

Pecan Grove Review



Volume IV
Spring 1999

Pecan Grove Review

EDITORS

Pecan Grove Review

Jack Bravich
Nadia Gonzales
Jenellva Gonzales
Lynette Gonzales
Lisa Hertz
Gandy Kennison
Jennifer Nappier
Loree Cardova
Maggie Smith
Deborah Rannin
Melissa Yon

St. Mary's University
San Antonio, TX

EDITORIAL ADVISOR

Director of the Press

Volume IV
Spring 1999

Pecan Grove Press, Publishers
One Camino Santa Maria
San Antonio, Texas 78228-8808



Printed in the United States of America
Bunk Publishing Company
San Antonio, Texas 78218



Pecan Grove
Review

St. Mary's University
San Antonio, TX

Copyright © 1999 by Pecan Grove Review.
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the Publisher, except for inclusion of brief quotations in a review.



Pecan Grove Press, Publishers
One Camino Santa Maria
San Antonio, Texas 78228-8606



Printed in the United States of America
Burke Publishing Company
San Antonio, Texas 78216

Table of Contents

Pecan Grove Review

Grasp

Brian St. John

EDITORS

On the First Ferry

Diann Gonzales Sarin

My Mother, Myself

Elizabeth Dairy

Sunset

Nadia Canales

Safety

Deborah Rankin

Doctors

Andrés Ramón

Water of Life

Kelly Bateson

Mary Magdalene

Glen Hayes

Christina Alexander

Jessica Baltera

Kelly Bateson

Rick Benevidez

Nadia Canales

Jonathan Gonzales

Lynette Gonzales

Lisa Kean

Sandy Kennison

Jennifer Napoles

Louis Sandoval

Meggan Smith

Deborah Rankin

Melissa Vela

Anna Villareal

COVER ART

Christopher Michael Narváez

(Inspired by M.S.)

FACULTY ADVISOR

Diane G. Bertrand

Pecan Grove Review is published each spring by students and faculty of St. Mary's University. This publication is sponsored by the English Communications Department. Submissions of poetry, short fiction, and essays are accepted during the fall semester. Selected writers should be able to submit an IBM compatible disk (Word 97 -- available in computer lab). Payment is one copy, and all rights revert to the individual writer after publication.

Ecologically Speaking: Am I Your Earth?

Lane Gary

Table of Contents

Grasp	1
Brian St. John	
On the First Ferry Boat to St. Joe's Island	2
Diane Gonzales Bertrand	
My Mother, Myself	3
Elizabeth Drury	
Sunset	4
Nadia Canales	
Safety	5
Deborah Rankin	
Dottoré	10
Andrés Ramon	
Water of Life	12
Kelly Bateson	
Mary Magdalene	14
Glenn Hughes	
Momma's Boy	15
Christina Alexander	
Springtime Love	21
Sean M. Lutmer	
Ecologically Speaking: Am I Your Earth?	22
Lené Gary	

Table of Contents

A Question of Manhood Anne Miller	24
Where Roses Fade Deborah Rankin	26
in an aluminum bird Meghan Fisher	33
They Always Go Back for Seconds Carlos Yzaguirre	34
Volition Meggan Smith	37
veteran's day parade Scott Fonger	38
A Moment between Breaths Jane Scheuerer	39
goo goo g'joob Michael Anthony Romero	46
Color of a Dream Hal Amen	47
What my Father Says about the Rain Debra Innocenti	48
Twenty Bucks Jessica Baltera	49
Labyrinth Nicole Jordan	52

A Bloody Morning Roxann Sánchez	54
Uncle Sam Daniel Carvajal	56
tie me to the bedpost Meghan Fisher	57
Nerves Kelly Bateson	58
Interruptions Morrisa Booker	60
Pot Holes Michelle Sepulveda	64
Night Vision H. Palmer Hall	66
A Child's Dream Michelle P. Piña	67
The Chosen One Henry Oosterveen, Jr.	68
Unicorn's Lament Christina D. Smith	70
Escape Hal Amen	72
Her Lips Say It All Lené Gary	73

The Long Ride Home	74
Victoria Hurtado	
Dedicated to Him, Wherever He May Be	78
Elizabeth Drury	
Gilbert's Lament	79
Diane Gonzales Bertrand	
This is How	80
Rick Benevidez	
Military Cemetery	81
Tracy Ruiz	
Giving	82
Zach Nasits	
Spin Blue	86
Michelle Sepulveda	
Repeat Offender	87
Ann Dunne	
Mi Colchita...My Blanket	88
Tanya Magaly Flores	
A Day in the Country	89
Rose Mary Droke	
My Mediterranean	92
Lisa Kean	
Jump	94
Christina Alexander	

Turning the Tide Sasha Lee Jaramillo	96
Problem Tracy Ruiz	100
Life Sentences Roland Suarez	101
Insomnia Kelly Shaughnessy	106

Grasp

Brian St. John

The soft gravel of Satchnie's voice

weeps by the willow

The heavy light of summer

falls on everything

like a thumb

removing

casting long crisp shadows in the afternoon

The distinctive sound of wind in the cottonwoods

reaches once simple memories, but which are now hard to grasp

like a moth who has ventured inside

attracted by the instinctive need to feel warmth

and see light in the darkness

Pecan Grove Review

Grasp

Brian St. John

The soft gravel of Satchmo's voice
weeps by the willow
The heavy light of summer
falls on everything
like a thunderstorm in March
removing all subtle values and hues
casting long crisp shadows in the afternoon
The distinctive sound of wind in the cottonwoods
refreshes once supple memories, but which are now hard to grasp
like a moth who has ventured inside
attracted by the instinctive need to feel warmth
and see light in the darkness

On the First Ferry Boat to St. Joe's Island

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

Skies purple with anticipation,
gulf waters whisper blue-green.
The seasoned reels, hoping
for the biggest catch of the day,
cast out their wisdom to
eager young spinners.

My daughter's version
of a good day's catch
is not kingfish or mackerel,
but tiny treasures to catch and release.

She is the first one off the boat;
carries bucket and net in hand.
Then come the rushing fishermen
bumping their loaded fishing carts
over the jetty rocks.
They are grim reapers.

My daughter's rushing too.
She's fishing for minnows
swimming among the jetty rocks.
She scoops up sea snails and hermit crabs
clinging to slippery granite.

I am charmed by her gentle laughter,
as she invites the sea life to swim over her fingertips,
and greets her tangerine sunrise lifting over the waves.

My Mother, Myself

Elizabeth Drury

Our lives mirror each other in so many ways.
Your goodness, your kindness, I've copied them well.
Your gifts and talents, Thank God, I have them all.
You used to bounce me on your knee
and help me find sleep as well.

Even your pains and hurts,
I followed in your footsteps and shared those too.
Where does it stop?
Where do you end in me and where do I begin?

"Enough," I said, "no more,"
when I could no longer endure the pain.
A new life, a new beginning I must search for.
This is where I say good-bye to old ways
and fearfully embrace new ways.
I shall gather the good in me
that you have taught me well.
I shall leave behind the old ways
that brought me so much pain.
Yes, unknowingly, even those
you taught me well.

Who is this person that I still live with --
this person I call mom (me)?
I used to know her (myself) so well.
Now she is (I am) a stranger.

Sunset

Nadia Canales

I know you in the sunset,
When the sun meets the earth.
Shades of blue, red, and purple:
That's where you exist.
A thin line of glowing yellow
Separates day from night.
As gentle whispers caress the sky,
Daylight is washed away,
Along with its petty worries.
When night sets in
The mysteries of my soul are released,
And I go to you.
The universe has shown its humanity—
One side relinquishing itself
To the other,
As I now relinquish myself to you.

Safety

Deborah Rankin

Angelique carefully placed the charm next to the passenger-loading door. Everyone had boarded the plane and it was now moving toward the runway. She watched it through the large window, awed and frightened by the slow movement of the enormous bird. This country was full of strange machines. Her granddaughter trusted these instruments of invention, but Angelique didn't share her confidence. She swallowed nervously as the horrible bird picked up speed. Her mouth was hot and dry. She swallowed again, but it didn't help. She needed a drink of water, but she didn't want to lose sight of the machine. It was moving further away, however, and she realized that watching it wouldn't help now. She had to rely on the charm.

Angelique looked around for a water fountain, trying to see past the people milling around the nearby caf. She could smell the acrid scents of strong coffee and burning sweetbread. She finally saw a fountain on the other side of the cafe, but there was already someone there. It was the woman who had walked past her three times while she was waiting with her granddaughter. The woman wasn't dressed like the other people. She wore loose clothes made of thick, soft material and she carried no bags. She must be lost--she seemed to be walking around in circles. Angelique swung her cloth bag over her shoulder and began walking to the fountain.

Bent over the water fountain, Carol saw a flash of color out of the corner of her eye. She recognized the woman from the waiting area at gate twelve. She had noticed the older woman because of her multicolored skirt and the fuchsia scarf wrapped around her head like a turban. Carol stood up from the water fountain and smiled at the woman, who just tilted her head and looked back at her. Shrugging, Carol continued her walk.

Carol knew that people noticed her--another Granny speed walker--and she heard the comments. But she also heard the more favorable remarks, which she preferred to remember. She prided herself in the fact that she had kept the youthful figure she had when she worked as a stewardess. And although she couldn't stay the same age, she did look young for her years. People always said she couldn't be more than fifty, when she was really fifty-five.

She briskly walked past the espresso bar and waved to the new clerk behind the counter (even younger than the last one, or did it just seem that way?). Carol had been in and out of airports for thirty years and her friends said she was crazy to spend so much time in one now. But she had always found the energy of the airport intoxicating. The rush of passengers and airline hosts, the tearful departures and joyful reunions, the occasional thief running off with untended luggage, were all familiar and exciting at the same time. She had seen an era pass in airports. She had watched the personal flyers slowly outnumber the business flyers. She had seen women board planes in flight uniforms, heading for the cockpit instead of the meal carts. But the best thing about the airport was the people she met. Each time she walked the concourse she met someone new, someone unique.

She stopped at gate twelve when something caught her eye. A small package was lying on the ground next to the passenger-loading door. Reacting to years of warnings about strange objects, she thought about calling a security guard. Her curiosity soon overcame her fear, however, and she walked to the door and picked up the bundle.

Whatever it was, it was small enough to cup in her hand. It was carefully wrapped in gauze and fastened with coarse brown twine. It smelled strongly of sweet spices and Carol wondered if it was a potpourri sachet. Perhaps it had fallen out of someone's luggage. She was trying to decide if it was worth turning in to the lost and found when she heard someone approaching from behind. It was the woman she had seen before. The bright colors of her clothes stood out starkly against her dark skin. Beneath her fuchsia scarf, her lined face was screwed into an expression of loathing that set off all of Carol's warning alarms. The woman started yelling at Carol in a foreign language. Carol looked around

for a security guard, keeping one eye on the woman who was moving even closer to her. With no security guard in sight, Carol tried to reason with the woman.

"I'm sorry, I don't understand what you want. Do you speak English?" The woman stopped yelling, tilted her head to one side and looked at Carol as if sizing her up. Carol stepped away from her, but kept talking. "Maybe we could go to the service counter. They might be able to help you." Carol knew her words were meaningless since the woman obviously couldn't speak English, but at least they kept her quiet. "I could take you there if you like," she said, backing away from the woman as she spoke, "or we could find a security guard to help you."

The woman suddenly lunged forward, pointing at the bundle in Carol's hand and spitting out a stream of foreign words that ended in a question. Carol's heart jumped at the sudden outburst. She looked down at the forgotten sachet and the woman's actions began to make sense.

"Oh, is this yours? I'm sorry. I found it here by the door. I didn't know." As she apologized, she held out the bundle, hoping the woman would take it and leave her alone. Instead, she spat at Carol's offering and made a remark that sounded nothing like gratitude.

Carol pulled her hand back in repulsion, dropping the bundle. She gagged, wiping the woman's spit from her hand onto her sweat pants. What was wrong with this woman? The look of hate had not gone from her eyes. They bore into Carol as the woman continued raving. Carol's confusion soon gave way to fear and she backed away from the woman, turned, and walked on shaky legs. Before she had gone too far, she looked back. The woman was bent over the bundle, examining it with a frown. Carol took a deep breath and continued walking. She decided to go home. She hadn't finished her usual laps, but she didn't want to risk running into that crazy woman again. When she passed gate eleven, a chill ran down her spine. She looked behind her and, to her horror, saw that woman following her. Carol walked faster, felling stupid for being scared and for running away from a much older woman. The other woman increased her pace as well, and, looking back, Carol could see her muttering to herself with an expression of deep concentration furrowing her brow.

Angelique spat insults in her native tongue. That stupid woman--didn't she know what she had done? She had probably rendered the charm useless with her unbelieving touch, thrusting Angelique's granddaughter into the cruel arms of fate. But when Angelique had inspected the charm, the binding chord had come unwound and the sacred spices were leaking out the opening. The spirits she had implored to help her granddaughter were likely released as well. They would be very angry at the insult that Angelique, through her neglect, had allowed to come upon them.

Celine had said that flying in that monster was perfectly safe and she had refused to take the charm with her. So when Celine had disappeared down the hallway that led to the metal bird and the door was closed, Angelique had secretly placed the charm. But then that woman had found it. Thinking about the now useless pile of gauze and spice, Angelique's stomach turned. It was an insult to the spirits she had implored to help her granddaughter. Her only hope now was to regain the spirits' favor by punishing the woman who had dishonored them.

The woman walked briskly toward the airport exit. Angelique was close behind, composing a curse as she walked. She knew the woman would not understand, but the spirits would surely hear her. They would know that she had defended them and they would keep her granddaughter safe. Angelique stepped up her pace, trying to catch up with the woman as they entered the parking lot. The woman reached into her pocket and took out her keys, dropping them as she took them out.

As Carol picked up her keys, she glanced back at the strange woman who was still following her. Carol was startled to see her so close and started walking so quickly she was almost jogging. She felt foolish, but her survival instincts tempered her vanity. As she approached her car, Carol mentally blessed Ford for making doors with remote control locks. She was in the car in no time and had locked it and started the engine before the woman reached her. The woman began chanting in a loud voice. Carol's throat was dry and tight. She wanted to leave—get away from this crazy woman, but she just sat in the car with one hand on the wheel and the other preparing to shift into reverse. She was frozen in that position, mesmerized by the sight of this strange woman's ritual. The woman took a sealed jar from her

bag. She unscrewed the lid and stuck her fingers inside. Carol panicked and quickly put her car in reverse. She started backing out of her parking space, but she could not get away before the woman had sprinkled some yellow oil on the windshield.

The car's tires squealed as Carol turned out of the parking lot. Once on the street, she was forced to wait for the slow traffic and the strange woman caught up with her. Carol stared at the woman through the rearview mirror. Yelling and waving her arms, the woman followed Carol's car down the street, attracting the attention of the travelers on the sidewalks. Carol felt like a spectacle. She wished the woman would just go away. She felt humiliated and, more frightening, she felt that she had been literally cursed. The traffic cleared and the cars in front of her started to move faster. She sped up anxiously, hoping to lose the woman who was still following her, screaming her foreign spells. Carol tried to focus on the cars in front of her, but her eyes were drawn to the yellow drops of oil. She stared at them, and didn't realize the traffic had slowed until the air bag exploded in her face.

Carol lifted her head from the steering wheel. Her neck ached and she felt like she had been punched in the face. She saw the driver of the other car get out to inspect the damage, but she couldn't move. She saw a flash of color out of the corner of her eye. She knew it was that woman. Standing on the sidewalk. Laughing at her.

Angelique had heard the squeal of tires and, before she knew what was happening, the woman's car had crashed. She ran to the sidewalk and tried to see what had happened. The woman was leaning over her steering wheel. The front of the car had folded up like a dropped cloth. Angelique stared at the accident and slowly smiled. These machines were certainly not safe. She laughed. None of her spells had ever worked so quickly. The spirits would be very pleased with what she had done. She had taught that woman a lesson. That one would not soon mess with the sacred things again. She turned and walked away, wiping yellow oil off her hands with the corner of her skirt.

Dottoré

Andrés Ramon

With windy scraping kisses,
slight breezes blow, silence flows,
along a whispering buho's blessing.

Stare hello, summon nothing,
this window's left wide open,
to spin the Cherub's silken dressing.

Decrescendo remains long,
as low tones in breezes fade,
skinned with God's gentle love caresses.

Los espíritos rush the blinds,
this heart desires purgèd crimes.

El vientecito along Her spine,
mischievous laughters echo in Time.

Dottorés love longing sighs,
resignation fills the eyes,
Cupid's lyre sings to Her delight.

Learned from Thee, hermosura,
a dancing without the Self,
these *pas de deus*¹ with ghosts of Maria.

Me he enamorado, de su belleza,
Dottoré Inmaculada.

Recede to the Infinite,
sweet sweat scent hath just passed nigh,
million tiny spirits peck good-night.

Onto other dominions,
onto other mortal dreams,
She sieves through trees, twisting, sweeping leaves.

Brief moment touching something,
solitude with sullen Grace,
wring this hardened heart, left soft without Her stay.

Una lagrima, undulating memory,
slides slowly down my face.

Pas de Deux - [Fr.] a ballet dance for two.

Water of Life

Kelly Bateson

Alone among a sea of faces
I am drowning
unable to break the surface
my limbs are numb
Something is beneath
huge and sinister
it reaches for me
grazes toes
pulls at slippery legs
The tendons in my ankles
fiber of calf muscles
should be able to contract
to move me away
out of this deadly haze
but my instinct to survive is lost,
smothered
Where is my God?
Should I cry out--
Make him listen?
Even if it were possible
even if he heard me
I am not sure that he can swim
Maybe he would go under too
Like me
Or perhaps he is the being
The thing beneath me
What if this is reality
This panic, the paralysis?

Now I will my legs to move
oddly slow, the connection is made
my emptiness begins to fill with the very water
that I so feared before

it's not so bad being alone

acceptance makes me light, gives me suppleness of movement
my legs begin to dance smoothly in circles

Suddenly I know

I must forget everything I once knew
And learn to swim again.

Mary Magdalene

Glenn Hughes

And when the fits were on me
I wanted to abandon myself,
strike my foot on a new mountain,
sacrifice the shudder of my voice.
In me, the bride led by maidens
up through the cedars
in sunlight and song
was a dark fire.
Out the narrow door, the world was gone.

Nothing is possible, Love, without you
making dusk gentle and the hillside warm.
I, who lived on the husk of terror,
who tore myself in my hair,
sit with you, beautiful
without fear.
Never, never filled,
now I long for what I already have.

Make him listen?
Even if it were possible
even if he heard me
I am not sure that he can swim
Maybe he would go under too
Like me
Or perhaps he is the being
The thing beneath me
What if this is reality
This panic, the paralysis?

Now I will my legs to move
oddly slow, the connection is made
my emptiness begins to fill with the very water
that I so feared before

Momma's Boy

Christina Alexander

"Excuse me for living," Harry said to his mother right before she slapped him firmly, though not hard, across his gray, stubbled face. Harry regretted his words immediately, even before she touched him. He knew he deserved it for showing her such disrespect. He loved his Momma very much. Now he had to make it up to her.

"Would you like some new scented candles?" he asked.

"No, Harry, I have quite enough, thank you," she answered.

"What, then?" he said.

"You know very well what I want, son," Momma said. "Now, don't pester me with silliness."

Harry rose from the chair at the dinner table where he had been sitting. His dinner sat half uneaten. Momma continued reading her *Better Homes & Gardens* magazine while she placed delicately-piled fork-fulls of fried chicken, on top of corn, on top of whipped potatoes into her small pursed lips. Harry got his light jacket from the hall closet, picked up his keys, then told his mother he'd be home soon. She told him she would keep the rest of his dinner warm in the oven.

For a large man, Harry fit into his Toyota Corolla rather well. When he slid into it, it sagged and creaked a little, then quickly balanced itself.

He took a deep breath when he got in. He closed the door, then stretched to pull his seat belt across his bean bag belly. Harry pulled out of their driveway, then headed north on Bermuda Lane.

His mind was on the disagreement he just had with his mother. The idea that she wanted him to move out still made him shake. He had lived with her his entire life—46 years. He left briefly for weeks, even a month at a time for new carpet expos—he was a salesman—but he had never *lived* any place else. Now, all of a sudden she tells him to leave? Harry didn't understand. At

first, he refused. She told him he was plenty old enough to live by himself now. When Harry expressed his frustration, she had slapped him. If moving was what she wanted him to do, he would make himself strong enough to do it. But even though he now accepted the move as inevitable, the thought still made him shake.

Harry pulled the Corolla into a convenience store. The car shifted in relief when he got out. He walked into the store cautiously, as if his back or legs were stiff. He purchased half a gallon of Haagen Daas vanilla, a pack of Virginia Slims, and a scratch-off lottery ticket.

Blue night had settled outside by the time he pulled back into the driveway. As soon as he came inside, he heard the water flowing in his mother's shower. He put the ice cream in the freezer. Smiling, he walked to her room. Harry carefully pulled the cigarettes and lottery ticket out of the bag, then laid them out on the bathroom counter. He hoped they would surprise her. He went to his room to put some jazz music into his compact disk player. He collapsed into his recliner, sighing a weary sigh, like air escaping from a punctured tire. He kicked off his boots, leaned his head back in the chair, then fell asleep.

When Harry woke up his heart nearly stopped. Momma was standing there watching him from less than two feet away.

"Momma, what are you doing?" he yelled, trying to get his heart started again by placing his thick palm over it.

"Just watchin' you sleep is all. Want some ice cream?" she offered.

Calm again, he said "yes," then moaned and groaned as he got up from the recliner.

"What kind we got, Momma?" he asked with a grin.

He followed her downstairs.

"Now you know perfectly well what kind. Of all the silly-" she said, trailing off as she turned into the kitchen. Her head shook slightly from side to side as if she were still thinking about Harry's last silly remark.

Harry smiled. He wanted to point out that she would never be pampered like this if he left, but he didn't. Momma scooped out two scoops, heaping them onto two waffle cones. Instead, he

asked about the lottery ticket, pointing with his chin to where the scratched ticket rested on the counter top.

"So we win or what?" he asked after a bite.

"Well, yes, you could say that," she replied.

He looked surprised.

"See, they already cut me a check," she said pulling one from her pocket. "It's a thousand bucks—perfect for an apartment deposit."

He said nothing while he looked from her to the floor in an instant. He held his cone far away from his mouth. His forehead wrinkled and his lips pursed, as if he was in pain.

"Why now, Momma?" he asked. "Why all of a sudden?"

"Sudden? Most men move out at 18. You're past that, Harry," she said.

"Yeah, but what's the point, then? Do I bother you?"

"Harry, as long as you've lived in this house with me, you've never learned to do a thing by yourself, and you never will. I will not be here forever," she said.

Harry asked, "Is there something you're not telling me?"

The rest of that conversation made Harry feel as if he were a hitchhiker on the highway with cars speeding past him.

Movers came to the house, then transferred Harry's music, clothes, books, and furniture to his new apartment two Saturdays later. The new living room was empty now, except for boxes, a television set, Harry, and Momma. Harry moved boxes to their appropriate rooms. Momma unpacked the boxes marked Living Room and Kitchen. She had bought him a whole new dish set, pots, pans, a coffee maker, and a toaster from Wal-Mart. She had made Harry pick the plate pattern: pale white with thin blue lines around the edges. She peeled off the plastic and threw away the protective padding.

"Harry, when you get done, I want to show you how to scramble eggs the way you like them," she said.

"I know how already," he said.

She stopped scrubbing the pan to look at him.

"How come you ain't ever done it before?" she asked.

"Never had a need to," he said.

"You're right, I guess," she said as she started scrubbing again.

Harry kept moving boxes.

After she left that afternoon, Harry went to the grocery store to buy a toothbrush because his was lost somewhere in the boxes he refused to open. On the way home, he stopped at a liquor store. His mother had never allowed alcohol in her house since his father died of alcohol poisoning when Harry was ten. So that night, he sat in his new bedroom staring at the bare walls, brown, neatly labeled boxes, and a new bottle of Southern Comfort whiskey. He held the bottle in celebration of his new freedom, in defiance of what she would have wanted, with the hope of forgetting his new loneliness.

But Harry didn't open the bottle. The phone rang. It was Momma. She wished him a good night.

Harry picked up Momma, then drove to the oncologist's office to hear her treatment plan. The receptionist called Momma by name and introduced herself to Harry. They sat down on a tan couch that was so deep and soft that when they sank into it, their feet came off the floor. Momma didn't appear to mind, but Harry squirmed until he touched the bottom; then his back could not rest properly, so he continued to shift. Momma leaned over to whisper to Harry as he fidgeted.

"Wasn't that nice of her? Introducing herself like that," she said, not expecting a response.

He nodded, having realized that the nurse wouldn't have done that if she didn't expect to be seeing him in there all the time. But he kept the observation to himself. If he mentioned anything about the ominous future of the cancer treatment, Momma would be able to tell his mood right away from his deep, shaky breaths. Then she would make him talk about it, and nothing would be able to hold back his tears once he started talking.

After he had given up on being comfortable on that sofa, he took inventory of who was in the waiting room. The only other people there were an old man sitting alone in the center of the opposite couch and a woman around Harry's age on an adjacent chair. The old man's white felt cowboy hat and wooden cane

occupied the seats on either side of him, but he kept to himself reading a paperback novel. The lady sat absolutely still in her chair writing something that kept her from lifting her pen from the page even once the whole time he watched her.

Harry turned to see his mother turning her head in a slow, semi-circle glance around the room, with a pause at the reception desk. Then she tore out a page of the *Family Circle* magazine she had been reading. She must have noticed him looking at her because she looked up at him and immediately said:

"I don't think anyone waiting in this, of all waiting rooms, will really notice that page 44 is missing," she said.

"I didn't say anything," he said.

He returned to his own thoughts while he flipped absently through a sports magazine. When the receptionist told them the doctor was ready to see them, he had been reading about the Rangers' snapped winning streak in their first series away from home. Harry didn't miss the irony there. He was "away" from home now and afraid that his winning streak might be up, too.

Inside the doctor's office, Harry found equally uncomfortable seats, only these were so stiff that he could not find a point on which to comfortably rest his weight. Momma took out a yellow legal pad and a pen, then told the doctor to proceed. Dread of the coming subject filled Harry to the brim, but he had been trying to keep it from spilling over. When the doctor finally spoke after an eternity of silence, all the words spewed out. For Harry, the words came without pause or order. He heard *stage 3, radiation therapy, 30 percent chance, and 6 to 8 months*, but nothing else. Momma listened, writing notes as the doctor spoke. Halfway through, she reached over to hold Harry's hand.

After the appointment, they walked to the car with Momma holding on to the crook of Harry's elbow for support. He didn't respond when she mentioned the doctor's pleasant demeanor. At the car, Momma forced him into the passenger's seat, despite his protests, then drove herself home. When they got to her house, Harry absently switched to the driver's seat. She pinched him hard on the arm and told him to snap out of it. He said he would, then drove to his apartment.

That evening, Harry sat on his sofa watching *Chicago Hope* and feeling the cool glass of the still-new bottle of Southern Comfort in his hands. Momma called, wanting him to go over. He left immediately, worried something was wrong. He heard a soft crying sound as he approached the door. He was so scared it was his Momma, and he swung it open so fast that he nearly broke the door. Inside, his mother sat on the couch with a little basset hound puppy squirming in her lap. He sat down next to her to pet it. Momma told him a friend of hers was having trouble getting rid of their puppy litter a month ago, so she had offered to take one of them. Momma said she didn't think she could handle the puppy alone now. She asked Harry to look after it instead.

"Sure," he said. "Does it have a name?"

"She has not been named yet," Momma said. "But you'll think of something."

He smiled, playfully grabbing the puppy by the snout and holding its long brown ears up in the air. After he and Momma played with it for a few more minutes, Harry left for home.

The puppy sat quietly in the front passenger seat of the Corolla the entire 15 minutes it took Harry to get back to his apartment. Once inside, Harry let her loose. She carefully explored the apartment. She brushed past the coffee table, nearly knocking off the whiskey bottle, but Harry caught it before it fell. He put the bottle in a high, hard-to-reach place in the kitchen cabinet. When he came back to the living room, the puppy was sleeping, curled at the foot of his recliner. Harry picked it up, sat down, carefully arranged the puppy on his bean bag belly, then cried until he fell asleep, too.

Springtime Love

Sean M. Lutmer

Woman, it is just too damn bright today,
Walking alone in this fair month of May.
So few words have passed in the crisp clean air.
Boy and girls walk along nary a care.
But this heart of mine holds a different weight,
For it knows of life with a different fate.
No flowers, no rain, no May springtime bloom.
I carry my winter, death into June.

Time on earth gone, I set sail to a place.
None to compare to thy beauty of face.
The past is all gone, the future is near.
I take with me love and more of my tears.
I bled them for her, I bled them for you.
I leave again alone, alone, alone...

***Ecologically Speaking:
Am I Your Earth?***

Lené Gary

Excavate my insides,
strip-mine me for my ores
Then leave me wearing wounds,
from where my goods were tore

Take my many minerals,
synthesize my soul
Then cover me with asphalt paths,
and burn, for fuel, my coal

Forget that I'm alive,
forget that I need air
Take that tar and cover me,
'til black is all I wear

Darken my dear atmosphere,
no, I don't need the light
And let my tears pour rivers to,
the wastelands in the night

Engineer my body,
make it better than before
Sanitize my surfaces,
with biocides galore

Keep the fish from swimming,
keep the deer at bay
Swallow up that "unused land,"
someone's bound to pay

Tell the children when they ask,
where did momma go?
You've been so busy killing her,
you don't really know

Am I your earth?

Manhood is manhood
What is manhood
for those
who left their legs
between the tracks
of the trucking train?
What is manhood
for Eusebio Palacios,
twenty years old,
and Aureliano Martinez,
twenty-eight?

I know it is something
I know it is
I know it is
I know it is
I know it is
I know it is
I know it is
I know it is

I think of them
in whose wounds
our gardens grow

Two small children
have just breathed
the line of trees
running, racing, laughing
Others hop the line with
and fellow

A sorrowful celebration
traces ancient footprints

A Question of Manhood
Anne Miller

As I sit here
at Mission San Juan Capistrano
on the evening
when Judas betrayed Jesus
a pain hangs past
just within the veiled margin
of the woods

I think about
your search
for "manhood"

Manhood, I muse
is the will to stand
on one's own two feet
and provide for one's family

The freight cars bound on
laden with the goods we get
on the backs
of the poor

Manhood, I wonder
manhood
is walking
those two thousand miles
to separation
and Western Union

A Question of Manhood

Anne Miller

As I sit here
at Misión San Juan Capistrano
on the evening
when Judas betrayed Jesus,
a train bangs past
just within the veiled margin
of the woods.

I think about
your search
for "manhood."

Manhood, I muse,
is the will to stand
on one's own two feet
and provide for one's family.

The freight cars pound on,
laden with the goods we get
on the backs
of the poor.

Manhood, I wonder-
manhood
is walking
those two thousand miles
to separation
and Western Union.

The train has rumbled
on down the tracks,
its pride of diesel engines
bringing up the rear
like a confused caboose,
misery resounding in its alarm.

Manhood-manhood...
What is manhood
for those
who left their legs
between the tracks
of the thundering train?
What is manhood
for Eusebio Palacios,
twenty years old,
and Aureliano Martínez,
twenty-eight?

I know it is something
I, my spirit
conquered too easily,
will never comprehend.

I think of those
in whose wounds
our gardens grow.

Two small children
have just breached
the line of trees,
running, racing, laughing.
Others hop the stone wall
and follow.

A sorrowful celebration
traces ancient footprints.

Where Roses Fade

Deborah Rankin

It is in the center of the city, fifteen acres of green among blocks of cement and peeling billboards. A tall, wrought-iron fence separates it from its urban surroundings. A sharp autumn wind penetrates the poor barrier of bushes that runs along the inside of the fence. Not even the silent inhabitants of Rose Park cemetery are safe from this frigid harbinger of winter. The trees and shrubs within the cemetery are still shining from a recent rain. Along the main pathway, the bushes that give the park its name, so splendid in warmer weather, have been reduced to leathery green leaves and sharp thorns.

The West end of the cemetery is old and unorganized. It is cluttered with tombstones and statues of varying shapes and sizes. In the back plots, more modern rows of efficient tombstones proclaim names and dates, and quote the occasional scripture.

A young couple walks through the gate. Their feet tread silently on the damp autumn leaves that carpet the pathway. The woman wears a black dress and jacket. She holds her full skirt gathered around her legs to protect it from the thorns of the bushes framing the pathway. The man walking beside her carries a paper bag. He shifts his shoulders under his heavy black suit coat and adjusts his tie. He glances at the woman several times as they walk past marble and granite tributes to the dead. When they arrive at the newly turned grave, a minister in clerical clothing is already there. The air is filled with the scent of fresh, damp earth. The minister approaches them with a smile.

"I'm glad you could come," he says, holding out a hand. "Did you have a comfortable flight?"

The man in the suit puts the paper bag under his left arm and shakes the minister's hand. "Yes, thank you, Reverend" He clears his throat. "It's been a while since we've seen you."

"Yes, Ben. A long while." The minister turns to the woman in the black dress. "And how are you holding up, Ruth?"

"I'm fine, thank you." She does not look at him when she says this. Her eyes are drawn to the newly covered grave. The headstone has not yet been placed. Instead, a large, colorful wreath rests on a stand at the head of the grave. The woman stares at a looped red ribbon that is attached to the stand.

"Is Mara coming?" the man in the suit asks the minister.

The minister nods. "She finally called this morning. She said the plane gets in at five, so they should be here soon."

The man in the suit looks at his watch. "It's six forty-five already. Maybe she changed her mind."

The minister shakes his head. "No, Ben, she'll be here."

"What makes you so certain?"

"You're here."

The man's jaw drops. "You can't possibly compare *us* to--"

"Mara." The woman in the black dress steps forward to greet two figures walking up the dark path from the gate. A woman and a young boy. They are merely silhouettes against the setting sun, walking past the rows of silent tombstones.

The woman approaches the grave, holding the boy close to her side with one hand and carrying a traveling case with the other. She looks around at the people assembled at the graveside. The woman in the black dress approaches her.

"It's good to see you again, Mara."

The woman releases the boy's hand and sets the traveling case on the ground. She unbuttons the long raincoat she is wearing, gently shakes water droplets from its surface, and folds it over one arm. "I'm only here because of Thomas," she says, putting one hand on the boy again. "I thought he should have a chance to say good-bye to his father."

"That was very thoughtful of you."

"I don't need your sarcasm, Ruth. At least I'm no hypocrite. Just ask me what I think about his death and I'll tell you. I think it's just what he deserved."

"Mara," the minister cautions, gesturing toward the boy.

"I think it's God's punishment, that's what I think, and I'm not afraid to say it."

"Mara!" The minister's warning splits the air and silences the group. "Well," he says in a softer tone, "now that we're all here, why don't we begin?"

The man in the suit and the woman in the black dress walk around to the opposite side of the grave. The woman with the long coat kneels on the damp ground to straighten her son's clothes. "The collar itches, Mama," the boy complains.

She unbuttons the first button. "There. That's the best I can do. Now, remember, you have to be quiet while the preacher is talking."

"Yes, ma'am." The woman kisses the boy's forehead and stands up. The boy rubs his forehead vigorously, glancing up at the man standing across from him.

The minister removes a small Bible from his coat pocket and opens it. He looks around at the group and then begins. "Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.'"

A gust of icy wind moves through the cemetery. It creeps along the ground, sneaking up skirts and pant legs, chilling the silent group.

"Our dear friend Richard Wilmont can no longer be with us. But although his body has been committed to the earth, his spirit resides with our Lord Jesus Christ. I feel privileged to have known Richard. He was a man of great strength and compassion. In his last months, he was a comfort to the other patients at the hospice. He shared his strength with those weaker than he was and spoke words of comfort and encouragement to those who preceded him to the arms of our Heavenly Father. For many patients whose families had abandoned them, Richard was the sole source of comfort in their last hours."

The small group is still and silent. Only the wind moves among them.

"Richard spoke lovingly of his own family. He told me about his first wife, Anna, and how he still loved her so many years after her death. He spoke of the close friendship he had with his daughter, Ruth, and how much he looked forward to her Christmas visit."

The woman in the black dress lets out a single sob and covers her mouth quickly. The man in the suit puts an arm around her shoulders.

"He spoke of her husband, Ben, and how glad he was that she would not be alone. He spoke of his second wife, Mara."

The woman with the long coat lifts her chin and holds the boy close to her side.

"He told me how much he regretted the end of their marriage. He told me how proud he was of his son, Thomas." The minister smiles at the young boy, who stares at the ground. "Richard left us at the young age of forty-eight. However, he said that watching the other patients, most of whom were much younger than he was, made him realize how fortunate he was to have lived such a full life." The minister closes his Bible and looks at the woman in the black dress. "I understand that you have something you want to say, Ruth."

The woman unzips her purse and removes a book with a green cloth cover. The cover is worn, but the gilt letters still shine in the waning sunlight. "Dad and I both liked to read." Her voice wavers a bit, but she clears her throat and continues. "This book was our favorite. When I was fourteen, we didn't have very much money. Dad was working two jobs, but neither of them paid very much. For my birthday, I expected just a card and a homemade cake. I knew there wasn't any money for a present. But that night, Dad came home with this copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I was thrilled. We spent the next three evenings taking turns reading it aloud."

The man in the suit takes a spade out of the paper bag he is holding. He hands it to the woman and she kneels at the side of the grave.

"I think you should have it now, Daddy," she says in a whisper. She hesitates for a moment, holding the spade over the grave. Finally, she digs a hole and lays the book in it. After another, longer pause, she fills in the hole, covering the book. She gives the spade back to the man in the suit, who puts it in the paper bag. The woman hugs herself in the cold wind and the man puts an arm around her.

The minister looks at the woman in the coat next. "And Mara, you have something as well."

The woman in the coat picks up her traveling case and removes two bags of wildflower seeds. She opens them and hands one to the boy. They step closer to the grave and she scatters her package of seeds over the fresh earth. The boy watches her and then scatters his seeds, mimicking the woman's

movements. When his package is empty, he steps back and looks up at the woman. She takes his empty package, folds it up with hers, and puts them back in her bag. She puts an arm around him again and holds him close to her side.

"Thank you both for your poignant gestures," the minister says, reaching into an inner coat pocket and removing a folded piece of paper. "Richard had only two request concerning his funeral," he says, unfolding the sheet of paper. "The first, as you know, was that his body be interred before the service. The second was that I read this poem, by A. E. Housman. In his last weeks, he constantly carried this copy of the poem with him. It's called 'With Rue My Heart is Laden.'" The minister looks down at the paper, trying to hold it still in the strong breeze that threatens to snatch it away.

"With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipt maiden
And many a lightfoot lad."

The minister's voice is thick. He clears his throat twice before continuing.

"By brooks too broad for leaping
The lightfoot boys are laid;
The rose-lipt girls are sleeping
In fields where roses fade."

The woman in the black dress is openly sobbing by the end of the poem. The man in the suit holds her, whispering into her ear. The woman with the long coat picks up her traveling case and takes the boy by the hand.

"Are you leaving already, Mara?" the minister asks.

The woman nods. "Our plane leaves at nine o'clock."

"We've planned dinner and a memorial service at the hospice. Can you at least drop by and have something to eat?"

"No! Of course not! We have to go home." She turns to the woman in the black dress, who has stopped sobbing and is wiping her eyes. "Good-bye, Ruth."

"Good-bye, Mara."

The woman with the long coat walks briskly down the path. The boy struggles to keep up with her. He looks back at the grave several times, until they disappear from sight.

The minister turns to the woman in the black dress. "Will you be coming to the hospice?" he asks.

"Yes, thank you," she says. "We'd like that." She turns to the man in the suit. "Honey, would you get the car and bring it around to the front gate? I really don't feel like walking out to the parking lot."

"Sure." The man in the suit gets his keys out of his pocket, watching the woman closely. "You're okay now?"

She smiles at him. "Yes, I'm okay. I'll be at the front gate in a minute."

"All right. See you at the hospice, Reverend." The man in the suit walks down the dark pathway to the gate.

"I'm glad you came, Ruth," the minister says.

"Why do you say that as if you didn't think I would? I'm not like Mara. I visited Daddy in the hospice. You know that."

"Yes, I know. Mara blames him for his illness. She'll never forgive him."

"But why should she blame him? We don't even know how he got it."

The minister tilts his head to one side and looks at her. "Why should that matter anyway?"

"It matters to Mara. Did he tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"How it . . . happened."

"Does it matter to *you*, Ruth?" the minister asks.

She looks down.

"Are you wondering if you should blame him?"

She looks back up quickly. "I'm not like Mara."

"No, you're not. But you're thinking a lot like her. How he got this disease is not an issue. Do you think one way is better than another? It all leads to the same end. He's gone, and it isn't his fault, no matter what he did."

"I didn't say it was."

"No, you didn't say it was. That's why you're not like Mara."

The woman turns away and stares at the looped red ribbon on the wreath next to the grave.

The minister puts the folded copy of the poem in her hand. "I'll see you at the hospice." He turns and walks down the pathway.

The woman stands at the grave for several minutes before unfolding the sheet of paper. She stares at the poem, crying silently. She begins to walk away from the grave, but she turns back. "Good night, Daddy," she whispers into the frigid autumn night. She turns and walks down the path toward the gate, passing hundreds of mute witnesses as she leaves.

in an aluminum bird

Meghan Fisher

views of gray tigers
rolling and purring upon
the plains of alaskan snow
while a beacon of light
a lantern, if you will,
glows on the freshly licked paws
and clean whiskers
enveloped between two ceilings
dark, black snow surrounding
suffers nothing except beauty
wishes are not wanting here
rabbit or man exists only
in the eye of the beholder
from this celestial light
or anything else for that matter
a family of buffalo
glare back at me
black river snakes its way
through the lofty carpet
a drowning alligator gasps for air
breathing with golden nostrils
screams help with yellow pupils
the river widens and soon
no alligators or tigers or buffaloes will exist
the snow will then be slowly melted
as a voice calls from outside this world
"Please fasten your seatbelts. We will be landing soon."

They Always Go Back for Seconds

Carlos Yzaguirre

I can't really remember their names or faces. It was a long time ago and we were only children. But I remember their mouths, or rather, the words that came out of those mouths. I also remember the day. It was cool and crisp and leaves wandered across the schoolyard. Autumn had arrived but winter was nipping at its heels. Winter was a welcomed season in my heart, despite its frigidity; Christmas arrives in the wintertime.

But it was not yet winter, only a crisp cool autumn day. We all sat around in a circle Indian-style, as children will. While sitting there on the sidewalk, the wind sang secrets in our ears, the kind of secrets only children hear.

Long faces were worn by all that day in our little circle as we watched the other children scampering across the playground like kittens. Our misbehavior in the classroom had brought down on us not only the fury of Mrs. Embry, our 2nd grade teacher, but the worst possible punishment a child can receive: loss of recess. There would be no four-square, jungle gyms or capture the flag for the likes of us.

That's when it happened. One minute I was watching a heated game of capture the flag, and the next the conversation began. How had it begun? I can't tell you now. No one ever remembers how such things begin, only how they end. I can say only that the minds of children jump from subject to subject and often times the topics of conversation are of the rarest variety.

"Well, I was born at 2:36 a.m.," one of my fellow inmates said.

"I was born at 4 in the morning."

"I was born at night! 1:32 a.m."

A hot debate promptly ensued concerning morning and night with regards to a.m. and p.m. I had nearly escaped. But children, however much their minds tend to wander, can be thorough when it's least desirable. And isn't that what life is? A series of near escapes and meaningless tragedies?

"What about you, Santos? What time were you born?"

I looked down at the sidewalk. A thin line of ants marched out of a crack in the cement, stretching and winding mindlessly to a dying grasshopper where a swarm of the little orange insects had made their attack.

"I don't know," is all I could say, hoping that it would end there, all the while knowing that it wouldn't.

"What do you mean 'you don't know?' How could you not know? Didn't your momma ever tell you? Didn't you ever ask?"

"My mom doesn't exactly know either," I said, still watching the doomed grasshopper. One of its powerful hind legs was kicking, but its attempts to free itself from the hungry jaws of those hundreds of tiny insects were futile. Trapped in that sea of jaws, the poor green beast was able to move itself only fractions of an inch at a time. But a moveable feast is still a feast, isn't it?

"Your mom doesn't know? How could she not know?" one child asked.

Then another: "Was she drunk when she had you? I'll bet she was drunk when she had you!"

Another: "Did your daddy hit her really hard? I think his daddy hit her hard and made her fall asleep."

Still another: "Is she crazy? She's crazy, isn't she? And they keep her locked up in a closet at Charter Palms!"

Childish giggles erupted and warm tears welled up in my eyes, but I remember fighting them off. None of that was true and there was nothing wrong with what was true. Nothing! So I stopped the tears before they fell. I cleared my throat and said, "No. None of that is true you idiots! I was adopted, that's all."

"Adopted? What's that?"

"Well," I started, "It's when—"

"It's when your mommy doesn't want you!" another child finished for me. "She doesn't want you, so they give you to someone else."

I had had enough. I got up to leave, but Mrs. Embry promptly shouted at me from the bench where she and Mrs. Stephens had been talking about their daughters and how beautiful they were.

"Santos! You sit down, you still have 15 minutes!"

"But Mrs. Embry—"

She gave me a fiery look. My plea had fallen on deaf ears. I turned around to face the jaws of the hungry little ants and sat down Indian-style, as children will, to the Last Supper.

Volition

Meggan Smith

A part of me hasn't made it back -
back to where heavenly tears
wind their way down my
window -
a window that reflects a face
hovering over the hallowed ground of my heavy heart.

But here I stand and I hope you see
how hurting you purifies me.
What I want is anything else
that leaves me free of all you're not.

I can't stay - I wasn't meant to be here -
I'm slipping through spaces that aren't mine
and never will be.

You want me to stay,
but if I did,
you'd never make it back.

veteran's day parade

Scott Fonger

red haze rising over scenic ocean view
and thoughts of you run through
my schizophrenic emotions caused
by not knowing who is who.
sympathize graciously
offer me change
a theologian's nightmare on the beach
of unfulfilled destiny -
out of reach.
out of touch with who we are
unsolved mystery of what we may be
when everyone has turned their backs
because it is easier than the facts
we're not human; we're just history
statues of a lost time in poverty
it's a sad, sad legacy
but we live on, move on to another city
another corner -
another scenic ocean view
i value your right to look away
i might have died for that right
but now i hope for the warm summer night
when i can sit at the steps of my house
with my wife, my kids, my dog, my mouse
who eats the crumbs off of my floor.
but for now, i'll stay in my hole
and find my own meals.

A Moment between Breaths

Jane Scheuerer

"It's just another day...." I thought to myself as I watched the brown sun rising. My cup of Chemcafé had gotten cold, but it was too much trouble to nuke it before I had to leave. "Nuke it?" I laughed sickly at how easily we use that word as I flipped open my comlink to read the news. "Damn, the population tabs fell again. Yesterday, they predicted a rise but I guess it didn't take." Closing it again, I stood and got ready to leave. I tried to distract myself with minutia: brushing my teeth, rinsing my rebreather, "...there has to be *some* way of getting out this bleach smell."

"Yeah, sure... it was just another day," I thought, "except, of course, for the part when I would probably be blown to atoms. That, and the fact that if I do survive, I'd get the honor of assassinating a United States president. Yup, just a typical, ordinary day."

Donning my environment suit, I adjusted the settings for today's radon readings. Once again my thoughts wandered to my wife. She had gone outside without her suit. They said that she probably didn't mean to do it, that she was just in shock because we'd just lost another baby. We knew the risks. We knew that you had to try a few times before you get a baby strong enough to survive. My wife never left the house during her pregnancies, but even our top-of-the-line atmosphere generator didn't help. Six pregnancies and none of them made it. Each time it broke our hearts, but everyone knows that's just how it is. The atmosphere was just too thin for their little lungs. This last one was the toughest. He lived for a whole week.

That night, she woke up and just walked outside, wearing a robe as if that could protect her somehow. I found her the next day, lying in our sand garden. She had raked the sand into swirls, then placed herself into the pattern, and died. It helps to know she

didn't suffer: without her rebreather, she just fell asleep and never woke up again.

I think most of me died along with her. When they were looking for volunteers for a scientific project that could reverse the damage to our planet, I'm almost ashamed to admit it, but it was the fact that you probably wouldn't survive that first got my attention. Sure, I played up the hero act, but the truth was that I volunteered because I couldn't stand living without her, watching the world die around me.

It made me sick whenever the news reported the population tabs as if they were just another statistic. What they really meant was that a lot of people died and not enough were being born. Maybe it's just as well, they were having a hard time producing enough food as it was, and although I've tried, you just can't live on synthetic coffee. I felt a pang of guilt for the small pack of black-market cigarettes I had with me. How many resources were wasted to grow this? They were wrapped with actual paper too! They cost a mint, but if I was expected to give my life to save the world, at least I'd get a last cigarette!

Popping my rebreather into my mouth, I headed out the door, "Might as well get it over with, one way or the other." The walk to the office helped lift my mood a little; the sepia tones of the ancient buildings were soothing somehow. The laboratory was built atop the white cliffs of Ohio, with a great view of the ocean far below. I stopped for a moment before entering the building. It felt as if I was in an old black and white photo. The only sound in the world was the wind and the waves. The few people I saw didn't seem to want to savor the view, as if even this would last forever.

The project was a long shot in every way possible, and a dangerous one at that. I was being sent back in time to prevent the catastrophe that continues to transform this planet into a lifeless rock. Worst case scenario: I climb into the chamber and get blown into atomic particles, taking most of the eastern coast with me. It helped knowing how hard it would be to gather an entire department of suicidal technicians. The machine folded time

and space, then forced me through a tear, opened at the precise time and place I needed to be. I saw the equation they came up with for that, and I'm just glad I wasn't the one that had to think it up. The proof alone took twenty years.

The problem with time travel was that the planet doesn't stay in the same place it was just a second ago. Not only does it revolve around the sun, but also the sun spins around the galaxy and the galaxy goes its merry way wherever it's headed. If H.G. Wells' time machine actually worked, he would fall off the planet and probably collide with Mars in two seconds.

As soon as I walked into the building, the techies pounced on me. They had dug up some costume from a museum that would help me blend in once I got to where I'm going... that is, IF I got where I'm going. It was a white shirt that didn't cover your arms and a pair of blue pants held together with rivets! I can't imagine what these people were doing that they needed rivets to keep their pants together! If the pants needed rivets, why didn't the shirt? The fabric felt soft but strong, and they tell me that it was woven from plant fibers. Who would think to waste soil and water just for something to wear?

Then they brought my weapon: a sonic canon. It was a black rectangular box, about the length of my hand, with a targeting viewfinder, a little button on top, and a conical opening in the front. The canon produced a controlled sound wave that could be aimed at a specific target, though it was beyond the range of hearing. When it came in contact with a human skull it reacted with the bone and amplified, causing it to explode. This benign looking little box had only one use: the ending of a human life.

The techies started to get on my nerves. They were all excited about their new toys, and how well everything was going. Meanwhile, I had nothing to do but wait for everyone to get ready. They kept bubbling into the room, chattering about one inane thing after another, so I put an end to that simply by taking out one of my cigarettes and lighting it. They all ran as if I had set their hair on fire! Okay, so it was rude, not to mention extremely illegal.

They weren't about to arrest me at this point and if I was expected to be an assassin, I didn't think I had to worry about being rude.

Finally, the time came to enter the chamber. It was egg-shaped and just large enough for me to stand inside. I wasn't to touch the walls at all, at least, not if I wanted all my body parts to come with me. They locked me inside as the steel mechanisms began doing whatever they had to do. At that point, my only thought was that if it did explode, it would happen so fast I wouldn't feel it. Thirty seconds later, there was a blinding flash of light and I was suddenly falling.

It felt as if I'd been turned inside out. My guts were on fire and I couldn't see, as I fell against a brick wall and into a heap on the ground. With a shock, I realized I was outside with no protection and nothing to breathe but the air!

"Am... I alive?" I wondered. Standing slowly, I rubbed my eyes, blinking out the tears. I had landed in an alley between two tall buildings but I could see a patch of sky high above. How weird the blue color looked, as if it wasn't real, as if the whole city was inside a huge building. As for the smell, I almost missed the bleach from my rebreather.

Regaining my senses, I checked my surroundings and myself. Other than being a little light headed, I was fine. Looking around the alley, I couldn't believe how much paper was just lying around for the taking.

"Man, if only I could get back with all this, I'd make a fortune on the black market." That's when it really struck me. There wasn't going to be any "getting back" for me and if I didn't get my act together and fast, I would lose the chance to stop what I knew was going to happen. I heard the music from a military band coming from the street and ran towards it.

His vehicle had just passed this street and I had to run to catch up to it. I found I could run much faster than normal. The air was fresher out in the open, and my body responded to it.

Everything seemed overwhelming. I had never seen so many people. More than that, there was just so much life everywhere. Even the ground was covered by plants. My head was spinning as I climbed a small green hill that had a perfect view of the street.

I waited for my signal.

The crowds of people were so excited. They were cheering this man that I had always known as The Destroyer. They didn't realize what the stress from his position had done to him, or that he would have a mental breakdown sometime tonight because of it. Tomorrow he would go home to Washington and argue with one of his advisors. Then an unforeseen fault in his brain would snap, sending him into a rage of paranoia. To him, everyone was a communist spy sent to destroy him and his country. He had to stop them, at any cost. He knew what he had to do and he knew how to do it so that no one could stop him. He then walked into his office and set in motion the death of the planet by attacking with the ultimate weapon: the doomsday bomb.

You see, these people had developed tremendous atomic bombs without understanding what would happen if they actually used them. They taught their children to duck under their desks to protect them, in case someone actually set one off. This didn't save the children of Washington and New York, any better than those of Moscow. The blast set in motion a long dormant fault line along the eastern coast causing massive earthquakes, which pulled most of the ruins down into the earth's crust. They didn't know that the blasts would send over 15% of the earth's atmosphere out into space, and poison what remained for generations.

The Destroyer aimed this weapon toward Russia and fired, but before it struck, his victims retaliated by firing their own version right back at him. The man that I had been sent to kill today would die tomorrow if I should fail. The difference was, today one man would die, or tomorrow untold billions would die because of him, including through the course of time, my wife and children.

His vehicle drew closer. I took out the canon and focused on him, waiting for the signal. Somewhere in this crowd is another assassin, one who would fail in his attempt. The poor fool had no idea what was going to happen tomorrow, he simply didn't like the president. He would aim his rifle and fire, but simply graze the man's forehead. For this, he would spend the rest of his life in prison, until he died of radiation poisoning.

My job was to make sure he did succeed. In that action, I would prevent everything... including possibly my own existence. In the new future, everything would be different: I might never even be born.

I heard the shot.

I held my breath and pressed the button.

I vanished.

Tim Walker sat at his breakfast table, reading the business section of the local newspaper. "Hmmm... the Dow Jones fell again...", he sighed and finished his morning coffee. Walking into the living room, he hollered, "Come on, Adam. It's time for school."

In a chaotic blur, his 10-year-old son poured down the stairs, out the door, and into the family van. As usual, Tim's wife Adora had to follow with a forgotten lunch, adding a kiss for each before they left.

It was a crisp autumn day; sunny, but with the first breath of winter in the air. Maybe it was the cool air, or maybe it was the morning sunlight coming through the trees, but Tim's mood was brighter than it had been for days. One of his major accounts had canceled on him, so money was going to be tight, and there was yet another political scandal rearing its ugly head all over the news. But today, it all didn't seem to be as important anymore.

"Dad? Do you know anything about President Kentucky? We're studying about his assassination in history class today. Were you around when it happened?"

"I'm afraid that was before my time, but you can ask Grandma. She remembers exactly where she was when she first heard about it. I do know he was shot during a parade by some nut that didn't like his ideas. Its a real shame, they say he was a good man. Who knows what he would have accomplished if he had lived."

Tim dropped off his son at the schoolyard, then reached under the seat for his hidden pack of cigarettes. He had promised his wife he would try to quit, but it was not as easy as he had thought it would be. He placed the cigarette between his lips and reached for his trusty lighter. It was a gift, shiny chrome and engraved with his initials: **TEW**. As he lifted it to light his cigarette, the sun struck it in just the right angle to blind him for an instant. Tim sighed and removed the unlit cigarette from his lips. He rubbed his eyes, then put the cigarette back into the pack.

"I don't think I really need this, it's just too nice a day."

goo goo g'joob

Michael Anthony Romero

smells like dookie to me who am i lie down in the crimson and
clover club potato chip off the old block of rock hard to die silently
singing in the rain--man who gives a dime when i try to forget the
past away when i remember new york-er driving down the street
car of confusion in the life of a romantic evening of dinner and
dancing flames consuming daisies in a field of summer heat and
desert mirages beating my thoughts of nostalgia concerns a
dream land of falling stars on the east set in the west across one-
third of the seventeenth period of something misunderstood to no
a veil in the black envelope with one word but everyone's name on
the top right hand corner looking at dead bodies in the sun up
and i don't feel like walking to new orleans or looking at the
sweetheart on my cup 'cause it reminds me of that smile that
almost took control of my will you try to understand-- in the
shadows of a memory in the back seat of my brain washed clean
of nothing in common when everything is except that shouldn't
ultimately mat-her voice and breath in the earth that i cannot live
with out of sight out of mind games with my growing Faith and
Grace amazing me when i don't look for it is out of my control your
own stuff 'round here there and i don't know where the heck it
came from my past you in the clouds once upon a place of when i
don't know who you are or what you want to go out or something's
don't make sense at all you have to do is look up and ask and you
shall receive ing images of moon lit rain drop kissin' tell you what i
really think i is kinda stupid and still am gonna do what i gotta do
to make it through lots of fog horn in my ear and i know you are
near ing a frightening future of things done a thousand million
times before you do that will be enough of that 'cause you're
starting to rub it in a little lady told me to go for it and i thought it
would work ing so i can't think and i'm running on sunshine
sweating in space left over to think some more 'bout this an' that
sounds pretty weird like sayin' goo goo g' joob

Color of a Dream

Hal Amen

The cold metal of the car door
Scorches my back through the T-shirt
As I stand lazily, hands in pockets
Putting questions to the clouds of the moon.

The porch light glows gold
Illuminating the half-dead grass
Creating a color so surreal
It can only be the product of a dream

The shadow of a tree conceals him
A cigarette's ember rising occasionally
To an unseen mouth
Forming smoke out of nothing

I want to put on my jacket
I want to paint the grass a different color
I want to shine light in his dark eyes
All I have is the moon.

What my Father Says about the Rain

Debra Innocenti

Only the body knows when. It's not
circles around the moon or the taste of the wind.
I watch these things less and less nowadays.

Even when it seems all I've grown is dying,
the maize, the corn, losing all green, I cannot pray.
Only the body knows when it's not

to be, when the fields are ripe to be lost,
when you must let go all you expect to reap.
I watch these things. Less and less nowadays

I open my hands to be filled. I keep myself
clean from hope, until what I have left is
only the body I know. When is it not

true: the fatted calf is trampled in the barn,
the daughter I lost does not walk the path home?
I watch these things less and less. Some day

in my sweet emptiness, salvation
will rush down like rain to fill me.
Only the body knows when. It's for me
to watch these things less and less nowadays.

Twenty Bucks

Jessica Baltera

"But Mooom! I'm playing Nintendo! Pleeeeeease! Five more minutes!" Sam screamed to his mom. "No, Samuel Joseph Lewis! Get your butt on that bike and go get me some milk, now!"

Sam hated it when his mom made him go run her errands. He looked like such a nerd running mommy's errands. Every Tuesday, she interrupts his Nintendo playing and sends him to the store. This Tuesday was just like every other Tuesday. He shoved the twenty bucks she gave him in his pocket and hopped on his Diamond Back Racing bike he got for Christmas.

Sam's mind was on other things when he rolled into the 7-Eleven parking lot. Just as he put his bike up against the store he caught a glimpse of her hair out of the corner of his eye. "Oh my God! There she is. Okay, calm down. Play it cool. You're fine," Sam thought to himself. There SHE was, Elizabeth from Mrs. Bonner's class. Sam took a deep breath and checked his hair in the store window. He went in to the store and got the milk. All the time, going through the motions, thinking about Elizabeth behind him at the pumps. Just as he put the gallon of milk on the counter, she waved at him. He smiled back, trying to act like he didn't care. A rush of confidence danced up his spine as he slid the twenty bucks across the counter to the lady behind it.

Sheryl Lynn had worked at 7-Eleven for 12 years, and not once did she get "Employee of the Month." She went to work on time, did her job like she was suppose to, but no one noticed. It was just her and the Big Gulps day in and day out. This Tuesday was like every other Tuesday, or every other day for that matter.

When she looked at the little boy handing her twenty bucks, his blues eyes struck a cord with her. Sheryl Lynn was twenty years old when she got pregnant. She wasn't sure who the father was and her family could barely afford groceries every week, let alone an addition to the family. There were no abortion clinics in her small town of DeQuincy, Louisiana. So she endured

a long, summer pregnancy and gave the baby boy up for adoption. She never even held him because the nurse said it was for the best. She caught a glimpse of his blue eyes and heard him cry.

Just then, a loud woman's voice boomed at Sheryl Lynn. Her memory faded away and she was jolted into reality. Staring at her, were these huge, bug eye sunglasses with a mouth screaming, "Excuse me, Miss. Excuse me. I am in a hurry!" She was obviously annoyed.

Molly was in a hurry, every second of the day. No one could stop her determination. She had stopped into 7-Eleven to buy a carton of Benson & Hedges. She promised herself she would only smoke on odd days of the month. But after a day like today, that moment of weakness was forgotten. Molly handed her a fifty-dollar bill and the cashier handed her the change of \$20.56. She left just as fast as she came in. Running out of the 7-Eleven, she tripped over a little boy's bike and ripped her stockings. "Perfect!" Molly thought to herself.

In an attempt to make up for lost time, Molly raced down 36th St. She dug frantically through her purse for her lighter. Rolling down the window and trying to steer at the same time, Molly lit her cigarette, accelerating as she passed the FM 359 sign. The wind began blowing and just as Molly reached over to her purse to put her cigarettes away, her things started flying out the window. In an attempt to keep her files from scattering about some God forsaken county road, she began to roll the window back up, concentrating on her cigarette. Just as she went to flick her mile long ash out of the cracked window, the twenty-dollar bill flew out the window. A decision had to be made. Save the twenty bucks or hit the hitchhiker that has his thumb stuck out in the middle of the road. Although she had a bad day, the best of her senses rose to the occasion and she blew it off. Twenty bucks was nothing to this woman. After all, she represented people who used twenty-dollar bills to wipe their noses.

Luke was trying to get to his sister's house. He had been hitchhiking across the country for awhile and decided it was time to check in with sis. A car zoomed by about an hour ago. Another car zoomed by. Luke was sure there was no way he could possibly walk the ten blocks to her house. Contemplating, to walk or not to walk or not to walk, Luke did not even see the BMW barreling for his direction. "Who drives a BMW in these parts?" he thought, as he turned his thumb down and put "the bird" up. Just then, a piece of paper flew out of the car. Still a little confused about what almost happened, but bored by the flat scenery, Luke walked over to the piece of paper. "Well, I'll be damned," Luke thought to himself. There was a twenty-dollar bill, right smack in the middle of the road. Luke shoved it into his pocket and gained a sudden spurt of energy.

As he headed off FM 359, Luke thought about his sister and the last time he saw her. They were very close, although they rarely spoke. He hadn't seen her son since he was an infant. Thinking about her son reminded him of when they were kids. He remembered when their uncle came to visit he always brought them some kind of present from some far off place that made Luke daydream. After college, Luke set off to see the world. He had been traveling for a year now, and for the first time in a long time, he felt the need to see family.

Turning left onto her street, Luke was a little nervous. He started to feel bad that he was just popping in. He should have brought a gift for them. He knocked on the door after hesitating a second. When she opened the door, her face lit up like it did every Christmas morning when they were growing up. They hugged. He felt a peacefulness rush over his body and he realized, "This is home." She reintroduced him to her son Sam who had no recollection of his uncle. Luke felt bad that he didn't have anything for the boy, when he remembered the twenty bucks. He pulled it out of his pocket and gave it to Sam. Sam said thanks and shoved the twenty bucks in his pocket.

Labyrinth

Nicole Jordan

If I had only known the irresistible attraction Fate builds between
two souls, pulling them closer together the more they pull
apart, overwhelming their every thought,
I never would have embraced your stealthy, bold physique.

If I had only known the insufferable pain and agonizing heartache
I'd bear just to hear you speak, if only to bring a moment's
bliss in a lifetime of misery,
I never would have listened to your deep, hypnotic voice.

If I had only known the insatiable yearning that would burn in my
soul, mind, and body, like a starving addiction that craves
for one more touch, one more look,
I never would have gazed into your alluring, piercing eyes.

But long after the touch, the whisper, the gaze that locked me in,
I know the endless lingering that was meant from the start.
Your enigmatic heart lured me into the obscure, intimate tunnels
of a love
My own heart could not resist, trapping me, forcing me to search
for the truth inside your secret emotions that no one else
feels but me.

And in that quest for what was right, I found everything that's
wrong.
Could that be why? Do I long for something so dark so I can shed
light on it?
Is the immorality somehow the cause of such intense temptation?
How could that be, when all your thoughts, actions,
morals—
Everything that's in you contradicts everything in me?
Against my will I'm lost in this labyrinth of love. It's all too
perplexing, I'm afraid to find the answer.

And yet, you did not invite me, so why am I still standing in this
hallway of memories, staring deeply into each painting on
the walls, seeking some kind of meaning?

What am I waiting for? Dare I hope for a sudden moment of
clarity?

Instead of straying from the pictures that reveal only remorse and
regret, I foolishly peruse them, knowing with my mind the
answers are not there,

But wishing in my heart they'll come to me one day, and I'll turn to
find you there beside me, gazing at the portraits of times
gone by, you too desperate and alone.

In that instant, everything we ever knew about ourselves vanishes,
and suddenly everything in me is everything in you.

A Bloody Morning

Roxann Sánchez

It was summertime, I was ten, and everything was hot. My parents owned one air-conditioning unit, which they kept in their bedroom. On hot summer nights, like this one, they'd let my brother and sister and me lay some thick blankets over the floor by their bed and sleep in the cold room. It was a small room; my brother was scrawny enough to lie comfortably between the foot of the bed and the wall, while my sister and I slept snugly in between my parent's bed and a wide, red oak dresser that seemed to grow wider each year. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, one of my parents would forget we were there and accidentally step on us.

The room would become quite nippy; there were times when the use of three blankets was necessary. The cold air made me want to sleep in for days. Tonight was such a night, but I awoke when I felt a sudden hint of warmth on my face. I slept right next to the door, and when I opened my eyes and turned over, I saw that it was open. I could hear running water, and as I glanced across the hall, there was my father standing over the bathroom sink. He wasn't wearing anything but his grand, white, Fruit of the Loom briefs. His belly looked much bigger when he wasn't wearing a shirt. The sun's radiant light was shining through the small bathroom window directly opposite my parent's room. Its rays reflected a pink hue off the shower curtain and onto the entire room.

My father was coughing uncontrollably. It was an awful sound, the kind you hold in when you're in public out of fear that others might gross-out. I could tell he had those gooey, slimy, gucky pieces of phlem hanging down the middle of his throat, because he kept on hissing like a cat on the defense. I could feel my face change. My eyes squinted, and my brows slowly frowned, while my mouth just puckered up in disgust. Finally, I heard the hissing stop and the release of a loaded mouth. My body cringed slightly, a natural reflex. Strangely enough, I managed to doze off for a few more minutes.

I was the first to rise and began my morning routine by heading for the bathroom. I leaned over the sink to wash my face, but it was disgusting. There were clumps of blood and mucus all over the sink. Its crimson color stood out against the ivory counter. What could have happened? My mind was ringing-up all the possibilities and my stomach was ready to vomit. Then, I realized it was my father's blood. A hideous sense of fear came over me. I searched for my father and found him asleep on his bed. He looked as he always did, and so I let the incident pass me by. "Besides, nothing could ever hurt Daddy," I thought. Little did I know this was only the first of many bloody mornings to come.

This memory of my father was the first of hundreds to follow: leaving work to run across the street and buy a 32 oz can of Bud, waking up on Sunday mornings in search of a store that would, illegally, sell him beer before noon, getting into fist-fights with the neighbors for no reason, coming home at 3:00 am and making us clean the house, or adding another ticket to his collection of DWIs.

At the time, I couldn't perceive it, nor could I understand it, but my father was slowly dying of alcoholism. He knew it, and his desperate attempts to stop drinking led him to admit himself into several rehabilitation clinics. The miraculous results were only temporary. He couldn't eat; his stomach had become conditioned to alcohol and rejected any type of food. He had to have a drink every few hours, if not, he'd become a monster, and his hands would begin to shake vehemently.

Ten years later, my father's condition has worsened. I can honestly say I don't know who he is. I can't remember a time when he was sober; he's a 24-hour drunk. Yet, I want him to see me graduate, to give me away when I marry, to carry my children. I hate this disease! He says he's stopped trying to overcome it. I think he tries everyday, but it's so hard for him. He thinks if no one knows he's trying, at the end of the day, no one will know he's failed. Meanwhile, I stand by the sidelines and wait for the bloody mornings to stop. I long for the day when I can wake up to brush my teeth and not have to rinse his blood off the sink. I fear the day I await is the day of his death.

Uncle Sam

Daniel Carvajal

I am Sam, Sam I am
The figure head of this great land
I tell you, "America is the land of the free."
Because, I want you to worship me

I am the leader of this great state
Capitalism used to harbor hate
America and God our goals are the same
Go to war, it's in His name

Your tax, my tithe, you pay the bill
Women, children your tithe they kill
I bought a bullet, I bought a bomb
It's in God's name, so nothing's wrong

So associate God and me
And the evil you will not see
I am Sam, Sam I am
I'm the devil's right hand man

tie me to the bedpost

Meghan Fisher

Leave me hanging, quipped and phrased
on the poignancy of your last utterance
feel the softness in me, warmth and trembling
moist lips and careless eyes, dish-water hands
almost taste the dread lusciousness in the air
tip-tonguing like a slinky snake
all too aware of your pompous parade
this endless charade of painful tick-tocking
metronome, string of crazy words
full of double entendre and ancient excuses
can't help the urgency and passivity of my body
slip-sleeping away in careful, caramel dreams of you
not knowing and then cognizant of everything around
like I'm some weird, misguided, indecisive Shakespearean angel
kiss-kill me away my hate-love, mal-amour towards
you blind me carefully so I can see more carelessly
affected passions in your kind, vicious glance
teach me how to be so cruel in loving, hateful in adoring
and I will forgive your un-sin
I don't move, though moved to hate or love you
can't always tell the difference, which is which
then realize I can't move because, accidentally
you tied me to the bedpost before I could decide
whether I wanted to hit or kiss you

Nerves

Kelly Bateson

Keyed up
I feel so close to the edge
Looking down
The ledge seems high
Above the blackness of ground below

What if I was to jump?
My wings might unfold
and catch the wind
Sending me upward
or

Something could go wrong
a million little things
possibilities flash
they overwhelm me with their number
and intensity
I realize how worn I am

Maybe change is needed
New eyes
I know that I can jump
but can I not also shuffle my feet
Concentrate
and step back?
maybe a little farther still
Yes, that's it

My legs shake
Knees buckle in surprise
Suddenly I'm exhausted
Head and neck tilt back
back back

The grass jumps up
to embrace my form
Feeling peace

I close my eyes
and sleep
So close to the edge

Interruptions

Morrisa Booker

The paper is due on Monday. THE PAPER. The last one of the semester and the one that will ensure me an A if it is good enough. I already feel that I have typed a million papers over the last four months, and if anyone knew just how much I hate to write papers...

It has taken me six weeks of steady research to come up with the information for this paper, and now, here I am trying desperately to get this thing written. My mind wanders to the thought of my nice soft couch in the other room.

O.K., I am getting serious now. I actually have a thesis statement and I am plowing ahead.

"Mom, I am home!!! I got an A+ on my spelling test. Jimmy fell off the slide and broke his arm at recess today and I had a cheeseburger for lunch. Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you that I have to make a paper maché moon for science by Thursday."

This long string of words was shouted to me by my nine year old, Alex, as he came flying in the front door with a bang. It was immediately followed by crying from the nursery as he woke up his 16 month old brother, Brennan, from what I was hoping would be a long nap. Oh, well, I guess I am done working for the meantime.

It is 8:00 p.m. The kids are fed, bathed, read to and tucked in bed. Now maybe I can get some more of this paper done.

Wham, wham, come the kicks to my poor, abused ribs. The baby that I am carrying is riding very high my doctor had to do an ultrasound yesterday to make sure he wasn't pushing on any of my vital organs. I don't know, but I think that I am starting to believe that ribs could be considered vital. I am convinced this little boy is going to be a tap dancer or conga player. I try to ignore the pounding but, as always, children hate to be ignored.

"O.K., kid-o, you win. Mommy will move around a little so that YOU can get comfortable."

Amazing, yesterday I actually got one and a half pages typed, and this thing has only got to be 10 pages long. It is not looking so promising.

I have spent the last two hours typing and quoting facts that prove my original hypothesis. Just as my mind starts to go a little numb, Alex comes running in "Mom, Brennan can say "All-right!" Brennan who is babbling complete nonsense all the way down the hall quickly follows him. I take a deep breath, stop typing, turn around in my chair and look at my youngest son and say to him, "All-right" with as much enthusiasm as I can muster at the moment. Brennan grins really big and says right back at me, "Ahh-wite!" It is the cutest thing you ever saw. He continues to say it the entire time that I am getting the video camera out, but the minute I point it at him, he goes mute. I spend the next 35 minutes trying to coax him to do it again. Alex and I try every trick we can think of, but, true to form, as soon as I am ready to give it up as a lost cause, Brennan spouts it out again, plain as day. We have captured the moment for eternity. Now to call everyone and tell them what he has done. You know how Grandmas love this stuff.

My mind is no longer on the paper, so, as every good mom does, I take to the kitchen to rip up newspaper and mix flour and water into paste in order to manufacture the best moon possible. I just hope that it will dry before tomorrow morning. Throughout the lunar assembly Alex proceeds to tell me all he has learned about the moon and her surface. He has learned stuff that I am covering in my Astronomy class at St. Mary's. I hadn't realized he knew so much. He also informs me that he has definitely decided that he is going to be an astronaut when he grows up. Last week it was a fireman and the week before I believe it was an Indianapolis 500-race car driver.

It is after midnight. I couldn't sleep worrying about this paper so I decided to get up and work on it. I have gotten about six lines typed when my groggy husband comes to find me, claiming he can't sleep without me. This, I know, is a bad line, because as a soldier in the U.S. Army he has spent a lot of time sleeping without me. There is just no way you could get me to sleep outdoors in the middle of a swamp in Louisiana.

"For goodness sake," I tell him "You spent a whole year in Bosnia!" But the sweet, loving look on his face once again lures me away from my computer.

Tomorrow, the paper is due tomorrow. I have at least 1,000 hours of work left to do on it and I am contemplating excuses I can give to my professor. I think the one about my own death would be the most convincing.

I am up to six pages now. That is six out of 10. I am starting to feel as though I am making progress. Brennan has been a dream child. He has played at my feet all morning, with his big brother's toys of course, and is now napping quietly in his room.

Alex is sitting at the kitchen table drawing pictures of Air Force jets. He thinks he might want to be a fighter pilot instead.

The baby inside of me has also been amazingly calm. No swift kicks to the side, no jumping on my bladder. I think I am beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel.

It is only when my husband walks in the door that I realize how much time has passed. He brings pizza for dinner and flowers. As he kisses my cheek he says, "I thought these might make things easier on you." I don't know which means more to me, the pizza, because now I don't have to think about cooking dinner, or the flowers because he has NEVER done this before. Gosh, I just love that man. He never ceases to amaze me.

Brennan is up, the pizza has been devoured, art supplies litter the table, and the kitchen looks as though it has exploded. My flowers stand in a vase next to the computer.

Brennan had cuddled in my lap earlier and as I scroll back through the last couple of pages I typed I see that he has sneaked in a few extra X's, M's and S's while I wasn't paying attention. Hey, no biggy, that's what spell check is for, right?!

The last requirement of the paper is to give our personal opinion of what we see as the future of our topic and what we feel we have learned from our research. I contemplate all of this for a while. I leave my glowing screen and read *Goodnight Moon* once again. I listen as Alex says his prayers. He includes my paper and me in with all his friends, grandparents and teacher. I check on Brennan who is once again making those cute little noises while he sleeps. He looks like an angel. My husband is cleaning

the kitchen. I know that it won't look as good as if I did it myself, but it is the thought that counts. The baby in my belly wiggles. Just a little. Enough to remind me that he is there and will be arriving in just two months. I wonder if he will have curly hair like Brennan, or be bald and green eyed like Alex was when he was a baby?

The house is quiet as I sit back down to the computer. I stare at the screen until it blurs. Then I type.

Although I found that almost all research done on this topic supports my hypothesis and proves that in order for our society to function properly we must all be willing to do our part in the effort to protect life, I must be honest and say that I learned more about life and the beauty of it all from the interruptions I experienced while trying to type my paper. My husband and three sons have taught me more in the last week by just being themselves, than six weeks of research could have ever hoped to prove. I learned about unconditional love, the need for communication and the benefits of hugs. So, no matter what grade I receive on this paper, I give my life an A. I could not ask for anything more, and I would not accept anything less.

Pot Holes

Michelle Sepulveda

I drive down a bumpy,
torn forgotten road careful to
avoid the pot holes that
have grown since last year.

The houses, built almost one
on top of the other, shed their
thick layers of old paint
only to reveal a discolored,
decaying exterior.

The shutters hang like frigid limbs
off their rusty hinges, and
when the wind breathes,
the hinges whisper in agony,
for they have been neglected.

Down the alley, a twelve year
old boy lays beaten and bruised,
surrounded by thirteen members
of a gang who are all too
cowardly to stand alone.
And for what? He wore a
blue shirt.

On the side of the Grandma's
Ice & Grocery the wall used
to read: "Have Pride Westside!",
it is now buried under a chaotic
rainbow of graffiti.

A seventeen year old pregnant,
doped up mother stands there,
in front of the wall

begging for money.
Her baby needs more crack.

I reach the end of the street,
nothing looks any better.
The pot holes are still there,
and they're only getting bigger.

All pain and how much would he give
All I love would stay

Instead of bustling work
My guard and angel
And stole my silver hair
She says to me "Goodbye"

The fairy dust would swirl around
While the tears came pounding down

I wish the rain would fall
And wash away my tears
I want the wind to take all
My pain and all my fears

I dreamt again of yesterday
Thinking it was there to stay
Bright stars and silver moons
Are the only things to soothe my wounds

Night Vision
(for Matthew Shepard)
H. Palmer Hall

Orion hangs in the sky
sword dripping down
like a suppurating wound
The poisonous night draws

all but the strongest stars
I led to a fanon--
--low on the night
you away back and forth push

emptied light
dab down to pacifying earth

Night Vision

(for Matthew Shephard)

H. Palmer Hall

Orion hangs in the sky
sword dripping down
like a suppurating wound.
The noisome night drowns

all but the strongest stars.
Tied to a fence—more
frightening than the war—
you sway back and forth push

ambient light away
drift down to breaking earth

pedding for money
that baby needs more track
I reach the end of the street
nothing looks any better
The hot holes are still there
and they're only getting bigger

when the wind breaks
the hinges whisper in sorrow
—or they have been neglected

Down the alley, a twelve year
old boy lays beaten and bruised
surrounded by thirteen numbers
of a gang who are all too
cowardly to stand alone
And for what? He wore a
blue shirt

On the side of the Crandall's
ice & grocery the wall used
to read "Have Peace Westsider"
it is now buried under a rainbow
rainbow of graffiti

A seventeen year old pregnant
doped up mother stands there
in front of the wall

A Child's Dream

Michelle P. Piña

I wish the rain would fall,
And wash nightmares away.
All pain and heartache would be gone,
All I love would stay.

Instead on blustering winds,
My guardian angel rides,
And steals my silver halo.
She says to me, "Goodbye."

The fairy dust would swirl around,
While the tears came pounding down.

I wish the rain would fall,
And wash away my tears.
I want the wind to take all
My pains and all my fears.
I dream again of yesterday,
Thinking it was there to stay.
Sunlight, stars, and silver moons,
Are the only ones to see my wounds.

The Chosen One

Henry Oosterveen, Jr.

I awake from the love and warmth of my dreams—to the cold loneliness of my cell and the harsh reality of my self-imposed existence. I ask God for forgiveness—for strength. I hear. I feel. I sense no answers—answers that will put all my doubts aside. The questions are always the same. Who am I? What purpose do I serve in life?

My doubts have grown through the years to where they not only dominate my waking hours, but have crept into my dreams. Dreams that used to be of God and serving mankind have been replaced by dreams of love, wife, children—family.

I am one of the chosen few, one, that heard the call and followed. I was a mere boy of fourteen when I heard the call. I knew nothing of life, but I had a deep desire to love and serve God. Was I misled by a group of men into believing that to serve God, to help my fellow man, I must sacrifice everything? Must I go against what is natural—against what God has ordained for all of mankind? Am I to spend my life here on earth consoling and administering to the needs of my “brother’s wife” but never to mine? Am I to help guide and teach my brother’s children but never my own? When day is done, when my brother goes home to the warmth and love of wife and children, will I always be doomed to retreat to my room and to the cold impersonal stares of plaster statues? When I don my white collar, do I lose my five God-given senses? Do I not see beauty in a lovely face? Am I deaf to the lyrical sound of children playing? Do I not pine for the feel of a warm caress? Am I indifferent to a feminine fragrance on a summer night? Are my lips to be used only for speaking, never to touch another’s in solemn promise?

When my duties oblige me to counsel a young lover about his growing love, what human experience gives me the right to do so? What passionate love have I felt? When a wife comes to talk to me about her frustrations, her wifely duties—her maternal obligations—from what shared experience can I give her the advice she so longs to hear? When I must reprimand a man for

staying out late and drinking with his friends instead of being home with his family—how deep must I search into my existence to feel the suffocating familial obligations that sometimes weigh a man down into the pit of alcohol?

My Lord, where does the physical and the divine in me separate? Have I become half a man by dedicating my life to You? Can I not love and serve You and still have a wife, a family? Must I forever owe my love and fidelity to a woman made of mortar and brick? Must I suppress these feelings year after year till there is nothing left except regrets, regrets for a life of dedication, yet unfulfilled?

Lord, give me the answers I seek, give me peace of mind—give me sleep. Let me return to the love and warmth of my dreams. Let me dream of love, wife, children—family.

Unicorn's Lament

Christina D. Smith

They want to touch you
But are afraid
You want their touch
But do not receive it
They want your purity
Crave your beauty
But for one reason or another--
A reason no one will tell you--
They refuse to go near you

They watch in awe your magnificence
But never talk
Voices you would love to hear
Do not speak
Your rarity astounds them
And they run from you

You are not a horse
You do not belong to any animal species
A single horn upon your forehead separates you
A separation that drives you mad
Magic does not allow you to belong anywhere
Except in a category all by yourself
You are further alienated by this fact laid before you

And yet...

They think you like being alone
They think you revel in being unique
And if they could hear your screams of anguish
Would they believe you could feel pain?
For a unicorn is supposed to heal
Yet all the magic you possess
Cannot cure your loneliness

The healing properties you own
Cannot mend your broken heart
As much as you would like to cry
Your immortality will not let you
So you continue to suffer
But rest assured unicorn
Someone has heard your scream
And answers you with one of her own

Escape
Hal Amner

She used to be
to the stars
in
in

She used to be
to the stars
in
in

She used to be
to the stars
in
in

She used to be
to the stars
in
in

She used to be
to the stars
in
in

From the hole a figure creeps
Silent slender, he unfolds
Into the dark his shadow seeps
Among the dapply hidden cold

His exit waits as dark he turns
Toward them eyes which flash and die
Rosebird wings in darkness burn
A face takes form in faint slight

Lips pressed close in fierce farewell
Still drinking sweetly when they part
No sound arose when footsteps fell
And faded into midnight's heart

Escape

Hal Amen

Just at the peak of Midnight's reign
Sheltered by the swaying trees
A swiftly sliding window pane
Breaks the calm monotony

From the hole a figure creeps
Silent, slender, he unfolds
Into the dark his shadow seeps
Among the deeply hidden cold

His exit waits as back he turns
Toward fiery eyes which flash and bite
Rosebud image in darkness burns
A face takes form in faint starlight

Lips pressed close in fierce farewell
Still drinking sweetly when they part
No sound arose when footsteps fell
And faded into Midnight's heart.

And yet

They think you like being alone
They think you revel in being unique
And if they could hear your screams of anguish
Would they believe you could feel pain?
For a unicorn is supposed to heal
Yet all the magic you possess
Cannot cure your loneliness

Her Lips Say it All

Lené Gary

Her lips are bathed
 in vintage wine
never has she
 worn this kind

She used to choose
 to glaze her lips
in sugared grapefruit
 or honey sticks

Sometimes she would
 bare them nude
as if to take
 away his food

Raw and tender
 peeling, chapped
white washed zinc
 coldness wrapped

Liquored lips
 and sobered soul
now she offers
 what he stole

A drink of wine
 a tongue to taste
the love of one
 in which to baste

The Long Ride Home

Victoria Hurtado

"But Doctor Teing, I'm so concerned. Every time I let her bathe she just scrubs and scrubs her skin with a wash cloth until she's red and her skin gets so dry. She just cries and cries that she doesn't look like me. I mean, this child is only three years old and I hate to see her so depressed about her beautiful skin. I just really want to know if there is anything I can tell her or anything I can do to ease her sadness?" As my mother talked to my pediatrician, she knew I was having problems with my dark skin color.

"Now Linda, I know that Victoria is very upset, but you have to understand that it isn't all that unusual. The best thing to do right now is really take time to think about why she is the color she is. Explain the answer to her because I know you know the appropriate answer. Don't worry- it'll be okay."

My mother realized that my pediatrician's advice was golden. "Baby, why do scrub your beautiful honey skin so hard?"

"I don't know Mommy--I wanna look like you. Not like Daddy."

I'll never forget the feeling of hate I had for my skin color and I'll never forget the feeling of remorse I had that my dad was so dark. My mother did come up with the best answer any child would have loved to hear; I will never forget it.

"Well you do look like me and you look like Daddy too. Baby, God made you so special that he decided to make you look like the man I love the most-and that's your Daddy."

I guess this is when it all began. A ripe age of three years and already worrying about social standards set by society. My mother has always been a set standard of beauty in my eyes, brown hair and light beautiful skin. I wanted this so much, but it was something I could never have.

At the age of four, my mind still was not at ease about the color of my skin and the complex I had created for myself. Everyday my mother would pick me up from daycare, scoop me

up in her arms and carry me to the car. She always had to wear long nurse skirts that always hit my face as it blew in the hot humid breeze. One day out of daycare would be one that will never be forgotten.

Billy was a curious little bully that never really bothered me, until that day. My mother scooped me up from the playground to carry me to the car, as always, and felt a tug at her skirt. Billy covered the sun with his hand and asked my mother, "How come she's so dark and you're so light? Are you her mommy?"

"Billy, I think it's time for you to go back inside to go play with all the other kids." My mother said this while we were about to leave the daycare center as she scooped me up into her arms.

There was nothing my mother could say to make me feel any better on that long ride home. She had nothing to tell me this time all she did was cry during the drive home. This made me so upset that I really believed that I was not her daughter. Since *Annie* was such a popular movie around that time, I understood the concept of not having any parents. I watched that movie so much. I identified with the little girls because they were around my age and I knew the loneliness of not being sure who my parents really were in my heart. I was convinced that she was not my mom and I waited for the day for her to tell me I was adopted.

As I grew up, I thought I was growing out of my complex with skin color. In the sixth grade, I went off to summer camp. It was the kind of place where I practically rolled around in dirt, so I had to wear comfortable clothes. The day my parents came to pick me up from camp, my mom and I did our bonding ritual of shopping. I was still in my camp clothes as we started our day of shopping glory. We started out at a boutique we had never been in before, but it was exciting since it was in the nice shopping district of town.

All of the clothes were so cute and I couldn't wait to try all of them on in the dressing rooms. It was a success! So many of the clothes fit perfectly and since my mom was in such a giving mood she said I could have them all. We went up to the register to pay for all my new clothes. My mom paid with a check and the girl behind the counter asked my mom, looking down at me: "Do you want one of our attendants to take your bags or your maid?"

That comment was enough for my mother to get so pissed that she got her money back and we left. The drive home was, once again, a long sad ride. Both of us cried. I cried out of hurt. My mother cried because she did not have anything comforting to say. I took comfort in her tears and in her understanding eyes.

About a year later, I tried out for cheerleader at my elementary school. Since the first day of first grade after a pep rally, I wanted to be a cheerleader. Tryout day finally came towards the end of my seventh grade.

After two weeks of rigorous new and physically challenging moves from cheerleading camp, we were ready, as we would ever be for try judgement day. It was a competitive round of tryouts of twenty girls, half above average and the other half mediocre. Judges from an NCA high school cheerleading squad came in to judge us; none of us knew them. This made the anticipation of knowing there were only ten spots even more incredible. The twenty of us huddled together holding hands, breathing hard, hearts pounding, palms sweating, and a few tears. As the names were being called out, my heart sunk after every name was being called, not hearing mine.

"Victoria Hurtado!"

"Mom! I got it! I did it!" I ran to my mother and tried to pick her up and we both started crying together. Every girl who made it had wanted the position just as bad as I did and we all just cried of pure joy, accomplishment and above all glory. The next day, friends and faculty showered the ten of us with flowers and little gifts to congratulate our accomplishments.

I never noticed that the squad was only comprised of two Hispanic girls, Christina and me. The rest were white. I didn't know how to see them as "white" until Karl Ruter, a well thought of boy, pointed it out to Christina. "The only reason you and Victoria got cheerleader is because the judges needed minorities on the squad. You know- a quota." I found out as I saw her crying and asked her what was wrong. As she told me, tears fell down my face and I actually believed that this quota existed. I told my mom on the ride home; it was a long ride home once again. We both cried. I cried out of fear that a quota existed. My mom cried out of her fear that she could hate Karl Ruter.

Faculty and students found out that he said this and he was alienated by everyone at school. Karl Ruter had to write a formal letter of apology to the both of us. I lost all respect for him.

A few years later at Christmas, my maternal grandmother truly showed her small town mentality. The two of us were in the kitchen and I was helping her with last minute dinner preparations. She asked me, "Nini, you're so dark. Why can't you learn to stay out of the sun so you can be light like me and your mama?" I had nothing to say; I was speechless out of complete shock. I couldn't believe my own grandmother would make such an ignorant remark to her own granddaughter.

On the way home I told my mother. It was a long ride home, once again. She was so upset that her mother said that to her beloved daughter. My mom and I were silently crying on the way home. I cried out of knowing the comment didn't hurt as much as before; I was growing out of the complex. My mother cried because she feared her hatred for her mother.

I don't know if I still resent the people who hurt me: Billy, Karl Ruter, and my grandmother. I do know that I have grown up since all that hurt and pain. I realize that there is so much more to me, as well as other people, than the color of skin. Believing in this realization makes me stronger than those that are ignorant enough to make their own stupidity evident by pointing out physical traits. They can no longer hurt me.

Dedicated to Him, Wherever He May Be

Elizabeth Drury

She stood there shaking, gun in her hand, pointing at a man she once loved with all her being. She had remembered the fun times they had shared during the sixteen years of marriage and wondered when his loyalties had drifted away. His desires made way for some idealistic state of mind, where bedding down with one woman was not as pleasurable as the conquest of many.

"You S.O.B.," she cursed him aloud. Then his screams of terror woke her from her daydreaming. She finally realized that he was yelling at her. "Have you gone crazy?" A cloud of darkness seemed to cover her mind, as if she were standing in a dream. Her shaking hand still held the gun. "You always thought of yourself first, and our lives ended up being centered around the things that pleased you," she thought, "...no matter how anyone else felt about it. When our son wanted you to go outside and play basketball with him, you always said you were too tired from working. Work? Were you even there when you said you were going? Bastard, why did I ever listen to you, trust you, worst yet, devote my entire existence to you? You scum of the earth!"

When she awoke from the nightmare, she was lying on a cot, far from home, with big black bars almost touching her face.

Gilbert's Lament

(for G.L.)

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

Next year

I could be eating government cheese
or selling women's hygiene products
in aisle five of Super K-mart.

Don't you know

I'm made for

East Coast Poetry Slams?

I want to wear tri-colored

T-shirts that read

Sip me, Slurp me, Slap me.

And chew skinny cigars
between my teeth.

I want to sit on the Parisian

sidewalk café where Hemmingway

wrote a masterpiece for Lit 3021

Can I sleep and get paid for it?

Or am I just a graduate with an English degree

destined to face comma splices and spitballs

and an occasional glimpse into youthful genius?

Today I am a graduate

shaking the hand of a Dean

who knows the paper he's handing me

will get me as far as a nickel in Saks.

This is How

(Para mi Tío, Master Sgt. Roy Benavides,
whose courage will be an eternal legacy.)

Rick Benavidez

This is how I want you to take me.
Lightly, like the coming wind, some bound renewal
careless against the coming day. And
I don't want so much for rain to endure
the night I go, but familiar sounds and sights,
my amorous endeavor beside me. I would
love a decaying stage to practice on and
time to prepare. Perhaps, direction would
ease the unsure heart to unlife.

Consolation would be nice, although that
external force is best needed by what's
familiar.

So I'll look for the naked tree of my winter's
sadness dancing in the wind, *haciendo vueltas*
to the song of the sun as I set, leaves strewn about
me like faded tears.

This is how I want you to take me.
Praying, embroidering words on my lips
in praise of you, giving thanks for what
you didn't give me *y con esperanza que he*
cumplido todo...que el amor era mi nombre callada.

No quiero que me borres de repente,
Quiero que me lleves como un suspiro...
...this is how I want you to take me.

Military Cemetery

Tracy Ruiz

My heart became heavy,
and for respect, stopped beating.

My eyes in awe
for a sight only seen on TV

This was real.
And it was beautiful.

It was like a sea of white pigeons,
quietly resting on lawn turf.

All the same.
All silent.

I was somber,
yet, I knew no one in particular.

All gone for a Nation.
All lying under God.

All now Invincible,
With no Liberty, and
no Justice at all.

Giving **Zach Nasits**

I noticed on our drive to the Ortega's house how the neighborhoods gradually grew poorer and poorer. I could see the reflection of my face as I stared through the car window. My face was clean, white, and healthy. But, as I studied the faces of inhabitants of that neighborhood, I remember seeing contradicting characteristics. They stared at us with what appeared to be astonishment. They had to have recognized that we were from a different place all together. Our place was invigorating and prosperous compared to theirs, and this was understood with a single glimpse at one another. My mood grew neutral as I pondered the thought of living how they did.

We turned into the gravel driveway, which had no cars in it, just a few bicycles. As we got out, I could feel the neighbors evaluating our every move. We walked up to an adobe house, which could not have been any bigger than my bedroom, and nobody said a word. The windows had some holes in them, as though some one had thrown rocks at them. What kind of world is this? We knocked on the thin metal door. An enthusiastic little boy opened the door and waved for us to come in; he knew why we were there.

The temperature of the air in their house was cooler and crisper than the air outside. It felt to be about fifty degrees, and the air was still. The winter tones of the brown grass and empty trees outside matched the condition of the gray cinder-block cavern.

I looked around for symbols of promise and hope and found only some ribbons made of shiny cloth. While my family was interacting with the family, I walked up to the calico colored 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place ribbons for various academic events at one of the children's elementary schools.

"Dos' are mine," said the nine-year-old Miguel. "I won dos at a spelling contest at my school." The ribbons were small and ordinary, but they decorated the discouraging concrete walls like a healthy orchid blooming inside (of something dismal). I honored their meaning because they were won by beating the odds.

Beside the front door, I noticed one window facing out over the Rio Grande and into the succumbing Mexican lands. Whatever light peeped into the room came through that window and was extremely filtered by the gray clouds outside. And, their Christmas tree created a glow, which was brightened by only a few colored bulbs.

Across the room from the tree was a bed where the other Ortega children sat with their father and gazed at us, investigating our every move. I could tell that they spoke almost no English, but the expressions on their face exhibited anticipation of a Santa Claus. A small woman came out of their bathroom to greet us. She was wearing a long-sleeve gray sweatshirt, which was covered by her long dangling pancho. The pancho wrapped around her short yet broad stature, shielding from the brisk, cool air. Its colors resembled those of Jacob's sacred coat, dark reds, purples, greens, yellows, and browns. All of the colors combined with her dark skin. Her short black hair and frying pan eyes demonstrated her beauty as her freshly assembled make up induced a youthful look.

"Hello. Are you Mrs. Ortega?" my father asked her.

The woman smiled and we couldn't help but to do the same. My father continued, "I am Clover Burnes, this is my wife Mary." He pointed to my brother, my sister and myself before he continued. "These are my children Adam, Noel, and Tim." We gathered to greet her; I tried to create the most humble hello so that she could know what peace we bring. She sank and seemed embarrassed by her poverty and then her son walked up to us. We immediately recognized that he was Daniel, for he was the biggest of his siblings. He stood in front of his mother and told us "Hello."

Mary kneeled down to him and said in her tender high-pitched voice, "Hello! You must be Daniel!" He nodded his head "yes." We knew all of their names because the agency that assigned us to the Ortega family gave us a list of all their names along with their appropriate sizes and "Christmas wishes." Daniel clarified how he was the only one in the family who could speak English. His siblings were learning in school, but were still too young and inexperienced. He then introduced us to his entire family; "This is my father Alberto, my mother Lucia, my sisters

Clara y Juani, and my broders Miguel and baby Santo." I already knew their names, shoe sizes, pant sizes, favorite toy, and so on, but I did not know their faces. I looked at each of them individually, trying to piece them together with all of the things we bought for them.

My dad turned to us and told us to go and get the gifts. We went outside to the truck, which looked as though it were Santa Clauses' sled, too weighed down to fly. We reached in and scooped up as many presents as we could and unloaded them around their humble Christmas tree. Lucia widened her eyes to Clara who eyeballed her to let her open some presents. She knew that she was going to have to wait until tomorrow. Each time I reentered their room, I paid attention to the children and their energetic excitement. Santo lay in his crib beside his new white teddy bear, which seemed larger than before. Miguel, who was seven years old, grasped his football like Dion Sanders of the Dallas Cowboys. I had never seen such happiness.

We each must have taken five or six trips before "the sled" was emptied. When everyone had regrouped in the room, there was not enough room to move around because there were so many gifts around the stool on which the Christmas tree stood.

Alberto's and Lucia's faces were buried in each other's shoulders. Mrs. Ortega's body was quivering and jerking with every sniffing whimper. He looked to us with teary eyes and said, "Thank you." I recognized his firm eye contact shifting between each of our eyes and I grew weak by his words.

We left the Ortega's world of poverty and reentered ours. Our car ride home was quiet as I could only think of the misfortune that the Ortega's life entailed. But watching their frowns grow into smiles made me feel good. Although we did not tackle poverty, I think that what we did was definitely worthwhile. I felt good about the happiness we were able to create for the Ortega's.

About two days after Christmas, Noel found a package on our front door step. It was a small basket wrapped in a purple plastic foil, which guarded us from seeing what was inside. There was a card attached by golden ribbon. She handed it to us and Daniel told us that she wanted us to open it. Mary read the card aloud:

Dear Burnes Family,

We are writing you this letter to thank you for the presents we got from you and your family. What you did for our family was very special for us. I know you will give to other families too. One day when you need something the same when you did for us someone will do it for you. Maybe not with toys but other things. You might need in a difficult time. My little brothers liked their balls, clothes, and their toys. My family and I are so happy because we didn't had good jackets and you gave us just for what we needed for winter. One mor thing was that we needed shoes and we were bearly geting money for the shoes you brought us some shoes. We think you were angels sent by God. The nest morning a cousin came to spent the night with us. When he came into the door he got very suprised with us because of the presents and paper were all over the place. He just came in and he wanted some of the gifts. We gave him one of our balls. I hope that is o.k. He went home very happy because he played with the toys you gave us. We want to thank you for the gifts you gave us. One day, god will repay you what youve done for many people in the world. God will save your places in heaven because he knows how big your hearts are. Sorry for the mistakes on the letter.

Sincerely,
Family Ortega

Spin Blue

Michelle Sepulveda

Blue spins in a frenzy,
spilling oceans
 of ink
 into Fantasia.

Summer brings delicate creations
like fireflies magically
 capturing
 the brightness
 of words.

I wish I could weave
in
 and
out
of the words,
finding their perfect meanings.

Then,
like Queen Mab,
I could sprinkle
their
 sweetness
 into my
 dreams.

Repeat Offender

Ann Dunne

A mayonnaise jar was left out-----

again,

On the table-----

open,

Almost empty;

With a knife standing up

as if stabbing.

This isn't the first time

he's done this to me.

Lazy---

Thoughtless--

Irritating-

Too busy to care?

I'll mention it,

He'll apologize,

but won't really care.

He'll forget.

I'll remember.

He'll do it,

Again.

My Colchitis... My Blanket

(Dedicated to Biba)

Tanya Masgaly Flores

Mi Colchita...My Blanket

(Dedicated to Bibo)

Tanya Magaly Flores

Since the day you were born,
I covered your little shivering body.
Throughout the years,
You spilled drinks on me
And took me out on long,
Cold trips.
Together we watched movies on rainy days.
When the lighting struck,
I protected you from getting scared.
You would name all the colors I displayed,
Went over my patterns with your fingers,
And listened to your mommy's stories on how each
Square represented a part of her life.
I've watched you bloom into a young woman,
And I realized that you did not need me anymore.
The day came when you had to leave
In order to accomplish your hopes and aspirations.
As you took one last look around your room,
I felt doomed when I saw you close the door.
Emptiness filled every inch of me,
All I had left were the memories we shared.
Suddenly, the little girl, now a young woman,
Came back and took me with her.

A Day in the Country

Rose Mary Droke

How well can you remember the worst day of your life? I remember mine quite well. One bright sunny morning in June, I loaded my eight kids into the family station wagon and headed out for a picnic in the country. One of my friends, Zora, had just moved to a peanut farm in Floresville and invited me and my kids for an outing at her farm. This was to be the first trip in our lipstick red Mercury station wagon. The new car showroom smell still lingered even with nine bodies crammed inside.

I should have suspected that this would not be an ordinary outing for the Droke clan when about ten miles or so down the road, Becky, my third oldest daughter, announced that Susan, the eldest of my group was going to be awfully mad at me. When I inquired as to the reason, Becky informed me that I had forgotten Susan and left her at home. She had forgotten her purse, and ran back in the house to find it. We then reversed directions, and after counting heads, we started out again for our trip to the country.

We finally reached the turn off for the farm-to-market road that led to Zora's peanut farm. This country road was actually a narrow dirt trail leading through pastureland and skirting the edge of a large peanut farm. The dust billowing up from our tires hid the fact that a herd of cattle was approaching the road in order to cross to get to a watering hole. Several men on horseback, wearing old sweat stained Stetson hats, faded jeans and well-worn cowboy boots were driving the herd down the dusty road to a watering hole nearby. They had bright neckerchiefs tied over their lower faces and noses to protect their lungs from the dust clouds being generated by the cattle. My children were quite excited to see this bovine parade crossing the road before our very eyes. We were excited, that is, until the bright red of our station wagon attracted the herd and they converged on our beautiful Mercury and crowded around the body of the wagon. They were shaking the car, rubbing their hides on the trim on the sides of the car and making the car shake and tilt as they pressed in on all sides.

Some of the kids were crying, some were screaming, some were laughing, some were trying to roll down the windows in order to pet the cows, and I was praying to a God who seemed to have deserted me on a dirt road in Floresville, Texas one bright June morning.

After the excitement on the road with the herd of cattle, we finally arrived at my friend Zora's house for our outing. A small creek bordered the back of her property, and a pavilion with picnic tables was located there. We were looking forward to a picnic lunch upon our arrival at the peanut farm.

Of course, the minute the car stopped, everyone needed to make emergency trips to the bathroom and to run off the excess energy stored up while making the long drive from the city. The older children supervised some of the bathroom trips with the exception of my son David, who decided that at the age of six, he was big enough to make the trip alone.

The farmhouse was of a 1920's vintage with high ceilings, wide baseboards, peeling wallpaper and was built long before indoor plumbing and bathrooms were invented. The only bathroom in the house was one built from a converted closet; herefore it had no windows, no outdoor vents and no duct work. The door to the bathroom was hinged on the inside of the bathroom and had a tricky little button, which could be pushed, rather than turn the key – in order to secure the door for privacy.

The kids were recruited and organized to help carry the baskets of food out to the creek for our luncheon when we suddenly heard the wailing of a child crying, "Help, help! Let me out!" We investigated the cries and soon discovered that my son, David, had somehow locked himself in the bathroom and could not find a way to unlock or open the door. We desperately called out instructions to David while we explored our options in extricating this little one from the bathroom. We considered calling the fire department until we discovered that there was no fire department in this part of the country, and needless to say, any telephone.

Children were crying, hungry, scared for their brother, mad at their brother, and temperatures were getting as hot as the weather outside. David had become frantic and his cries were desperate and edged on hysteria. Mr. Friend, Zora, brought a

ladder from a wood shed and suggested that we climb into the attic to see if there was some way we could get through the ceiling to get my son out of the bathroom. The attic was hot, crowded and dusty with the musty smell of long forgotten dreams. We discovered a small opening over the bathroom below – a vent pipe running through the roof and venting outside. Such excitement – until we discovered that none of the adults present were skinny enough to fit through the opening in the ceiling after we had removed the vent pipe.

We began to measure the children in conjunction to the size of the vent pipe. We needed to determine which of the children was thin enough to fit in the pipe and which of the children was smart enough to open the door after we figured out how to get one of them into the bathroom. We finally decided that my oldest daughter, Susan, was the likely candidate. I laid flat on my stomach in the attic and forced Susan's feet and body into the drainpipe. I held both of her hands in mine and began to lower her into the room below. She managed to get her feet onto the sink and I let go of her hands to a chorus of screams of encouragement from the rest of the Droke clan.

David was rescued and learned a valuable lesson in life that sweltering day in June. He learned that we all need to be able to react in an emergency by using our heads, our imagination and our creativity. Most of all he learned that we do need each other and that his family worked together out of love and concern for their bratty and stubborn little brother.

We have not been invited back to my friend's house to spend another quiet day in the country. I wonder why? It was certainly a day to remember. Maybe I only thought it was the worst day of my life at the time it was happening. Now I remember that day with a smile and wish we had the opportunity to be together again for a quiet, peaceful picnic in the country.]

My Mediterranean

Lisa Kean

You can't quite picture me as a little girl sitting there with her feet
in the sand,
But on la playa, of the Southern seas of the Mediterranean is
where I grew up.
Barefoot and tan in that small fishing town in Spain.

We lived in a cozy apartment above the shop where my parents
sold antique treasures,
Jewels those silly American tourists pretended they found and
hunted, rather in a shop.
There was three in my little family, my mother, father, and I.
Until my sister came along, robbing me of being the
One and only in my mother's eyes.
Sometimes the Spanish gypsies stole my tricycle, occasionally the
big boys would take my snack away at school,
Through a five-year-old little girl's eyes life was just fine.

One day we took a vacation to America,
I remember waking up in the backseat of my uncle's suburban.
Sometimes I think this is when my life really began.
I saw the capital in Texas, cows, the American flag
And I ate American macaroni and cheese.
We stayed in Texas and my father went back to Spain.
I lost my beach, my sand, and my little apartment.
At six-and-a-half it became very apparent that things were not
good.

I learned my ABC's in English, and slowly, like a chameleon,
Transformed into an American.
No more Spanish mommy, I want to be like all the other kids.
Who would want to be friends with a little girl from Spain,
Where everything was so different?
But those kids, they adopted me,

At eleven I was American made with blue jeans, bubble gum and Keds.

My whole life has been spent throwing out the old,
Until one day I realized I can't take it back.
Now older, I yearn for what I don't have anymore:
My Spanish, my father, my heritage, and my beach.
Sometimes I think I will never be able to put the broken pieces
back together again.

Then one day I found myself back on the hot sands of my
Mediterranean.
For the first time I saw the entire picture through adult eyes.
I longed for it, standing there watching the waves hit the rocks.
In my mind Spain is still paradise.

But I have my world and I am sticking to it.
I am American and this is the life I have chosen to keep.
Maybe someday I will return again to that world, I will be a
different person then.

Jump

Christina Alexander

Strapped in so tightly, my bladder would have protested
if I had been thinking about it.
So panicked my head might have convinced me otherwise
if I could have heard it over my beating heart.

My right ear hears:
you're going into the basement at midnight,
opening up that dark closet,
checking for monsters,
telling death you're not afraid.
I nodded.

Midnight.
Helmet snapped.
Goggles in place.
Connections secure.

The Basement Closet.
Diver One slides open the clear plastic door.
Swirling wind and gushing air surge outside.
I hear it.

One, two, three,
they all jump.
My turn.

The Monster.
We waddle towards the plane's open side.
Far away, deep blue lakes and
dark green forests and fields blanket the ground.
I see them through the frame of my goggles
and the plane's open door, with my foot stepping over the edge.

I blink. I breathe. I pray.
I cross my arms, hands gripping opposite shoulders.
One, I feel my body lean forward.
Two, I lean back.
Three, and I'm flying.

Turning the Tide

Sasha Lee Jaramillo

Every time you share a tender kiss with him, she slides out of his shadow with a sly smile and a wink for you. Why, you wonder, can't she just dry up and blow away? You know your thoughts are dumb--somewhat childish, even, but you can't help it; it's the way you feel.

The two months you spent apart from him were hard because being alone defied the very essence of your existence. You want to cry all over again when you remember the peg-legged days of daytime "Television for Women" and the achingly quiet nights when no one whispered sweet words into your sleep-fuzzy ears. You still cringe when you hear those songs that made your eyes fill with tears and made you feel as though your brown eyes really would turn blue. You made a mental note that you would never listen to country music again.

As time passed--and your eyes did not turn blue--you realized that he really wasn't worth missing. You pieced your life back together, and you felt like one of those daytime television heroines. Except for one thing. *Her*. Jealousy and hurt gnawed at you on a daily basis because while you were alone, he was not. You knew his days were not numbed by the lulling hum and glow of a TV set like yours were. Instead, they were filled with laughter, sunshine, and chocolate-covered strawberry picnics. Nights when a full moon glowed and days when the butterflies migrated were occasions spent with her.

While you know it's not her fault (at least, not entirely), you hate her. The hatred spread through you when you first learned her name. Annabelle. That name has come to represent what was taken away from you and the loneliness you endured. You hate her for laughing while you rested your aching head on a tear-dampened pillow.

Now, you tell yourself that you don't care about her. She is part of his life, not yours. Despite your strongest resolutions, however, your thoughts are stained and smeared by images of her. What kind of perfume does she wear? What does her voice

sound like? Does he love her? You think that every woman who passes you on the street knows her and how she is affecting you. The woman who gave you a quick grin at Barnes and Noble is her best friend...she was laughing at you because she knows everything.

After months of self-induced paranoia, you decide that enough is enough. In order to celebrate your decision, you decide to treat yourself to a double latte. For once, your thoughts are light as you stride into your favorite coffee shop. You sit down at the counter next to an impatient woman who could be anyone's friend or daughter. Only she isn't.

In an instant, you know that it's her. The tall, skinny woman at the counter is the same one he showed you a picture of last month. Your heart begins to beat much too fast and your ears fill with the sound of rushing blood. Before panic makes you fly out of your chair and through the door, you quickly assess the situation and realize that the cards are in your favor. After all, you know who she is, but she has no idea who you are, or how much you despise her. After taking a deep breath, you begin the best acting job of your life.

"God, don't you just hate sitting around like a stool pigeon waiting for other people to get their act together?" you say in your best Joan Crawford voice.

Sensing a kindred spirit, she graces you with a twisted smile and says, "Yeah, these people never know what's going on. Just once, I wish that things would go smoothly, so I could come in, order what I want, and leave."

After a few minutes of idle chatter, you introduce yourself using a name you've always liked. She smiles, shakes your hand, and begins to tell you about herself. Inwardly, you sneer because she played right into your hands. You know that females are prone to instantaneous friendships if approached in just the right way, and she didn't disappoint you. Settling back in your chair, you feign interest. You nod sympathetically when appropriate, laugh in all the right spots, and convey just the right amount of sincerity at all times.

Before she leaves, you exchange phone numbers and make plans to have lunch on Thursday. You now know what you

have to do. There are no options anymore. You tried forgiving, but forgetting just hasn't come along with it.

Now, six months later, you realize Thursday's lunch was when you really sealed her fate, when it was too late to turn back. You are fascinated by the fact that you have managed to forge a solid friendship with her in such a short span of time. Of course, not everything has gone smoothly. She always wonders why you can't be around to meet her boyfriend. There have been plenty of opportunities for slip-ups, but you have managed to skirt them all gracefully. Except once. One time you called, and *he* answered. A split second after you asked for her, you realized what you'd done. He paused and asked, "Sierra?" Quickly, you mumbled, "Sorry, wrong number," and hung up, hands trembling. Overall, though, things have gone remarkably well.

She thinks you are her best friend. After all, you helped her pick out a new pup at the pound when hers had to be put to sleep, and you were the first one she called when *he* proposed last night. When she jubilantly shrieked her good news to you, you shrieked right back and promptly suggested a celebration vacation for the two of you, just as a best friend should. As the wheels of your mind began to turn, you told her, "Just think of this as your last vacation as a single woman." She laughed.

So now both of you are first-class bound to a tropical Mexican paradise where you hope to get rid of all your tension and stress. You have decided that there is no way your troubles are going to follow you home. You rearrange yourself in the leather seat and glance over at her. She is sleeping peacefully with a silk eye mask resting on her face. Driven by your inner child, you screw up your face and stick out your tongue at her. Feeling strangely satisfied, you turn to look out the window, and let out a long, slow breath.

After a small delay at the airport, you arrive at the hotel ready for a nice, long swim. Forcing a bright smile, you urge her to accompany you to the hotel hot tub, where you soak and make wedding plans for hours. She tells you that you will be her maid of honor. In order to mask your scorn, you give her what you hope is a shy grin. You even manage to produce a few real tears when you say you'd be honored. And this is how your vacation begins.

hey What kind of perfume does she wear? What does her voice

After a week of sightseeing, laughing, and stuffing yourselves full of *chiles rellenos* and nearly drowning in *pina coladas*, you are almost ready to go home. There is one more thing you must do before you leave. You tell her that you have always wanted to be buried in the sand. She laughs and says that it is lots of fun. Since this is your last day of vacationing, you decide that there is no better time to fulfill your wish. Both of you head down to the shore, where she buries you in the sun-warmed sand. Amid girlish giggling, both of you talk about how you'd like to take the lifeguards home as souvenirs and about the sleepy-eyed waiter in the hotel restaurant whose gravelly voice made your skin burn with a feverish glow. As you are helped out of the sand, you notice the wash of colors that have appeared in the sky, signaling the approach of twilight. Laughing, you tell her that now she must be buried, too. Despite her protests that it is too late, and that she is too tired, you drag her to a perfect spot and begin digging in the moist sand. Before she is even buried up to her chest, you notice that she has fallen asleep. Oh no, you think, she has to be awake for this. As a sweat-drenched chunk of your hair falls forward, you pause to look at the ocean, which has deepened to a rich indigo. It couldn't be more perfect. Before long, you feel the foamy water frothing at your toes. Finally, you are done. You drop to your knees, slap her with all your might, and hiss, "Wake up" while she looks at you with an expression of hurt bewilderment.

When you tell her that you are the girlfriend he left behind for her, and that she made a huge mistake by trusting someone she barely knew, she begins to babble about being sorry, but you quickly silence her by shoving a wet handful of sand into her mouth. As she coughs and sputters, you get up and rinse your hands in the surf that is now ankle deep. You turn and walk away, wishing it did not have to be like this. But, you counter, this has made you feel much better. When you hear her screams begin to fill with a liquid gargling sound, you turn, smile, and watch the tide slowly roll in.

Problem

Tracy Ruiz

You know it's there.
Lurking behind the scenes.
Wanting to catch you in its web.

Its inter-mingled thread
became more elaborate
as it grew.

Its delicate fibers hang loosely
in front of your eyes.

Believing it would go away,
you avoid it.

Until that one bright, sunny day.
When it hits you in the face.

Trapping your fears
and demanding attention.

Life Sentences

Roland Suarez

The envelopes sat on the dashboard glaringly white on the deep gray daring us to open them. Our past, our future, and the present were all contained in two-dimension inside the little white envelopes neatly addressed to each of us. It was a surreal moment as we reached for our respective envelopes and opened them in silence.

*

*

*

We were sitting in Danny and Sara's apartment. I was lying on the couch laughing. Danny regaled us from the broken recliner, whose footrest refused adamantly to close, so it was constantly in the recline mode. J.C. was sitting indian-style in front of the television his grimace of amusement reflected by the silver ornaments on the Christmas tree. Our little coven was one of old friendships and common problems and above all genuine respect and affection. And as always, we managed to congregate during breaks in our college experiences in trips home from St. Louis, and San Antonio. Jokes, anecdotes, and laughter bounced off the walls with almost no pause for breath.

At the next pause I picked up the conversation that would bring us to the envelopes. We had been discussing sex, a topic that usually brought us much amusement. That's why I don't know what made me say what I said next.

"Have you ever been tested, you know for AIDS?" the words seemed to squeeze past a nervous lump in my throat.

Nothing. My question seemed to exist for an endless moment. It filled the room overpowering the muted hum of the central air. I finally looked up to see their faces. Danny stared at me in utter shock, as if I'd walked up to him and hit him in the face. J.C. refused to look up at us, choosing instead to chew on his thumbnail and stare at it as if it held the answer to the mysteries of the universe.

"I've been thinking about it for awhile, we haven't been what anyone could call too careful."

"I haven't been tested, but I feel fine" Danny shrugged off his shock.

"No, I haven't," J.C. mumbled "it's really frightening."

Funny, we had never thought of sex as frightening. Now we were afraid of the test. It wasn't even the test really, but what it symbolized; the consequences of our choices.

There was another pause and I could practically see behind their eyes the ongoing tally of partners. It was a count I was performing at the same time. The totals added up to one conclusion, it was time for a serious consideration about taking the test.

Even now the talk blurs in my head. How casually you can toss around issues that at other times, when applied to your own life, have a frightening urgency.

"What would you do if you found out you had 'it'?"

"How would your friends and family react? Would you tell anyone?"

"What if you don't get tested and you have 'it'?"—we didn't want to pass it on if we did have it, that was too much responsibility. Others shouldn't have to bear the consequences of our mistakes.

'It', always 'it', as if naming the disease would guarantee the positive result of our tests. As foolish a precaution as refusing to name the devil for fear that he would appear.

"All of this is just totally stupid, let's get tested and worry after we know for sure, what's the point of worrying before we know anything?"

We decided we would call Planned Parenthood and make an appointment to take the test. The next day we conferred and set an appointment for the Monday following Christmas week. The first of many waiting periods began.

Anticipation is the only thing that can occupy your mind constantly. It lingers at the edges of consciousness, if not at the forefront, at all times demanding attention. It's as inescapable as death and reality.

Christmas came and went more soberly than I ever remembered. Whenever we gathered we laughed and joked, but always with the weight of the test pressing down on us.

We hadn't vowed secrecy, but J.C. and I had shared only with our closest three or four friends on our plans to get tested. Danny, in a moment of weakness confided to a friend from his university. Hector was a new friend, he and Danny had only known each other for a few months at the most. Danny opened up to Hector and had shared his fears about the whole situation. The results of which played out like a twisted scene in a bad drama.

It was the Sunday night before the test. We had all congregated, Me, Danny, J.C. our friends Aide, Monica, and Sara. We decided to enjoy ourselves that night in an effort to forget the next days needle prick. We cruised out and rented a couple of videos, we were all so eager to be cheerful we actually succeeded. All of us sat in the apartment throwing popcorn and laughing, happy to be alive, enjoying every experience with the abandon of people with knowledge that tomorrow our lives could change. We heard traffic up and down the steps all night but thought nothing of it.

It was about 3:00 A.M. when the second movie finished. I yawned contentedly ready to go home. J.C. and I got up to go, sharing a comrade-in-arms hug with Danny and kissing the girls good night. Danny opened the door to let us out and hanging on it was a large neon pink poster board with something written on it. No one got a good look at it as Danny snatched it off and carried it to his bedroom. All of us being pranksome ourselves, we rushed to see what was on it, expecting some grand joke from one of our absent friends. We walked into Danny's bedroom only to see Danny standing slack jawed with his eyes glazed over in disbelief. I knew then that this was more than a joke.

"Let me see that!" I said in a voice edged in anticipation of a surprise. Danny's hurt face told me I was in for a nasty one.

The garish pink background highlighted the title across the top: ***Top Ten Reasons Why Your Test Should Be Positive.***

I had to fight to draw a breath. My face was burning and I could feel every hair on my head, rage heightening my senses. J.C. or someone snatched it out of my grasp. Gasps of astonishment hung in the air.

"Who would do this?" I heard a raw fierce voice ask. It took me a moment to realize I was the one who had spoken.

"It had to be Hector, he's the only one I told, and that's his handwriting," Danny said "Maybe it's a joke," he mumbled weakly, trying to understand how a friend could be so cruel to play on fears that were so near the surface. It was so ironic that we had succeeded in forgetting our worry only to be slapped back to reality in this way.

"It *is* a joke," I hissed "a sick one!"

I can't remember having been so angry before, a rage that blurs your vision and grows in your bones aching to get out. J.C. couldn't even talk, Sara muttered darkly under her breath, Aide and Monica were pale, teeth clenched in imitation of their fists. I wanted to drive mine through a wall or more appropriately into Hectors' flesh. We all left feeling the aching void that devastation and betrayal leaves behind. We could fight people like Hector, it is much harder to battle ignorance and fear.

So, we had our first hand demonstration of the ignorance of people and their lack of compassion towards anything AIDS related. It was something that reminded us of what we might have to look forward to. It was brought home by the fact that we had been treated this way by someone we thought of as a friend.

After that night the tests seemed to be almost anti-climactic, the waiting began again, this time for the results. Being in a relatively rural area meant waiting for three weeks. Holidays were over before the allotted days so we left, agreeing to return in three weeks to get our results together. Three weeks never passed any slower, dragged out by anxiety and the inevitable anticipation.

*

*

*

The envelopes sat on the dashboard glaringly white on the deep gray daring us to open them. Our past, our future, and the present were all contained in two-dimensions inside the little white envelopes neatly addressed to each of us. It was a surreal moment as we reached for our respective envelopes and opened them in silence.

My thoughts churned "Please God, I'll be more responsible from now on, just let me be negative. Please, let me not have to deal with this."

I opened the envelope with cold trembling fingers.

Danny laughs and hugs me.

Negative.

J.C.s' eyes tear up in relief.

Negative.

I open my result sheet.

AZT, lesions, T-cells, hospitals, prejudice, pity, death, how to deal with it? Should you have to die for a sexual encounter? If only I had done something, been more responsible.

Three weeks prior to that moment I had taken a test, I opened my eyes to see the results. Those results have changed my life. I've learned that I can't undo the choices I've made, I can only weigh all future choices with more care. I am more aware of life in general and my responsibility to, and for my own life.

Negative.

Insomnia

Kelly Shaughnessy

Late at night
after the nightmares pass,
I wake
only to find a drenched pillow.
A heart throbs angrily
as it tries to break free,
with the touch of my hand
it settles down.

As I lay back on my bed
sweat
glistening from my forehead
rolls into my ear.
I wait for sleep to creep
up and surround me,
but sleep exists under
the crack of my window
to dance with the demon
waiting by the mulberry tree.

Thoughts come and go,
but the one that stays
is my fear:
to go on alone
and know
I'll wake up again
at the same time
tomorrow.

Pagan Grove Review
Volume V
Spring 2000

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

Each writer may submit up to three typed pieces. There is a limit of six pages of prose (per piece) and each poem should be no longer than 40 lines.

Deadline: October 1, 1999

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

Rejected writers should be prepared to submit an IBM disk (Word 6.0) only within ten days of notification. Word 6.0 is available in the Academic Library Computer Lab.

Submit writing to:
Mr. Brian Bernard, Faculty Advisor
Office: CH 401
Phone: 434-1003

Pecan Grove Review
Volume V
Spring 2000

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

Each writer may submit up to three typed pieces. There is a limit of six pages of prose (per piece) and each poem should be no longer than 40 lines.

Deadline: October 1, 1999

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

Selected writers should be prepared to submit an IBM disk (Word 97 only) within ten days of notification. Word 97 is available in the Academic Library Computer Lab.

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

St. Mary's University
Students, Faculty, and Staff
Featuring

Christina Alexander	Debra Innocenti
Hal Amen	Sasha Lee Jaramillo
Jessica Baltera	Brian St. John
Kelly Bateson	Nicole Jordan
Diane Bertrand	Lisa Kean
Rick Benevidez	Andrés Ramon
Morissa Booker	Anne Miller
Nadia Canales	Zach Nasits
Daniel Carvajal	Henry Oosterveen, Jr.
Sean M. Lutmer	Michelle P. Piña
Rose Mary Droke	Deborah Rankin
Elizabeth Drury	Micheal Anthony Romero
Ann Dunne	Tracy Ruiz
Tanya Magaly Flores	Roxann Sánchez
Meghan Fisher	Jane Scheurer
Scott Fonger	Michelle Sepulveda
Lené Gary	Kelly Shaughnessy
H. Palmer Hall	Christina D. Smith
Glen Hughes	Meggan Smith
Victoria Hurtado	Roland Suarez
	Carlos Yzaguirre

Cover Art by: Christopher Michael Narváez

\$7.00