

# THREADS

## 2013



*Threads* is a journal of student writing and art published by  
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### **2013 Editors**

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### **Special Thanks**

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### **Cover**

*Front cover: "City Sidewalks" by Nicole Schubert*

## Message from the Editors

We would like to thank all the students who submitted their work to *Threads* this year. We received many quality submissions, and we continue to read with pleasure the enthusiasm and creativity each submission presents. Of course, all pieces have merit, and we would like to publish everything submitted, but the limitations of space will simply not allow it.

It is important to note that *Threads* reflects works that are not necessarily perfect in their format and composition, but exhibit insight, creativity, social awareness, and a unique perspective. These works—of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and photography—reflect the range of experience, culture, and imagination of the student. The editors relish the opportunity to travel and explore the territory each new issue stakes out.

Every year we are extremely pleased to highlight the exceptional work of the students at Hudson Valley Community College. Please plan your submission for next year.

Please submit your work to *Threads* electronically. Visit us at **[threads.hvcc.edu](http://threads.hvcc.edu)**, or e-mail your work to **[threads@hvcc.edu](mailto:threads@hvcc.edu)**.

Jaime Barrett  
Brook Hobson  
Noah Kucij  
Sara Tedesco

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# THREADS WRITING AWARD – FIRST PRIZE

## My Father's Daughter

*Cristin McIntyre*

He looks like hell, I think.

He's approaching sixty, but he looks ten years older than that. I have to remind myself that it's been a long time. He's an old man now. God, how is that even possible? He'd been balding even back when I knew him, and now all that's left is a little hair on the back and sides. His face sags in a way that it never did before, his mouth curved into a permanent frown. I'd often wondered if he'd thought about what he'd done every day. If he ever regretted it. Now, looking at him, I realize that he probably has. Sadness is etched into every line of his face.

I wonder what I look like to him. I shift self-consciously, fully aware of every single one of my physical features that are likely to be seen as transgressions of some kind. Too fat, I probably remind him of my mother, even though I've always looked more like him besides that. Hair too short, dyke-ish to his mind, probably. Maybe I still look fifteen to him. That would be a trip, it was almost fifteen years ago. Half of my life has gone by since I've seen this man. I wonder if he's even aware of how old I am now.

"Did you, uh, want something to drink? Coffee? Soda?"

I'm tempted to ask for liquor, just to see his reaction, but he might actually give it to me, and alcohol is the last thing I need right now anyway. Besides, I'm determined not to take anything from him.

"No thanks, I'm good."

Silence. Neither of us has ever been particularly good at small talk. Yet another thing we have in common that I'm always trying to forget.

"So... what are you up to these days?" he asks. "Rachel won't tell me anything."

Yeah, because I told her not to. I want to make sure I have control over the amount of information he gets, and my little sister has a big mouth. I don't know why he feels like he's entitled to know anything about me, anyway. "I know."

He pauses hesitantly. "You married? Kids?"

I can't help the snort that comes out. The question just shows how little he knows me. "No."

"Boyfriend, at least?" he presses.

"I prefer being single," I say. Only a half-truth. He nods like he understands but I can tell that he doesn't.

I know I'm acting like a brat. I'm not even sure why I came here, traveled through four states, if I was going to do this, but it's like I can't even control it. Every time I look at him, I remember that morning that my mother woke me up to say, "your father's gone." Just like that. I want to ask how he could do that, why he tried to get in touch with my sisters but not me, but the words get caught in my throat. Instead, I decide to throw him a bone, since I feel a little badly for my behavior. "Right now I'm going back to school."

"For what?"

"English, what else?" I ask, even as anger bubbles up in my chest. No, he doesn't know a damn thing about me. How could he even ask that? I've grown up, but it's not like I'm an entirely different person. I'm more jaded, maybe, broken in a way that's probably never going to heal, but more or less the same. I've always been a cynic.

He has that look on his face that people get when you admit to majoring in something they think is pointless. "Oh. Well, you did always like to write."

"Yeah," I answer. It was my first love, actually, but I let it go. The meeting has already exhausted me and I don't feel like fighting anymore.

The silence intrudes again, and I let him sit with it. It's his burden, not mine. I'm not surprised when he breaks it.

"You still like fantasy?" he asks, gesturing at me, and I assume he's referring to the dragon pendant I'm wearing.

I nod. That's the way it always was. He was sci-fi, I was fantasy. I was never a daddy's girl, Rachel got that distinction, but I was the one who would watch him pull apart a computer, who got him to teach me how to write programs in BASIC. I don't know where my words come from, I don't know of any writers in my family tree, but I know that I got my intelligence from him. The analytical side. The nerdiness. The silence, too. The tendency to retreat inward. And maybe, someday, the ability to walk out on children and a marriage of fifteen years without so much as a goodbye. It scares the hell out of me just how alike we are in so many ways. My mother throws it in my face whenever she's irritated with me. "You're just like your father." Sneered, just to hurt me.

Apparently he didn't have any follow-up questions prepared, because the conversation lapses again, the dragon hanging awkwardly in the air. He clears his throat.

"Listen, I want you to know that... I didn't want this. Your mother-"

"No. I don't care about your excuses. I know why you left, I really do. But what I'll never understand is how you could knowingly leave your kids with that woman."

"You were old enough to handle it," he says.

"Bullshit. You couldn't handle it, how were we supposed to? You have no clue what happened after that. That stuff's not your fault, but you chose to leave. That's totally on you."

"Jackie-"

"This was a mistake," I say as I stand up. I'm tired and I don't want to fight and I'm just done. "I'll let myself out."

I don't let myself cry until I'm a few blocks away, well out of sight. I'm not going to give him the satisfaction of knowing he got to me. Especially not after he couldn't even be bothered to try to keep me from leaving.



# *THREADS WRITING AWARD – SECOND PRIZE*

## **On Reading The Classics**

*Dae Jin Yuk*

“A classic is something that everyone wants to have read and nobody wants to read.” - Mark Twain

Do you want to join the intellectual bourgeoisie? Do you want to count among the ranks of masterminds who can quote from Moby Dick and Metamorphoses? Have you longingly listened to the literati who can seemingly channel Aristotle, Plato, Ovid, and other long-dead white men? Well, you've come to the right place.

There are multiple ways to achieve this, but before we go any further, take a look at Mark Twain's quote at the top of the page. Now, he might just have been bitter because he knew he couldn't help but write classics and was, therefore, doomed to the dust of library shelves, but the main thing to take away from this is that nobody really wants to read the classics. And people generally don't do what they don't like. So how are there so many people who always have Don Quixote quips on hand? All of their secrets, and ours, will be revealed, with just a FOUR time monthly payment of \$9.99! Call now, at 1-800-HOW2READ! Just FOUR monthly payments!

We're so glad you chose to do the right thing. You put your trust and your money in the right place.

The most efficient way to read classics is this: don't read them, but pretend you have. This is not easy to do, but you can do it. In fact, most of the skilled classics-unreaders use this method exclusively. The trick is to announce your accomplishments with a certain triumph, but be vague enough so that there is no possible dispute. For example, you might set your Facebook status message to “Just finished War & Peace. So good.”

One of our previous customers used this to great success. Notice how the author, who happens to be a Russian fellow named Tolstoy, is not mentioned. This is to intimidate all the nosy people who might not have known the author into not asking who wrote it, or, God forbid, what it was about. Because it would be obvious, right? Or you would have mentioned it!

All the other people who have wanted the ability to say what you wrote will nod sagely as they read your status and think, "What a smart fellow. Finished War & Peace, he did." These people will not admit their ignorance in asking what the classic was about, but instead use another unreading tactic, which is to add on to the non-conversation with such comments as, "Nothing like good ol' Tolstoy." While they might be latching onto your shark-like ascent out the sea of plebeian, unwashed masses like suckerfish, do not be concerned at all. These people are actually your best friends.



Figure 1: A good friend.

Sociological studies in group theory show that people are less willing to go against a majority, which is hopefully you, so you should make it your duty to have as many of these people around you as possible. Who will go against a majority of people who have read classics?

If you are not confident of your ability to intimidate and awe, just look up a smart-sounding quote from the book you want to have read, and stick that onto, or into, your announcement. Using the aforementioned War & Peace as an example, try Googling, "war & peace quotes." On one of the first links, I found "Nothing is so necessary for a young man as the company of intelligent women." Now tack on "-tolstoy" to the end of that, making sure to keep the author's name uncapitalized, as it gives of that sense of personal friendliness you have with that 19th century Russian. A quote such as the above is a double-whammy intellectual panty-dropper, and who would ever confront that?

When you become really good at not reading, you can technically profit infinitely from specifically this method, as the division of (number of people awed by your ability to read over 100 pages) by (effort put in, which if you are good should equal 0) will result in indeterminate numbers, or in your case, infinity. Aren't you glad you came to us?



Figure 2: Success.  
Bonus DVD

Do not be worried that you might sound condescending. Just take a look at the word. Condescending. Con-descending. Con is the Latin root for not, and descending is obvious, so condescending is just ascending, and what grievances should anybody have against people who are trying to better themselves? If anyone would be ignorant enough to call you condescending, now you know also know how to defend yourself while effectively calling out the playa-hater.

# THREADS WRITING AWARD – THIRD PRIZE

## Four Minutes

*James Morrison*

As a piercing siren howls over my teacher's voice telling us our homework for tomorrow, students scramble to pack up their things and run out the door. I slam my folder shut and stuff it into my bag wrinkling worksheets and tests as I sling my book bag over my shoulder and slide around desks to the door. I glance at the clock on my way out. I've got four minutes.

Bolting to the stairs in front of me, I snake my way around a sea of faces as a cacophony of noise assails me. Sweat and perfume hang thick in the air: a cloud of false pretenses and dashed hopes clinging to everything like moss on a tree. Floating down the stairs two at a time, I reach the bottom and hug the right turn. A wall of midgets bar my way, all lined up at the feeding trough waiting for their turn. Three minutes left as I charge forward.

I put my head down and push through throwing my shoulders left and right to make a path. A sudden jolt from my left rocks me sideways. I roll with it like a pinball and smile at the pumped up steroid monkey who pushed back. He throws me the finger as rage darkens his face, but I continue to walk backwards away from him and wink. Another right hand turn leads me facing an almost empty hallway. I pick up the pace as my eyes flick to the clock: two minutes.

Another left and a right and my destination is at hand. My eyes scan over the entire cafeteria taking in who's there and who's not. I slide my bag under the table from five feet away and ghost into my seat. I hunch down a little and plant myself, affecting an easy manner that makes it seem as though I've been there for years. Traditional greetings are thrown about as a fist bump here and a nod there settle the table into its normal rhythm. I swivel on my seat and brace to get up. My eyes flick right to the clock - one minute - and then left when a flash of crimson freezes me in place. My breath catches in my chest and a lump forms in my throat as I try not to stare and fail miserably.

I see a peak of tan and olive green as the crowd swirls and moves like a swarm of bees around a hive. They part and settle, I drink in the view, and my heart kicks back into action pounding in my chest as hard

as a jackhammer. A splash of white peeks out the bottom of artfully wrinkled tan cargo pants. Riding just above her hips, they cling to her shapely legs to the knee where they flare out. A flash of smooth, creamy skin sends a shiver up my spine and a tingle to my toes. A wide strap, olive green tank hugs perfectly to her hourglass figure. The contrast of color makes perfect skin glow with an inner radiance, instantly making my palms sweat.

My eyes trace up her body, along the sensual curves that accent her neck and shoulder. Her head flips sideways, tossing a riot of perfect auburn curls bouncing out of her face. Brushing it back over one ear, several silver piercings stand out in stark contrast, creating a sort of halo. Delicate and manicured eyebrows sit above thick black lashes, making her eyes glow brilliantly. As our gazes lock, crystal blue eyes burn with unbridled intensity, penetrating to the very core in a heartbeat. My eyes flick left - 10 seconds - then down to the slightly pouty, full lips that are talking. Full and firm, they stir an inner heat as I force my body to shake off its paralysis and get up.

As if floating through sludge, I walk towards her, never breaking eye contact. One step at a time we grow closer. Her hips sway back and forth betraying her lean and athletic stride. A brief flash back to the previous day makes me smile: watching her run down the hallways in those short red shorts and gold t-shirt, sleeves rolled up, full dedication plastered all over her face. A gentle perfume pierces through the smells of food, sweat, shame, and teenage angst. It is a simple, yet heady scent, which snaps me back to the present with a vengeance. I inhale deeply both to drink in her smell and to brace myself. As we cross paths, our hands seem to magnetically lash out, brushing against each other. A cold shiver runs up my arm, a stark contrast to the inferno that is my face. A gentle touch, there and gone, electrifies me as we seem to wrench ourselves away from one another. Reality comes rushing back in, kicking me in the teeth as I'm dragged back to earth. As I trudge into the door to get lunch, another bell tolls but seemingly in the background. Four minutes is up.

**THREADS WRITING AWARD –  
HONORABLE MENTION**

**Why Are You Calling Me That?**

*Victoria Minick*

Skin not fair  
Thick hair  
Full lips  
Noticeable hips  
Likes Rap  
Hair Wraps  
Cocoa Butter for the skin  
Pissed off, neck spin  
And that's why you called me Black?

Likes pop  
Corny Jokes don't stop  
Can't rap, just rhyme  
And laugh like all the time  
Don't really know any slang  
Would get scared of a gunshot bang  
How this voice sounds  
and going home is Stillwater bound  
And that's why you called me White?

Well I have a crazy idea  
How about you just call me Victoria?

## **THREADS WRITING AWARD – HONORABLE MENTION**

### **Olivia and Jack** *Shauna Lynn Anderson*

In his truck, the sound of Frank Sinatra creeps quietly over greasy-grey, cat-scratched seats. Marilyn, a doting mother age fifty-one, frequently berates him, “Clean the mess! Buy new seats! For goodness sakes, buy a new truck, Jack; that cat-crazy Craigslist man should never have sold you a thirty-year-old vehicle with nine lives and no air bags!” Her concerns meet silence, of course, for he has no intention in betraying his trust to the only special lady in his life, dear Olivia.

His truck Olivia carries every loyal tool to his name, every type of garbage bit and piece that keep the rats company in the city sewers, and each and every part of him that represents his individuality and masculinity. In the truck bed, nuts and bolts jostle against each other in their flimsy plastic box with the widening crack (well, it’s impressive that he even has a box for the things!), making delicate music like wind chimes on a pearly-fresh May afternoon. Sometimes he shuts off Sinatra so he can simply listen to the sound of a country man’s metal utensils, even rolling down the manual windows to hear the lovely notes better, even if the rain pours. Oh and if it does rain, then all the better, because the bed needs a good cleaning now and then of all the crumpled oak leaves, crawling insects, and smelly car oil. Maybe later in the blustering storm, the wind will come to play and conveniently blow away all the empty canary-yellow Trisket boxes; the single, moldy Carhartt job application; and the painstakingly constructed love notes to giggly girls who never cared for him. Until then, his wagon-red Craftsman’s tool box protects his simple necessities, a charmingly humorous mixture for sure: Dove deodorant; his current read (*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* by R. Rorty); Ruger’s dog leash; a wrench set (costing what he remembers clearly as an unacceptably immense lump of money); and some random, broken car parts, which he insists will have another use to him someday. His mother Marilyn disagrees, of course.

Olivia’s garbage could fill two trash cans; he knows this because his mother tested it out on a particularly irritable Saturday evening when she concluded she couldn’t suffer anymore with his filthy man-cave habits clashing with her tidy woman habits. In two short hours, the

damage was done. Stripped of his trash and disorganization, he felt exposed as his truck sat bare and naked under a bright, cool moon. Two days later, his man habits returned.

Sitting in Olivia's ripped front seat, he presses his foot gently on her temperamental brakes, his two most precious treasures swaying from a piece of twine on her mirror. A handmade sock snowman with black pipe-cleaner arms and orange felt nose peers at him innocently from charming kidney bean eyes. Five-year-old Laya carefully built this creation with furrowed brows in her Aunt Marilyn's neat dining room, a few days before Christmas Eve. "Cousin Jack," he remembered her pleading, "does my snowman look like Frosty?" "Of course not, Laya, your snowman doesn't look like Frosty for he is Frosty. Just blow on him, will you, and I think I will be able to hear him wake." She did so and then gasped as Jack's smiling chocolate brown eyes reflected the beautiful magic in her own. Before she left, she placed her gift in his large, calloused hands as she reached up on tiny tip toes to give the young man a sweet kiss.

Next to Laya's present, an embodiment of love and loss offers aching, dark shadows under the setting sun. A fading silver compass, his grandfather's last gift to him before he passed last month, reminds him to direct his steps in the ways of his mother's father in every decision of every day. Gosh, he misses Papa! His grandfather practically raised him from wide-eyed lad to confident youth after Dad slammed the door on his mother's face for some other woman in red high heels. Undoubtedly, he would be wandering the streets hunted by pain and confusion without the old man. During every drive with Olivia, the compass under the front window begs him, "Never forget."

He encourages Olivia onto his bumpy, gravelly driveway; rolls up her windows; and steps into a torrential downpour. As Marilyn emerges from their tidy, country home, he covers his possessions with an azure tarp. "Jack, you were supposed to be home for supper a full hour ago," Marilyn complains, exasperated. "Did the thing stall again? Jack!" Of course the thing did, a few miles up the road on Route 32 in fact, but his mother's concerns meet silence. Jack has no intention in betraying his trust to the only special lady in his life, his pretty, dear Olivia.



# San Francisco

*Dae Jin Yuk*

"I have a critical mass in my colon!" This was one of the first things I heard, my last time in San Francisco. It was a docile-looking middle-aged man who practically screamed it while trying to get on the bus from the middle of the street. I believed him then because only such genuine panic at imminent disaster can spawn such genius and despair. Unfortunately for him, I thought, that's exactly the kind of saying that will make sure he doesn't get on that bus.

I was with my friend Josh then, who was driving. We never found out if the man made it on, partly because we turned the corner, but mostly because of the tears of joy clouding our eyes.

Here is the dictionary definition of critical mass: "a size, number, or amount large enough to produce a particular result." (The encyclopedia has "mass of material... able to sustain a nuclear-fission chain reaction," which is equally as hilarious as the dictionary definition.)

I guess you could say that we also had critical masses in our lives, too, although ours were more masses of confusion and aimlessness rather than bathroom problems. That was why we were in San Francisco. We were panicking and lost in life, and we didn't know where else to go.

Unfortunately, we didn't only forget the flowers in our hair, but we came mostly without a goal. When we were planning our trip, we made a list of things we wanted to do. "Eat good food," Josh said, so I wrote that down. "Meet cool people," I said, and I wrote that down. We kind of ran out of ideas at that point.

We didn't say a lot of things like "get laid" or "have a bomb-ass time." We didn't say "be away from home and work" nor did we say, "be free" (whatever that means). We didn't say any of these things that we really truly wanted, but, most of all, we didn't say "find what we are doing in life."

And so off we went, in his Sentra, talking about the food we would eat and the people we would meet, but we were mostly thinking of how we would really benefit from this trip. The trip there was boring long stretches of Californian Dust Bowl to the soundtrack of a lot of Frank Ocean and J. Cole. Once we got in San Francisco, we had a hostel booked in downtown, so that's where we headed. And that's when we met our man with the critical mass in his colon.

In retrospect, we shouldn't have laughed so hard at that guy. I really hope he made it on.

As for us, our trip was technically successful: we a) met cool people, which led to b) eating good food. The cool people were my old friends James and Lily who happen to be married but without a son named Harry, whom I hadn't seen since high school in New York. Together they are the band Yassou Benedict, and they showed us around town in the medium of good food spots and bars. Without them, we probably would have had to rely solely on Yelp! and the depths of our wallets, both of which were poor in comparison to what Lily and James showed us.

As for our other goals, it's hard to say whether we fulfilled them or not. We were definitely away from home and work. Sure, we had a bomb-ass time. But did we find our purposes in life? I don't think we did. Although I'm back in college now, I'm still just as confused as ever. Josh recently fought and won an amateur muay-thai fight to "test his will," but when I asked him what that "will" was for, he wasn't sure. I know it's not for his job, which is shipping clothes from a warehouse.

I don't know, I guess there are no conclusive endings in real life. Maybe that's the way it should be. Like, even if that guy made it onto the bus that one time, colonic masses are a daily problem because there will be more in the future. So even if we had found our ways in life that one time in San Francisco, I'm sure we would have lost them on the way back, or in the following weeks. And even if we didn't find anything, it's not like we're getting shot at, or we're starving. Maybe a purpose in life is just a luxury, just like our trip was, and we should just be thankful that we were able to do it. I just don't know.

## Turn

(Parody of Sylvia Plath's "Cut")

*Lucian Moriyama*

What a sight –  
A forest instead of a path.  
The trees quite gone  
Except for a sort of hinge

Of paper,  
Pages pursed like lips,  
Zero red.  
Then that pressure-white.

Little tilde,  
They're watching you twirl your moustache  
Your meandering  
Voice snaps

Like finger bones.  
You step to it,  
Pressing line breaks  
Leaky bandages.

An exclamation, this is.  
From Austrian map-dot  
A straight handsome arm stretches up  
Forcefully.

How many sentences were killed?  
Oh no  
Teacher, I sang solfege  
And have taken to sacrilege.

The thin  
Papery feeling  
Of a Bible,  
Poetry book, porno –

The stain on your  
Sunday's best  
Dickinson drag  
Won't stop complaining.

The balled  
Pulp of squirrel and bird hearts  
Confronts its small  
Swillmill.

The quick  
White fox jumps over  
The lazy dash  
And sighs.

# My Relationship With Writing

*Patricia Wire*

My relationship with writing can be likened to a 40-year-old virgin on the cusp of having sex. I have thought about it many times and have had urges. I have had a few dates but never consummated the act and most certainly never reached a climax. One thing or another always seems to get in the way. By the time I'm finished doing the things that I need to do, my desire has either dwindled or I fall asleep.

I know lots of other people are doing it. It is prolific on the internet. I have become voyeuristic towards writers. What techniques are they using? How did they get started? I read about them on the sly like a peeping Tom with stealth lest my true ambitions be found out. Confusion abounds with the conflicting advice given freely and profusely like well-meaning friends on a wedding night. Concentrate on creating the mood as that is the most important element. Build gradually to the main event. Skip right to the fun part. Don't have a clue? Just start doing it, and nature will take its course. Do it for the audience, but an audience is awfully intimidating to the uninitiated. Do it for oneself; but isn't that still just fumbling in the dark?

As a quiescent writer, I can only speculate. I can picture myself as a successful writer with royalties coming in. I wouldn't have to bother with daily trivialities like earning a living. Freed of the pressure of daily subsistence, the creative juices would flow. Unfortunately, I don't see this as happening anytime soon. So while taking this class, I can explore a little and dream a little. Maybe I'll figure out how to overcome the curse of the virgin.

# My Sanctuary

*Zahara Moore*

Beep, Beep, Beep, 6:30 A.M, suddenly I am ripped from my peaceful sleep with the painful noise of my alarm hammering into my skull. I don't want to wake up or get up. It's not Sunday, but I need to go to my place of sanctuary to connect and reach the feeling of inner peace. I grab the things I will need: a towel, bathing suit, swim cap, goggles, a water bottle and I leave. Swimming is not only a great form of exercise, but a way for me to connect and clear my thoughts.

From the locker room to the pool, there is a long cold hallway that feels even longer, and even colder this early in the morning. The small, square icy tiles of the hallway make me feel as if I'm walking on ice cubes with my bare feet. Halfway down this passage way from reality to my place of peace, I smell the familiar scent of chlorine. Some people detest this smell, but for me it brings back memories of the ache in my muscles from long tough practices, the sound of gold medals that hung around my neck clinking together, cheering crowds and the taste of victory.

The pool is standard, rectangular and Olympic sized. It is 25 yards long, has four lanes, a shallow end and a deep end. It has bright orange lane lines that stretch vertically in the pool, like highlighter markings. But they do their job of keeping swimmers in between their lines. I approach the edge of the pool and sit down. Apprehensively, I put one foot and then the other down into the cool water. As I enter, the water swallows up my body inch by inch. I suddenly submerge my body down into the water and then up like a pogo stick. Every swimmer knows, this is the best way to get used to the water temperature. Next I cover my hair with my swim cap; this will help reduce the resistance of the water. Finally, my pink speedo goggles suction my eyes and protect them from the water that is mixed with chlorine.

Under the water is another world. Everything is aqua and quiet, free from corruption unlike above the surface from where I came. While swimming, I start counting out the number of strokes in my head. This is soothing; I am now alone with only my mind, my thoughts and can only hear the sound of rushing water as it passes by me. Down, around, then straight, down, around, then straight is the motion of my arms. My arms and legs move with strength and become a machine.

I change from one stroke to another, freestyle to breaststroke (my stroke), breaststroke to back stroke, and finally butterfly. When I change strokes, I do it like a D.J transitioning from one song to another, smoothly and without hesitation not to mess up the beat. Every now and then I catch a glimpse of the lifeguard. He is sitting in the lifeguard chair like a stone statue with a whistle around his neck.

When I finally experience the feeling I've been searching for, the feeling of internal peace, I stop swimming. Oxygen rushes into my lungs, I glance at the clock, an hour has slipped by and it's time for me to face reality again. To me swimming is more than just an endurance sport. Back to the real world, I climb up and over the mountain that has become the side of the pool. Farewell to my sanctuary, I will return to worship next week.

# Where Did It All Go?

*Jennifer Armbrust*

we poured simplicity,  
with fine wine-consumed,  
we spoke symphonies,  
to feminist drums-  
renewed,

arrows and ambu bags,  
life living and saving,  
from pharmacy to catastrophe,  
poems playing passions,  
you lied to me,

atheism with smoke,  
life's enchanted,  
concerts in the cold,  
color me decanted,  
everything unknown,

calling bluffs,  
educating our futures,  
construction below-  
looking up!  
Where did it all go?

watch this through your eyelids,  
stick around I'm busy,  
cuddle with comatose,  
love like letters, lost,  
don't let me skip a dose,



cigarettes and chantix,  
got a patch?  
a game of tricks,  
got a match?  
on the rocks, a quick fix,

misdirection,  
lets make this exception,  
colors burn true in the sun,  
ever the other, another one  
Enough of this show,

the one-sided, divided,  
efforts are crazy,  
love is lazy,  
what of me, dear princess?  
hazy, forget the maybes,

bows in bundles,  
deny delaying,  
no messages, missing,  
the cold is waking,  
opposite of staying, I go.

# Where Do I Belong?

*Jael Dick*

In my picture perfect world, I would have spent New Year's Eve 2012 in New York City sleeping on a church's cement floor. My anticipation abruptly dissipated when I learned there was no room for my brother, Seth, and I to stay at the church. The organization Samaritan's Purse had set up a relief sight at a church three months after ocean water curled down avenues in Island Park, NY destroying homes. Seth and I responded to clean up debris, but when our turn came in late January, we could only volunteer for four days. This was not my New Year's Eve treat anymore.

Upon arrival at the church, I wore unwanted clothes for tearing down walls and ripping up floors, but Seth and I were excluded from gutting. Instead, our assignment involved cruising along the highway in a warm truck and spraying an antiseptic to prevent mold at four homes each day. With half hour breaks after each job, driving from home to home in warmth, and no shower lines early in the afternoon, the day seemed slow-paced and too easy. I had come here to tear things apart not cruise around in a four door gas guzzling pick-up truck!

Worse yet, I could not befriend many volunteers working with only three others. My longing lengthened during share time when volunteers summarized how God had guided the day's events. A gutting team had eaten New York pizza with homeowners one afternoon. Oh, I wished all the more to join a gutting team. The spray team did not spend enough time with a family to build relationships and eat together.

The next day I crouched under the floor joists in a crawl space again spraying antiseptic on exposed wood. As I turned around my bare forehead knocked into a clammy pipe, and the spray hose nozzle caught between beams yanking me back. Seth waddled to take a turn tilting his head and dodging pipes.

Pssss, the antiseptic sang. "Seth, sometimes I am tempted to fake spraying and just sit down here and have a tea party. Our team leader confided that mold will regrow in crawl spaces after being sprayed but it will not spread to the first floor. If we spray simply for the owner's comfort and the guy is not even home, why go through aches and pains and bobs and whacks and cold hands?"

He starred. I could not deny my feelings! Why was I ducking under floor joists hardly three feet from the ground and waddling across a dirt-caked concrete floor? I signed up to pull down walls and strip houses free of gook on the first floor, not in the basement or outside.

From the outside homes appeared clean and whole, but barricading the curb black garbage bags filled with sappy family pictures and handwritten notes betrayed the truth. Inside bare floor beams and molding wood rotted. That is how I felt. My orange hat and shirt matched. A smile decorated my face, but inside I was empty like those houses, longing to gut homes, come during New Year's Eve, feel exhausted from extensive labor, and meet more volunteers. I needed repair. It started at night during share time.

A girl stood up and said, "I'm so thankful for my team. You guys are great! You sing and smile despite the hard, cumbersome work. When we tear down walls and gut houses we worship God." I associated worship with singing in church but the next day while stuck in a crawl space my thoughts flew free: "Could I worship in this crawl space?" In the crevices of the basement and my heart a whisper breathed, "Yes." Spraying wood with antiseptic connected me with homeowners to show the compassion and love of God. Before and after each job we prayed with and for the family. We listened to their stories of when the flood waters seeped under the front door and furniture floated around the TV room. We signed leather bound Bibles at each home. One lady lost everything on her first floor including the annotated, dog-eared, and beloved Bibles of her grandmother and mom. She pressed the new Bible to her heart and tears glistened in her eyes. This book would begin rebuilding the collection of literature on the now empty bookshelf.

Our service prepared for the redesigning and furnishing of her home. It also filled her with courage. As we cared and provided for homeowners, we reminded them they could draw near to God and ask for help anytime. We answered their pleas for help, and God was faithful to keep providing. The church building rose from the city blocks, and although I considered it a place to sleep, the community saw it as a safe haven and provider. Hope and comfort had come for the homeowners and me.

Back at the silent church, I sliced bread with Tom in record time. Tim, the manager, explained the political debacle barring Samaritan's Purse from rebuilding homes, and I felt like an adult not a college freshman. Awake in bed, my new best friend, Haley, recounted months ago laying on the beach and feeling God's peace crash over and envelope her like the waves colliding into the rocks. For the first time, God's endless love captured her heart and months later she now shared God's love with me. Trust forged between us in those four days. It did not matter how I spent the days. Spraying antiseptic allowed me to share more time, energy, and compassion with people back at the church, since I returned early in the afternoon and not fatigued. Gutting houses would have infringed on this opportunity. God knew what plans would work out for the best. I realized I belonged here, this week, on the spray team, in the crawl space, serving others.

## Li Ming

*Lisa Palleschi*

Hair the color of onyx, so soft and so strong.  
It's straight as a line and it grows very long.  
She pulls it back tightly at the crown of her head,  
with a ribbon of coral which is so perfectly thread.  
Her eyes like the aqua in the tropical sea.  
So deep and so gorgeous as can possibly be.  
Their shaped like almonds, so sleek and slight round.  
Lips the color of scarlet, make a wonderful sound.  
They curve on the bottom and are heart-shaped on top.  
A smile so radiant would make anyone stop.  
Her skin very delicate like a porcelain doll.  
Over her shoulders lay an elegant shawl.  
It's made out of silk and its color is plum.  
In the bottom right corner is a beautiful mum.  
She's wearing a cheongsam made out of brocade.  
So carefully stitched with dragons of jade.  
Its collar stands straight. Length down to the knee.  
With buttons of gold, the front cuts in a "V".  
Her face very fragile, all powdered in white.  
Like a star in the sky, it glows very bright.  
The fragrance of orchids escape from her skin.  
She is small like a child and like bamboo, quite thin.  
Her hands are petite. So slender and fine.  
Long nails colored of crimson give off a slight shine.  
Her shoes made of velvet, the color of cream.  
A gold buckle on top that displays a small gleam.  
This person of beauty. Her name is Li Ming.  
She'll make your eyes sparkle and make your heart sing.  
You would never forget her, this angelic vision.

## Raising Kids

*Marjorie Bleau-Waldorf*

First, let's talk about how they get here. A studly sperm swims up to an egg and uses his pickup line. "Do you want to...ah, tango?" Being a wallflower in the past, the egg thinks this may be her last chance to dance, so she agrees. As the old wedding song says, "and the two shall be one." Maybe! There may be two, six or even eight, in which case, the owner of the womb may choose to do a swan dive off the Collar City Bridge.

When the new little one arrives, the parents are surrounded by a smug cloud of ungodly, superior attitude, thinking that they are the only ones in the universe that could produce such a miracle. Only after weeks and weeks of non-sleep do they wish the miracle could have happened to someone else.

As this little bundle of joy begins to grow, each parent begins to point out their particular features that the new baby inherited. Some say all babies are beautiful. Not so! You can change fat, but you can't change ugly. However, every mother in the world thinks her baby is gorgeous, as all of mine were.

As the baby grows, their wrinkles fill out and they no longer look like a Shar-Pei puppy. I remember thinking how could anyone declare that a bald, toothless being could in fact, be so beautiful. Again, all of mine were.

To watch a baby's growth in the first year of their life is truly a miracle to observe. They go from a totally dependent little person, having to be fed, bathed, clothed and diaper changed (hopefully, on a regular basis), to a crawling, investigating little tyke. They learn to feed themselves and any pets that live in the house, with leftovers from their highchair. My son, Jeff, use to multi-task, that is, feed himself, the dog and then shampoo his hair with spaghetti sauce, all while enjoying his meal in his highchair.

Babies learn early on, if they smile, they can entertain their parents and grandparents for hours. By smiling, the baby wraps the adults around their tiny fingers, and the adults' hearts are totally wrapped in love from this little person forever.

In the blink of an eye, babies can change from the adorable, playful, all-trusting baby to the two-year old that suddenly becomes an alien with temper tantrums and barking orders like General Patton.

On their first day of school you pray they have the skills and independence needed to survive meeting with a classmate who doubles as a sumo wrestler. You also hate the phone call from the principal, saying your child needs to stop using her karate moves on her classmates.

We need to remember how much they need structure and discipline even though the world displays little of it.

While kids are growing up, we feel mountains of extreme joy in watching them experience the wonders of nature and the world in general. We suffer through the valleys of their disappointment at not being invited to the rich kid's birthday party or not being picked as their Little League's pitcher.

They can provide comedy in the most innocent of moments. After picking up my four-year old son, Jeff, from his tonsillectomy at Samaritan Hospital, my husband and I decided to treat the kids to a dinner out and a ride through the country. It was a beautiful spring day and as the saying goes, "Love was in the air" as we watched a cow and a bull going at it as we drove by some farmland. Hoping the kids didn't notice, our hopes were dashed when Jeff excitedly said, "Look, Dad, two cows playing leap frog."

My son, Chris, at the age of six, could also have become a comedy writer. When a new male puppy arrived at our house, all five children gathered around and started bouncing off names for the new arrival. When a girl's name came up, my know-it-all, because I'm in first grade, daughter, Cheri, piped up that you can't give him a girl's name because he can't have babies. Frustrated by his smart-ass sister, Chris turned to his dad and said, "They can too, can't they, Dad," to which his father said, "Got to go to work, kids, see you later." To which I replied, "Thanks a lot, Jim."

The conversation was put on hold while they concentrated on playing with our family's newest member. Later, at the meal table, the talk turned back to naming the dog and the argument continued between Chris and his sister. Finally, Cheri said, "Mom, will you tell Chris why boy dogs can't have babies?" I tried to explain to Chris that boy dogs don't have the indoor plumbing that girl dogs do, so boy dogs can't have puppies. Chris, not to be outdone replied, "Oh, yes they can, they just say OK, poop, move over, I'm coming through."

My aunt had a St. Bernard named Brandy Alexander, so we decided to name this adorable, caramel colored puppy, Bourbon. Somehow, Vermouth, Jack Daniels or even Rum didn't fit him.

Having only one car in the family for eight years meant taking four kids to the market with me. Jeff sat in the seat of the cart, Eric inside the cart and Chris and Cheri hung off either side of the cart. When I emptied the groceries at home, there were always items that I know I didn't put in the cart, such as cigarettes, candy bars, etc. My husband and I didn't smoke, but while I was busy at the register, they thought they were being helpful by pulling items off the immediate area of the register and later, I couldn't understand why my bill would be so high.

Having four kids under four meant a lot of work and five years later, along came Patrick. On one trip to the market, I ran into a guy that I used to date and he made the comment, "Marge, one is planned, but were the rest of them mistakes?" Incensed, I retorted, "No, none of them were planned, but there's not a mistake in the bunch."

It seemed I no sooner started them in kindergarten, than they turned into teenagers. Living in a house with five teenagers all at once, with very distinct and different personalities is a fun but harrowing time that you can't even imagine. My aunt use to say that they should take teenagers away at 14 and return them at 21, because at age 14, they think their parents don't know a thing and by 21, they've revised their thinking to maybe their parents do know quite a bit. She may have been onto something.

We lived through Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Art lessons, Little League games for all the boys, baton twirling, ballet and tap dancing for Cheri, boyfriends, girlfriends, breakups, dances, mechanical bull riding, wild bull riding, bareback bronc riding, motocross, car racing, tours in the Navy, tours in the Army, marriages, divorces and then grandchildren came and it started all over again.

The best part is, they all turned out to be wonderful, caring, decent human beings. Did I make mistakes? Absolutely! I was an only child. I wasn't ready for "Playtime at the Zoo." If you feel you need to judge your parents, just remember when you were born, a "How to Parent" book didn't pop out with you. It was on the job training, trial and error and a baptism by fire lesson.

Speaking of lessons, I'd like to pass some on to you, because even though I learned some of them late, they're still worth repeating. Get down on the floor and play games with kids. See the world from their height and view. Don't be too busy to answer their questions and do it honestly.



Remember to say: Please, Thank You and I'm sorry, so they'll learn those important words. Let them choose their own colors and if they color outside the lines, tell them it's OK and don't try to fix it. When you're angry with them and you understand why some animals eat their young, let them know that there's never a time that you don't love them or wouldn't give your life for them.

Say I love you every day and never let them leave the house angry with you as it could be the last time you'll ever see them. Teach them to share their toys, ideas, dreams and their love with one another and that hate and racism have no place in their lives, even if it's shown to them. Show them guilt and anger are too heavy a baggage to carry and forgiveness is the key to unlock it, and never be the travel agent for someone else's guilt trip.

Teach them that God gave us seven days in a week and we should at least give one day back to Him. Give them the gift of prayer and faith, because someday it might be all they have left to hang onto. Prayers don't have to be formal – it can be as simple as, "Hey, Lord, it's me again."

I'm sure people who are smarter, more patient than I've been, could add many more to this list, but for now, my parenting days are over, although, as a parent, we never stop loving or worrying. Oh, great! Here comes the great-grandchildren!

# Married to a Cat

*Jamie Frankenfield*

I stare at my cat sometimes while he sleeps in a tight ball on top of my comforter. He appears to be so innocent and delicate, but the large tabby, Angelo, knows exactly what he is doing. He has my husband securely wrapped around his 6-toed paw, which enticed me to start watching his actions. My cat has taught me a few things about the temptations of marriage.

After just 2 short weeks at our home, Angelo quickly climbed into our bed. He made it between the sheets in less time than I did when my husband and I first started dating. I knew when he snuggled up close to my husband's chest, I would have to watch my rival closely. Sometimes Angelo will catch me glaring down at him while he sleeps beneath the covers as if to say, "Watch and learn. Watch and learn. This is what a good wife does."

Angelo is a loyal cat, so my husband thinks. He waits faithfully by the back door at 5 o'clock every evening to greet my husband when he gets home, and wakens my husband every morning with gentle kisses on the nose. Angelo is right on cue with the loyalty, and my husband never questions his timing. Angelo only allows my husband to see what the sneaky cat is willing to display. When my husband isn't looking, I catch him snuggling with my oldest daughter and greeting her at the door at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, ideal timing when my husband is away. But, like any relationship, you will see what you want when loyalty is on full display.

Angelo is the most affectionate house cat I have ever seen. The sly tabby brushes up against my husband while the news is on, and chats with my husband while my husband showers. As soon as my husband turns a corner, Angelo is waiting for him- full of love and attention. I watch my husband sweep the tabby off his paws and close his eyes while he nuzzles his face into Angelo's; they seem so in love. After my husband gently sets Angelo back down, he heads for the treat bag and showers the feline with fancy desserts. The more affection Angelo displays, the better the reward.

I wonder if cats were blessed with 9 lives so they can move on when a new love comes along. Do they get to keep falling in love and playing the game? It's clear Angelo has the game perfected. He is what marriage vows were created for- love, honor and obey; words mistresses abide by too. But, what lurks inside of him, is it the urge to run and sneak around if things just don't go his way. So, for now, he sleeps comfortably on the bed, greets my husband with kisses when he comes home and continues to chat with him about his day, or gripes about me. I'll continue watching, hoping I'm not the one picking up the pieces when my husband learns he has strayed away.

# **The Missing**

*Kristin G. Diodonet*

The die are cast, the numbers called. What's public ends private between  
god and me. If you're looking, I'm long gone. Still you'll see me around  
town. I'm the girl in the papers, the one pied piper found.

# Armando's Choice

*Jornell Bacon*

"So, where tu going from here monsieur?"

"Saint-Barthélemy"

"Je vois....Be careful"

"Oui , I will be André"

It was 1924, I just arrived in Marseille. It was dark outside, and the only thing visible was the rotating light of the Light tower far in the distance. As I stepped off from the boat, I sensed the air became slightly colder and the fog surrounding the harbor became more dense. The light tower started to fade away, and all that remained was a small flicker. I took my suitcase and gradually walked towards the barely visible village. The fog lifted and an old man stood right before me with a dismal stare on his face.

"Armando? Follow moi"

I cautiously followed the old man with the oil lantern. The Old man wondered as to why I wanted to see Estaffan. You see...Estaffan was an old friend of mine, but more like a brother with whom I shared so many childhood memories. Years have passed and we somehow lost touch.

We finally arrived at his house. The old man knocked on the door, suddenly I could hear footsteps approaching closer and closer. The door slowly opened and made an eerie, creaking noise that could have been heard miles away.

"Estaffan, it is you!", I could barely retain my joy

"Armando! Hah, how've you been amigo?"

"Great – great, I am truly glad to see you Estaffan"

"I feel exactly the same way. Come in, have some tea and let us converse. Gaspar you may leave."

"Yes monsieur"

We sat down at the Spanish cedar table in the Kitchen. The room was almost pitch dark if it would not have been for the vibrant and exuberant light that illuminated from the fireplace. We talked for while. He asked why I would even come here so far away from central France. I had difficulty explaining my situation.

“I am looking for Isabella, my wife. We had an argument....and she ran away. I’ve been looking for her since over a year”

“I see...”

The expression on his face became blank, any trace of emotion faded into nonexistence. He stood up and walked into the next room. I could hear a mourning noise from the distance. He returned with another person next to him, but I was not able to recognize who it was. The face was covered and the hands were tied up.

“Listen Armando, everything in life happens for a reason. We all follow a certain path, and the decisions we make in our lives could drastically alter that path. Today Armando, you will have to make a decision that will drastically alter YOUR path. I know you haven’t made the best decisions in your life, but redemption is awaiting”

“What are you talking about?”

He gently removed the cotton bag from the person’s face. My heart dropped.....for an instant I thought I was going to faint. I could not believe my eyes. It was really her.....my Isabella.

“You bastard! What have you done to her!?! I am going to kill you!”

“Hold on a second there amigo. This is not the way this game works. I am the creator and your part of my creation, so you have to follow my lead here, okay? Now Armando....you have two choices. Choice one: you take the case to my right, which contains more money than you could ever wish for, or choice two: take your wife and leave...but understand she will have no recollection of who you are and you will have to gain her love and respect all over again as if you just met her. But if you choose to take the money, she will keep her memories and her awareness of not loving you anymore. Make your choice wisely, because she will not remember who you are, and by refusing the money you may

end up with nothing but an illusion of what your life could be....Once your decision is made, there is no going back. Return at sunrise to tell me your answer."

I returned at sunrise. My choice had been made.

"Your back Armando. And? What is your answer?"

"Erase her memory"

"Are you sure? You cannot reverse what is done. Time does not turn back, it only moves forward."

".....Yes"

"As you wish. Don't ever forget, life has given you another chance."

This was it. Physically, she was the Isabella I knew. Her beautiful long black hair, her dark brown eyes, and the warm presence of her loving nature. But she was not the Isabella that once loved me. I had to start all over again, and this time I was not going to make the same mistake again. My only hope was that I could rekindle the essence within her heart so she would love me again....but this time for being the man she deserved.

## Elusive

*Fatima Hussain*

Tell me something, are you whole?  
Beyond the grinding, grunting, garish face,  
Is there a god? Is there a grace?

For this, our endless, savage chase...  
From whence to hence and hence to whence  
Longing for one surreal embrace...  
For this, is there some recompense?

Are you real, more so than me?  
I am fleeting in my sincerity.  
Shade of an always restive soul  
What claim have I to indignity?

You flutter this way and I flutter away,  
An unrelenting mess of avian distress.  
Maybe the wind will carry me today, and  
With it, you and I, my dear, will sway.



## Things I Do

*Fatima Hussain*

I look at you. Tomorrow ends  
all the universe, so I do  
feed my soul upon the vision  
that is you. Hungry irises,  
angelic face devoured through.

I smile at you. Expresses naught  
the voice in words, so I do  
glow the light of flaming suns to  
beam at you. Contagion of joy,  
man of halo granted his due.

I think of you. Intellect hums  
its chaos in tunes, so I do  
calm the mind by harmonies of  
life in you. Beatific thoughts,  
bird of glorious wingspan flew.

I dream of you. Extinguish eyes  
with thoughts adoring, so I do  
let my slumber be possessed by  
sights of you. Paradise in sleep,  
white-robed being floating in view.

I love for you. Existing wants  
for channeled worship, so I do  
breathe immortal devotion in,  
out to you. Reverential soul,  
mighty seraph without a clue.

## With Us

*Willa Tsokanis*

“Count under the dash, Carrie! How many times do I have to tell you that?” Alex hissed over to the passenger’s seat at me. “You want me to go to jail?”

Alex drove a 1994 Nissan convertible. He called it his first love. Honestly, I’d call it a piece of junk but he loved it. He even dished out the \$62.50 for his custom “GDFTHR” plates.

Alex was only half Italian, but he thought he was a gangster. He hung around the high school, a 24 year-old-long-time-drop-out pushing hydros and Special K to kids.

“We good?” Alex asked. I had counted the stash about 12 times and was still coming up short.

“We’re good if you’re holding some of the oxys.”

“Why would I be, Carrie? God dammit –” Suddenly, we heard thumping in the trunk.

I shut my eyes tight as Alex quickly began to speed up. The thumping stopped. Silence.

We were headed back home from New York City. Alex’s supplier had just gotten some new inventory, and I have to be honest, I was pretty fucked up. I had tested out the coke and had just popped some oxycodone.

I mean to say that, because, well, it’s not I didn’t know it was wrong, but I was in Alex’s hands at that point. I would’ve been dead on the street without him. He always had a way of keeping himself there. I call it “with us.” You know, “Are you with us?” I always got lost in my own head.

Well, anyway I was pretty high, and out of nowhere Alex stops the car. It was really dark on that stretch of road, and I didn’t want to be alone in the car so, I got out with him. He popped open the trunk and I had to start crying.

I mean when I got pregnant I didn’t want Donte. I didn’t even know who his daddy was then, but by the time I was six months Alex and I were going pretty steady. Alex was kind of happy then I think. He was looking forward to my baby.

So, Alex opened the trunk and I knew how wrong it was to be keeping a two-year old in there. I started begging Alex to just let him sit on my lap. But Alex said we'd get stopped that way. We didn't have a car seat.

Alex was about to close the trunk back up because Donte had fallen back asleep, but he woke up. When he saw me he started calling for me and he got up. I froze. I didn't know what to do. Alex pushed him down and he hit his head on the back of the trunk door. He was real quiet, but I couldn't think straight.

I didn't see him bleeding. If I saw him bleeding I would have gotten out right there, and walked back home. But it was dark. Then Alex closed the trunk and we got back in the car.

On the drive back Alex had me sample some of the new stuff his supplier had come across. I've taken a lot of drugs in my time, but this was definitely different.

When my mom was alive we used to watch this show about people who died and came back to life. Almost every story had them looking over their bodies, and then floating over some cornfield or above mountains or something. I thought it was great. After my mom died I thought it was the stupidest shit I'd ever seen. I hated those assholes for going up on TV and lying about death like that. I put my mom in the ground. When I took this new stuff, this pill, I felt like those people.

I was watching the two of us in the front seat of the car. I know it was the middle of the night by then, but everything was different colors – bright colors. I heard weird pulsing sounds. Maybe what it might sound like to live underneath the ocean.

We pulled into a spot pretty close to my apartment. I wasn't really there while Alex wrapped Donte up in blankets and handed him to me. I remember thinking of Alex's gun. He always carried it with him in his oversized leather jacket. His jacket had lots of secret compartments. The gun was in the one closest to his heart. I remember smiling with my baby in my arms thinking Alex's gun was nice and warm.

I went to grab my keys to unlock the door, but for some reason my hands wouldn't stop shaking. Alex silently opened the door for me.

I crawled into bed. Alex sat at the end of the bed in a T-Shirt and his boxers smoking a cigarette.

I always did alright in school. When my mom died, in ninth grade, the principal thought I oughta start seeing the school counselor. Mrs. Siracusa and I got along real well. She gave me a notebook to keep by my bed to write my dreams when I woke up.

That night I dreamt. Alex, Donte, and I went downtown so Alex could meet with a friend. The place was on a corner. One street was flat and the other was up a hill. Alex asked me and Donte to go take a walk up the street with the hill.

The hill seemed to be getting steeper and steeper. I tripped. Once I hit the sidewalk I realized I was slipping. I grabbed onto a street sign with my right hand. Donte was in my left arm. I looked down and Alex seemed miles away, but I could tell it was him waving at me. He was laughing. I felt my fingers slipping away from the sign.

I woke up. I was sweating. The light was shining through my window. It was burning my eyes. I turned over.

I was in the bed alone.

# Romania

*Zach Hitt*

I know somewhere  
desolate  
Void of bright eyes  
No energy to grit  
Grey teeth

An angry man  
With lungs of steel  
Once knew  
The way

But the charred, the coal color  
Broken, cracked rocks  
Are contrary

Destruction is screamed  
By dead kids  
Women  
Men  
Who could not fire enough  
Bullets



*"Colors of the Carnival" by Nicole Schubert*



*"Implications" by Chad Coumbes*



*"Synchronic" by Chad Coumbes*





*"Lady Night" by Brigitte Chum*

# Rumble

*Mark Davidson*

The plastic is worn; a little scratchy. It feels like one of the perfect skipping stones found in the bottom of a fast moving river. Fingers grip tighter and you can hear the leather gloves crunch a little as they glide over the wheel. Sweat slowly drips down in the hot desert sun. The pedal goes down to the floor; the gas sprays into the eight cylinders; the pistons barrel up with the force of a railroad spike driver, igniting the nitro methanol mix, shooting the blast like a lightning bolt out the short headers onto the rubber covered pavement. The engine roars like a lion just brought to the zoo. It still has the wild in its heart and yearns for the open plains where it can be free. The wheels start to spin and squeal like a baby pig. The thick smoke billows every-which-way. The brakes released ever so slowly, the immense power starts to push forward, blowing the smoke out and away from itself, just like the unveiling of a brand new car on a game show. The engine is deafening. Another roar: this one slowly growing louder. It is the crowd. They feel the power that this lion beholds. They cheer for it and want to watch it run down its prey in the field. They feel its adrenaline running and theirs runs with it. The wheels come to a stop and the smoke slowly wafts away, slightly illuminating with the glow of yellow. It blinks once, twice, then red, then a flash of green. The engine roars again. Flashes of orange shoot out of the exhaust pipes like fireballs, wheels screech, and the fans cheer. The tires have traction from the burnout and are now gripping like a mother to her newborn child. Faster and faster they go - the engine now louder than a rocket screaming by a frightened bunch of children. The lever for the transmission flies back into second position, then third; gears shift and grind, pushing it faster and faster. Suddenly, a sputter and clank rattles the air. Violently shifting from side to side; the front wheels fight to regain traction. The cement barrier – cracked, broken, blackened, and bruised – barrels closer and closer for comfort. The sound of metal crunching and grinding pierce the ear drums like nails on a chalkboard. All cheers have fallen on deaf ears; gasp and cries now shriek out. The lion that proudly roamed the open plains now lies broken and bloodied - the life flowing from its heart. Sparks shine out like fireworks on a clear Fourth of July night. Landing on the now flammable pavement, flames shoot up out of nowhere. The sound of a siren perks up through uneasy grunts and grumbles of the crowd.

# The Silence

*Michelle Trotman*

It was his silence that would haunt me the most; his inability or refusal to say goodbye. I am not sure which gave me more pause, his departure or his failure to say good-bye. I had to rely on an unsuspecting disturbing call to let me know that he had left and would not return. When she called me that Monday evening, I was resting. I had been sick with an upset feeling in my stomach that afternoon. Unable to ignore the strange symptoms my co-worker thought it best for me to leave. Reaching home, I laid on my couch and stared into the nothingness of my almost empty room. My room although filled with the frivolous toys of materialism, was void of the voices of comfort and hands that brought hugs and embraced lives. It was a cool May evening, my eyes searched beyond my window to see the passersby as they hurried to their private world. My eyes became heavy. The sun proceeded to gracefully retreat into the darkness, I slipped into the coziness of the unknown. I heard the phone ring. I was jolted from my restful peace and hurled into a matrix that would change my world forever.

"He left me today," she said. "Your father picked himself up and left me today."

"But, didn't you just come back from vacation today?" I asked.

"I wanted him to tell you good-bye but I could not remember your number. I didn't remember your number at work."

"But mom, I have been home all afternoon, I was sick and left work early."

"I can't reach your sister."

The conversation ended abruptly as it begun. She left me holding the phone wondering what was happening two thousand miles away. In the stillness of the moment, I began to understand the vast repercussions of his abandonment. Suddenly her friend spoke.

"Michelle? Do you understand what's happening?"

My failure to discount the event could not change or undo what had happened.

"Yes. Tell mom I will be there tomorrow."

I wanted to assure her that we would cope despite his decision to leave but she refused to talk anymore. I had to face the haunting of two parents who would not release their voices into the atmosphere, so my feelings could dance in the harmony that was unique to each. I called my cousin and told her of my parent's breakup. The love affair that had lasted thirty one years was over. She helped me make reservations and comforted me. I began packing. How I wished I could manipulate time and travel. If I could, I would appear at my mother's house and hold her until her anger turned into tears.

Feelings abandoned me. It seemed as if I were not able to see events from my eyes. It felt as if I were viewing myself and my actions from the eyes of a stranger. I felt cold, unable to move, unable to come to grips with reality. Yet the burning sensation in my chest was undeniable. My cold fingers dialed Muriel, my co-worker. I heard myself talk to her. She told me that she would be right over. I don't remember who else I spoke to or what I said. I don't remember how much time elapsed before she got to my house or what I did while I was waiting for her to arrive. I don't remember opening the door or if I hugged her. I remember her voice. She made decisions and handed out instructions. I followed her lead. She made calls. I remained numb and unable to speak. She scurried about my apartment getting things ready. I stood still, unable to move like the concrete structures my father erected. I had known Muriel for three months. I was new to Albany and she was my only lifeline in this town that was miles away from my familiar. I remember being on the Greyhound to New York City. I don't remember how I paid for the ticket or who was sitting beside me. My consciousness drifted into the darkness of the night and was awakened by the lightning that jolted me back to reality. Even the heavens cried that night at the news of my parent's breakup.

When I finally cleared immigration and customs in Trinidad I waited. No one came. I felt like an orphan. No one was waiting to embrace me. I was alone. I was dropped off by a taxi, and began to climb the hill that became a contributing factor to my father's departure. The doctor had advised him that the condition of his heart would not allow him to climb such a steep hill. He had informed daddy that too much pressure on his heart would lead to his death. My father was stubborn and prideful. He climbed the hill. It would be angels who could carry him to Heaven but the undertakers who would remove his body from his palace. We never knew of his severe heart condition. I guess he must

have known but hid his pains and fears within the same muscle that would cease to operate. It was on the day he died that he received the diagnosis and prognosis he ignored. When my mother speaks of him dying in her arms despite her pleas for him to stay, she is still emotional but calm. She has come to grips with his passing. I have not. I still feel numb, wanting to cry, scream or reach out for a voice that I can no longer hear. I had become everyone's support and my ability to feel have been hardened and locked in a time and place that I could no longer reach. I think of him and still see him smiling at me in my dreams. I feel him in my heartbeats. Despite the fact he left my mother, I forgive him. It took a while for forgiveness to penetrate my concrete overlay but it did.

# A Howard Johnson for a Jose Canseco

*Jason Jette*

Oh, what I wouldn't give to relive just one of those days! My two younger brothers and I, building forts, riding bicycles, and creating our own adventures; spending days outside, leaving the house in the morning, returning when we were hungry. These were the summer days of childhood, enveloped in a particular type of magic; a magic that most adults will never experience again.

Growing up in Cohoes, NY, there was a corner store called Mayo's Grocery that the three of us would go to just about every day. We would scrape together change, often consisting of the milk money that our mother tossed into our lunch bags, or look for empty bottles and cans until we had enough money to buy a pack of baseball cards and some candy cigarettes. Mayo's was a magical place; a source of joy, day after day, summer after summer. Racing our Huffy bicycles there, the coaster brakes bringing us to a skidding stop at the corner, we would storm through the door, jangling the bell that was attached to it, and buy as many twenty-five cent packs as we could afford. One hard-earned quarter in exchange for a neatly packaged opportunity; perhaps one of these fifteen cards would be the one that I had been looking for! Treasures in hand, we would frantically pedal home to tear them open and negotiate trades while chewing the stale bubble gum. That we would one day view things in a very different light was the furthest thing from our minds.

I remember stopping in at Mayo's some years later while I was in the neighborhood. I parked my 1980 Oldsmobile Omega alongside the curb and stepped out onto the sidewalk where my bicycle once lay. I walked into the store, jangling the bell, which now seemed to serve only the purpose of alerting the counter lady of another customer to deal with. She was not excited to provide me with something special, nor was I to receive it, as we both knew that my purchase of some chips and a bottle of soda would be nothing but ordinary, and certainly not magical. The store itself was dimly lit and dingy, giving off the general appearance of being run down. I realized it was now a source of different joys, as I observed the dirty, tired people of the neighborhood purchasing scratch-off lottery tickets and 40 ounce bottles of malt liquor. The cigarettes were no longer made of candy, but of real, low quality tobacco, of which the butts littered the ground in front of the building. Without the eyes of my eight year old self, the place was kind of a dump.

The dull world of adults can really take on a new sparkle and shine through a child's lens. Even dimmer than the adult realm is the realization that childhood is gone, forever. I will never spend a summer riding bicycles and collecting baseball cards with my two little brothers again. Now, we get together for beers or go bowling. Our baseball cards collect dust in our attics, and will most likely do so until the next time that we move. Corner stores no longer carry baseball cards, and even if they did, they would probably cost five dollars a pack and not include bubble gum. Nothing in our adult lives will ever equal the magic of the days we spent together as children, and never again will I get to say, "I'll trade you a Howard Johnson for a Jose Canseco."

# A Man and His Toys

*Patrick Kelsey*

As a blue collar man it's hard to pick a favorite tool out of the many I use regularly. To be honest, I long ago stopped calling them tools and refer to them as my toys. I'll say "Time to go play with the toys," and the guys I work with know exactly what I'm talking about. The two tools I use the most often are with me so frequently that I have a holster that carries them both. I call it my gun. I leave my office with my badge and gun to go play with my toys. Like a real gun, mine allows me to project force on an immovable object and make it bend to my will (or unbend it if I have to). My badge is the security pass that allows me access to the secret places few are allowed to see.

My gun is my Leatherman Super Tool 200 and a mini Mag lite. Like an old dog lounging on the porch, it sits patiently in my locker waiting for a chance to play. For those of you not familiar with Leatherman, mine is a nine inch piece of cold stainless steel from which, when manipulated properly, other toys spring to life. There is the file, perfect for removing burrs from broken fingernails; a knife blade excellent at removing splinters from calluses; an assortment of screwdrivers for which to tighten or loosen many types of small fasteners and a few other odds and ends that like to come out on occasion.

Many an amused and amazed cubicle dweller has watched as I repaired some minor annoyance, quickly and magically with just what I had in my pockets. A flashlight to see the source of the problem and the appropriate attachment fold out of my wonder tool. My Leatherman is still the most faithful of friends. He's always dependable, always available for work (or play), and has a lifetime warranty should it ever need repair. Once, my old friend had to leave me; sent back to the factory to have a broken attachment replaced. I missed it so much I bought a cheap replacement to see me through those dark days. My new friend was adequate and those few weeks of separation were difficult. On the day we were reunited, I could hardly wait for something to break; someone to need me and my pal to turn distress into just another thankless task done. My Leatherman and I don't get together as often as we used to. Today, most of the repairs I make are electronically done on a fancy computer system that controls all my buildings' major systems. But-my old friend waits, sitting on the top shelf of my locker and occasionally calling out "Hey. Let's go play."



# The Flyer

*Crystal Harris-Foreman*

May 2009. It was an exciting day. My graduation was taking place. After two years of hard studying the day was finally here, and I was so nervous; I had to give a speech that day! I was forty one years old and finally about to walk across the stage to receive my high school diploma. Oh how I had dreamed about this day.

I remember the day the flyer came in the mail: I woke up that morning with all sorts of thoughts going through my mind, and decided to make myself a nice cup of tea with some buttered toast. I thought about cooking some bacon and eggs, but changed my mind. I could see it was going to be a very warm day, because at 9:45 in the morning, and it was already 75 degrees. There was a little wind blowing, tree leaves waving back and forth, flowers starting to blossom, and the smell of fresh cut grass in the air.

Spring is a beautiful time of the year, but I was sitting alone in my living room glaring out of the window, feeling down. Watching the cars go by, I began to think about my past as well as my future. At the young age of fourteen years old, I had dropped out of school due to being pregnant and homeless.

As I started to reflect on my past, I could see the birds flying around chirping without a care in the world, and I noticed my mail lady walking into my yard. I ran downstairs with my red shorts and ripped T shirt, Legs ashy, barefoot, my hair wild. I had the hope that maybe she would be bringing me a package from anywhere. Snatching open my door, with minimum of excitement, she only handed me a school flyer, sort of a little booklet she smiled and walked away.

At this point I felt nothing exciting. I began to walk up the stairs holding on to my shorts, heading for my trash can. As I browsed through the flyer, I noticed it was offering a high school diploma program. Unsure how this might work, I quickly disregarded the flyer, tossing it on my bed.

At this point my daughter was twenty- five years old in her first year of college. I still had not received my G.E.D or High School Diploma. I remembered the day my daughter was born, August 17th 1983. She was seven pounds and fourteen ounces, with no hair; I studied her eyes to see if they were like mine. All I wanted was the best for her, so I put my life on hold.

I was starting to feel as, if life was over, that it was too late for me to achieve anything at my age, although, without a high school diploma, I had been able to achieve employment, in of fields, such as PBX operator at the Omni New Haven Hotel, Certified Nursing Assistant, and other positions. Still I felt my high school diploma was imperative to achieve. I no longer was happy with just getting through; I wanted to achieve college degrees. I started to think about what my future could bring.

Ms. Coppola was the director of the High School Diploma Program. One day she called me in her office and closed the door. I was not sure what was going on. She pulled out my grade records and told me my GPA, was a 4.0. I would be honored by the Rotary Club for student of the year. This was the day I knew there was nothing I could not do. It's 2013 now and I am in my first year at Hudson Valley Community College. It makes me reflect back to the day the flyer came in the mail.

# Color

*Marcia Malone-Ray*

The color of skin is what we see.  
While color usually enlightens,  
providing texture and truth to the world,  
skin color can make,  
flat and dimensional shapes.  
Like sheets of paper in a file.  
But before we file, we title:  
"Muslims are radicals,"  
"White men can't jump,"  
"African-Americans can dance,"  
How can the beauty in the ability  
to see color become ugly?  
Ignorance shoulders all the responsibility.  
The cure is skin color blindness, or rather  
to accept the truth of color.  
An object cannot reflect its unique  
characteristics of hue, saturation and  
brightness without light.  
Light is energy. So in order to see  
the beauty in color we must provide  
the energy to see the color in the correct light.

# They Thought They'd Seen Everything

*Caitlin Mahar*

Karen and George turned the volume higher on their television. Karen knit quietly while George sipped at his Scotch. Neither one of them was really watching the TV but it was better than hearing their neighbors shouting.

"They're at it again George."

He took a larger swig of the Scotch then sat his glass down. "I turned the TV up what more do you want from me?"

Karen got up from her chair and moved to the window. They're neighbors blinds were open and she could see their living room right down to the pictures on the mantle. "Last week they got so bad that she actually threw the turkey she had worked on all day right on the floor. And they had guests. Imagine that!"

"Well what do you expect Karen?" He got up and joined her at the window. "We've all seen what goes on over there. It's a mad house. What I can't imagine is how on Earth they are still together. And if they must stay together and be so hostile why can't they do it privately."

"I heard that Annie was walking the dog Tuesday and they were in the drive way just screaming at one another."

"I'm not sure there's a single person, in this entire neighborhood, that hasn't seen the things that go on at that house."

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Karen was washing dishes when she heard the sound of horn outside. She moved to the living room to get a better look at who it could be. When she pulled the blinds back she saw a taxi outside the neighbor's. She looked around for the couple thinking that perhaps they were leaving for the weekend and the neighborhood might finally have some peace. Instead she saw only the woman.

Karen watched as the woman, roughly the same age as herself, struggled to juggle three suitcases to the taxi. She even watched as the woman loaded her belongings before taking one last look at her house. Even after the taxi was far from sight Karen stayed at the window.

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Days had paced when there was a noise from a door outside slamming. George got up first to look out the window. "What is he doing now?" he asked.

Karen put down her knitting needles and took her time walking to the window. For some reason what she saw didn't really surprise her, after all they'd pretty much seen everything by now. The man from next door had moved his bed, sofa and TV out to his lawn and was in the middle of moving the desk. "From the looks of it George, I'd say that the man is moving outside."

He sighed and went back to his chair. "Can't anything pleasant ever happen over there?"

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"Looks like somebody finally stopped to take a look at the junk on that guy's lawn," George said.

Karen looked out and saw a young boy and girl looking over all the stuff outside. "Oh, George, stop. Dinner's on the table so hurry up and come eat."

Karen was washing dishes as George dried them when they heard the music. When they looked out the window she gasped. "What are they doing?"

On the lawn next door they watched as their neighbor twirled the young girl they had seen earlier around the yard. There was no crying, no screaming, no fighting; there was only dancing and laughter.

Karen smiled. "Just when I thought we'd seen everything."

# An Essay Concerning Community Building

*Troy Viscusi*

Imagine for a moment that you're living the life you've always envisioned for yourself. You're in an ideal neighborhood, one that requires little thought of security measures, fear from citizens around you and only allows you to transmit a sense of pride for being so lucky as to being able to inhabit such an ideal place of living. Now, shift your focus back to reality. Not the reality that you'll never live in such a place, but the reality you're responsible for your current residence not being the destination you just imagined.

It is a harsh reality for some, that they're responsible for the very problems they deplore. A neighborhood riddled with crime, graffiti and a lost sense of pride. These circumstances and their severity obviously vary from location to location. However, the underlying problems that cause our neighborhoods to become lost, our families to feel unsafe and our futures from being brighter are all very much alike.

It can be described rather simply by pointing to what I have coined "The Hitchhiker Theory". I created this theory after experiencing a flat tire and the helplessness that ensued as a result of nobody stopping to offer me help. I knew why I wasn't offered help. It's an all too common occurrence to read of such initial kindness leading to a violent crime by the person being offered help. I didn't blame the people who passed by without offering me help that night. With that said, I was still left feeling sad for society and was still in rather desperate need of help because of my tire problem.

The correlation I make between my hitchhiking experience and the way society operates is that we often let the bad people among us dictate the way we live our lives. In terms of community building, the good among us are too afraid to offer support, lend a helping hand or even speak up due to fear. This in turns adds momentum to the vicious cycle of others remaining silent and thus isolated. This isolation is the single greatest thread woven into the fabric of our worst neighborhoods. The isolation of like minded individuals who want to provoke a positive change, will allow these circumstances to continue, if not strengthen over time. While we will certainly never experience a time when the bad among us cease to exist, or a time when the fear of aiding a stranger becomes irrational, there is hope of our communities truly becoming "ours" yet again.

There is really no such thing as a "bad" neighborhood. There are only people who live within these neighborhoods who decide to live their lives badly. We must begin to collectively understand this and realize that we're all capable of positively influencing the very things we complain about daily and feel hopeless in fighting. The time for community building has come. The building of trust among neighbors, the collaboration among clergy, businesses and politics and the collective effort to achieve a common goal: Community pride.

The resources for such a movement are readily available, but there has never been a rotary club that created itself, a written speech that projected itself from a podium, or a run down building that refurbished itself into a functioning business. The cause to unite our communities rests solely at the very feet of those who inhabit them. We are the one's who are responsible. Anyone who is willing to pass this responsibility along to another, is in turn responsible for perpetuating the lost cause that is their community.

This is a challenge to those looking to make a difference, those who are searching for their cause, and those that have been hiding away in fear. It's time to take action. It's time to build a brotherhood, a sisterhood, a community.

# Just Keep Your Mouth Shut

*Kate Maresca*

The first time I was talked down to was three years ago. A man's candle wasn't bringing in enough light to his table and he asked for a new one. I then informed the man that we only carried one type of candle, but I could move him to a table with better lighting. The man stood up and got inches away from my face and said to me, "If I wanted to switch tables I would have said that, I asked for a new candle so I suggest you go find me one." Urgently, I walked away from the man to go find him what he had so rudely demanded from me. Obviously I wasn't going to return to the table without a brighter light source for the man. Feeling enraged and witty, I returned with a 'Heavy Duty 4-D cell Flashlight' and bent over so I was looking at the man face to face as I sternly recommended to him that he could do two things with that flashlight... I don't think he took either of my well thought out suggestions very well. Needless to say, I didn't get my usual twenty percent tip that night.

The second time I was talked down to was around two years ago. A woman came in to the restaurant in a tiny black dress and fancy jewelry decorating her body from head to toe, causing nearly every male-eye in the restaurant to be on her. Apparently she didn't get the memo that this was a family-style restaurant in a small town, not a night club in NYC. I walked over to the table to take her order. She glanced up at me with her cold blue eyes and said, "I want a steak and I want my steak cooked medium-rare, do you know what that even means? Probably not, it means a little pink in the middle but not too pink, got that?" as if she thought that I, myself would be cooking her steak... I told the woman I would try my best to describe to the chefs what medium-rare looks like, because I doubt they learned that in culinary school anyways.

Now, the third time I was talked down to wasn't as rude as the other times, but I think the customers were genuinely concerned... A table had finished eating their meals and left the restaurant, so as always, I cleaned off their table and wiped it down with soap and water. As I was doing this, a young couple sitting at the table directly next to me felt some sort of impulse to inform me that the type of washing fluid I was using was unsanitary and it was disgusting that I thought it was okay to let my customers eat off of dirty tables, and that I should consider switching products. I had learned my lesson when it came to talking back to customers, because unfortunately, they always win. Instead of giving them a 'smart-ass' comment back, I just replied, "I'll be sure to fix that. Thank you for the suggestion."

Jerks!



# Dissolve

*Joseph Ryan*

The dreams keep  
My hated reality  
From a violent love  
Who won't wake up.

She can't stop slipping  
On her tired lies.  
The sick ties,  
That kept us.

She can't help herself.  
Her daddy didn't love her,  
So no man could,  
But I loved the challenge.

This shouldn't surprise me.  
The attention starved,  
Closed off girl,  
Can feel intoxicating.

Drunk off her drama,  
I couldn't help myself.  
I can't say no  
To desperation.

Maybe I deserve to burn.  
I just hate watching,  
Her crash on the sidewalk,  
While I dissolve in the clouds.

# The Lost Days of Gold

*Carl Cacciotti*

The “Golden” times of life are cherished the most. Every moment that I shared with my mother sparkled brighter than the precious metal itself. She was extremely generous and caring, the kind of person who would give the shirt off of her back to a stranger and ask nothing in return. Most of the memorable moments came on vacation days from grade school. She would always take me with her while she shopped for the family’s necessities. Each shopping trip gave me the same delightful reborn feeling as if I was exploring the Jungles of Africa for the first time. Many years have gone by since my mother has passed away, but I often visit the same stores I frequented with her as a child.

One of my most memorable moments of childhood took place at a department store called J.M. Fields located in Troy, New York. This store was always on the list of stores to visit on my days off from school. A feeling that one creates from a passing moment has life and paints an everlasting picture in his head that will live on for a life time. For me, this was when I sat at the deli and grill counter inside J.M. Fields department store. In those days, I perceived the world from a different perspective. The distinct smell of the grill cooking hamburgers, hotdogs, and fried onions at lunch time would make my mouth water with a great hunger and anticipation. The vivid pastel colors and text on the menu signs had been outdated for decades, and the bells of their old style cash register pierced my ears as they rang out their sound of success. But the most memorable thing in that deli was the feel of the old style barstools. I remember spinning around and becoming so dizzy, I would lose track of where I was. Time itself has slipped through my hands, but my memories of those times still have a hold. Since then, I have frequented many similar establishments, but have had no luck recapturing my feelings of youth. One good example of this is a diner that is located close to where I live. Of all the times I have eaten there, I cannot recall ever taking any special notice of its interior surroundings. The smells of the grill pass by me with no meaning and without the essence of the past. The sights and colors are nothing more than distractions and text and the sounds pass by without ever having the courtesy to say hello or announce their existence. Just thinking of sitting on the barstools brings an ache to my lower back.

Another place that holds many memorable moments for me is when I visited my father's shop. I had a fort under the stairs leading to the second floor. I used to hide there and watch the men work in the shop without their knowing that I was watching. Also, I would sneak down to the basement, even though I was scared to death of it. At times, I could swear that I heard voices in the dead calm of the silence. Another room I played in was called "The Pigeon room." This was a room on the third floor that was full of pigeons and should have been knocked down years earlier because of safety issues. In this room one could just about taste the toxins in the enormous piles of pigeon feces. Every now and then, my father and I would play hide and go seek in the showroom. I would hide in the cabinets, and my father would look for me. I felt the excitement and anticipation while I wondered if I would be found.

Now that I have worked in the building for over twenty years, I can truthfully say that I no longer look at it the same way. The stairs have been removed and replaced with machinery. The sounds of my father's workers have long since been replaced with the sounds of the new machines. These days when I visit the basement, I no longer hear the whispers in the silence, but just the silence. The pigeon room has been removed and replaced with an addition to the building. The old smell of pigeon feces has been replaced with the new smell of fresh carpet. And when I show customers the cabinets I offer in the showroom, I no longer have any feelings of excitement or anticipation.

I believe that these changes in my perception of life can be attributed to growing up and gaining knowledge, but the main reason is because I want to hold on to them so dearly. Retaining them allows me to never lose the feelings that came along with youth and trap those feelings in my heart forever. And even though sad and empty feelings sometimes lurk inside of me when I think of those times being gone, I also have an overwhelming feeling that fills my heart with joy. My love for my mother and those days is as deep as the ocean. Stay Golden Pony Boy!

# The Paradox

*James Rufo*

The chance of us two uncontrolled  
At a later stage in life I'm told  
To be together tried and true  
Is something not for me or you

Soulful wishing each was there  
Waiting while our hearts shed tears  
For us to be in same positions  
Likely not, hence this rendition

Then one day you meet another  
Simply just a surrogate other  
Likely then your one of true  
Becomes available for you

And thus the cycle repetition  
In reverse with no remission  
She is there, and you are not  
Wrong time, wrong place or just forgot

Such a story everyday  
How many lives each day it plays  
For you and I there's no adoption  
Hence we live our second option

# Revisiting the Lake

*Emma Micare*

Ever since I was about two years old, my family would take me to our camp on Sacandaga Lake. Everyone from my family went there including all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins. Almost every weekend of every summer we would visit the camp. Although many years have passed and the horse I used to visit has passed away, there are still many things that have stayed the same about my camp.

My dad would put me and my sister into the back of his old, green Jetta. My dark hair fell just past my shoulders, and it would dance around in the wind from the windows being open. We would all sing along to "I Don't Need Your Rockin' Chair" by George Jones, I not knowing any of the actual words and my dad whistling the harmony. The ride was about an hour long, but to me it felt as if we would never get there. I would constantly move around in my seat with excitement. But, eventually we would turn right, and I could hear the crumbling of the rocks beneath the tires as we entered the road to our camp. Seconds after, my dad would put the car in park, I would jump out of the car and into the camp. Running past my grandmother, who always greeted me with a kiss and into the bathroom to change into my swimsuit which was covered in white anchors, my heart pounded a cheerful song. As I changed, I could smell the hot dogs cooking on the grill and the sunscreen being lathered on my cousins.

The only way we could go into the lake was if my Papa walked us down the dirt road and past the old church, which sat on the hill just above the lake. Sometimes we would peak in the windows of the church and see the old wooden pews and the Madonnas next to the altar. My papa would walk us and tell us stories of when he was a boy. I remember him telling us how he never had a camp and that we were lucky to be spending time with our cousins. But, I never fully listened and understood.

Finally, we would make it to the lake and stay there for hours. Our skin would turn darker as the sun shined brighter. We would just play in that lake for hours, without ever getting bored or tired. Eventually, my Papa would take us back to the camp and we would change into our warm, cozy pajamas. My uncles would start a fire, and we would roast marshmallows all night. I always hated marshmallows, but I would roast about half the bag and give them to my aunts. I would watch the fire

burn all night, and I would put the white marshmallows into the fire and watch them burn from yellow, to brown, to black without ever moving my eyes.

My drive up to the camp now is very lonely and somewhat tranquil. Instead of George Jones, I now play whatever is on the radio. Usually I drive up alone, but when I drive past certain things like the barn with two horses and a couple chickens, I can hear my dad making jokes and my sister laughing. As I arrive to my camp, I see not much has changed. The dirt road is still unpaved, children still run around in only bathing suits and all the laundry is hung outside. When I walk into the camp, my grandma still greets me with a kiss, but I no longer ignore her. And when my Papa walks the kids to the lake, I still come, and I sit on the shore and talk with him. He is one person I know who has lived through everything, and as I look into the grey water which was once blue to me, I realize nothing has changed but me. When we go back to the fire at night, I think of all the things that have happened on this lake, this camp. The memories of swimming, laughing, love, heartbreak, family fill my head as I watch that marshmallow turn black. Pulling my stick with the burnt marshmallow on the end out of the fire, I take a bite of it, realizing I still hate marshmallows.

# Shattered Dreams

*Emma Micare*

As her pink, satin slippers  
Sweep the dust on the floor, mother smiles.  
Leaping in the air-  
Her mother's heart sinks.  
Deep, deep, deeper-  
Mother's fingers clench to the chair.  
Don't disappoint me...  
The thoughts of last night,  
Piercing through the ballerina's mind.  
Sobbing, crying, weeping.  
She falls to the ground,  
Instead of landing on her feet.  
Her feet bound.  
With beautiful, pink satin,  
Hide the bruises and wounds  
Created by a monster.  
Created by me.  
Afraid to look out,  
Into the audience of strangers.  
It is mother.  
It is me.

# Cold, Lonely Night

*John Murphy*

We all have days and nights that are memorable in some way or another. Some memories are good and some are bad but no matter what, they will always be a part of us. The day after Valentine's Day of last year was one of those days for me. I was deployed with the Army to the eastern part of Afghanistan near the Pakistan border, also known as Paktya Province. My team and the unit we were attached to were in an area with the same seasons as we have back home in New York. The toughest challenge for me was getting used to the elevation change because we were 7,000ft. above sea level. The conditions and terrain are very similar to the Rocky Mountains: cold, desolate, and unforgiving. Being up in the mountains was both a physical and mental struggle most days, though I will always remember February 15th, 2012, as the worst night ever.

I couldn't sleep at all because it was so cold, so the little sleep I did get was unsatisfying. I woke up at 0230 for my 0300 guard shift and slowly climbed out of my sleeping bag. As I put on my clothes, layer after layer, I realized just how frigid it was going to be that night. For the next three hours I would sit alone in what felt like a steel prison. This fortress of solitude had a rickety metal stair case and was approximately 30 feet off the ground. Each tower had three windows but most of the windows had cracks, and the breeze would chill anyone's bones. No matter how much I clenched my muscles or curled up into a ball, there was no escaping the bitter and freezing gusts of wind. There were make-shift doors made from blankets and plywood, but this configuration let the cold and wind in all the same. Four others and I kept a watchful eye out while everyone else slept soundly on their cots. Looking through the faint, green glow of my night vision goggles, I could see no signs of life in the surrounding area. The sky was so lit up with all the stars, all I could see were the snow capped mountains for miles. It was so quiet out that I could hear a pin drop, or the crunch of snow as someone walked to the outhouse. The actual temperature was between 0 and -5 degrees Fahrenheit, but it felt like hell froze over that night.

With every breath I took, it felt like small daggers made of ice were stabbing my throat and lungs. As much as I wanted to sit on the metal



chair and rest my tired legs, I could not because the cold radiated through every inch of my body. My eyes became weaker and everything started to blur because the night vision was very harsh on my eyes. I could feel the blood being slowly retracted from my outer extremities and back towards my vital organs. With every passing minute, my head and eyelids grew heavier and heavier, and I thought I was going to become a human ice sickle. No matter how cold it was or how tired I was, I could not sleep and could not falter because the safety of everyone else depended on us five lonely souls.

Just when I thought all hope was lost, I was startled out of my lethargic and vegetative state by the clamor of the metal staircase. The next shift had showed up to relieve me. Oh how sweet it sounded as someone trudged up those stairs. I raced over to the warming shed and quickly took my boots off, but it was no use because the damage was already done. It was so cold that night that I sustained frostbite on four of my toes, but the mental anguish would be far worse than the physical pain. Even to this day, the winter will remind me of those cold, lonely nights in Afghanistan that will haunt me forever.

# Old Gods, Fall Echos, Master Street

*Christian Stanzione*

Cyclopean world-  
Dionysus celebrates-  
Old Gods Still upheld.

Hard winds are blowing-  
Nature Changing before me-  
Echos of fall fade.

Walking down my road,  
the sun in my eyes.  
I can see your house from here.

Swimming in your pool,  
I almost drowned,  
from the weight of our sins  
pulling me under again.

Alone in your bed,  
my legs start to shake.  
Cloaing my eyes I wonder,  
Where did you go?  
And where have you been all my life.

# Dead Man Rising

*Miah Bentley*

Trevor woke up from a white flash of light, his body numb, his head and back sore. He tried to sit up, but couldn't, his body felt too stiff. He realized that he was lying on the floor of a forest of bamboo trees, which were closely knit together. The sun streamed through the gaps of the trees in a green hued light. Trevor didn't know where he was or how he got here. A shadow of a man peered over him, blocking his vision of the sun, and interrupted his troubled thoughts. Trevor couldn't make out the man's identity for his face was shadowed, he opened his mouth to ask the man who he was, but before he could the man spoke in a voice like 'Morgan Freeman' saying,

"No kid you aren't waking up from a long dream, you're dead...dead as a doorknob. Now this may come as a shock to you, but you'll get over it, I know you're young (and you young people like to think that you're going to live forever) but, jumping off that bridge into that fast current of water was just stupid, and I don't mind telling you."

Trevor blinked, his eyes wide like that of a deer in headlights, "You mean...."

"No, you're not in heaven, but you're not hell either, you're in the waiting area...the big man has a lot of people to talk with before he can see you about your fate, so while you wait, you get to enjoy this luxurious forest where you can "relax" for a bit. We have other things we have to discuss, but first would you please get up, you're dead not paralyzed so stop being a slug on leaf, get up!"

The man lifted Trevor to his feet, whose mind was spinning with questions. When he was able to see the man's face, Trevor saw that it was transparent, but every time the man moved or changed his expression a flicker of color flashed across it; and his eyes weren't just one, but rather all the colors of the rainbow. He wore a white suit, a white fedora, and a blue tie.

"Are you an angel?" Trevor asked.

The man laughed loudly, "You could say that, I like to call myself the Boddia."

"Bodo?" Trevor asked confused.

"No, BO-DEE-AH, Babysitter Of Dumb Deceased In Afterlife." Boddia smirked proudly, sending a ray of flaming red color across his face.

"Well Boddia, I guess the polite thing to say would be that it's nice to meet you, I just wish that it was under other circumstances. What happens now? Do I get to experience my childhood over again? Do I get to visit my friends and family? Or do I get to view the contents of my life....can I see my own funeral!?!" Trevor asked with a weird smile on his face.

Boddia looked at him, clearly not amused, "Seriously kid? First, no, you're the age you are and you're staying that way. Second what have you got to see back down there, your dad sitting on the john complaining that your obituary was crap, or you're mom watching family made movies of your childhood crying, wishing that you had been smarter; or would you rather see your friends getting stoned on the bridge you smartly jumped off of "wishing you the best up here in the sky." Sorry, but the big man has a 'no haunting' policy. And no, you missed your funeral; why would you want to see yourself cold and dead, stuffed in a box anyway? No what happens next is we go on a long walk, you get to ask me all sorts of questions, which I may or may not answer; then I'm going to take you to the lake for the "gathering" where you will meet other's who are deceased just like you, you can talk with them all you want, about anything you want, hear their stories, hopefully learn from them. Some are really quite marvelous, most are very tragic, sounds boring to you I'm sure, but you never know who you might just meet. I remember meeting all kinds of people, no story is alike and not every life amounted to anything, but you will learn something, I promise.

So with that, Trevor followed Boddia through the bamboo trees, and after some time, they came to a clearing where there lay a beautiful lake, and surrounding the water's edge were a group of people, talking with one another. Trevor took a deep breath, and as he did he thought, guess the dead really don't just sit around watching the living, nor care to, for their journey of life ended on earth, and now they begin a new journey of death in the land of waiting.

# Gleaming Gold

*Joanne Iris Aclan*

Callous and rough,  
She missed the feel of a ball on her hand  
Residing in her stomach,  
A maelstrom of flutters  
A game that can make or break

The sound it makes after a clean shot  
The way she reaches to knock down a threat  
Gratifying and satisfying  
Eyes like a bullet,  
Always searching, scrutinizing a weakness

A stolen breath  
As the ball swirls around the basket  
Hovering between a win or lose  
Gold within her fingertips  
Time is running out

Her smile spread  
Like yellow tint on ripening mangoes  
The cheers  
The shouts, echoing in her mind  
And soaked in like water to a towel

After all the cheers died down,  
She takes a step  
A path unknown, rock-strewn  
Fire, wild and hot  
Always running through her veins

A flash of gold catches her eye  
She looks back  
Bittersweet memories flooded her  
Her body, soul and mind  
Always longing for the days of glory

# The End

*Samantha LaFountaine*

The gates were tall and black, the sharp ends like the devil's pitchfork. The metal gates were cossed by the light rain that started to fall moments before. As we drove up the hill to the cemetery the dirt road changed into a scene of clammy, granite and marble gravestones as thin as this plastic world. There it was - the empty hole, the final destination for this man and his vacant remains. We slid out of the rusty, shady blue 1988 Jeep Cherokee my father had bought me a few months ago. Silently we walked to meet the man and get him settled in his new residence. We had previously said adieu at the service earlier, the world's filth had been washed away from his lifeless body and his face painted to look as if his heart were still beating, he was a stranger now.

"You can't breathe until you choke, you got to laugh when you're the joke, there's nothing like a funeral to make you feel alive..." I couldn't get this song out of my head from the drive over, I was in my own world, I could feel the damp wind on my cheeks, the chills up my shirt, the goose bumps on my arms. I looked up in the gloomy, grey sky, only a few little clouds were up there. All the typical rounded bulbous kind and one tiny bird that seemed to have lost his way. The air tasted bland, like steamed potatoes and the rainfall danced around us as the casket was finally lowering in the ground. My polished black stiletto heels started sinking into the dirt as if the devil himself were pulling me down; the ground was soft and spongy. I looked up again to see if that single bird was still trying to find his way but there was no life in the sky, no one watching. It was quiet again; we walked back to the jeep, its tires sinking into the mud as well. It was over, the heavy hand of the beast was pulled off of my shoulder and I was free.

## The Retreat

*Jami-Lee Daunais*

The thought resides in her lower temporal lobe,  
Causing her to embrace the time she has been given.  
The aroma of fresh salt water,  
The beckoning waves slamming against the rocks;  
The sight is too breathless to intake fully.  
As she mentally takes a snapshot,  
She finds herself turning away from the endless blue.  
Knowing there'll be no return,  
She walks away with a grin that expands from ear to ear.  
Retreating to the promise she had kept,  
She knows of nothing more.

