THE SCARAB 2010

28th Edition

OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY
THE SCARAB 2010
28th Edition

Oklahoma City University’s
Annual Anthology of Prose,
Poetry, and Artwork

Presented by
Sigma Tau Delta,
Omega Phi Chapter

Editors: Ali Cardaroli, Kenneth Kimbrough, Emma Johnson, Jake Miller, and Shana Barrett

Dr. Terry Phelps, Sponsor

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NON-FICTION

THE SCARAB 2010
We Hold These Truths…
By Spencer Hicks

“When the president calls, you answer that call.”

This truth is held to be self-evident, at least by my boss, Governor Brad Henry. This is why I’m sitting in the south lawn of the White House. I can feel myself start to sweat, partly because of the gravity of the situation, partly because of the sticky 100 percent humidity. I’m missing the Oklahoma City Comedy Competition because of this event. The subtle voice in the back of my mind is nagging me for missing the competition, but I drown it out by telling myself that this opportunity probably won’t present itself to me ever again.

I look at the schedule of events after using it as a fan. It reads:

2:30 – POTUS enters with Jimmie Johnson.
2:35 – POTUS introduces Governor Henry.
2:37 – POTUS begins speech…

The PA system booms, “Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States and 2009 NASCAR points champion Jimmie Johnson.” I peel myself off my chair to give the leader of the free world the respect he deserves. Barack and Jimmie are flanked by the nine other finalists in the NASCAR points race.

I explain to a grandmotherly woman behind me that in NASCAR, they race for points (as well as money). The better you do in a race, the more points you get; so, at the end of the race season, the driver with the most points is considered the winner. The points champion is like the winner of the Super Bowl in the NASCAR world. She pretends to understand, and I pretend to believe that she understood me and turn my attention back to the event as the applause slows and people begin taking their seats.

The drivers and president are cool and collected. We the people, the ones who’ve been waiting in the audience, are dripping with sweat. I look around and realize I’m not perspiring as much as the people around me. Sure, I might be sweating, but it’s entirely hidden under my jacket. The middle-aged gentleman sitting next to me is focused on the president. His salt and pepper hair seems to be leaking, causing the sweat to roll around the edge of his ears and hang on his earlobe… hanging… hanging… hanging… finally falling onto his shoulder to make room for the next drop. I smile to myself.

I take my attention away from this gentleman’s ear-faucet and give it to the President, who gives a quick speech and then poses for some photos with the drivers. He then approaches me as he begins the presidential tradition of working the crowd. Working a rope-line is like reading. You start from the left and go to the right, hoping you don’t run into any problem words. This truth is not self-evident. Well, maybe these truths are self-evident, but not at the state level. In Oklahoma, the politicians just get in the mix and start “kissing hands and shaking babies,” as I tell friends for a laugh. The left-to-right method of presidential crowd working probably has something to do with the Secret Service and efficiency.

I’m seated on the front row, first seat on the left. Not realizing that I’m going to be the first to be greeted, I look confused. Why is the president coming toward me? Sure we made eye contact a few times during his speech, but that is just him being a good public speaker. I realize where I’m seated.

Oh.

As he gets closer, he makes and maintains eye contact. His head is up, an easygoing smile, and a confident stride that shows no hint of his dropping poll numbers or the other problems of our country that were placed on his shoulders when he took the oath.

“How ya doing today?” The President asks. I manage to eke out, “Good, it’s an honor to meet you.”

“Honor to meet you?” How cliché. Like the President doesn’t hear that a million times a day. Holy crap, why didn’t I think of something better to say?

That is probably the most annoying thing he ever hears. Like the buzzing of an alarm clock.

“HONOR TO MEET YOU! HONOR TO MEET YOU! HONOR TO MEET YOU!” He hears as he slaps at his night stand, trying to make contact with the snooze bar. I imagine Michelle }
next to him, giving the president a grumpy groan of disapproval.

*I can’t believe I said that to the president.* I’m sure if I had said something else, anything else, it would have thrown him off; making him stop in the DC heat to find out more about this fine red-headed American.

Maybe if I had responded, “I’m good, Prez. I just bought a pocket Thesaurus,” he would have been so taken aback by this statement he would be forced into a conversation with me. Perhaps he’d have responded, “Who let you in here?” or “Why aren’t you wearing your helmet because you are special.” That would have made for a better story to tell my friends.

But that didn’t happen. And for now, I’ll have to settle for being demeaned by my own mind.

Just like that, my encounter with the President is over. I furrow my brow, *Was that it?* Somehow I expected more. I’m not sure what I expected, maybe our ever-wise commander-in-chief would see something in me. He would take one look at me and say, “You there - here is a pile of money and a new car.” But he didn’t say that, so I scan the crowd to find Governor Henry. It starts to drizzle, which comes as a relief to the heat as well as an alibi for the sweat starting to show through the back of my jacket. I switch from “awestruck” back to “personal assistant”; *I would have rather performed in the comedy competition.*
September 1990
By Sheray Franklin

The nurse left the hospital at 5pm. My soon to be family was eating Sheppard’s pie with gravy made just right by Nana, my father’s mother. To drink they had sweet tea with a lemon wedge on the side of the glass, common in any southerner’s home. My brother Stanley was four and Stephan was three. I was not yet their baby sister but the camel’s hump in Mommy’s stomach. Dinner was unusually quiet but filled with an excitement that could have easily been mistaken for anxiety.

It was now 6pm. The “Six o’clock news” was on and my family was anything but busy. My mother was platting her hair, my dad’s eyelids were watching the television, and my brothers were getting in as much mischief as possible. Time was moving as fast as still waters off the coast of Savannah. It was quiet, the buzz from the television was faint, and as my Dad’s snoring grew softer my mom began entertaining my brothers. Oh the Places You’ll Go by Doctor Seus, a classic, my brothers were mesmerized by the pictures. My mom was delighted; the smile was proof, yet inside she grew weary. She had been tired all day. Her instructions were to rest, but rest she did not. As always she was cleaning and this time it had been 4am before she felt the firm cotton of the sheets. Cleaning, being a mother, and enduring were her habitual events.

It was 10pm and the boys were bathed and tucked in for bed. Their chests rose and fell with every inhale and exhale of the long night. My dad heavily slept while my mom waited. She waited for me. I was now 10 days overdue. In the back of her mind she had already predicted I was going to be late, and constantly reminded herself that everything would be blessed, but what she was soon to find out was that I was actually going to be early, unimaginably early.

Screams shocked the air like ice water on someone’s back. Moans, groans, screeches, and all the unwanted noises of a woman in labor. The boys were rushed to Nana’s house not understanding why. My mom roared in the dark morning as my dad was sure to support my neck. It was in a 1986 blue Honda where I took my first breath. Tears washed down the face of my parents, for my mother tears of joy but for my father tears of fear. I was attached to my mother for another 17 minutes as my dad carefully proceeded to Northside Hospital.

The nurse was called back to the hospital for the night shift even though it was not her turn in rotation. For a brief moment my dad left us as he sprinted to the emergency room door. Frigid air and bright lights welcomed him. “He’s been shot,” the nurse screamed but my Dad’s words were concise “My wife the baby in the car.” Nine nurses and 2 doctors surrounded the car before my dad could finish. In the midst of the chaos and the fast hospital bed nearly defying gravity the news stations had been called.

“Baby born on Interstate-285 seven pounds and nine ounces.”

The umbilical chord was cut freeing me from the connection of my mother. There was a tear on her cheek and a smile that crawled on the nurse’s lips as she started the IV. The IV was not only a procedure well known to her, but to her sick mother who was left for what should have been someone else’s nightly duties. Her mother had been sick for a while, and as my mother waited, so did she. Every night the nurse prayed for one more day while her mother prayed for her last. Her mother, Louise, was ready to see the Lord, ready to be renewed. It was her fourth stroke and the right side of her body lay paralyzed, but she managed to smile.

As the tear drifted down the smooth curve of the nurse’s cheek, she was unaware that she would never see her mother’s last smile.
Her mother was all she had, her dad died when she was 14, no husband, and no kids. Her mind and body told her she was alone but her soul did not. For she knew the Lord her mother spoke of, she met at 14 when her dad past. Of the many things she remembered told to her by her dad it was this one line that would stick with her forever, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” A life taken away from her and a life given to me occurred in September of 1990.

Bothell Landing by Erica Olavarria
Fearless With Baron
By Terre Cooke-Chaffin

His name is Baron and he stands about 7 feet tall on hind legs against the once smooth glass of my front door. He looks a lot like what you’d expect a grizzly bear to be doing in the midst of some battle with a fierce opponent in the woods.

This random comparison runs thru my mind as I wonder what’s running thru the head of the person on the other side of that glass, every time Baron hears a car or truck he doesn’t recognize enter my driveway. I’m not sure how he knows all seven of our vehicles in this family of four by sound alone, from upstairs behind the closed door of my bedroom. But he does. And if it’s not one of those seven pulling in or leaving the driveway, he’s on it. Literally, that once smooth glass front door. He scrambles from his post on the carpet in my bedroom, where he lounges if I’m upstairs. Each of his four legs compete to be first to gain traction in his mad dash down the carpeted staircase, sliding across the wood floor at the bottom, those same four legs scratching for connection on the slick floor as he does his best to make a slight right turn to that door. That beautiful, heavy, wood framed, beveled on the edges, front door that is no longer so luxurious. I know, who could have a relationship with a door? That’s what I asked myself as our builder was going over details for the replacement door when our old wood one no longer locked, and was so ancient it had long ago lost the battle with the elements outside. The old door was discolored by 110 degree heat of the western summer sun and dried out from frigid air ripping thru its cracks in February. Cracks that interior decorators call distress, but distress this homeowner can appreciate more in the wallet than the eye when she reads her utility bill. So the old one was coming down and plans for the new energy efficient glass and wood one were in the works. I know it’s just a door, that’s what I said too. A door? Whatever. Just make it airtight.

And glass would be nice as it will serve as a giant window to the world out front and let in peaceful light to a front hall in need of some warming up. But to the passerby its just a storm door.

Well, that was before Baron. Oh, he loves my door. Standing sentry, or laying as if dead to the world, in that sun bathed room, until he hears that truck or car that doesn’t belong. Baron is 3 years old. A full blood male German Shepherd. 100 pounds. He’s thick through the chest of black, grey and tan coarse hair. He’s as tall as my counter tops in the kitchen. The length of his back, literally, becomes an extension of that countertop when he stands just right, smelling a pork chop or piece of chicken on someone’s plate. He’s three years old and one of the great loves of my life.

I always love my dogs, sometimes I think more so than most people, spending hours of time and duplicates of dollars training them to “come” and “sit” and “wait”. The list of commands they learn is long. “I’m first” when we go to leave the house or car and they obediently drop back to let me proceed out ahead of them. “Leave it” when we approach another dog on the park that is so curiosity provoking in their minds that Id be wrapped around a tree if they didn’t understand we are going to look and be aware, but not attack or charge with such eagerness it might be misread as threatening. “Watch me” is another one, when I want their attention among multiple distractions when we are in public. “That’s enough, I’ve got it”, I tell them when they announce the arrival of someone at the door. Baron has never really learned this last command.

Dogs are pack creatures. They live in groups in the wild with clearly defined roles of who’s first in a pecking order. They know their place in the world, and in a home they are well aware of where they fit in the chain of dominance. If I’m first and I am because I feed them, train them and play with them like children, they follow my lead. And they want to please. Dog treats are helpful in the training process as it locks in their brain the desired behavior, on many sense levels, most effectively taste. If the training is done repetitiously enough when there are no people at the door, or dogs on the park, they learn to associate the word with the action I am asking of them. It builds a bond between us, a form of communication that over the years evolves into a silent understanding, much like an awareness two people share after a long marriage where both partners commit to a certain code of behavior that works. German Shepherds are genetically adept at this process as they are what’s known as working
dogs, bred to shepherd sheep they can practically count and over many generations have developed a high sense of watchfulness, possessing a bright intelligence. Police do not use them as the breed of choice because they can’t focus on a job. Sometimes I think Baron is more aware of his environment and me than that husband of many years. My dog and I have a shared look. Every time I glance his way, he’s looking mine. Who would have ever guessed?

She was running down the street so fast she worried she’d tumble head first onto the tar road, barefoot, knowing she could make it if she didn’t fall. Her dad was standing at the edge of the neighbor’s lawn, just talking in the summer heat, just shooting the breeze on a breezeless day. It was 90 degree Washington DC heat. Muggy, the kind of air you can’t take a breath in, can’t not sweat in, the kind of heat that holds the sound of crickets at night, denying a chirp be only a chirp, but rather an unending noise put in the air that will hang there til morning. But it wasn’t evening yet. It was quiet except for the panic in her head as she noticed the small dog a few yards away at the exact time he noticed her. She was 12 years old and panic was the loudest noise in her brain at the moment as she raced to get to her dad, before that dog got to her. Brown and white, about the size of a beagle, but most interested in that racing preteen that he could smell panic on and looked like a good chase. She won that race, literally climbing the long limbs of her father’s 6 foot one frame, shinnying up his torso all the way to his shoulders. She would have climbed to a perch on the top of his head like a parrot would seek out if she could have fit. She was terribly afraid of dogs of any size or color. Unexplainable fear but don’t try and explain that to someone who has it. All that matters is not being near that animal.

Her mother, who happened to be standing there as well, was not even considered for protection. She wasn’t tall enough. But her mother was chuckling at her for the lunacy of it all. There she was feeling safe, but foolish. Her dad telling her it was fine.

“Honey, he’s not going to hurt you, you can come down” he said.

“Terre, what on earth are you so afraid of, he’s not going to bite you” was her sweet mothers response. She knew her mother was an animal lover, but a little cruel in her lack of empathy for her nearly 12 year old daughter’s inordinate fright.

How does one go from that 12 year old girl to this adult woman who’s owned five dogs of her own, a pound puppy, a Schnauzer and three German Shepherds? Fear is a funny thing. It’s irrational so much of the time.

“Terre, when you were 2 years old and I would come into your room to kiss you good morning before I left early for work you would stand at your crib, sleepy eyed and pronounce “dog baarrk” in your young language and sure enough I would listen in the early morning darkness and hear a dog far off in the distance across the space of Idaho farmland. I don’t know why you were so afraid of dogs”.

This is my 87 year old father’s rendition of the roots of that fear in today’s conversation. Much like the misunderstanding of where it came from, I cannot tell you where my journey to overcome it began either. Maybe in the pound where I decided, one afternoon many years ago, to dash thru, thinking about rescuing a puppy that would otherwise be euthanized. There was a tiny black and white one that nestled itself up as close to that iron gate separating him from me and the world outside, making direct eye contact, unlike all the others, announcing quite clearly he would love a chance at a life outside the loud, concrete, iron enclosed cage he had 10 days within which to live. I gathered him up, brought him home and named him William. He was a mutt who never weighed more than 20 pounds and never understood one command in his life. I’d set him outside my apartment door early in the morning before work, go back inside, take a shower, eat breakfast and get dressed. Id open that door thirty minutes later and like clockwork he’d be waiting for me to bring inside, barricade on a tiny concrete second level porch with a slat like railing that allowed him a birds-eye view of all the comings and goings of that apartment house parking lot. He would eagerly await my return 8 and a half hours later, recognizing my car above all the others, jumping up from his shaded bed wagging his tail so hard he could barely stand up. Those were the seeds of a relationship with an animal who needed me as much as I needed him.

I often see fear as kind of stray piece of data on the hard drive of our brain that gets stuck flying around with no file to fall into, like that stray dog I rescued. I see fear as an over response to a momen-
tary situation long ago that many times was an aberrant first reaction. Oh, don’t get me wrong there are many people legitimately scarred by events that have happened to them, that if they don’t cause fear are more likely to be repeated. But there are irrational fears too. And this woman’s twelve year old self suffered from one of those. And William helped me begin to put it aside, followed by Alex and Jake and Ike.

And now Baron, my giant 100 pound German Shepherd, is launching onto that glass, scraping his nails across the shimmer of sunlight, leaving a permanent scratch on that once perfect door, this near perfect love of mine. Whoever is at the door has no way of knowing this gigantic dog is the biggest goofball in the world, who relishes carrying around various stuffed toys. Sometimes it’s an octopus with eight legs dangling from his mouth, or squeak toys a cat would love. But Baron loves them more, squishing them with delight, particularly if you laugh out loud at him and tell him he’s a nut. He’s quite an entertainer, quite a lot of things all mixed in one. Guard dog, entertainer, a momma’s boy, protector who takes his job a little too seriously, judging by his over response to the delivery person. And the twelve year old girl in the adult woman’s body remembers what fear feels like, perched on her father’s shoulders and she reminds Baron:

“I’ve got it,” and reassures the person on the other side of the door, “He wont hurt you,” as her parents did long ago.

But delivery people are gone before she sees them, they usually don’t even ring the bell, knowing Baron has sounded the alarm. They just leave whatever they came with on the concrete step, in the hot sun or wind driven cold air on the other side of that glass door.

Portrait by Laura Murray (Plaster)
Inevitable
By Sherry Andrusiak

My father, now 60 years old, has, I swear, ADHD. I remember sitting down with him and mom to watch a movie – Kill Bill part 1 – something they both wanted to see. Not five minutes into the movie and I can see out of the corner of my eye, my father fidgeting in his chair.

It starts with his feet, hoisted up on his recliner. They knock back and forth once, twice, three times. Then, screech the springs of his chair clang as he sits up, leans toward me and says, “So, this situation with parliament doesn’t look too good, eh?”

“Shhhh!” I place my finger to my lips. “We can talk about politics after the movie.”

Ping, ping. The spring on his chair twang as he slowly reclines. Two minutes. Or less. I see the feet tremble, then, hands clasped in his lap, he starts rubbing his thumbs, not really twittering them, but picking under his nails. Three, two, one. I count the seconds to the next interruption.

Creak. Chair comes down, Dad sits up. “You guys hungry?”

“Shoosh!” says Mom.

“No, Dad, we just ate,” I reply.

“Hmm. I want a snack,” he says, then springs from his chair with a child-like exuberance, and heads towards the stairs. He begins climbing out of the basement, aimed for the kitchen.

“Should we pause it?” I call out after him.

“No, no,” he replies, his mind already running through the items in the fridge, analyzing the contents by memory. He returns five minutes later, a plate of cheese, pickles and his homemade deer sausage in hand. He sets it on the coffee table, along with napkins and toothpicks for all of us.

Creak. He reclines again, a handful of snacks at the ready. Dad stares intently at the screen for a couple of seconds before turning to me to ask, “What’s going on?”

“I asked you if you wanted me to pause it,” I say, barely disguising my exasperation.

“No, you don’t have to pause it; just tell me what happened,” he says.

“If you would sit still long enough to watch the show, you’d know what’s going on.” My mother does not hide her annoyance, but after 38 years of marriage she’s entitled.

Fifteen minutes. Minimal twitching, no interruptions. I steal a glance at Dad, not wanting him to think I’m trying to engage him in conversation, but wanting to see what he’s doing. To my surprise he is actually watching. I look again five minutes later and he’s sound asleep. On the chair in front of me, my mother begins to nod off too. I finish watching the movie, wake them both and head to bed.

A month later, back at my own home, my husband puts on a movie. Pauses it, waiting for me to come out of the kitchen. “Go ahead, it’s just trailers,” I say.

“That’s the best part,” he insists.


“Just making sure you’re here to stay,” he replies defiantly.

I watch one, two, three trailers. Glance at my water glass on the coffee table in front of me. Empty. I stand, grab it, walk to the kitchen. The sound of the trailers stops.

“Don’t pause it,” I plead. “I can still hear what’s going on.”

“ Didn’t even make it through the previews,” he mutters, just loud enough for me to hear. I set the glass down in the kitchen, remembering the laundry sitting unfolded in the basket. Go to the bedroom, grab it, head for the couch. Sit, movie starts, I sort socks. Then I remember my water glass. I don’t want to be a nuisance, but I’m suddenly thirsty. “Don’t pause it,” I say as I get up, dart to the kitchen, grab my glass, dart back to the couch. Sit, sip, fold. Didn’t miss a beat.

“Who’s that guy?” I ask. He pauses, then backs the scene up to the point where I left. “You don’t have to rewind it; just tell me who that guy is,” I say.

The familiarity of this scene suddenly hits me. I suppose it was inevitable, my ADHD, but I can honestly say I didn’t see it coming.
Resolution by Laura Murray (Acrylic)

Spirit by Michael Dean
Political Fever Sweat Out: A Political Commentary
By Ashley Knuckles

During the primaries for the 2010 presidential election the youth of America began to start paying attention to politics again for the first time in a long time. We had a political fever that was so apparent, and reminiscent of the youth of the ‘60s that participated in anti-Vietnam War and civil right protests of that time. Young people fiercely and passionately fought for what they believed in, articulately expressed their views through words, music and speech, and showed the world that we had an opinion that would no longer be ignored.

For the first time in a long time we were paying attention to the world around us, and the world was paying attention to us. We got the world’s attention as we participated in the voting process in record numbers, integrated politics and pop culture and fiercely stood up for what we believed in.

But since the presidential election, it seems that the fever that was so strong before has been sweat out. As if to say, “Obama’s there now, we can relax now.” Or, “Obama’s there now… there’s no use.”

If that is what you think, you are terribly wrong. There are still fiscal social and bureaucratic problems facing the American government that need to be tackled nationally and locally. And the youth have the power to do something about it. No one man can change a nation.

But instead of using our fever from the presidential elections and starting a new era of youth involvement, we have allowed the fever to sweat out… We took the cold medicine of complacency, wrapped up in the smothering blanket of ignorance, and let political fever slowly creep out of our skin of awareness and evaporate into thin air of the status quo.

I remember my friends eagerly headed off to the polls to vote in the presidential election. As they voted I desperately wanted to be part of the process. Although it was hard not voting, I found contentment in the fact that at least some one my age, who may have some of the same life perspectives and political views as me, was voting.

Now I once again have no voice. Once again "that guy" is speaking for me. That guy who is disconnected from me and who I am. And that guy that I would argue couldn’t care less about what I thought. He was speaking for me for a long time before the last presidential election and he wasn’t doing a very good job.

So I say we need to get the fever back. We need to make sure that people know what we think. Come on… watching a few hours of CNN won’t kill you. Or even, dare I say it… local news.

Yes, it’s boring sometimes. Yes, it seems unimportant compared to the pile of homework sitting next to you and the fact that you and your friends are meeting up in a few hours. I too am guilty of choosing Real Word re-runs over Anderson Cooper 360, when three months ago you couldn’t force me to change the channel from CNN. But we have to do better than that… It’s our world too, and we have a responsibility to it. We have to know what is going on in the world around us. We have to make sure our voice is being heard.
Mystery Man  
By Terre Cooke-Chaffin

Bruce is kind of a mystery person. It’s as if he came into the world with no instructions. No-body comes with instructions, of course, but his sister had been wondering, again, whether Bruce ever thought about why he was the way he was. She certainly thought about it a lot, but they never talked about it. He really never talked about much of anything when she saw him.

When she sees him once or twice a year that she gets out to the west coast for business she’s always amazed at how they turned out so differently. He smells like he needs a shower, looks like he needs a home, looks like his home is on a street somewhere, wears second-hand dirty clothes, usually a tan jacket and some sort of faded olive pants. He walks hunched over, with his head down and slips a five-dollar bill to a homeless woman huddled in the doorway of a San Diego restaurant on a rainy afternoon. It seemed a gesture of pure grace. The unnoticed notice the invisible. His sister barely saw the woman leaning against the wet tiled doorway, wearing unmatched socks and pushing back a strand of dirty hair. But Bruce never skipped a beat on that damp sidewalk as the two siblings made their way to lunch one day. It was just one of the maybe two a year that his sister might get to the west coast. Bruce never even reached into his pocket for the five, just extended his arm to the woman and then it was back to his side without a word, as if he knew what it meant to have no home.

“Alcohol kills developing brain tissue in a fetus.” The reporter knew that when she asked the doctor about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

“It’s most lethal in the first 8 weeks of pregnancy, so often, women will not even know they are pregnant and be causing damage to an unborn child if they are drinking. Any amount of alcohol is toxic to a fetus because it kills the developing brain”.

Dr. Douglas Dannaway rattled off the facts and known science behind the ravages of alcohol on unborn children, not knowing this woman asking him the questions was seeking information on her Mystery Man. Dr. Dannaway, a neonatologist, sees all kinds of kids born to mothers who drank during pregnancy.

It was raining outside, on a cold and mud-colored grey day. The reporter was beginning to sprinkle on the inside too, aware of that downpour of feelings just around the bend of conscious mind, the kind that chatter for answers that never come. She wasn’t sure what Bruce did on the inside. That’s part of Bruce. He never showed what went on internally. In all their years of growing up he never talked about feelings or reasons why he never seemed to fit into any group or crowd. Sometimes the most perfect of outsides have the most diseased interiors. Maybe Bruce was okay as he sure wasn’t perfect on the outside.

His sister knew the facts of Bruce. The one’s she dug up from the family he grew up in. He’d been born in 1953, to an alcoholic woman, an unmarried schoolteacher who named her son Francis before she gave him up to a foster home and eventually he came to live in his adopted family. There were no memories of him coming into that family as he got there before she did.

It was a catholic priest, seeing the despair of a young couple that had lost a son of their own, who brought 15-month-old-Francis, soon to be Bruce, to their door. Francis had been living in a foster home and needed a place to stay for good. His new family didn’t stay anywhere for good, picking up and moving every few years for a new job. But the potentially new parents were married, were a family, weren’t alcoholic, and were trying to start a family of their own. Francis became Bruce and joined the group

“He was the child of neglect, he had bed sores on him when he came to us”, her mother told her when she was but twenty and asking again, “Why is Bruce the way he is?”

That was before he was homeless or living in a hotel where he pays a day or week rate. He always slunk around the lockers alone in her high school, was in the same grade as she was even though he was three years older. He finally just dropped out and went into the Army, breaking an ankle four years later while trying to run away from the military life and receiving a dishonorable discharge. She
pretty much figured out he wasn’t like anyone she’d known and nobody could ever tell her what he was. Or why.

But she did know some things nobody else talked about. When he was young, all the way through his teenage years he could beat anyone he ever ran against in a foot race. He could sketch an entire scene in seconds if he had paper and pencil and he carved intricate animal statues out of wood blocks he’d pick up, wandering alone somewhere. But that was a long time ago.

“Alcohol not only destroys brain functions in the developing fetus, it destroys the nesting areas for future brain functions” Dr. Dannoway was explaining as she was thinking about all of Bruce’s talents instead of his deficits. If Fetal Alcohol Syndrome babies have an average IQ around 70, which is considered handicapped, then most of his 70 points were on the art side of his mind.

“The typical Fetal Alcohol Syndrome baby has three primary characteristics”, he continued, “a smooth flat philtrum, narrow set eyes and a thin upper lip.”

A philtrum is the tiny valley-like structure that runs between your nose and your upper lip. It’s valley-like if you weren’t exposed to alcohol while in your mother’s womb. Bruce was exposed. His philtrum was flat. That’s a pretty good match her reporter’s mind was thinking, always searching, never satisfied. She was aware as she gathered information how much easier it was to hide behind facts, to focus on the information she collected instead of the outcomes of all that drinking. A reporter for a living, she knew what to do with facts. It was the unanswered emotional issues that were difficult.

Drinking and cigarettes. There wasn’t much information on what those did to the unborn back in the 50’s. That attention wasn’t drawn until the late 1960’s or early 1970’s. So maybe it was ignorance, not denial, responsible for the pictures you still see today in photos from the time, mid century women, a drink in one hand, maybe a cigarette in the other, conversing at a cocktail party, obviously pregnant.

It reminded her of the sunscreen issue. Those same women didn’t even have that word in their vocabulary back in the 1950’s. Who knew then what damage that warm, life giving ray of light would mean when the tan had faded by 20 years? But the sun didn’t hurt the unborn child and she’d never seen Bruce’s biological mother. But, from the looks of Bruce and the story of his early foster care situation the woman had done some harmful drinking.

Dr. Dannoway’s facts were unsettling. Last year in the United States, four million kids were born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

“I don’t know what that priest was thinking, bringing us that boy in all of our grief. We had no idea what we were getting ourselves into.” Her father unearthed that feeling of regret to her, just several years ago when she again queried, keeping careful notes as a reporter would, hoping to make sense of something that never really made sense, a story that always seemed to have missing pieces.

“I just adopted a dog into my family and I only adopted it because I knew it had come from solid parents,” her sister was saying on the phone just the other day. All of this conversation had been kicked up because the reporter’s mind had recently wandered to the Mystery Man and she was still, all these years later, trying to get some answers, the kind she could hide behind or the kind that might satiate an appetite of anger.

I haven’t been able to find my brother, Bruce, on the phone for more than a year. I sent him a card and some money just a couple of weeks ago. I will watch to see if the check gets cashed. I don’t know why Bruce is the way he is. No amount of questioning makes it better. I haven’t heard an answer that explains it all away or fits tightly in a box of understanding. But Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is the best answer I have, just for today. Maybe tomorrow the Mystery Man will check in.
I Am a Journey
By Allison Gappa

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By Allison Gappa

I am a motorcycle burn from a burning silver pipe. I am from matching blue sundresses with my little sister on Sunday mornings, from bamboo forest adventures in my North Carolinian backyard, and from singing “Pharaoh, Pharaoh” on stage for five hundred students at the age of seven. I am salt water accidentally swallowed because of an overwhelming Myrtle Beach wave. I am from Barbie doll houses, from classic Disney Princess movies and from pink walls with leopard bedding. I am tangled blonde hair that refused to be brushed until middle school.

The temperature couldn’t have been anymore perfect. Surprisingly the wind doesn’t blow away my hundred pound body as I run across the black ocean’s shore. “Don’t run so far ahead of us!” my mom shouts in a panic as I disappear into the darkness. I come to a halt. Turn. And skip into the night’s warm ocean water, flailing my tan arms between the dim waves. I wiggle my little feet as far into the soft ocean shore as mother nature will allow me until I feel a sharp edge against the ball of my foot. Being the young archeologist that I am, I dive head first into the black water and begin to excavate this foreign object. I’m quickly running out of breath because my young body hasn’t quite developed an adequate diaphragm. Bent over underwater, I give one last yank on this persistent treasure the earth finally sets free, sending me flying above the water only to end up sitting on the crunchy ocean floor. Underwater. Again. Returning to oxygen, I admire my beautiful pink and golden conch shell and much like the boys in Lord of the Flies, my eyes and heart couldn’t have opened any wider. My family, also amazed by the beauty, begins to search for ones similar like it, and even though they are able to dig up two or three more, none of them are able to compare to the seashell that will sit on my family’s bookshelf for the rest of my childhood.

I am a moving van that will alter lives. I am from old country roads, from bon fires on summer nights, and from green tractors always visible in the distance. I am the new girl. I am from the house with the broken mailbox, from early mornings my mom spent unrolling my hair before a cheer competition, and from Braum’s parking lot being the hotspot. I am the unsolved puzzle.

I stand out on the football field looking at a full stadium, not really being able to make out any faces. I smile as bright as I can, and think about how lucky I am to be out here. Despite my jittery nerves I still devote all of my attention to the overhead speaker. “And your 2008 homecoming queen is…” The pause couldn’t have carried on any longer. The majority of the student body sitting in the stands know what I had been through the past few years. It wasn’t glamorous, it wasn’t beautiful, and it wasn’t be any means desirable. However, like all hardships in life, it only made me stronger. It made the girl standing out on the football field in a white gold sparkling dress who she was. The familiar voice of my U.S. history teacher says my name, just like he does in class, but this time I can tell he was smiling. My eyes shoot open as the stadium lights seem to get all the brighter, and I begun walking to the center of the field to receive my crown. My mom, brother, and sister, along with the rest of my cheer team rush the field. Everything felt like a dream.

I am a new dorm room. I am from roommates who have caught my alligator tears, from coaches who have driven to the hospital to see me in the middle of the night and from friends who kept calling even when I was unresponsive. I am late nights filled with acoustic music, hot tea, and homework. I am from unexpected struggles, from caffeine that can only ensure so much energy and from talking to God every night for guidance on my rollercoaster of a life. I am a journey.
Don’t Blink
By Terre Cooke Chaffin

I didn’t want to open my eyes this morning. Not even a crack. I wanted to stay exactly where I was in my head. I wasn’t anywhere. That’s where I wanted to stay. I couldn’t move because the tiniest of motion would betray my alert consciousness.

Underneath my false, early morning slumber, I was on the verge of hyper aware. But I let the mind glue in, the goo that stops thought, but requires complete stillness and no visual stimuli. It was part of my battle plan: refusing to let the reality of what my mind was trying to review, yet again, into my mind, for unending analysis.

It was a simple proposition but that didn’t make it any easier to open my eyes. The looming thought, bouncing inside my sleepy head wasn’t going to cause any bodily harm to a loved one, didn’t represent the first time in the human race such an experience was taking place, wasn’t even affecting the person my brain was so focused on in any negative fashion. But, the idea of my first born leaving home, moving away after 18 years of close personal contact, a one and only son, was causing me immense pain. It was the kind of pain previous experience had taught me you don’t open your eyes over, or death would come crashing thru the safe world of sleep.

I remember playing this game before, trying my best to pretend sleep when I knew I was awake, pretending with myself that if I opened those eyes, the ruse was up. The reality of what I was most afraid of would be true, and I couldn’t go back.

I had felt it as soon as I blinked that morning long ago. My mother was dying in a frequently cleaned, but dirty at the edges, Memphis hospital. Hard linoleum floors with no color, nursing staff fixated on charts and break times for employees. Absent surgeons being paged on the intercom. It was late August and humid. It was the kind of place you wanted to die. The hospital was only 15 miles from my Dad’s home but it felt like 30 as I drove back and forth, endlessly, over three days.

Driving was my attempt to escape the reality of what was going on in that windowless inner city hospital room, numb to traffic and heat, headed to a clean house where the windows opened, or at least there was a semblance of air when you came thru the door. Nobody opens windows in August in Memphis. Too much hot sneaks indoors.

Operating in an almost dreamlike state back then, I would understand later it was a survival state, a level of consciousness where I felt trapped between two worlds, the real one I was living in and the one I had stepped out of just two days before. My mother had never woken up from what was supposed to be a routine heart surgery, if there is such a thing. I’d said goodbye to her in a holding area, hugged her close, told my father not to worry, as up to that point in my life, I didn’t know that sometimes the world didn’t go as predicted. Until the nightmare began, the living one, where I sat late at night watching my mother’s chest go up and down, her mouth somehow secured to a breathing tube that was really doing the movement for her. The room smelled sweet, filled with the breath of a patient whose body can no longer control its own sugar metabolism, pushing the scent of sweetness out through her lungs into the room. Less than a week ago she’d been in Oklahoma City with me for a Russian ballet. She had loved the Soviet born dancer, Mikhail Baryshnikov.

And I loved this woman who now lay dying before me, four days after that ballet, escaping the tragedy for an hour at a time, walking the late night empty streets of Memphis, driving a rental car back and forth to my fathers suburban home until she finally stopped breathing, three days post op, and I never wanted to wake up again.

But, feigning sleep this morning, 22 years in the future, did not stop all normal function as my brain screamed “Wake up. It’s not the same. You have misclassified this most recent terror”.

Light refusing to be shut out by an eyelid, was dancing thru my awakening consciousness. I was doing my best to stay right there in the crumpled, cool sheets, the kind that leave deep crevices of markings on smashed facial skin but I was losing the battle. I rolled over with competing thoughts of where
to find boxes, how to pack clothes, should we fold them or lay them on top of massive amounts of electronic equipment destined for a Chicago college dorm? My mind moved to scan mode.

The SUV needs to be checked out by the car service department. What are we going to do about the health insurance when he’s out of state? Should we drive to St. Louis and spend the night or make the whole drive in a long day? Do I really want to drive 12 hours both ways or fly back?

The barrage of questions pushed back this new sadness that took me in waves, one moment happily discussing a family members’ recent move to Colorado when a friend asks “Has Luke left for college yet, Terre?” And in the unsuspecting moment I couldn’t breathe. I could not take a breath, in or out as I worked hard to stop the memories of the lifetime of laughter and late night conversations I’d shared with this son of mine. Oh, how our loves and joys and tragedies and daily living get all inter-twined. This straight A student, long and lean in jeans forever slipping just a notch below the checkered boxers; this quiet teenager who started watching late night comedy and Jon Stewart when kids his age were still wrapped up in Little League baseball and paintball wars, was about to leave my home and taking a massive piece of my happiness with him. Keep moving my mind was cooing silently from a survival mode level. Pushed aside by the movement of coherent thought, the overruled fear and sadness gave way to action. A glance in the dresser mirror revealed the deep-sheet-wrinkle imprint across my left cheek, evidence I’d contemplated hiding in my comfort zone too long. I was responding to an old pain. A new awareness has come from down deep. This is a life-producing experience. It’s not about death this time.

In overdrive now I began to plan. Call clothing store for boxes. Decide how to fit everything into that SUV. The college bound son could solve that predicament; I would direct us toward our higher selves, avoiding the impulse to just dump toothpaste, deodorant, shower gel and shampoo into an empty liquor box grabbed from an alley. Maybe we could have some order about it. Or maybe that was a decision for the college son too and I was just trying to make order of disorder in my mind.

I opened my eyes; breathed deep with the knowledge this was not going to kill me. I miss you Mom. I love you Son. This is a life adventure, not a tragedy.
FICTION

THE SCARAB 2010
Mi Morena
By Megan Gourley

James Hurst sat staring out the window as the rain poured down outside. It had been seven long years since he had been in London, and now that he had moved back he could feel the nerves kick in at the thought of meeting up with his friends from so long ago.

As he watched the water droplets race down the foggy glass his thoughts strayed to his last day he had spent in his hometown. That was the day he had meant to do it. To confess his undying love to the woman who had stolen his heart. But that opportunity never came…

It had taken him months to work up the courage to do this. Torturing months. The emotions and feelings of the day’s events were so close to him he could still smell the fragrance of the flowers he had held in his hands. His eyes could still see her beautiful image walking toward him vividly.

To anyone else in the world, it was a simple, ordinary day. But to James it was full of excitement, and nerves. He was certain that she would confess how she loved him in response. Nothing could stop his determined decision.

James laughed hollowly as he remembered those thoughts from that day. How wrong he had been. How terribly wrong. Not even an hour after meeting with her, their plans of a romantic picnic by the river were shattered.

James’ gaze rested on the car parked isolated in his gravel driveway. If it were possible he wouldn’t use it. It was a constant reminder. A symbol of death and pain. How had it happened? He wondered to himself for the thousandth time. He had simply stepped away from her for a moment to grab a copy of ‘The Times’. He should have stayed next to her. He should have saved her.

It was the memory of turning around at the sound of screeching tires, seeing her eyes open wide in horror, her body crumpling to the ground, that haunted him still. He had run to her. Run to help her. Only it was too late.

Even as he scooped her limp frame into his arms, her heart gave her up. Death consumed her beaten body. Her last breath was but a wisp of air from the small gap between her lips.

And as James held her to his body, his heart and mind willingly died with her. What was the use of having a beating heart when your sole purpose of living had been taken away eternally?

Ever since that day, James had felt empty and hopeless; those being the only words that could even give off a faint hint of how he felt. For there is no word in the English language to describe such pain and despair. Not for the extent at which James had felt it in those horrible moments.

To this day he hadn’t so much as talked to another woman, unless it was absolutely necessary. He knew that if he couldn’t have her then he wouldn’t have anyone. There was only one person for him, and she no longer existed.

The pools of water on the street swirled carelessly, and James envied their simplistic state of being, their emotionless beauty.

His forehead rested against the cool windowpane, and his eyes closed of their own accord. The faintest of smiles crossed his face as a pair of soft brown eyes filled his thoughts. Her stunning eyes that he longed to see and look into even if only for a moment. Her flowing brown hair that he longed to touch and feel. Her beautiful smile. Yes, her smile. He remembered it probably the best out of everything. He would give anything to have her back in his life.

The soft pitter-patter of rain hitting the window grew louder as the wind blew forcefully against the glass. James opened his eyes once again, his heart feeling cold as the vision of his love fluttered away.

He turned his gaze toward the grassy plain lying outside his home. There was something moving out in the distance, but the thickness of the raindrops obscured his vision. His eyes squinted as he tried to
get a better view. As the figure drew near he felt his heart stop beating for a split second before moving to a pace so rapid he thought he might faint.

Surely he was hallucinating. She was gone. He knew she was gone. But even as he looked out into the rain he knew there was no mistaking it. How could he ever forget those piercing eyes and elegant body? She was there. Not even thirty feet away from where he sat watching entranced.

With a fleeting last glance out the window, he hurried toward the door opening it in one fluid movement and stepped out onto the porch looking around frantically.

His eyes caught sight of her standing on the gravel road that led up to his property. She didn’t take notice of him and instead began spinning with her arms spread out, head thrown back, and a smile spread across her face.

James’ rational thoughts were pushed aside. He didn’t care that it wasn’t possible for her to be there. All he knew was that she was. He wasn’t about to ignore that.

He slowly walked out into the rain, his entire body becoming instantly soaked as he neared his destination. Her.

She stopped dancing turning her gaze to James, who was looking on with a look of utter disbelief on his handsome face. She smiled at him, holding her arms out to him, inviting him to come to her.

James hesitated only a moment as he stood within feet of her before reaching his hand out and taking hold of hers. Her hands were warm despite the cold chill of the rain, and James felt his entire body heat up at her touch.

He couldn’t take his eyes from hers, and she lifted their entwined hands above her head, turning underneath them. James reached his free hand out, catching hers as she turned back to face him. She moved his hand to her waist, resting her hand gently on his shoulder, and stroking the base of his neck.

James’ eyes closed as she turned their bodies, remembering the last time he had danced with the woman now in his arms. His eyes opened as she twirled underneath his arm once again, stopping with her back facing him, their hands still clasped together.

She turned her head so she could see James, and smiled warmly. James continued staring at her, his eyes clearly showing the confusion he was feeling.

“How is this possible?” He whispered, more to himself than her. She turned in his arms, her legs bumping his from their close proximity.

“That’s not important,” She said reaching her hand up and running her fingers along his jaw line gently. James immediately leaned into her hand, savoring the feeling of her skin touching his. “I’ve missed you James,” She said softly.

James’ entire body tingled as her breath washed over his face. The words he wanted to say were trapped within his throat.

“Tell me what you’re thinking,” She said, her face inches from his.

“I…” James seemed to have lost the ability to talk and had to clear his throat as she continued to run her hand against his neck and into his brown hair.

James leaned in, his lips touching hers lightly.

“I love you,” He said against her soft lips, “I love you so much, Lily.”

And with that James closed the gap between them, feeling complete and happy for the first time in over seven years. She kissed him back, the warmth of her lips on his driving him wild.

His body melted into hers as he shared his first kiss since she had gone. He didn’t know if he was imagining it all, but it felt so real. All he wanted was to have the feeling of being with her once again.

She pulled away from him slowly, kissing his cheek, and forehead gently.

“I love you too James,” Lily said looking into his eyes.

James smiled at her, his arms wrapped securely around her waist, holding her as if he would lose her once again if he let go.

“Please don’t leave me again, Lily,” James pleaded softly as he ran his hands over her back. Lily didn’t reply, only tightened her hold around his middle.
James sensed her hesitance to say something and felt his stomach twist in a knot.

“You’re not leaving me are you?” He asked moving away from her, but only enough so he could see her face. And as her eyes filled with tears, he knew his answer. As those tears fell down her cheeks, mixing with the rain, he knew she wasn’t here to stay. He would have to let her go. Again.

“I’m sorry James,” Lily said kissing him lightly on the lips before slipping from his embrace.

James watched as she walked a few paces away. Normally he would be running after her, begging her to stay. But something inside him kept him at peace as she smiled, bringing her fingertips to her lips and kissing them. Sending her final farewell.

He stood still as a statue, all his thoughts on the woman now turning her back and walking away from him. She headed out into the rain, and before reaching the edge of the road, disappeared into nothingness.

It’s impossible to know how long James stood out in the storm, eyes fixed on the place where his love vanished. But one thing is for certain. For the first time in seven years, he felt content. He knew that wherever Lily was, she now knew he loved her. And this simple thought was what kept his desire to live and love carry on through the rest of his life…

Photos by Sarah Cook
My living room is spotless, she’d notice if it wasn’t. The mess that usually crowds my home is tucked away. She walks into my house, misery and despondency billowing around her like a cloud. It’s suffocating, poisoning me as I breathe it in. I can feel it sliding down my throat and settling into my lungs. I try to hold my breath but I don’t have that much control.

Cathy’s a tiny woman, barely five feet tall. The fine black hair that announces her Asian heritage is thinning and wrinkles line her tanned face. She’s skinny, skeletal even, and she looks far older than her almost fifty years. Her daughter’s trendy clothes hang off of her frail frame. Her large brown eyes are flat and lifeless and I can’t bring myself to meet them.

“You’re here,” I say.

I offer her a seat, each of us taking a stiff high-backed lounge chair. It’s telling; the sofa is soft and comfortable and made for hours-long chats filled with laughter and inside jokes. We’ve sat on that sofa many times in the past. I cannot bear to today.

I hide my discomfort, like I’ve hidden everything else I don’t want her to see, behind a closed door. My smile is rigid as I offer her tea and she takes it, this little ritual of ours not easy to break. The cups are white porcelain with a trailing pink rose pattern on them, a Christmas gift her daughter bought for me eight years ago, when she was seven. She takes her tea with honey and lemon, a combination I’ve never been able to accustom myself to. Her lipstick leaves a bright red stain on the rim and it’s all I can stare at. I don’t want her here, in my house, in my life, tainting everything I’ve worked so hard to build. But she’s my best friend and she needs me.

“He left.” Her voice is steady and clear. “For good this time.”

“Happy Birthday, Rachelle!” I yelled, my voice blending in with all the other partygoers as Cathy brought out the cake. Nathan cleared a spot for his wife to set it in the center of the table and handed her a lighter to light the candles. Fourteen of them placed so carefully on top of the creamy chocolate icing. Thirteen and one to grow on.

Rachelle smiled as she blew out the candles. She looked radiant, her dark hair long and thick, and her dark eyes sparkled, like a younger version of her mother. She wore a new dress for the occasion and the gold heart necklace with the tiny diamond that was my gift to her. Everyone’s eyes were on Rachelle.

Except mine. Mine were on Cathy. She looked almost the same as usual, her lipstick red and thick over her smiling mouth but her smile didn’t quite reach all the way up.

Rachelle leaned in to blow out the candles and we all applauded when she was done. Nathan nudged Cathy to the side, his big muscled bulk all but dwarfing her. He smiled and laughed as he cut the cake, placing each chocolaty piece on a pink paper plate. I took mine with a nodded “thank you” and sat down across from Cathy to eat it.

“She left,” Nathan said to Cathy, offering her a piece.

“Oh, no, thank you,” she said, and I knew that she was thinking of how much sugar had gone into the cake. Cathy’s diabetes were bad and getting worse. She’d already been hospitalized once and her doctor had given her strict instructions on her diet.

“It’s your daughter’s birthday, you can’t have a piece of cake?” He stared at her. Into her. “It’s just one.”

“Oh, no,” she said. She took the plate and fork Nathan handed her. She took a bite and smiled. And if her hands trembled a little, well, I was the only one that noticed.

Cathy’s bracelets were silver and heavy, making little metallic sounds whenever they clinked together. They weren’t hers. I’d bought them for Rachelle the last time I took her to the mall. She tried to hide the faded greenish-yellow bruises that snaked around her wrists and I pretended I didn’t see
them, carefully looking anywhere else. We’d been through that before. Twice.

It was a Thursday: Girls Night Out. Once a month a few close co-workers, Cathy and I met up at a local bar and grill for food, drinks and conversation. Cathy and I were early, sitting at a booth in the bar. I was already on my second mojito and the waitress took three empty glasses with her when she brought Cathy’s latest mango martini.

The bar is dim, smoky and loud, crowded with people. Not altogether private, but anonymous nonetheless.

“How’s Nathaniel liking college?” I asked. I swirled my glass around, playing in the condensation rings left behind on the table. “He decided to live at home?”

“Yes. He’s doing okay. He kind of wanted to take a year off before he went but Nathan insisted he go now.” Cathy took a swig of her martini. “It’s good for him.”

“That’s good. He’s a good kid.”

“Yes, he is. Did I tell you? He shaved his head.” She quietly flagged the waitress and held up her empty glass. “Just like his father.”

The table wobbled every time I tapped my foot. We were sitting at Starbucks on our lunch break. We went there often, a little quiet time away from our noisy, busy jobs.

“I think it’s time,” I said, tapping my foot again.

“He’s coming home.” Cathy dipped her straw into the mound of foam on top of her caramel cappuccino. “He said that it was over. That she’s gone.”

“And you believe him?”

“Maybe?”

“Really?” Tap, tap.

“I don’t really know what to think anymore. I mean, I never thought this would happen.” Cathy took a drink of her coffee to wash down the lump in her throat. “Not to me.”

“Cathy. It’s done. It’s been done and over for what? A year now? It’s not going to change. He’s not going to change. The only question is what do you do now?” Tap, tap, Tap.

Cathy had all but obliterated her whipped foam. She nodded.

“There’s the kids. How do I tell them?”

“Cath, they already know. And they’re not happy right now. But maybe, if you do this, they can be.”

A sigh.

“Thirty years.” She drank the last of the cappuccino. “And this is what is comes to.”

* * * * *

It was 3:00 in the morning when she called. The number on the caller ID showed the county jail. The jail was colder than I thought it would be; at least the room we were sitting in was. I had goosebumps on my arms but I didn’t think it was just the air conditioning.

She sat across the wooden table from me, wearing a county-issue orange jumpsuit, her hair dirty and full of flyaways, mascara clotting her lashes. Her red lipstick was faded and smeared. I couldn’t help but stare. I’d never seen her like that before.

“My shirt got ripped when they were putting me in the police car,” she said. Her hands picked at the cloth and her shoulders twitched randomly. She wouldn’t look at me.

“He said your alcohol level was .14,” I said, referring to the officer now processing her paperwork. “You got lucky.”

“I just had a couple of drinks.” She shrugged. “I needed them. I needed a break. It was no big deal.”

“They’re taking away your license. You realize that?”

“Yes.”

“And an absolute minimum of six months probation.”

“I know.”
“Why didn’t you call Nathan? Where is he?”
“I did. He said…” Her voice cracked and she had to swallow several times to get the words out. “He said that I did this and he’s not using his money to bail me out. I’m sorry I called you. Woke you up. Made you come down here.”
“No. Hey, don’t apologize for that.” I reached my hand across the table toward her. She jumped at the motion, trying to cover her reaction by smoothing her hair behind her ears.
I stared at the left side of her face. The flesh was livid. Dried blood was crusted in a small line from her neck up to her ear, the lobe split where her earring had been pulled out. I could see where her eye would puff and blacken in another hour.
“Nathan?” I asked. My hand clenched into a fist where it still sat on the table. She looked at me and shook her head, tears shining in her eyes.
“Where is Rachelle?”
“She’s at a friend’s house. She, uh, wasn’t there.”
“And Nathaniel?”
It was quiet. I could hear her as she took a deep breath. She closed her eyes and tears streamed down her sunken cheeks. Her hand reached up to her tattered earlobe, fingering the cut.
“Oh.” I didn’t know what to say, to do. “You can’t stay there. Neither can the kids.” I reached for her hand again and she let me take it. “It’s time, Cath. Come home with me.”
* * * *
The waiting room smelled strongly of musk and mold and ammonia. It made my lungs burn every time I breathed in and I wanted to sneeze. I’d been sitting in one of the hard and uncomfortable chairs for almost an hour now, Cathy’s battered black bag sitting on my lap. I’d driven Cathy to each of the court-mandated doctor visits, one every two weeks for the last two months, because she couldn’t bear to go alone.
I’d long since memorized every inch of this waiting room. The gray walls that looked more dingy than modern. The metal magazine rack on the wall that held torn and battered copies of Redbook and Harper’s and Ranger Rick that were decades old. The water fountain that was constantly smudged with handprints and only gave lukewarm water. The rows of alternating red and black chairs lined up like a Checkers board. Like if you just knew who to jump you could win. What, I didn’t know.
I’ve always been good at Checkers, at strategy, knowing when to push forward and when to retreat. I hadn’t played Checkers in a long time though. Cathy wasn’t very good at it; she always played it too safe, the same moves every time, even when she knew they wouldn’t work. She was too easy to beat and I got tired of watching her lose. Her kids got rid of their board when they grew up enough to realize she’d never actually let them win.
It was startling when my lap started singing Justin Timberlake’s “SexyBack.” My face turned a little red as everyone glanced over at the noise. I dug quickly into Cathy’s purse and pulled out a half-used tube of Target Red lipstick, a roll of mints, an extra pair of socks, and a mini bottle of hand lotion before I found her Blackberry. I turned the ringer off and glanced at the screen. When I saw who was calling I answered it.
“Hello, Nathaniel,” I said, knowing that he’d recognize my voice.
“Hey, is my mom there? I need to talk to her.” His voice was distant, the connection full of static. I wondered what he was doing.
“Sorry, she’s in with the doctor right now.”
“Oh. Do you know when she’ll be done?”
“They found something that they needed to check out. It’s probably going to be a while,” I said. “Did you need something?”
“Yeah, Rachelle has to be picked up from school and I got called in to work early, so I’m heading there now. Can she go get her?”
“She’s waiting now? Is there any way that your father could go instead?” I asked, checking my watch. I figured we still had another hour or so before Cathy would be done.
“No, he’s busy. Besides, it’s her job anyway.”
“What?” I asked, not sure I’d heard correctly.
“I said it’s her job to take care of her kids. And she’s doing a really sucky job at it.” There was a sneer in his voice that I’d never heard him use before. “I have to go now. Just tell her that Rachelle’s waiting for her.”

I heard a faint click and then the steady hum of the dial tone. I stared in shock at the phone in my hand for a moment before turning it off.

I hadn’t talked to Nathaniel in months, not since he’d started college. But that was not the kid I’d known. The Nathaniel I knew was always polite and cheerful. He was a protector by nature, always putting his family first.

Cathy lived far enough away from the school that the bus didn’t run that way. I glanced at my watch – 2:45. It’d take almost 25 minutes to drive up to Rachelle’s school and another 20 to get her home. I thought about calling Nate, asking him to take care of his daughter, but I didn’t want to hear what I thought he’d have to say.

I stood up from the uncomfortable chair, standing still for a moment to get the feeling back in my legs. I walked up to the check-in station and motioned for Ann. I thought it was a little sad that I’d been here enough times to know the nurses by name. I told her where I was going, handed her Cathy’s purse, along with some cab money and asked her to make sure she got it. I knew Cathy would be upset with me when she realized that I’d left. I pulled out my own cell phone, dialing Rachelle’s number, as I walked out of the waiting room and into the fresh air.

* * * * *

She’s sick with grief, tempered by diabetes and liver damage. The tea in her hands has gone cold.

“Are you sure he’s gone?” I asked.

“He took everything. Cleaned out our bank account and opened one in just his name,” she said, before taking a sip of tea. “She called me yesterday. Said they’re living together now.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know.” She sets her cup on the table. Her shoulders stiffen, her tone growing cold and distant. “Nathaniel moved into the dorms. But I was wondering if Rachelle can stay with you?”

“Of course she can. What about you? Where are you going to stay?”

She stands up, pulling her sweater a little tighter around her, arms crossing around her middle. Her voice, when she finally speaks, is thin and spoken on an exhale. “I’m going home.”

I can’t breathe. I don’t know why I asked or why I don’t try to stop her as she leaves. I should. I get up and take the dishes back to the kitchen. I’ll have to do laundry. Rachelle will need clean sheets for the guest room. The pink ones, I think.
Heartbreak
By Erica Olavarria

The nurse left the hospital at 5pm. This was unusual, as Jennifer normally finished her shift at midnight. The sunlight gleaming off the cars in the parking lot hurt her eyes. How dare the sun shine on a day like today? As she squinted against the gleam, the tears already welling in her eyes spilled over the edges and slowly streaked down her cheeks. Standing in the middle of the bright hospital parking lot, she took a deep breath and reviewed the terrifying events of the past seventeen hours.

Jennifer had finished her shift at 12:00am, like usual. It was a Friday night, and her son Josh had been on a date with his girlfriend of three months, Emily. There was a message on Jennifer’s cell phone from Josh. Apparently the date had ended roughly and Emily had driven home, leaving him stranded. Jennifer sighed and rubbed her exhausted eyes. Her starched, white nurse uniform crinkled wearily as she bent down to grab her purse and headed for the hospital door. So much for her plan to be asleep by 12:30.

As Jennifer drove to the park where Josh was waiting, she thought about his message. He had sounded upset, and Jennifer knew that something serious must have happened. He was a rational guy, and did not get worked up easily over petty issues. At seventeen, Josh was tall and lanky, with curly brown hair and a goofy smile that warmed Jennifer’s heart. He was slightly awkward, but in an endearing way. Josh had been a blessing to Jennifer and her husband, Bradley. After years of failed attempts, they had nearly given up hope for their own child. Josh, having been followed by no siblings, was the only sunlight in their lives.

Jennifer and Bradley had been ecstatic when they met Emily and saw the joy she brought to their son. A junior in high school, Josh had never before had a girlfriend. Jennifer wondered what could have happened between them tonight. She told herself that this might be the first of several heartbreaks that Josh would encounter, and contemplated what kind of advice to offer.

Josh was hunched on the curb when Jennifer pulled up in her blue Toyota. It was January and he was wearing only a T-shirt in the crisp weather. Jennifer mentally scolded her son for being so thoughtless but decided not to mention the offense, because it was apparent that he had more serious issues on his mind. She had barely stopped the car before Josh opened the door and slumped into the passenger seat, resting his heavy head on the window. Jennifer tried not to scrutinize her son too obviously, but she thought she could make out the faint glistening of fresh tears on his cheek.

―Hi, sweetie,‖ Jennifer offered, unsure of how to respond to his depressed nature.
―Thanks for picking me up, mom,‖ he muttered.
―Part of the job description for being a mom,‖ she said brightly, but the silence that followed left her remark hanging in the suffocating gloom. She exhaled slowly and started the car. The two drove in silence for a few minutes while Jennifer started fifteen different conversations in her head, although none of them seemed appropriate. Finally, Josh spoke up, still staring blankly out the window.
―It’s over.‖
―I’m sorry, honey. What happened?‖
―I don’t want to talk about it.‖

Jennifer hated to see her only child so dejected. She took her right hand off the wheel and grabbed his hand, which felt cold to the touch. He didn’t pull his hand away, but left it resting on the seat, lifeless. She squeezed. He didn’t. Jennifer gazed at him and wondered what she should say, or not say. A new tear formed under the lashes of his closed eye, and slowly slid down past his nose. Josh was holding in his sobs, she could tell, because his chest heaved noiselessly. She racked her brain for a comforting word, but found none. Jennifer felt helpless. All she could do was silently watch as he experienced heartbreak for the first time.

Jennifer heard the horn only a split second before she saw the headlights through the passenger window. As the horn jolted her senses, she realized that she had failed to notice the intersection, and the red light. Then those bright headlights hurtling towards her and Josh collided with the passenger side of
the car, and she lost control completely.

Jennifer’s memories of the next hour were chaotic. Someone screaming, that must have been her. The blue Toyota was a mangled wreck. Josh. Josh! There was blood everywhere. A terrible pain in her arm was nagging away at the back of her mind, but all she could think about was her son. Red lights, that must have been the ambulance. People talking. Talking to her. What had she told them? She couldn’t remember. Stretchers. One for her and one for Josh. What happened to those headlights that had been racing toward them? What about their driver? She had no answers to the endless questions.

Before she knew it, Jennifer was back at the hospital. Her white nurse uniform, now stained with red, exposed the events that had unfolded since she had departed the hospital barely an hour earlier. Jennifer was not badly injured. Her right arm was broken, and she was covered in bruises. All in all, she was very lucky. Slowly she became more aware of her surroundings, and as she did, she wanted only one thing: for Josh to be okay.

Josh had sustained multiple severe injuries. The blood soaking into Jennifer’s uniform was his, not her own. He had received the direct impact of the collision, which hit the passenger side of the car squarely. Jennifer was beside herself. He was so young! Josh! It wasn’t right. It wasn’t fair. If only she had been watching! If only she hadn’t been trying so hard to think of the right thing to say! Now she might never have the chance to say it, if she ever did think of the right thing. Everything was her fault.

Jennifer had called Bradley, who arrived quickly. The passing of time betrayed them; hour after hour rolled together while anxiety dictated the torturous day. Jennifer and Bradley had held each other as Josh took his last, shaky breaths and slowly slipped through their fingers. Was it really already 5:00 in the afternoon? Not that it mattered, anyway. The hospital room swam around Jennifer, who suddenly felt stifled by the familiar noises and smells.

“I need to go outside,” Jennifer had managed to croak to her husband, wearily pushing herself to her feet. Falteringly, she had made her way through those previously familiar hospital doors, which now seemed menacing and accusatory. She was the empty shell of a person, someone who did not matter.

That was how she felt now, standing in the middle of the bright hospital parking lot, bewildered. Last time she had stood here, everything had been perfect in her life. Now, she felt as though she had no life at all. What was life without Josh? She could never forgive herself.

Sometime later—maybe five minutes, maybe an hour, she didn’t know—Bradley joined her outside. They sat against the hospital wall, numb, neither speaking. Bradley took his hand out of his pocket and grasped her hand, which felt cold to the touch. Another tear slid down to her chin, and she relented to the heart-wrenching sobs that had been clawing at her chest. Somewhere above, she knew that Josh was silently watching as she experienced heartbreak for the first time.
Outside of her house we waited, the opportunity to strike was close. I had a large satchel of forks resting beside me. Dakota held an arsenal of the softest, most expensive, delicious, creamy white, rolls of passionate heartbreak toilet paper that he could steal.

Moments before, Dakota’s lifeless attitude chilled the presence in my usually comforting room. Dakota and I sat quietly on my bed: his eyes were similar to a zombie’s waiting for death. Silently, he stared at a spot on the wall. After some time of waiting, waiting for something to happen, Dakota’s fists clenched. His veins became infuriated with anger, his heart bled with passion, his focus now on revenge.

She was the girl that had broken his thirteen-year-old heart. He answered the phone earlier that day, she told him she was finished, she told him he was not for her, she hung up, and he dropped the phone, fell on his bed and started to cry.

“You ready man?” Dakota asked. I looked at him and replied, “Definitely, lets do this.” He said, “Okay, after this car passes we are going to go for it.”

The air was innocent. Dakota was in front of me stretching his long body, getting ready for the attack. A small sedan, completely unknowing of the delinquents resting in the nearby bush, glided past us like a careless ice skater.

Dakota flared across the pavement onto the enemy’s yard. He released a long crisp roll into the air and it bounced off limbs on its way to the ground. I waited for him to complete the first half of the yard as I watched— I was always better at preparation than Dakota’s kick ass now, take names later mentality, he never did see a consequence for a consequence—he looked at me from the nearest tree.

“Hurry up man! Get out here and get your feet wet you puss.” I smiled and ran in to the dew-frozen yard, like a marine going in to combat. I reached into my satchel and grabbed fork after fork, placing them in the ground. The trees were completely covered, Dakota drew a white Christmas with his toilet paper fury.

I was ending my last five forks when, running for his life, Dakota appeared from the side of the house. A black beast purged from the dark and gnashed his teeth at the weeping, over heightened, red neck child; he looked like a noodle flipping through the air.

“She’s got a dog— run you son-of-a-bitch, run!” I turned to run; my steps were quick, and solid, and moving with imperative reasoning.

We ran.

I could hear Dakota screaming as we moved through the yard, it was poetic: strands of toilet paper swirling about from tree to tree, hundreds of forks resting in the grass, a large ignorant kid about to be eaten by a dog, and his best friend running, helplessly. It was poetic indeed.

As planned, we ran through the trees, into the country, around the marked bushes, through the split barbed wire fence, and in the waist high frozen grass, around the shores, onto the peninsula, to our pond. The pond was the place where we lived. No matter what happened in our lives, we could always run to the pond and breath.

We sat down and took in deep breaths of winters chilling side effects. The cold danced in my lungs like a child listening to the Macarena, it leaked into my bones, restricting my movement, and I shivered. Dakota stared at the stars.

“Hey man,” I asked, “you promise me something?” He turned his head. “Yeah man what’s up?” I then asked him, “You promise me we won’t change?” Dakota’s eyes grew questionable, his face squinted like I was joking around, “what do you mean?” he asked. “Well, I don’t want to lose you man, this is good, you know. You, me, the weather, ha, yeah man just me and you.” He paused, “I won’t leave you man. We’re brothers, brothers don’t leave for nothing, no matter what.” After he spoke he looked back towards the sky—in my heart I wanted to believe him, but my heart was not ready for that.
Changing the subject, I asked, “hey man you remember them dogs I had, those two spaniels?” Dakota smiled and said, “well, hell yeah man, I loved them dogs, what ever happened to them any-ways?”

The morning sun was fresh that day; heat drank water from the plants and yawned a peaceful openness. My dogs were running around the summer life, swatting at birds with their eyes. In the field behind my house, deer emerged from the trees, a doe and her two fawn following nearby. I watched from the window of my house as my two dogs rifled in on them. The deer noticed the two bird dogs. They stared at each other. Moments of silent interrogating took place, and then the mother decided this wasn’t the place for her children. She ran, and the dogs hurled towards the fleeting animals, their paws tapping the grass, throwing particles of earth and dew into the air, I too, followed. How could I lose my two dogs, to a stupid deer? They were gone. Away from me.

I was about to tell Dakota what had happened to my dogs when he recovered his memory. “Shit man, I know those dogs, they chased after that deer. Stupid sons-a-bitches. You never saw them again did ya?” His insensitivity hurt, but as usual, I quickly recovered. “Alright, so you promise we aren’t going to change, or run after something stupid?” He smiled, stood up and reached his hand towards me to help me up. “Alright man, I wont, now lets get out of here, I think my balls are starting to freeze a little.”

I took his hand, standing up beside him, and we walked towards our houses. When we reached the neighborhood again, we decided to go and look at our toilet paper expertise. It was about three thirty in the morning when we got to her street, we could see strands of toilet paper reaching into the air, playing with the wind; I smiled.

We were standing, fatigued, under a dim streetlight studying our work of art when we heard a noise; it was a strange noise, a clunking noise. “Dakota, you hear that man?” He looked paranoid, “yeah bro sounds like a horse or something. Where is that coming from?” We looked around trying to figure out where the noise was located. “Wait, I think it’s heading that way!” I pointed towards her house, the one we had just decorated with toilet paper. We hit the ground and crawled slowly over the hill, through the bushes.

On her yard, was a deer. A large deer walking through the forks I had placed in the ground just hours earlier. I could see its breathing as steam puffed from its nostrils like flames into the air. It walked silently through the yard as we watched from a nearby bush.

The deer bent down to nibble at frozen grass. Dakota’s footing slipped and several rocks slid across the ground. The deer stopped and stared at us, we did not move, or blink, or breathe, or think, we waited.

The deer continued its midnight snack with its eyes aware, astonished, like a farmer in Time Square, wandering through the neighborhood yards. The deer slowly moved to the next lot, Dakota followed. I stayed, where I was, where I had always been, just waiting. I watched him disappear into the dark, aimlessly, searching for the deer.
My name is George, and I am a proud resident of New Orleans, Louisiana, it has to be one of the greatest cities in the greatest nation in the world. I grew up here, lived in Metairie all my life. I have a beautiful wife, and a grown son at LSU. I am also a very active member of my church and a vocal supporter of Christianity.

My biggest problem with New Orleans comes around once a year, Carnival. Carnival is a disgusting remnant of the French, where locals and tourists alike begin to act like heathens and drunkards and choke my poor city with sin. Each year when this happens I take it upon myself to spread God’s message to these misguided souls.

I woke up on Mardi Gras day and I knew that it would be a busy one, when the sin here goes from bad to worse. After showering, I put on my shirt that says, JESUS HATES SIN, ate breakfast, said goodbye to my wife, and picked up the sign that I bring every year and hold in front of St. Louis Cathedral all day. I was very proud of the sign it said, “WARNING TO ALL: Drunkards, Idolators, Fornicators, Atheists, General Heathens, Sodomites, Witches, Liars, Abortionists, Adulterers, Satanists; HELL AWAITS YOU!,” I then got in my truck, and headed to the French Quarter to give those sinners a piece of my mind.

I haven’t always hated Mardi Gras. Growing up, I loved everything about it. In my younger, more reckless days me and my buddies would party and get drunk like everyone else. I would even bring Matthew, my son to the parades and let him get on my shoulders to catch toys and beads better.

One year, when Matt was 8, I decided that it would be best to keep my family away from these awful festivities.

There is a time and a place for everything, and a parade is not the time nor is a large gathering of families the place to expose yourself. Unfortunately, this happened when me and Matt were watching the parade. There we were having a grand time, a big float had just passed and my boy and I had just caught our fair share of beads, and were getting ready to witness the marching band, when we looked across the street from the neutral ground and saw some young tramp pulling her shirt down, having just exposed herself for beads, I didn’t wait around much longer, I yelled at her, and took Matt to the truck, that was our last Mardi Gras.

From then on I spent my days during Carnival yelling at the sinners and picketing on Jackson Square, hoping to make people thing and go home before they were consumed by the sin that floods this great city every year. If I could turn at least one person back or make them question their actions, I considered it time well-spent.

When I arrived there, Mardi Gras was in full swing; obscene costumes, drunks, indecent exposure, and sodomites everywhere you looked. “We’ll have to start earlier,” I told my fellow picketers, they agreed.

After a few hours, while I was warning the heathens of the damnation that awaited them, a pretty girl about my son’s age angrily approached me, “What do you people think you are doing?”

“We are warning the participants of this awful celebration of what they’re in for,” I told her.

“I can see that,” she said, referencing my sign, “but don’t you think it’s awful cocky of you?”

“How so?”

“Well, didn’t Jesus say to pull the plank out of your own eye before telling your brother about the splinter in his?”

“Yeah, so? These people are going against the laws God, and they should know that.”

“I don’t think you should be judging them and telling them what God wants from them,” she said, “I’m sure he can take care of that.”

“What are you doing here if you know so much about God?”

“I’m from here and I come to Mardi Gras just to have fun. I can be a Christian and still enjoy myself, we did invent it after all.”
“Oh, I see, you’re a Catholic.”
“I actually happen to be Baptist, not that there’s anything wrong with Catholics.”
“There are several things wrong with Catholics! They worship saints, Mary, the Holy Spirit, the pope, these shouldn’t be placed on the same level as Jesus and God,” I screamed.
“I’m not saying that I agree with them,” she answered calmly, “but I don’t believe it is my place to judge, besides, they’re Christians like you and me.”
“Maybe like me…”
“I don’t see why you insist on being so closed-minded, I think it could hurt you in the long run,” she replied.
“Well maybe this sinful celebration will hurt you in the long run,” I smiled.
“We’ll just have to see who is right. Goodbye,” she smiled back as she left me to think about the conversation.

Maybe she had a point, I have always thought that I was only warning these people of the dangerous lifestyles that they led, not judging them.
“Mathew?!,” my thought process had been interrupted. I couldn’t believe that was really my son. It looked like him, but my son would never dress like this young man. He seemed to be wearing a military uniform, but it was bright blue, with white decorations, he had longer hair than I remember him having and a fake moustache.

“Dad! How are you? What’s with the sign?”
“Not so good anymore, son, what’s with the costume?”
“Oh, yeah, I’m Paul McCartney from Sgt. Pepper. Jeff is John, Bryan is George, and Sam is Ringo.”

“Why are you doing this? I taught you better than this!”
“What, that Mardi Gras is sinful and evil? That everyone that doesn’t measure up to your unreasonable standards is going to Hell? Am I going to Hell, dad?”
“Why would you go to Hell? Just go home and ask God to forgive you for being out here.”
“I always thought you were a hypocrite. I always thought that when you left early on Mardi Gras, and returned home ate that you were celebrating without me, that you didn’t bring me or Mom because we’d just get in the way. This is so much worse.”

“How could it possibly be worse?”
“You’re condemning what you don’t understand, you’re condemning me,” he cried.
“Matthew, how am I condemning you?”
“This probably isn’t the best setting.”
“Matthew I demand that you tell me whatever it is now!”
“Well dad, not only am I an Atheist, but I’m also what you would call a sodomite, Jeff here, is my boyfriend.”

I was stunned by this revelation. Had my son really just told me that he was a gay atheist? Was this a dream? I protected Matt from the world to avoid this kind of thing, had I driven him to it instead? Did I have the courage to condemn and disown my only son? That was judgement after all, not warning as I hoped to be doing. I couldn’t do it, I couldn’t fight him here. Maybe I could try to be open-minded, at least then I could have my son, at least I’d hear him out. I began to pack up my sign, it was still very early in the day, but I was done.

“Matt, I’d rather not talk about this here,” I told him slowly. “You and Jeff come by the house tomorrow night for dinner, I’d rather settle this privately and with your mother. Goodbye, my son.”

I hugged him and set off to go home. I wasn’t sure about a great deal, but I’ve always known that I love my son a great deal. I love him so much and for that reason he deserves to be heard. Maybe Hell does await him, though I hate to think that about my son. Maybe Hell awaits me for loving and accepting my son for who he is. Maybe Hell awaits us all.

Oklahoma City,
2009
The Lone Cypress by Amanda Lautermilch

Windmill from Beach by Amanda Lautermilch

The Lone Cypress by Amanda Lautermilch
“Timmy, what do you want to do today?” asks Timmy’s Mommy as she comes into the room.
“I want to be a superhero,” Timmy says.
“Alright,” says Timmy’s Mommy. “Let’s get the fabric out and make you a costume.”
“Cheyenne wants to be a hero too,” says Timmy talking for his baby sister as he follows his Mommy to the closet.
“We’ll make her a costume too,” Timmy’s Mommy says as she searches through her fabric.
Finding pink and blue fabric, Timmy’s Mommy heads to the table.
“What are you doing?” Timmy asks as he watches his Mommy trace and cut out letters.
“I’m making your the letter T to put on your shirt to match your cape,” Timmy’s Mommy says.
“Do you know what letter Cheyenne will get?”
After thinking for a minute, Timmy says, “An C?”
“That’s right. Cheyenne get’s the letter C,” Timmy’s Mommy says. After she finished making the costumes she pinned Timmy’s T to the front of his shirt and his cape to his shoulders.
“Now what do I do?” Timmy asks. “I don’t have any superpowers.”
“No you don’t have any powers, but you can be an everyday superhero,” Timmy’s Mommy says.
“What’s that?” Timmy asks.
“It’s someone who does nice things and helps others. Do you think you can do that?” Timmy’s Mommy asks him.
“Yes,” says Timmy. “I can do that. Let’s go!”
Smiling, Timmy’s Mommy says, “After Cheyenne gets up from her nap we’ll go to the library and you can help people there.”
At the library Timmy asks, “What can I do to help people?”
Looking around, Timmy’s Mommy sees a little girl carrying a lot of books, “Why don’t you help that girl carry her books to the counter?”
“All right!” says Timmy as he jumps out of his seat to help her.
After helping the girl carry her books Timmy asks his Mommy, “Was that good?”
“That was very good,” Timmy’s Mommy says.
Timmy, Cheyenne, and their Mommy then go to the post office, and once again Timmy asks his Mommy, “What can I do to help people?”
Seeing an elderly woman walking to the door with a package, Timmy’s Mommy says, “How about you open the door for that woman over there?”
“All right!” says Timmy running over to the door to push it open before she gets there.
Before going home, Timmy’s Mommy takes him and Cheyenne to the park. While Timmy is on the jungle gym he sees a boy fall down. Timmy rushes over to him. Offering the boy a hand up, just like Mommy does for him when he falls, Timmy asks, “Are you ok?”
“Yes,” said the boy waving at his Mommy so she knew he was all right. Then he asks Timmy, “What are you wearing?”
“It’s my super hero costume. I’m a superhero!” says Timmy.
“You’re a superhero,” says the boy. “What are your powers?”
“I don’t have any powers,” says Timmy. “I’m an everyday superhero.”
“What’s that?” asks the boy.
“It’s someone who does nice things to help others,” Timmy says. “Like helping carry books, opening doors, and helping you up when you fell down.”
“Wow! I want to be an everyday superhero too,” says the boy.
“You can,” says Timmy. “Just do nice things like I did.”
“Do I have to where a T on my shirt too?” asks the boy.
“No, the T is for Timmy. Because I’m Timmy,” says Timmy.
“I’m Bryan,” says Bryan.
“Nice to meet you,” says Timmy.
Then Timmy and his new friend Bryan ran off to play while their Mommies sat on the bench smiling and talking about their everyday superhero sons.
Smoke rings brushed against the red
bunches of fruit hanging from the lychee trees,
the pads of our fingers stained with the newspaper
print wrapped about our tobacco rolls.
I fisted my dirty hands in the earth
from underneath those waving trees and sprinkled
it beneath a faraway grove that grew among cement —
willows, who dragged their hair through the breeze
in peaceful calm; who sheltered my studies
on paper born from their sisters’ bodies;
who protected services to a god invoked from the pages
of a red Bible. Under those willow trees, I suspended
my Yellow Stone Earth God and eased my aching forehead
from my kowtows to Buddha while listening to Christianity.

When my family welcomed me home, the lychee trees
once again granted a gift of their deep red fruit,
a red that mirrored the bloodied Communist flag
that dictated my denial, that strove to bury my soul
beneath the Yellow Stone earth from which I sprung.
I pushed against the soil that contained me, dropped
the lychee fruit like an offering at the foot of the dean,
and dyed the pads of my fingers black writing the twenty-six
characters that could build a ship across the ocean for me.
And when the letter finally came, the trees whispered their approval,
whispered with the voices of Buddha and Christ, of Beijing
and Yellow Stone, of paper and pencils, of the promise of Nebraska,
where the wind in the plains of wheat rushes
with the familiar sounds of the Dong Jing River.
It’s Too Early  
By Neilee Wood

It’s too early in the morning to be thinking about genetics and biology. I stayed up too late talking to Elizabeth about anime and anarchy, the way we both secretly breathed in the cologne of gorgeous boys over the summer.

It’s too early in the morning to think coherently, and so I am a butterfly that flutters distracted from one flower to another.

The boy in front of me in my 8 o’clock class has the most beautiful red hair, a burnished and gilded wave of flame, like the sunrise crown of Pharaoh Ramesses.

Hair like that is a recessive trait, you know, and complicated in its inheritance.

Elizabeth and I watched the clock hands travel in their planetary orbits, but could not cap our bubbling giggles. I’ll regret this, I thought, when I’m in genetics tomorrow and my eyes are too leaden and my brain too sluggish to focus on the red and white eyes of fruit flies.

While laughing with her, my hair had curled, styled by the heavy hand of humidity, and my makeup was sliding off, but I felt celestial; my thighs swelled with Titian’s curves, and my body had a wild, compact beauty.

For an instant, at 3 o’clock in the morning, I was a sunrise-crowned majestic who walked along the blushing seam between dawn and night, who balanced the rain in a jug upon my head, and who trailed my fingers along the cheek of the earth.

But these are digressions due to lack of sleep. The professor is lecturing.

The only thing I know is it’s much too early in the morning to be having class on a Friday.

Skin  
By Neilee Wood

I’d never thought to look closely at his skin. But once I did, the intrigue continued, to wonder how his skin became so weathered and worn.

He was composed of ridges, of strata of sedimentary rock, with a flash of silver ore peeking beneath his chipped and layered shale hair. Freckles dotted his face, and marks that I had no name for.

I’d never thought to look closely at him at all, this man I saw almost every day.

He had once sliced me, jagged and rough, but I had since scaled his surface, climbed among the veins of molten memories that formed him.

I saw the spark behind his craggy eyes, and I knew I wanted to have skin like his, weathered and worn, like a handful of rich soil full of sand and quartz and dirt, treasures in a mottled, familiar face.
Birding
By Abigail Keegan

1. The Robin has returned
to her mud-cup of grass
and twigs afloat on a drain pipe
against the house. Red of Breast
and large of heart, she whistles,
in her rising and falling pitch,
*cheer up, cheerily, cheer up,*
*cheerily,* full of worms and irony,
she broods. I remember my
grandmother’s hands mending
a baby robin’s wing with gauze
and popsicle stick, feeding
with eye droppers of water
and bits of worms, waiting
until it flew away. Day on day,
Robin watching becomes custom,
and some years, I confess, she
broods more than once a season.

2. My first Saturday as houseparent at St. Joseph’s,
expectant children listened all afternoon for
parents who never came to scheduled visits.
When sun went in, sinking to a little oblivion,
little ones left rolled about my room, eating
pineapple sections we’d stashed away all day
in case we needed them for our night spirits.
One by one, they closed their eyes until
the cluster seemed peaceful as nesting eggs.
Suddenly, sound rushed like wind in lonely pine
branches outside the orphanage window,
children fluttered about in fear and hope
an errant parent had come so late as
to be scolded. But quick enough, a hallowed
*h-o-o-t,* h-o-o-t let us know we had heard
a large flap of owl wings leaving us.
That night, we all lay awake listening for
the haunting, hooting sound of a return.

3. Mourning Doves, long-tailed lovers of
sorrow, soothsayers of comfort,
*rocous-rocous* from roof and holly,
soft, grey and a full plumpness
of woe, bow and rise, bow
and rise, wing up to long wires,
lower, lay two white eggs in low
bush. Wing and bow to ground,
morning after morning, soothsayers
of this life’s love and sorrow.

4. Mother Goose-like geese, fully
fattened in Bethany’s storybook
pond, waddle out and about outside
the library. Usually we winter with
thin Canadians of sleek, black necks,
but these pale brown and white-puff
feathered foragers, honk and cluck us
into such a fairy tale. A small child,
running from her mother, tumbles,
drops crumbs, collects a round of birds,
her first time alone on shore she fills
air with squeals of nonesuch and
delirious delight, she turns unaware
as a dervish in a rose-like row of wings
until tears storm the incorrigible clucking
and make her face, suddenly, so much
older and so on its own.

5. First day of spring, birds beat their wings,
batter berries by hundreds to the ground,
like humans flocking to groceries yesterday
having heard the snow was coming. But birds
are caught unaware. A red-shafted flicker stares,
stabs his long curved beak into frozen ground,
flicks off quick, as a huge hawk swoops down,
and claws small mums just newly risen. Late snow
harries the world: hectic swoops, wings of fierce flight
everywhere. Confused birds burdened with heavy,
snow-wet wings, shoved by steel wind, crash into
our windows twice. Off course, my heart beats
its mad wings, as I stand helpless in a world full of fear.

6. The Royals, stout-billed, stocky
crows big as Chihuahuas
caw down from tall, old oaks,
to rule morning light and lawn.
Our terriers charge with fierce
protests, just a babble of tongues
to black-eyed, black birds
manning perches with dark
scrabbling feet, black wings
batting against sky. Muting jibes,
they grin down fat as Cheshire cats,
at the hazed, fool-hardy hearts of dogs.

7. Cardinal’s spray of red over new snow,
Blue jays write a scabbale of lines in white,
a grounded, red-head woodpecker pokes

(continued on next page)
at iced earth. My big window lets in a riot
of color just as my grandmother’s breakfast
booth let us watch morning hours in Ohio.
I sat next to her greedily eating jeweled
orange segments left in her juicer before
she threw away that day’s fragment, just so,
birds devoured the few worms of winter,
how I loved the birds that that stayed
all through snow and ice to spring.

8.
I could not have known that some day
a Blue Jay would torpedo my nephew’s head
as we went out a door to a Dallas Easter buffet,
a cardinal would be the Holy Spirit to a nun
I’d know years later, that standing mouth
gaping wide-open at my first eclipse of the sun
a bird would poop a yellow mustard on my tongue.
Nor all the seasons I’d count on migrating birds
to fly back to my many houses and many windows
from the miles of lives they’d taken up in other worlds.
Secure at my grandmother’s window, I could not
have known how far we all travel nor how winged
things teach us to accept things as they are.
Ode to FDR
By Daniel Correa

I've told myself time and again, "don't feed the hungry with words, don't pay the poor with advice," and each time I toss a dime into a well. Somehow, I realize that that careless toss is much bigger than me. That ten-penny incarnate face of FDR has more weight than I give it credit. A new deal, indeed, in self-sustaining equity, the freedom of the masses implore your gracious gesture. In every dime, a thousand faces appear and vanish with every flip of its torch and face. A penny for your thoughts, a nickel for your dreams, a dime for the hope that remains. And someone will fish it out, I know. And that same someone will pass it on and on and I will hold him again and he will die. Once there was a dream engulfed in the dust bowl that held a virtue true, to live and die in an equitable fashion with an FDR to feed your spouse for a day. That day is gone and that spouse is dead. All that remains is the self-same face whose opposite the flame laid waste to all who call his name. "Can you spare a dime?" I haven't got mine. I threw it down a well.

Barely Speaking
By Daniel Correa

We never speak nor hint or say
All things within that timely fade.
The sounds of which we daily spew
Sound out all things never true;
Still,
A careless whisper may yet consume
The ear to dream and heart to bloom.

Wendy
By Daniel Correa

Beauty must always be its own excuse for being,
For seen or sought, it is always worth believing.
A Rhodora in a desert land, you are for only God to see,
A testament to his work and formed most delicately.
A pearl amidst a world of dust,
A diamond as the ashes fade,
The wind wears down these precious stones in time,
Still your beauty in this world remains.
One Word to Keep You Here
By Daniel Correa

Will this one word do if the word were true?
Could I say it once, or would you misconstrue?
For want of less fragility, uttered and breaking through
Upon a wave, the damage one can not undue,
Will this one word do what I couldn’t do for you?

If I held my breath and could not confess
The truth buried and locked inside this chest,
To shelter the word that I can not express,
For too much is said when one says less,
Will the sound regain your confidence?

The sound of frailty upon the wind,
The ebb and tide flow deep within,
Holding it back every time I begin,
But to shout it out and not hold in
Would just bring it all back again.

If one word would make you stay
I’d say your name every single day.
Floralia
By Daniel Correa

When from the spring jets forth the summer rays'
Hue that oft’ fills each rose in bloom,
The Gold diffused burst glorious displays
For every eye that dare consume.

Weary eyes thus turn away in due time
To watch the autumnal leaves fall
And spread their seeds of yester eve’s chime
Singing “seasons change for us all.”

To our hearth will we hearken side by side
Huddled forever from the cold,
While winter’s flurries to our lives confide
That all in spring shall ne’r grow old.

The Yellow, The Doronicum Shape, and the Herbal Scent: or, The Joy of Neural Binding
By Daniel Correa

I lament that all the world I see
Experienced my neural circuitry.
For once beholden a certain bloom,
Shaped my senses by reflective loom,
And when each part became as one,
I smelled the sweet Doronicum.
But, lo! How once the world seemed new,
Each color, shape, and smell’s reused,
For no more the youthful joy will spark
Awakened by a somatic mark!

Coalescing Sands of Time
By Daniel Correa

I’ve built this world to watch it fall;
This world called mine, I own:
Never new, nor once begotten,
But everlasting home.

Deep in these bones I mourn for sure,
And out, my world project,
So if you were, then now you are:
Eternal intellect.

Watch now as this world I crumble
Falls slowly by your side.
Never fret nor ever wonder
That you exist inside.

For in this world that is broken
There stands a tear from you,
Which coalescing sands of time
May build all life anew.

Of Love and Souls
By Daniel Correa

Our frail frames pretend existence:
A play of shadows against a stonewall canvass;
And we extend our hands, barely reaching, never touching,
As beads of sand running though the crevices of our fingers,
Each one a dream longing to be,
We live in an embrace removed:
Two souls longing to touch.
Simple Pleasures by Lindi Jones

A Day At Pier 39
By Amanda Lautermilch
A Vivid Incarnation
By Sherry Andrusiak

The colored leaves of autumn fall,
Blanketing the earth in yellow and red
Creating landscapes ornamental
From something that is dead
Blanketing the earth in yellow and red
What beauty can be seen
From something that is dead
Bringing hope of what is to be
What beauty can be seen
As their season comes to an end
Bringing hope of what is to be
As the colors merge and blend
Creating landscapes ornamental
The colored leaves of autumn, fall.

Mushrooms
By Kenneth Kimbrough

Mushrooms are a dingy medical storeroom
With rusted shelves populated by organ-filled jars.
The doctor takes his scalpel and divides a gray, rotten eyeball,
Letting the bitter juices ooze over my supper.
*Thank you.* I wasn’t going to eat that anyway.

King Seiko
By Kenneth Kimbrough

the watch clad in silver
lords over the desk
arms clasp behind his back
joining with a snap
subtracting my life with the
 twirl of his mustache
The Secret Lives of Saints
By Adam Shahan

What shall be said of those who live and die in God’s restraints
Brought low by utterances such as these, the secret lives of saints
Of noble ones who toil for God and nary see complaints
But for the walls of empty rooms that hear, that see
The secret lives of saints
And early hushed is she with whom the low apost’ acquaints
She loudly cries, with opened eyes, of the secret lives of saints

In the Square

I saw him there amidst the square of cheering apostates
They stand upon the working poor— th’ societal depredates!
I saw him standing in the gap between themselves and God
Not mediating Grace for sin, but stealing Maker’s laud

What shall be said of those who live and die in God’s restraints
Brought low by utterances such as these
The secret lives of saints

It was a shame, twas such a shame, no greater shame than such
For when complete, he crossed the street to lean upon his crutch
A pretty crutch, a bosomed crutch he laid upon the hearth
And in his way, for her that day, brought living hell on earth
“And is the grace you give enough to cover even me?”
“Enough, be still!” He beat her ill and, breathing last, did flee

What shall be said of those who live and die in God’s restraints
Brought low by utterances such as these
The secret lives of saints

In the Antechamber

The man was so protected by a poisoned, passive brood
Twas just enough to salve the cuff and forgiven be, for good
The constable, a cloistered one, led authorities astray,
And offered up an innocent for punishment that day

What shall be said of those who live and die in God’s restraints
Brought low by utterances such as these
The secret lives of saints

A beautifying notion of his power and mistrust
Gave way to formulation as he polished up his bust

(continued on next page)
“*A bright display of rhetoric will ne’er again be preached,*
*Save for the words I seek to give when morning light is reached*

What shall be said of those who live and die in God’s restraints
Brought low by utterances such as these
The secret lives of saints

He slid from silken bedderies, placed feet upon the mat
Coughing up yore’s hypocrisies as a beleaguered cat
He John’d himself in robes of Life and stoles of Way and Truth
And knew that day that none would come to God but through his couth

**In the Church**

A dusty congregation in the drafty chapel sat
And through hushed tones didst speak of bones swept far beneath the mat
When walls were thin and entered in the one the one they knew and trusted
Who, in his mind, already found one after whom he lusted

Amidst the robes and pageantry to the chancel did he lurch
And with an air of holiness was placed upon his perch
“For such piety and holy degree is needed by none more, they say,
Than those who fear God and offer up laud, and take up the cross every day!”

They rose and gave cheer, though he hush’d ‘em and sneered,
“You clap not for me, but for God! I am simply a man who has followed His plan,
And off’r’d angels’ wings upon which to trod”

What shall be said of those who live and die in God’s restraints
Brought low by utterances such as these
The secret lives of saints

He shook their hands; they left in clans, to houses where they’d find
The meal they’d come to think about while sharing Bread and Wine
When who should pass but one fair lass whose beauty had no bounds
The one he picked as he entered in, to add among his crowns

And as they left he closed the doors and hugged himself and smiled
With truth, and God, and debonair, “I’m sure she’ll be beguiled”
Yet walls thinned again and entered in an unexpected guest
The very crown whose Bible underneath her pew did rest
He sat her down and spoke to her of Judges in Nineteen
And related what a shame it would be to recreate the scene

It didn’t take; she tried to shake from his cold grasp and flee
He shook her still and beat her ill and dropped down to one knee
When walls were thin and entered in a man in tattered clothes

(continued on next page)
Who sought out alms and, hushing her, the minister arose

“I beg of you sir,” with a rickety burr, “I’m living in such poverty”
“Have you a knife?” “It’s from my late wife” “For lending’s sake give it to me”
He cut her ill, and lying still and breathing last, did flee
“And as for your life, I’m taking this knife for all in the square there to see!”

What shall be said of those who live and die in God’s restraints
Brought low by utterances such as these
The secret lives of saints

In the Square

I saw him standing in the square of awe-struck apostates
And verbalized his awful lie, and to them did relate,
“A murderer’s there, a young girl he scared, and her blood is spilling down the grate! He sought after
alms, I had naught but bare palms, and enraged cut the nearest beauty,
Then that crazy old fool, with his rusty, sharp tool, had intended it’s sheath to be me!”

They rushed the empty chapel and the beggar man they tossed
Outside under the watchful eyes of the Stations of the Cross
The constable, a cloistered one, did pull his strings again
And I saw him enter back into the chapel walls so thin

What shall be said of those who live and die in God’s restraints
Brought low by utterances such as these
The secret lives of saints

In the Church

“It was too close.” It was too close, he spoke with racing mind
When he caught the watchful eye of Jesus Stumbles the First Time
And turning ‘round to break the gaze was Simon of Cyrene
Forced to carry Jesus’ cross, it forced him to one knee

For peace he watched Veronica Wipes Jesus with a Cloth
But Christ Stumbled then a Second Time, the mask of peace ripped off
He turned his gaze on Jesus Speaks with the Women of Jerusalem
But Christ Stumbled then a Third Time and any comfort went out from him

He stood and stumbled sideways to gain passage from the scene
But the Soldiers Strip Jesus for Crucifixion brought him this time on two knees
And Matt’, and Mark, and Luke, and John surrounded on all sides
And the Soldiers Crucify Jesus truly opened up his eyes

What shall be said of those who live and die in God’s restraints
Brought low by utterances such as these
The secret lives of saints

(continued on next page)
In the Antechamber

He fled back to the meeting place where the brood* would congregate,

*To whom evil ills, and bitter pills, and sour bowels equate
  The passion of the moment and the power that he saw
Employed by him and his brood to further their intentions raw
  Weighed down upon him in and out so that he’d had enough
And he flung himself from loftiness to end his darkened mood
And nothing was enough to salve the cuff, and forgiven be for good

In the Square

What shall be said of he who lived and died in god’s restraints
Brought low by an utterance such as this, the secret life of this saint
  This noble man who toiled for God and nary saw complaints
But for the Stations of the Cross that heard, that saw
  The secret life of this saint

I saw him buried in the square by weeping apostates
With pomp and circumstance they martyred this once-depredate
  A suicidal story to a hero’s tale was turned
A man so driven by his God that fire within him burned

The poisoned brood stood one by one, delivering instruction
Concerning how to live like him— this will lead to destruction
The tears and bouquets flowered forth and filled the misled herd
  With illusions of grandeur and an innocence absurd

The constable, a cloistered one, followed familiar play
And offered up for blood payment an innocent that day
I saw them there amidst the square building up the statue

To watch over all who would pass through, a monument to virtue

And as the group did process forth with banners hung on staves
A field of little consequence with two, small unmarked graves
  Was passed
And in hushed tones, they spoke of bones swept far beneath the mat

What shall be said of those who live and die in God’s restraints
Brought low by utterances such as these
The secret lives of saints
Edifice
By Shana Barrett

You never flinch when winds try to sway you
The foundation you have laid has imprinted the ground
Without making it fracture
You carry your weight well

You observe the world silently
Many sunsets have made you witness their passing
The darkness causing the light in you to shine
As you wait on your surroundings to be cleansed by morning

You were born, just a building
Tower over the chaos beneath you
Beauty unrecognized by the masses
Another piece of scenery, but

I have seen the history within your walls
Memories that you have kept on the shelves of your heart
Forgotten throughout your lifetime
Discovered in mine.

You will die my landmark.
Illegitimate Child
By Shana Barrett

If Africa and America ever had a child out of wed-lock
Then surely, it was me

Black and Ashy
But still, breathing America’s breath

Clothed in the finest fashions
Yet still, bleeding Africa’s blood

For my insides are sheltered from famine as an American
And my outsides are exposed to it just as an African
Leaving me to wonder which one I am

Which one am I?

You see my soul, it’s stuck in an ocean between two shores…

I reach out to my North American father who wants nothing to do with me
I cry out to the West African mother that claims she is through with me
and I am left in the middle paddling

Because Mother Africa does not want to remember the encounter
While Father America counters

He no longer wants to be guilty,
His debt has been paid.

And all I can do is ignore the blood build-up on my insides
Take a breath
Sonnet #1
By Shana Barrett

If wind didn’t blow hard in the fall, you
could never witness leaves leave winter.
And missing my accompaniment and all
I feel like trees, lonely, in december

Could it be those sweet leaves were never mine
Be that those dear friends were just for décor
Together, in the sunlight, we were fine
Again, the wind blows harder all the more

I weep, but in this song contentment lies
Won’t be long before it lulls me to sleep
Or strong whispers tell me to close my eyes
And heed all the secrets the wind can’t keep

Bad weather is just ahead, so sleep well
Spring is approaching, its cycle won’t fail
Citizen of the Night
By Eric Brown

Tyger, tyger, burning bright
In the forests of the night
--William Blake

O that my true soul could shine
As brightly as that wild, unhindered one.

Exiled to a house of darkness,
Long denied a swift release.

And still it roars from deep within,
Echoing throughout the trees.

The echoes, though, are barely heard
When filtered through the tangled wood;

Its snarl reduced to soothing wind:
Embrace the beast that’s deep within.

And how I want to venture forth
Down all those dark, forbidding paths

And become utterly lost in the desolation
To find that beast, to gain its trust

And join in full embrace, and talk with it
And lay with it and make it mine.
ARTLESS
By Brittney May

Hearts are broken because love is heartless
It cares not for situation
love is artless.

It appears to be pure but it began in the dirt
If we didn't know each other
then we'll never know it's worth
We still search...
day in day out for logic
of four letters released from the mouth
but maybe this quest is suicide
because the wise know love and logic never col-
lide.
so the metaphysical we must hide.

Love has always been a fools game
That will never be known to the brain...
The only ones who will ever know love,
are the ones who are...
insane.

I wanted to love somebody,
Even if I doubted that he loved me.

I was searching for a feeling
that was like a foreign land.

I wanted to first step foot on the soil
the sift it through my hands.

I wanted emotions to capture me
in moments that made thoughts like vapor in the
air.

I hoped that one day I too could learn to care.

In a way taught only by the beat of his heart.
only when I looked in his eyes did the feeling ever
start.

You see I've felt the love of fearful men
I've walked in there dazzling spoils

but each foot step with you
each dream we share...

is the only time I feel royal.

[Untitled]
By Brittney May

I wanted to love somebody,
Even if I doubted that he loved me.

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but each foot step with you
each dream we share...

is the only time I feel royal.
**Forest for the Trees**  
*By Eileen Chase*

Love is the seed that becomes the trees,  
so we plant enough to connect the seas.  
While false truths wither and liar leaves fall,  
our forest keeps growing, it grows so tall.  
To cover the valleys, to cover the plains  
Will protect the earth when hatred reigns.  
Like a mass umbrella to shield from hate,  
The branches can help the hate storm abate.  
You’re planting a forest;  
Let everyone know.

**The Wood Wanderer**  
*By Eileen Chase*

To the wood wanderer:  
You wander the woods, though it's frigid tonight  
Your feet freeze to the ground; you're afraid to take flight  
The cold air is blowing, but there's warmth in the sky  
You can have what you want, If only you'd try  
The winds whisper, "go," yet you stay on the ground  
The stars murmur, "fly," but to the earth you stay bound  
To fly is to risk; to risk is to dream  
If that's what you want, then do what you mean  
The snow starts to fall and your heart starts to drum  
You can stand there forever, but the warmth will not come  
The earth may bring comfort, but it pales to the sky  
If you wander for too long, you'll eventually die.

**Deliberate Living**  
*By Eileen Chase*

I choose to live deliberately  
for this is my life  
yet me sometimes thinks it too blithe.  
But with a more serious tone  
on and on it would drone  
like a metronome.  
So I have fun instead,  
and I paint the town red.  
I leave boring for dead.  
For I choose to live deliberately.

I choose to live deliberately  
for I am me.  
So my life I shall lead  
whimsical and carefree.  
Through life I shall dance.  
To the past I shan't glance.  
So here is my stance:  
I choose to live deliberately.

I choose to live deliberately  
but please hold off on your judging,  
for as your thoughts your are drudging  
my stance isn't budging  
and I still choose to live deliberately.
Not OK.
By Eileen Chase

You're slowly ripping the bandaid
off the wound that you caused.
You know that it hurts, but you won't let it heal
'cause if I heal, then you've lost.

So you pull and you pull
and you never rest.
You tear me apart
until I bleed to death.
Nothing makes you as happy
as watching me die
on the inside.

So go!
Leave me alone.
Let my heart heal for once.

Just go!
Please, just leave.
I can't continue to bleed.

Get out!
Hit the road.
I don't care where you go.

Just leave.
'Cause you're infecting me.

You just keep coming back
for reasons unknown.
I wrap myself up
and I cast myself off
until you break more of my bones.

I try to get better
but you won't let it be.
Haven't you noticed
you're killing me?
I wish I could run away
but I've nowhere to hide
because you've invaded my mind.

You're the arsenic of my life.
You pulse through trusting veins
and rip them open like a knife.
You've been poisoning all of my soul.
The Cabin
By Erica Olavarria

The rain beat down upon the wood
Above us, falling as it should.
The cabin ours from dusk ‘til dawn,
And us to do that which we could.

That flame-lit room made fears be gone,
You held me close, I did not yawn.
And we, surpassing want of sleep,
Succumbed to lust our love did spawn.

Too soon the morning light did creep,
No soul for miles: the forest deep.
Our love as strong as scent of pine
While nature’s treasures we did reap.

That moment ours, our love divine,
Was ever there a night so fine?
And as the birds flew ‘cross the sky,
I swelled with joy that you were mine.

Today I’m forced to say goodbye.
Beside you now I wish to lie
As in our cabin in the wood,
Instead a tear falls from my eye.

[Untitled]
By Erica Olavarria

The concrete cold and hard against my back,
Tonight I lack the warmth we used to share,
When stars emerged against a screen of black,
But now the clouds reflect the earthly glare.

Those nights so long ago: two years have passed,
Yet I remember clearly in my mind,
How we would stay while frost appeared on grass,
My pillow’s icy crystals, cold designed.

Geneva yawning softly to our right,
The vast expanse before us full of truth.
As time dissolved, we held each other tight,
And savored love now etched into our youth.

Tonight I wish that you were here with me,
For I cannot ignore my sad heart’s plea.
How Time Flies
By Ashley Knuckles

My time flies with wings made from memories and lessons
Patched together with the same glue that healed emotional wounds of the past.
It uses magic that comes from peace of mind to lift itself off the ground, and escape mental slavery and the status-quo.

My time flies through people’s facades straight to their true colors:
Sometimes beautiful shades of purple and blue
Sometimes ugly dark oranges and dooky browns
And sometimes just cheap fluorescent lighting strategically positioned to camouflage undeveloped character.

My time flies to loved ones lost, to assure them that they are still truly loved and missed
And flies among living souls, to relish in beautiful opportunities to grow closer to God’s children.

My time flies with surprising strength it never knew it had
And grace that seemed to have developed overnight.
Through glorious clouds of forgiveness and joy,
And frustration and doubt.

My time flies with assurance that no matter where it’s going, and no matter where it’s been…
It will always be time.
And nothing can stop it.

Night of Empathy
by Tom Mortaine

Tonight is a night of clarity;
Tonight I hear what you heard so long ago.
Tonight I hear only the scream of distant violins,
And a bass drum thundering through the walls.

Tonight is a night of empathy;
Tonight misery is my muse.
Tonight I feel only a relentless yearning,
And the dull vibrations of the floor.
Your touch
Is paralyzing, your presence
Fulfilling
But when you’re away it’s a thousand times worse
Because your every breath, your every kiss is played over a thousand times,
Relived again and again in my mind
How many times you’ve held me is without number,
Your gentle caresses outweigh the count of the stars
I can recall the exact color of your eyes,
The vivid softness of your lips
The rest I felt being held against your chest
Resurrects in my dreams
And comforts me in my slumber

What is thirst?
I only remember your moth
What is hunger?
I yearn for you alone
What is taste, what is color, what is sensation?
Only you are my vibrant being, my flash of color

Rule over me you have,
‘Tis a sweet dominion I’ve subjected myself to
To belong to you is to be protected
To be loved by you is to made a goddess,
The recipient of every gentle expression of your love
Because you are like the ocean
Hunting for one worthy river to carry all your affection
You are like a star
Searching for one seed in which to lock your light

Look me over not
Pass me not by
For it is your breath in my lungs,
Your sparkle in my eyes
Feathers Fall Faster
By Danielle Kilhoffer

Today, I swear feathers fall faster
As if the cold wind of February hasn’t reached my bones already,
As if you being so close and yet so far away hasn’t made me step back and ask why

Today, my tears have fallen faster
Fighting the urge to bid the day farewell and snuggle under covers
Fighting not to soak my sheets with my own tears

Sun, you have left early, and it matters little to me
For little have your rays brightened my world

Tomorrow, I’m sure everything awaits me
Pianos in otherwise empty rooms,
Books with empty pages,
A blank music staff waiting to be filled

But what about me?
I can’t have feathers beating me to the ground.
Awaken, Sun! I think I feel a ray of life.
Concert of Life
By Todd Anthony Murray

Storm shadows incubate sordid symphonies
Of screaming winds and mocking thunder
Pelting rains follow as the chorus
Stinging, searing, scarring our souls

Lightening pierces shadows like clichéd crashing cymbals
Offering glimpses of life's dreary grayish-green pallor

We cling to purgatory and suffering
Of repentance ending the storm

Creating omnipotent conductors
Orchestrating meaning and existence
Praying for an encore to overtures
Played out of tune, out of time, out of key

But all is for naught as the curtain closes

"Summer's Debt"
By Alex Bigus

Dancing down the twilight path
Stepping with the sun
My shoes shine brightly as
The Summer's Day is Done

Fall is now Coming
Winter Follows Yet
Soon the cold of icy Winds
Will Repay Summer's Debt

Speaker Phone
By Elisa James

I have got something,
I might have said…
No, better not.
Thoughts make a better home in my head.
…but silence beats against my ear drums.

“It is rather cold outside.”
Genius.

Maybe if you had something,
You might’ve said?
Not good, avoid asking questions.
Pests don’t make for good pets.
…maybe just a small hint.

“I miss you.”
Too much.

I would’ve thought we had something,
We might have said.
No, my mind just floats.
But, there’s always a chance…
Well don’t ruin it, shut your mouth and wait!

“You’re an ASS.”
The Blue
By Jordanne Benton

Fair weather friend
Where have you been?
I've been searching the skies
And shedding some old skin.

The clouds have gone away
No more thunder, no more lightning
Can't you see the blue?

My problem's are all gone
No more anger, no more fighting
Can't you see the blue?

Fair weather friend
Where have you been?
I've been searching the skies
And shedding some old skin

There's a bitter taste inside my mouth
I've been waiting for you to come around
Don't worry, don't you hurry away

This isn't venom that you've found
It's only blue blue skies. Just what you like.
Can't you see the blue?

Sticks and Stones
By Jordanne Benton

This is your stick, this is your stone
I wonder if you'd let me alone
The pain is alive, the pain is unreal
This is how you make me feel

I trusted the lies, we all know it's true
For too long I tried to keep holding you
The bruises will fade, the bones will mend
But with your words my heart you did rend

So here is the thought as I'm falling asleep
Your heart was the curse I was willing to keep
But this is the truth, the crux of it all
I could have loved you, but I didn't fall.

Wherever You Go
By Jordanne Benton

We were young
Looking at the stars
And we made a promise

One day we'll tell them
We are not the same
And we'll leave the world behind

Wherever you go
I'm gonna follow
Where ever you are
No matter how far

You were gone
I looked to the stars
and I made a promise

When I tell them
You'll be by my side
We've got nothing left to hide

Wherever you go
I'm gonna follow
Where ever you are
No matter how far

Here we are
Looking at the stars
They look the same, here

We've got nothing left to hide
and we can leave the world behind
How You Forgot
By Jordanne Benton

I say goodbye to my friends
never knowing when I'll see them again
And I step forward into my new life
We all smile, congratulate
owning each hug with the fierceness of love
promising that every moment shared will live on in our souls
I say I'll write or I'll call
or stay in touch, no matter what
but it's different to say it than to keep your word

You'll never know the changes
that the world could carve into you
or how you'll bend like a reed in the wind

And then one day the news comes
and all you think is of the difference
how you grew apart and drifted,
how you forgot to stop by and say hello

I say goodbye to memories
of a boy with a troubled smile,
a broken heart and a sadder laugh - you aren't him
And it's selfish that I mourn you
though you weren't ever mine
it's not my job to place the blame or save your soul
I say I'll miss the girl I was
who watched over you, who cared
but it's different to say it than to feel it

You'll never know the changes
that the world could carve into you
or how you'll bend like a reed in the wind

And then one day it's over
and all you think is of the difference
how you grew apart and drifted,
how you forgot to stop by and say hello

Nobody Said
By Jordanne Benton

There once a prince and his betrothed, they were different
and so they made a promise to ride off into the sunset, away
"My world is incomplete without you" said the princess to the prince
"and one day I'll save you from evil" the prince replied

nobody told them
nobody said
it's okay, it's okay

One day the princess fell sleeping underneath the curse
The prince killed the dragon and he cut away all the thorns
and when he found her sleeping he went to her and kissed her
Her eyes didn't open, she continued to sleep

nobody told them
nobody said
it's okay, it's okay

The prince and his knight knew the kiss wouldn't work
So they went on, to rid the whole world of evil
A thousand years later a girl found the princess sleeping.
She couldn't help herself, she kissed her, and saved her

nobody told them
nobody said
it's okay, it's okay

The princess is still sleeping as the story goes
but I know the truth, and now so do you

nobody told them,
nobody said
it's okay, it's okay
(to be gay)
Welcome Away from it All
By Jordanne Benton

Here is your part, the violent start to the twisted game
(it's all the same) we'll pass the blame from us to them
it won't really matter either way in the end.
For history never writes itself, nor does it quite repeat
instead it teaches us to play the game, just so others can cheat.
You're looking at me from under the sheet
The veil, the curtain, the mile-long wall. This little house
away from the call of military, wine, and sin.

And now you wonder why did I let you in?

"Be quiet," I whisper to your burrowed keep, your lazy eyes
drooping with sleep. Your half-formed lies stay within your teeth,
and a knock on the door carries all through the house. Not a fear
is stirring, except in the mouse as it watches the cat watching it,
watching her. You tremble, courageous, and I wish to laugh.
But I'd rather not kill this, I want it to last.
The tension, the tricks, and all of the rest. What would you think
to say this was my best, the plan of all plans, this was the test.

A key in the door, you look at your clothes. I give you no sign,
but I wish that you'd know- this is not the end, by far. One night
and you think how accomplished you are. But here I am playing
to win the war, not the battle, not the moment as one.
The man is stepping upon this stairs, with each step the more I care.
I want to whisper to you "be still" but there is no time, not that I will.
He's at the door, blank in surprise. "Hello father. This is my girl."
A sweep of my hand, rumpled bed-sheets and clothes, the smile
on your face, the tinting of rose. And this is how the game has begun.

I know the rest, I have seen it before. All in the tales I wished were mine,
my father will drop some glass to the floor fight for a bit, then speak no more
But this is what I was willing to pay. Your parents will talk and scream and blame.
I'll hold your hand if you're willing to stay. Your fiancé will engage again,
to his military girl. Your sister will love you, all the same. Your parents will wince
when she says your name. We'll walk down the street, mothers will glare
Keeping her innocent children from us the twisted. The violently in love.
I see it now, and I smile at you. Your cheeks are still that brilliant hue.
I've said my piece, my father gapes at this daughter, his only one.
With a sigh on your lips, I see I have won.
“In the Absence of Chocolate and Diet Coke”  
By Elyse M. Davis

My fault
Your fault
My indecision
Your shamelessness

Purple
Blue
Sunshine of your love
Speed Chaos speed

Hearts breaking in two
Do I still need you?

Touch me-
I fly away from this harsh world
Touch you-
I am brought back down to Earth

Music runs in your veins
Running flows in mine
I don’t get it
But you will never understand

Gray Matters
Lines blur
Are we one?
Or none?

Drowning: help me!

Wait- it’s your hand that holds me down, down, down

I come up for air
Breathe, breathe, breathe
Open my eyes-
I’m free

"Ear to the Ground"
By Nicole Fancher

I understand you
Because I am you.
(Hell, I can talk like this with confidence.)
“Batter my heart”…oh lonely God.
You are lonely, for I am not with you.
Do you miss me?
Miss me, do you—do you feel me?
Oh God, around your throne I lie.
Face down, on the ground (heavenly ground)
Pillars pouring in and scepters moving about
I cannot rest here though, because of my transgressions.
For my skin is stained with sin.
I wish I had a heart like David, oh God
That is my prayer.
Instead, I am a Red Riding Hood--
this Big Bad Wolf of a world has swallowed me whole.
No more pie plates, or rosy glasses.
My cup is empty,
and my jowls hang low.
(Whispered): God, God, God.
Lean your ear down to me here on earth
For I can feel you.
She hangs in Lunacy  
by Davis Good

She hangs in lunacy, like the evening  
Ritual contortions ancient, pitiful  
Forms forgotten; forgetful mutterer  
Clicking tongued rhapsodies woeful,  
Naught but noise to any listener.  
Once swirling sylph of carols beautiful,  
She hangs in lunacy, jaded, twitching,  
Curvaceous and skeletal, painfully ponders  
All that is nothing; distraut Wisdom  
Wailing at the twilit gates  
With sutured eyes and arms a schism  
Groping through absence for childish wonders.  
She hangs in lunacy, delighting in suffering  
Ignorant of birth and life and death.  
Alpha, Omega is she of she,  
Pale and virecent, bride of Heaven  
Emaciated by sleepless nights of glee  
Infernal and days of fleeting breath.  
She hangs in lunacy, crucified, exulting

Destined Shores  
By Angel Abreu

Like a baseball batter eager to score  
Waiting for the crowds exciting roar!  
As our heart skips a couple thousand beats  
While patiently awaiting love's retreat.

Riding the waves to our destined shore  
Not missing our chance to slowly explore  
Arriving a little late but right on time  
Crashing into one another, complete sublime.

Sensing the music of love in the air  
Our souls intoxicated beyond repair  
As we begin to dance to nature's call  
We find ourselves with no rhythm at all.

Led by our heart's relentless cries  
We discover passion we can no longer deny  
The missing beat is finally attained  
With a new rhythm forever engrained.

A song without rhythm is never complete  
Without you, my life is offbeat  
So let us dance to love's neverending song  
The one in which we knew all along.

Scenes from Our Eyes  
By Dillon Horner

She is my mistress, she is my love  
Her wooden skin conforming with my every step.  
Her glowing embrace is warm against my skin.  
Her eyelids of velvet shine as beautifully mysterious as her gaze,  
Her silent laugh a creaking rumble in my ear.  
Her whisper is a parting kiss.  
She speaks to me, her words thunder and joy, her children knowledge and love.  
Her name is artist, teacher, lover.

She is my mistress.  
She is my love.
Taste of Seasons
By Joseph Hawkins

a ceaseless drift
down rivulet endless flow

savor those
flavors
it permits
us to know

peppery winter
blacks, grays
flecks
specks
sunless days

habanero summer
saffron fires
stinging
bringing
sweat, perspire

cilantro spring
leafy greens
roots
shoots
tepid, pristine

ginger autumn
russet, brown
palpitate
salivate
waning ground

embrace
the subtle taste
of seasons
that we knew

and make
palatable the soul
as their flavors do imbue
Aware (Nature Speaks)
By Joseph Hawkins

the single stream
it speaks to me
without a single word
splashing sputters
and bubbling mutters
through bends and
S shaped curves
round valleys nigh
and hills of high
it grants my ear
its gift
I stoop to
get a better hear
it sprays me
as it lisps

the lonely tree
it talks to me
of things I’ve seldom heard
in rustling leaves
by a rattling breeze
and secrets of
the birds
top prairies low
the roots do sow
for waters deep
they sift
I walk
in hopes
I’ll hear their search
top leaves that
whisper crisp

the stretching field
it lectures me
in intermittent waves
the chatter
and the matters
of endless
windblown blades
it quivers
quaintly shivers
holds me tight
as I do tread
inviting me
to consummate
the phrases

gone unsaid

the silent sounds
that nature speaks
too often go
unheard
but when aware
I’ve found I hear
the implicated words

Photo by Sarah Cook
Carpe Noctem
By Joseph Hawkins

devoid light
save the stars
darkness stretches
near as far
nature's still life
painted black
impressionist strokes
new moons begat
errant whispers
nocturnal sighs
as shadows caress
day's darkened thighs
the real dark night
within the soul
is 3:00 A.M.
top unlit knolls
when all's serene
sans incandescence
where night's breath
revives swift as penance
enveloped by
a world concealed
where everything
you trust you feel
though eyes deceive
there's naught to fear
the night deserves
only revere
revel the moment,
and realize
that night's just day
in a better disguise
the dawn is nigh
luminance will ensue
so seize the night
as night besieges you

Untitled [1]
By Joseph Hawkins

hedgerows march in single file
mantes pray profuse
decorated conifers
chrysanthemums salute
deracinated foliage
onerous droning bees
munitions from a pistil
held aimed for quick release
armored beetles idle
hummingbirds they hover
moths lay motionless
so as not to be discovered
all the while the troops
are waiting for the cue
the apocalyptic signal
foreboding of their doom
when out of dusk
the sky erupts
as fireflies ignite
cicadas wail and dive bomb
eager to join the fight
the crawlers they uncover
emerging from the trench
invigorated by the
subtle smell of
dying’s stench
a bulging penetration
spurs the inert front
dandelion paratroopers
first and final jump
minor points of rallying
where monarchs flap on stems
reconnaissance by dragonflies
that bomb with larval nymph
the battle slowly dissipates
in rhythm with the sun
until the dawn, when life
repeats impressions of Verdun
**Untitled [2]**

By Joseph Hawkins

her vestige is the tincture
that irradiates my soul
the catalyst that motivates
my edifice to glow
her artistry inundates me
an elegant fresco
unto my halls a profile of
herself she has bestowed

her being is the flooded stream
that surges into me
and effortlessly permeates
embankments I've conceived
I can't say I'm the least concerned
I built them rather weak
in eager expectation
that behind her weight they'd breach

her essence is the torrid heat
asphyxiating me that clutches me
so resolute I'm powerless to breathe
but if for just a moment
in her presence I could baste
I'd revel in her sultriness
content to suffocate

**Untitled [3]**

By Joseph Hawkins

I'm medicated, I'm dead clock stare
I'm physically attached
to my television chair
I'm in my boxers
legs are bare
ignorant
and unaware,
as antique moons are shed anew
as solvent suns mitigate
the days of morning hue
as seasons coalesce and bring
the summers fall to winter's spring

I'm rehabilitated, I'm caffeine stare
I'm consciously attached to being here
I'm freshly shaven shampooed hair
cognizant and well aware,
as clouds ensconce the suns array
as errant shadows relegate the passing of the day
my mind can now devour
the seconds minute shift to hours

**Smile**

By Joseph Hawkins

I'd forgotten how a simple smile
could guide you through a day
adhering to your nature
in its enigmatic way
the upward tilt of lips
tepid creases in the dermis
on the verge of veering down
it very capably can turn us
comes in company of winks
cutest dimples or half moons
and that spot above the mouth
curving like a tiny spoon
there is nothing as endearing,
by experience I've trusted,
as the early light that twinkles
from a welcoming bicuspid
Dr. Abigail Keegan teaches British and Women’s Literature. She has published two books of poetry, *The Feast of the Assumptions* and *Oklahoma Journey* and a critical book, *-Byon’s Othered Self and Voice: Contextualizing the Homographic Signature*. In 2007 her chapbook received a merit award from *Byline’s Silver Anniversary* chapbook competition. Her current poems, *Depending on the Weather* will be out this year.

Adam Shahan is a senior Religion major from Lindsay, OK. He is a published fiction novelist and pastors a small United Methodist Church in Lexington, OK. He and his wife, Aly, commute to OCU from there.

Alex Bigus is a junior Musical Theatre major from Overland Park, Kansas. He writes to say the things he can't, and sometimes shouldn't, say in speech.

Ali Cardaropoli is an English Major. She is on the writing track focusing on Children’s Entertainment and Comic Books. Ali would like to thank the OCU *Scarab* for giving her the opportunity for her first publication.

Allison Gappa is a freshman broadcasting major from Chickasha, Oklahoma. She has loved journaling since she was a child, and continues to use writing as an escape and relief from her everyday demands.

Angella Abreu is a Spanish Education junior who finds writing as a positive way to release her emotions and explore her world through imagination.

Amanda Lautermilch is a senior BFA Acting major and Directing minor from Highland Village, Texas. In her spare time, she enjoys writing and photography, utilizing both as means for observing and connecting more deeply the world and people around her.

Ashley Knuckles is a senior mass communication major, originally from Liberia, West Africa, raised in Oklahoma City. She is an aspiring journalist who loves feature writing, and likes to read and try creative writing in her free time.

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Daniel Correa is a Second-Year Law Student from Sacramento, CA. He writes poetry, political commentary and philosophical investigations when he is not studying Law as a discipline, or reading philosophy out of curiosity.

Danielle Kilhoffer is sophomore music major from western Oklahoma. When she's not practicing or hanging out with friends in the music building, she likes to read Dickens.

Davis Good is a freshman Music Composition/English major from Tulsa, OK. One of his many ambitions is to explore the connection between music and literature.

Dillon Horner is a freshman Acting major from Arlington, Texas. He finds love in his work and is blessed with the joy of language. He is not as pretentious as this bio makes him sound.

Elisa James is a junior music major from Waco, Texas. She likes chai tea lattes, fuzzy stuffed animals, and writing whenever the mood strikes her.

(continued on next page)
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Erica Olavarria is a sophomore from Seattle, Washington. She thanks the Scarab for giving her a place to unload her artistic musings.

JJ Hawkins is graduating this year from Oklahoma City University. He has a beautiful wife named Crystal and 5 children (Ember, Will, Jaia, Taylor, and Jos. He absolutely adores them all.

Kenneth Kimbrough is a sophomore English major from Oklahoma City. He writes fiction and poetry while making time for leisure reading.

Lindi Jones is a BFA Acting and BSB Not-for-profit management and leadership double major. She is a true believer in enjoying the little things in life and feels like her photography shows that.

Lori Sublett is currently an MLA student who once wanted to be a famous Nobel-Prize winning pilot who performed complicated brain surgery for fun while running a successful amusement park in outer space. 'Til that happens, she'll just keep writing.

Neilee Wood is a freshman Cell and Molecular Biology major from Oklahoma City. She loves learning, and in her free time, she writes fiction and poetry.

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Shana Barrett is a senior English major from Spencer, OK. She enjoys writing and truly believes that it is her vehicle to educate and minister to people.

Sherry Andrusiak, an MLA grad student, grew up wanting to be a trapeze artist and compensates for that lost dream by rollerblading at break-neck speeds. And writing.

Spencer Hicks is a graduate student from Shawnee. He works full-time as the personal assistant to Governor Brad Henry, and enjoys performing stand-up comedy.

Todd A. Murray is a third year law student who hails from Blackwell. In his first career, he tortured thousands of high school students in speech, theatre, and debate classes. He is a frequent non-winning entrant in the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest. He's not sure if that's complimentary or not.

Tyler Woodward is freshman Youth Ministry/Film Production major from Mustang, Oklahoma. He writes a variety of short stories and poems ranging from light hearted comedy pieces to very emotional life struggles. With much of his writing, he tries to include his favorite theme, faith.

Zalifah Redza is a MSN student from Malaysia. She enjoys photography because she believes every capture has its own story.