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Threads 2007

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Table of Contents

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TITLE	AUTHOR	PAGE
The Embrace	Sarah Worden	5
Precipice	Richard DeSpain	6
A Response to “This Is Harlem”	Tina Daniels	10
Inspired by “Two Lovers”	Tina Daniels	11
Fishing with My Dad	Brandy Smith	12
“Dad”	Angel Willis	15
A Long Road to an Everlasting Friendship	Alyssa Smith	17
The Truth in Goethe’s Words	Katherine Powers	20
Bob	Jaclyn Stabell	21
The Earth Invasion	Donyell Dukes	22
Stay Here	Kia Fischer	25
Serenity Now	Rebecca Braungard	27
Following Your Passing	Katherine Powers	30
On Writing	Tricia Hardy	31
Mrithtuu	Josh M. Bauscher	33
Frustrations of the Mediocre Writer	Stephanie Sivaslian	35

TITLE	AUTHOR	PAGE
An Improbable Teacher	Carrie Smith	38
World of Loneliness	Livina Hudson	41
Two Pink Lines	Jennifer Pushee	46
The Freedom Run	Zachary S. Reiff	48
What Makes Me Thankful	Tamara L. Greene	50
Saving Seats	Brittany Sener	52
The Big Blue Shoes	Tara S. Harmon	53
The Last Day of Summer	Elizabeth Madigan	56
Fall	Matti Bowen	58
On Removing a Sliver	Katherine Powers	62
beautysamgrey	Delia Hubbard	63
Strawberry Juice	Rosemary Nelly Roberts	64
The Singing Gardener	Nancy Warrick	66
When My Stars Were Black	Josh M. Bauscher	69
Seasons Change	Jeffrey Hebert	70
The Snow-Globe	Sarah Worden	74

***THREADS* WRITING AWARD WINNER**

By: *Sarah Worden*

The Embrace - A Haiku

Wide-eyed and exposed

A river of surrender

I melt in your hands

***THREADS* WRITING AWARD WINNER**

By: *Richard DeSpain*

Precipice

Death was never really something I thought about, until one night some years ago when I was given special insight into the *precipice* of death. That night I was thrust into sharing, witnessing, and participating in someone's last hours of life.

I was a young man and had just graduated from the Air Force Reserve training school as a medical technician, so I was eager to practice my new trade full time. I had gotten a job at a local hospital in Seattle working the evening shift in the Emergency Room(ER). Overlake was a very busy hospital, and on our weekends we typically cared for an average of 300 to 500 patients a day.

The evening began with my inventory/stocking duties for all the examination rooms. Shortly after going on duty, I was paged to proceed to the Cardiac Care Unit (CCU) on the second floor. My secondary duties included "on call" Hospital Code Response Team. This evening it was to perform what I thought would be a routine electrocardiogram (EKG) for a patient in room 221. Arriving at the patient's bedside, I introduced myself with my standard greeting and a smile; I explained the procedure he knew all too well. He was a middle-aged good looking man in his late 40s. His wife, sitting next to him, was clutching his hand with a reassuring hold. They both smiled back with salutations and relief as if they had just come through a tsunami. In fact, earlier that day he had just gone through open heart surgery that from all accounts was very successful. So, this would be one of many routine EKGs I would perform on him that evening and was expected every hour post operation of this kind. We all laughed about that, you know that nervous laugh you give when deep down you're still very concerned. His wife was still worried and I could tell she had been weeping all day. I pulled away the gown that draped his chest to reveal the wounds of his surgery. There on

his chest, standing out in the skin, were numerous staples of shiny chrome trailing down from the top of his sternum to the mid-chest area. The skin was still rosy red, raw, and tender from the large surgical incision. I took care as I placed each electrode lead on his chest in pre-determined spots. As the monitor began to acquire his signal, I told him just to relax. His wife exclaimed "YES, the worst is over Honey." He was exhausted and now breathing calmly, accepting that this was just another routine procedure. The artifact subsided on my monitor and I had a textbook reading. I pressed "record," and the EKG started spitting the printout.

"Looks good," I told him jovially. "I'll be back in an hour."

This same routine took place several more times that evening, each time we met with an increasing calmness. I could tell they loved each other very much and were very dear to each other. I had actually started to look forward to my escapes up to his room in CCU; by now, it was the usual mad house down in the ER and so visiting him and his wife was a delightful break. At around eleven o'clock that evening, visiting hours long over, I returned to his room to find his wife leaning over embracing him. Assured the worst was now over she told him that she should go home to check on the kids. She kissed him, on his cheek and promised to return in the morning. I could tell they were in the prime of their lives together and this was a cruel interruption, just another one of life's obstacles. Powering up my machine alone now with him it was very quiet. You could hear only the beeping of his heart monitor. A single incandescent lamp was on; the room glowed a familiar pale yellow. I asked him once again to just lie still. He didn't hear me as he was already asleep, exhausted from the day's events. My task complete, I removed the leads, gathered up his blanket and tucked him in, leaving to return to the chaos of the ER.

Working in the ER is a very stressful job, but for some like myself, it's a good stress. The stresses are like those of a skydiver's or bungee jumper's and can be a rush. The work can be rewarding and at the same time it can be extremely frustrating and discouraging. I had just brought an elderly woman with dementia from the waiting area to her examination room when I heard on the overhead PA. "CODE TEAM CCU ROOM 221."

I dashed away along with another nurse from the ER. As we ran up the stairs, I realized it was the same room I had been visiting all night. We entered his room, and I relieved the CCU nurse performing chest compres-

sions. Another nurse wheeled in the Defibulator/Code Cart and we began our trained response of injecting drugs, shocking, and CPR. By now, a respiratory therapist had arrived to take over bag-ventilating from another nurse. The on-call doctor asked what dose/step we were on and promptly increased the order. Again DRUGS injected, SHOCK delivered, resuming CPR and ventilations. This cycle went on for 45 minutes.

“Has the attending physician been called?”

“Yes,” replied one of the staff. “He should be here any moment.”

Continuing on with our recitation efforts, every 5 minutes, we would stop to check his pulse. With everyone falling silent, the nurse would feel the carotid vein at the neck the doctor would listen to his chest and I would hopelessly feel for his cephalic pulse at his wrist. NOTHING.

We resumed our efforts once again, DRUGS, SHOCK, and CPR. His Cardiologist finally arrived from home and took over. He reassessed the situation, asking how long we had been in arrest; someone replied, “about an hour now.”

By now, the patient’s skin had started to turn a slight ashen gray color. The cardiologist then ordered a chest surgical tray. Opening the tray and putting on sterile gown and gloves, he poured Betadine all over the chest. He grabbed the very large chrome clamps that were on top and began cut and pull each one of the one centimeter staples out from his chest. When the staples were removed, he grabbed a larger chrome clamp vise and placed it upon his chest, pushing and maneuvering the jaws into his chest. Once in position, he began to turn a large thumb-screw on the side of the instrument that forced the patient’s chest to separate, pushing the sternum and chest bones to the side exposing a gaping hole.

I could see his heart now, lifeless and still. I had just been talking to this man earlier; now I was staring straight into his chest. He did not bleed, not like you would think, just some oozing. This man’s heart had stopped. We all knew he was done. The doctor changed gloves and then with his right hand (and the audacity of a god), reached in. Grasping, he began to massage this man’s heart in one last defiant attempt to resume its beating. Then ordering three final sets of internal paddle shocks, defeated, he pronounced the poor man’s death.

We were done. It was over. Nothing more could be done. We had failed.

We all disbanded, and I returned to my other duties in the ER.

It was late now, about 12:30. My shift was almost over when I was called one last time to go up to CCU. I was not quite done yet. I had another reluctant duty to perform, bringing the expired body down to the hospital's morgue in the basement. Returning once more to the CCU, this time with a covered gurney, I entered the man's room, one last time. It was eerily quiet now; everyone was gone. I spread out the white plastic bag along side of him in the bed. Rolling him on his side, I placed the bag behind and laid him gently down onto it. I attached the ID tag to the right toe. Then starting at his feet, I began to slowly zip up the bag, tucking inside his arms over the chest where his heart still remained exposed and still and finally stopping at his emotionless, pale, empty face. He was covered now, just a bag.

His nurse helped me slide the bag onto the gurney. Rolling the gurney away, I took the elevator down to the morgue. Alone now in the morgue, I positioned the gurney in front of the chill box and rolled the bag into the enclosure for the impending autopsy to follow the next day.

Have you ever kissed someone you loved knowing it was the last? Knowing it would be your last embrace? We very rarely know when we are at our *precipice*. In a way, that's a good thing. I was able to see death firsthand. It was final, indiscriminate, and his end. My shift was over. This was my last task for the evening. Today had been his last task of his lifetime.

A Response to “This Is Harlem” by Jacob Lawrence

By: *Tina Daniels*

We break ourselves down to analyze our parts
What makes us tick?
The lines on my face
The calluses on my hands
A representation of the life I live
Lungs gone black
And a bad liver to boot
What makes me me?
What makes you you?
No trees in sight
Just a touch of green will do
I pull up my collar to go face the news
Walking down the block I hear the sweet melody of the blues
A yellow summer's day
A gray winter's night
Lover's quarrel,
I remember the fights
To sum up my parts
To examine as a whole
The color of my culture paints my soul

Inspired by *The Two Lovers*, Artist: Riza 'Abbasi

By: *Tina Daniels*

I wait for her in the moonlight

My heart yearns for her in the moonlight My breath is short and fast
in the moonlight She said that she would come and that I would be
able to see her with the moonlight Every moment that passes brings
a little less light Oh, how shall I see you without the moonlight?

You said I was beautiful

You said I was kind

You said you would meet me with the twilight of the moon

Oh, where are you my love?

Who keeps you so long?

Have you forgotten your promise?

Have you forgotten our love?

I guess your not coming and all hope is gone The moments keep
passing Your feet do not bring you along I am going The moon has
lost its hold on me Keep someone else waiting in the light of this
wretched moon There is truth in this silence I hear it as I sit But as
time passes I cannot make myself move I guess your hold on me is
stronger by the light of the moon wretched moon There is truth in
this silence I hear it as I sit But as time passes I cannot make myself
move I guess your hold on me is stronger by the light of the moon

Fishing with My Dad

By: *Brandy Smith*

I have a lot of great memories from my childhood. While every one of them is special in its own way, there is one that I can remember just like yesterday. This is the memory of my dad and me going ice fishing on the weekends.

I couldn't wait for the winter months to come along. This was the time of year that I loved the most, especially out on the lake. We always got to the lake just in time for the sun to rise. Vibrant colors of red and orange filled the sky like paints on an art piece. The blazing sun was so bright that it gave the false intentions of the day being warm. However, in reality it would be so cold that the ice was thick enough to hold snowmobiles and even trucks! The quietness of the day, not yet begun, allowed the sounds of cars crossing the bridge miles down the road to be heard as if they were close by. Even though the weather was cold, I couldn't wait until the weekends came.

The first thing we had to do to prepare for fishing on the weekend was to set traps in the rivers and streams. Being the time of the year when it was frigid cold, we couldn't use worms for bait. Instead, we would catch "minnows"(small fish) in the traps. This was easy to do. We would put bread-crumbs into the trap and lower it into the water. A day or two later we would

go back to find dozens of the small fish trapped inside, unable to escape.

After much anticipation, the morning of the big day would finally arrive. After breakfast, which my dad would cook for me so that I would have my strength to pull in “the big one,” I ran to my room to get ready. Making sure to dress warm, I would pile on layers of clothing. First, I’d put on my thermal underwear, or as I like to call them “long johns.” Then came a long sleeved shirt followed by a heavy sweater and my winter coat. Snow pants were very important so that my jeans didn’t get soaking wet from the water on top of the lake. Sometimes with the warm winter sun, there would be a thin layer of water on top of the ice. Finally, extra socks and heavy boots along with gloves, hat and a scarf would help keep me warm. By the time I got done, I could barely move!

After packing all of our fishing supplies, along with a thermos full of hot chocolate, we would head for the lake. The first thing we would do was make holes in the ice in which we would set our tip-ups. Tip-ups act as a fishing pole does for summer time fishing. They are made of wood, are shaped like a cross, and have a spool of fishing line on the bottom. The cross shape allows them to be stable over the hole in the ice. After putting the bait on the hook, the line gets lowered into the water, awaiting the first bite of the day.

Unlike summer time fishing, in ice fishing you don’t hold onto a fishing pole. The tip-ups placed over the open holes in the ice have bright orange flags on the tips of them. When there is a catch on the line, the flag, which is on a spring, flips up into the air to let you know that you have

something. After sitting, waiting, and hoping for a catch, the flag goes up and my dad and I race to it. I would have so much clothing on that he would always beat me there, but it was always fun to try. This was probably the most exciting part of the day.

Being out on the lake was really beautiful. The winter sun would be warmest in the late afternoon, giving me a warm feeling, even though it was really cold out. Sometimes when the sun hit the lake it would make a sound as if the ice was cracking. This could be really scary when you're out in the middle! My dad had to always reassure me that it was just the warmth of the sun hitting the cold surface of the ice. He would explain it to me by comparing it to when you place an ice cube in a glass of warmer water. When the ice cube first hits the water, it makes a loud cracking sound, and splits. Somehow this would always make me feel better.

Being out on the lake, in the open air could be truly tiring. By the end of the day, I was ready to go home and have a nice warm meal that dad and I would make from the fish that we had caught that day. Then soon after it would be time for bed to get up for the next day's catch.

“Dad”

By: *Angel Willis*

Hey dad it's me, the one you donated sperm for.
Hey dad it's me, the one you didn't want anymore.
Hey dad it's me, don't you remember my name?
You gave it to me dad, it should be burned in your brain.
Look at your arm dad, look at your tattoo.
Your tattoo is of my name dad, that's how much I meant to you.
Look at all these pictures dad, pictures of you and me,
Back when you used to love me dad, back when I was your baby.
But then you left us dad, me, my mom, and my brother too.
And we still loved you dad, we loved everything about you.
But I remember when I was seven dad, I waited for you outside.
I just sat there and I waited dad, I waited for you to arrive.
Then Mom would come and get me dad, and say "Honey he ain't
gonna show,"
& I would go to bed crying dad, telling Mom I needed to know.
"Why don't dad love me Mom? What did I do wrong?"
But now I'm saying "thank you dad," 'cause you only made
me strong
See, I made it through without you dad, I made it after all.
And I thank God every day for Mom, dad, 'Cause she never
let me fall.

See, she was mom and she was dad, and she did what she could.

& I think she did great dad, better than you ever would.

Oh, & I heard you on the phone dad, saying I ain't your kid,

Saying that you disowned me dad & I couldn't believe that you did.

But once again "Thanks dad," because you made me who I am.

And you know what dad? You ain't my dad, you ain't even a
real man.

So go ahead dad, live your life. I hope that you grow old,

Cause to me dad, in my head dad, you died a long time ago.

A Long Road to an Everlasting Friendship

By: *Alyssa Smith*

I have had many people complain to me about their parents and say, "Ugh! I cannot wait to be on my own. I can't stand them!" I have come to conclude that many people my age do not have a close relationship with their parents. This is all very strange for me to hear because the relationship that I have with my mom is the complete opposite. The fact that she is a single mother has greatly contributed to the bond that we share.

My mom comes from a destitute background. Therefore, nothing has ever come easy for her. My mom also had me while she was young, so she developed a great sense of autonomy. She was working long hours, living on her own, trying to keep food in the house and find sitters for me. She has never asked for help from anyone. She would rather work doubles than ask anything from anyone. I admire her strength a lot. She has been toiling to support me for as long as I can remember. We moved many times throughout my life. I have lived in Herkimer, Utica, Syracuse, Little Falls, Broadalbin, Duaneburg, and Amsterdam. I do not remember much about my houses. Some memories that stick out are: in one apartment, in Little Falls, I had a little purple three wheeler, and my mom would let me ride it around the whole apartment. For a treat, my mom would buy me Smart Food popcorn, and we would watch scary movies all night! We really enjoyed and looked forward to our quality time together. She has married twice since I

was born. Both marriages ended because both men could not handle the fact that she put me before anything else. She has put me before anyone for as long as I can remember. Then, it was the two of us alone again, and she was left to support us on her own. It did not take her long to be independent after each divorce. All of the effort that she has put in has helped us live comfortably and grow together as a team.

Overcoming multiple obstacles has made our relationship not only strong, but also unbreakable. My mom has been transcending throughout her whole life for the better, not only for herself, but for me too. My mom was the only person in her family to graduate from high school. Since she did not have a lot of money, going back to school to further her education was out of the question. Therefore, she started at low paying jobs and worked her way up. She got a job in the Duquesne school district working in the cafeteria. She was the "cool lunch lady." I was very proud of that because I had THE cool mom. She was offered a job later on as a teacher's aide, and she is presently doing that today. In addition, she is going back to school so she can move up in her career even more! I am so proud of her for doing all of this on her own, for her own reasons, for once. It is nice to see her live for herself and not only me. She recently said to me, "Alyssa, I want to go back to school and be like you!" For her to say that to me, well, it made me so proud. All of my life I have looked up to her, so for her to look up to me, well, that is something. I owe my mom much gratitude for all she has done for me. Not only is she my mother, but she is my best friend as well. She always provides solace in a time of need, and I would like to think that I

do the same for her. When no one else is there to talk to and "hang out" with. I know who to turn to. My hero.

Every time a boyfriend breaks up with me or something goes wrong, she picks up the broken pieces. I can remember when my first love, my first boyfriend broke up with me: I was devastated! I thought the world was at its end; I would never find anyone again. She took me shopping, wiped the tears falling from my eyes, and mended my first broken heart. Her words are still in my memory, "Lyss, I am not going to lie to you and tell you that you will be over it tomorrow, it is going to take time. Everything happens for a reason, and you learn something from each break up you have; it will only make you stronger." She was right, as usual. I later on gave those exact words to any of my girlfriends that came to me about a break up. They told me that I was right. I responded with a smile on my face, "No, my mom was." I enjoy our time together still, even more so as the years go on, and I would not trade it for the world.

If it were not for all of the hard times that we endured, my mom and I would not have been able to develop the rapport we now share. I am very lucky to have been able to witness the obstacles that I have. For I am very appreciative and do not take anything for granted. "Anything that is worth it, is worth working for": the words of my best friend. My mom's mentality and ambition is amazing. Being a single mother for nineteen years, and working twelve-hour days, just to get by. My mom has come a long way. She truly is my hero, and my inspiration to strive to make a life for myself, so I hope one day I can take care of her. Now it is my turn to give to her!

The Truth in Goethe's Words

By: *Katherine Powers*

Tongues, Tongues

Decrepit Tongues

Moth dust puffs like chalk from lungs

Polluted lungs jammed with lint and shard,

Arteries lodged with whiskey and lard.

Paper thin skin, sodden veins,

Mucous marshes, bone crackling pain.

Still,

Those tongues, tongues

Unraveling tongues,

Win the trophy for most foul;

Foaming like rabid dogs in search of youth,

Withering like dried up poppies.

It appears Goethe spoke truth;

Perhaps, only children and birds know the ripe taste of fruit,

For the luxury of sweetness seems far from these old tongues.

Yet,

One elder smiles sweetly

As she reaches for the first piece of

honeydew in the

Styrofoam bowl.

Instantly, pursed, puckered lips reveal;

She too, has surrendered to old age.



The Earth Invasion

By: *Donyelle Dukes*

Let me tell you about the day my life changed, and the day my body was invaded by a metal object. I was 21. Two weeks prior to the shooting, I had just won a boxing match against a well known Golden Glove champion. Therefore, I was feeling extreme pride because I was the underdog in the fight. Well, little did I know, my great feeling was going to turn into a feeling of great pain. I will never forget that day (as if it were yesterday). May 13, 2001 was the day my body sustained a bullet.

I went to a night club to celebrate my victory (which was far from easy) over the well known fighter. You see, not too many people knew of my talent in boxing which I learned when I was eight years old. At the age of 13, I fought in Lake Placid, where only the elite go, and I fought the four- time reigning champion. I lost the fight, but really, I didn't. It was a great experience to fight for the whole Adirondack New York. I loved it. I remember when I went to Canada numerous times and fought. Between ages of eight to thirteen, I fought a total of 45 times and won 38 out of the 45. Some matches would be so close in the fight that the hometown fighter would get the win. Overall to this date, I have a total of 60 plus victories, so I'm very qualified and well known in the boxing world.

So now party time has come, and I go out all alone (that's how I came in this world). I know a lot of people, so I know I'll see familiar faces. I was in this club in Troy, NY which is the local hot spot. Well, I would find

out just how hot it was. Once in the club, I was greeted by everybody, hand shakes from guys and hugs from females. I'm feeling the atmosphere, and everyone is having a good time except these wannabee gangsters standing over in the corner with their lost, sickly, mean faces. I just walked by, with my usual swagger, smiling and greeting people with a happy aura while on my way to the bar because I'm ready to drink like a fish. I just turned 21 years old, but that never stopped me any other time from getting a drink at a bar. After about 10 drinks, I'm feeling it. I spent about 60 dollars myself, and other people brought me drinks, too.

Now, I'm on the dance floor, drinking and dancing, surrounded by all females (shaking what our mama gave us). Until, out of nowhere comes this guy, standing in front of my face with dark gloomy big eyes staring inches from me into my eyes. When I said face-to-face, I meant close to enough to kiss. I'm about to lose it. "Who is this guy?" I'm thinking. Does he know I will knock his head off? My hands are considered lethal weapons. My mind slowed down, my boxing professionalism kicked in, and the discipline I was taught followed. I just started pushing against his face/forehead with mine because this guy is too close for comfort. Just then a club bouncer separated us, and the kid walks off into the crowd.

I started to dance again when two or three minutes went by. All the sudden a popping noise occurs. The noise is not that loud but loud enough to be heard over the music. I heard the pop also, and also felt something like a cold wind breeze go through me. I turned around to look and didn't see anyone, but the shooter was moving too low to the ground for me to see

him. He had put the gun to my upper buttocks area and pulled the trigger close range, so close that my leather coat was melted where the bullet hole was. He just kept moving by in a crouched position and ran in the opposite direction. The crowd parted into two. Half the people going left, the same direction as the shooter, and the other half going to the right with me. Just imagine, it was the perfect sequence as if the people practiced this before. But I found out prior to my event, a week earlier, there was a shooting in front of the same club. I walked quickly with the crowd, looking for one of my friends whom I had seen earlier that night to ask him if I was lucky, or maybe it was all my grandmothers' prayers that saved me, from being in a wheelchair from spinal cord damage, which could've occurred from the single 25 semi-automatic bullet. The bullet bounced off both sides of my pelvis and through my groin area. I still have torn tissue and the scars to go with it. Worst of all, are, not just the memories, but the fact I carry that punk's bullet inside me forever.

Stay Here

By: *Kia Fischer*

Stay here for just awhile and learn how to be alive
Fleeing from the dances of boredom that we already know
Find that simple dream for which to continuously strive

The emotions can lift to the heavens or fall short in a dive
Only time can tell which one will really be the star of the show
Stay here for just awhile and learn how to be alive

Why do we allow everyone to sit before us and contrive
The way we ought to be and how we ought to grow
Find that simple dream for which to continuously strive

Sit and see how a little ingenuity can become a safe hive
From the loneliness that is never distracted from the path we follow
Stay here for just awhile and learn how to be alive

The only way to a solution means that it's important to derive
That it's all a journey through which all must eventually flow
Find that simple dream for which to continuously strive

So when you look back from the richness of life at ninety-five
And at how the tides of history break waves as they come and go
Stay here for just awhile and learn how to be alive
Find that simple dream for which to continuously strive

Serenity Now

By: *Rebecca Braungard*

When in need of some peace to collect my thoughts, I visit the field from my childhood in Plainfield, Massachusetts. We own over sixty acres of land covering a wooded hillside in the country. The smooth field where I have often played sits atop that same hill surrounded by a plethora of wild plants and trees. Stretching over a hundred acres, the field offers me comforting serenity whenever I visit.

To gain entrance to the field, I must first overcome the obstacles of steep hills and natural stone bridges scattered along the pathway. After climbing past an old campsite, over a trickling stream, and through a blueberry patch, the narrow path breaks free of the brush in a small opening. As the fresh sunlight blinds me, I can look back toward the entrance leading into the woods and see how it contrasts with the leafy branches, like a dark rabbit hole on the side of an embankment. At the edge of the field, stand two aging apple trees. The canopies of these trees provide unbiased shelter against the hot sun or the icy rain, while their apples provide equal nourishment to the hungry hiker and the weary child.

The passing years have not eroded the old stone wall that lines the field on its southern and western borders. A short dirt road runs along the northern border and bisects the longer road on the east. Tall pine trees surround the entire field like guardians, stretching out their arms in a protective

gesture. They shade it as though the field is a special secret that only the worthy few may enter through a hidden portal. Each visit to the field is like a voyage to another world. Aside from the peaceful nature of its setting, I never know what to expect upon my arrival. The field goes through different stages of upkeep from year to year and season to season. Some times in the summer, the smell of freshly mowed grass lingers in the breeze, and the urge to run and frolic like Maria does in *The Sound of Music*, twirling around on an Austrian mountaintop, is irresistible. Other times, usually in late autumn, the grass grows longer, and the field transforms into a sea of waves with the tall grass blowing in the wind and rolling over its hills.

The privacy of the field allows for other marvels of nature to be witnessed as well. Amidst the morning dew, I can quietly observe a young deer tentatively crossing the wide open space. The sky high above the field appears close and forms a sphere around the entire hill. On a clear night, the renegade stars break free from their heavenly chains and dive to their freedom on the earth below. In the spring, hundreds of milkweed plants grow near the tree line. On the waist high stalks, sprout pods filled with the silky white seeds that float through the air like feathers. They add an image of elegant decoration to the permanently frozen wave of the green field. The milkweed plants are only possible because the field remains untouched by civilization. I have never seen them grow anywhere else, and the field will continue to keep them hidden through the tests of time.

At dusk, the field's majesty reaches new heights. In the northwest corner of the field stands the solitary structure of an old sheep barn. Time

has stripped away all but its basic frame, leaving only the support beams, a rusted tin roof, and uneven floor boards. Despite all of this, the barn is the field's most redeeming quality because it faces west. I like to climb to the top of the barn at dusk and watch the sunset in complete silence. At that moment, I feel on top of the world, and I can finally collect my thoughts in peace. The serenity of this place allows me to release my stress, as I let the field's waves of nature wash over me.

Following Your Passing

By: *Katherine Powers*

First, I stripped the walls of the faded faces who kept you company,
threw out the stale peppermints you
kept around incase "the children from the lake" stopped by, and turned
your television to black and white. The next hour,
your bird clock struck eleven and the Blue Jay sounded his whistly bell
while I gathered your tea bags and cross-word puzzles.

Later, I discovered three singles in a note to my son;
"Buy an ice cream cone kiddo." Last week,
I postponed our visit as you sat in silence
anticipating a kiss and the warmth of sticky fingers 'round your neck.

On Writing

By: *Tricia Hardy*

Writing has always been a difficult hurdle for me to jump. After the untimely death of my mother, I realized using memories and emotions lessens that obstacle.

Vera, my mother, died when I was 14 years old. I was unable to express my grief after her death. Locked deep inside me were my emotions; no one could touch them. A year after Vera's death, my Aunt suggested that I write about my mom's life. How could I write about my mom when I had only known her for 14 short years? My aunt and my grandmother told me they would help fill in the blanks. They handed me a gift, a pen and notepad. As I opened it, I noticed the first few pages were cluttered with words, and I realized that this was a more abundant gift than I first perceived. Reading my aunt's memories of her sister and my grandmother's memories of her eldest daughter inspired me to review my 14 years with my mom. I took the notepad, the pen, and the memories, and I started to write, write about my mom!

As I started writing, I discovered that I was a lot like her. Her fears were my fears; her dreams were my dreams; her likes and dislikes were my likes and dislikes. I was amazed at her strength and bravery, having experienced two deaths in her lifetime. Again, I noticed the parallel between our lives: my mom had lost her younger brother, when he was two months old,

and her husband , my dad, to a tragic accident. With my mom's sudden death, I had lost both my parents.

After writing my mom's biography, I was able to set free those emotions I had locked inside of me for two years. I cried. I laughed. I smiled. I got angry. I felt loved. Tranquilly, I put my mom to rest.

Mrithtuu

By: *Josh M. Bauscher*

The morning is bare.
It frames a picture,
Cold, grey, aloof;
I no longer care.
Do not think.
It hurts to breathe.
Worse, I barely exist,
But it hurts to be
A semblance of hope
Whom she will never believe.

My day inevitably persists,
And I prepare for school
Like a robot
With clenched fists.
Don't think.
Her eyes, her touch, her kiss.
.his face, his hands, his lips.

A cold bowl of oatmeal
And milk raises toast
To jealous whims and
A half-naked ghost,
To loving friends and
Those who hurt us the most,
To happy ends and
Having once been so close.

It's a long drive to school.
I've gone, slowly, so many times before,
But today every painful thought of her
Closes the gap between the pedal and the floor.
The leather wheel is tightly gripped
By my shaking fingertips.
The road is curving;
I take no notice.
The world is blurring,
Lord, hold me closest.
My eyes are open,
But all I see is you,
And as the wheels begin to scream
I know that today I am not going
To school.

Frustrations of the Mediocre Writer

By: *Stephanie Sivaslian*

Writing an essay is difficult. Writing a specific type of essay for a college instructor is an even greater challenge. There are numerous distractions and of course the infamous writers block, usually attributed to a lack of topic. What a dilemma this can be. How does one cope? How does one achieve the desired purpose? How does one write? These are my issues.

One major distraction is noise. The television, in particular, is definitely a distraction, which is currently tuned to “The Simpson’s.” The melodic tune of the theme song recites over and over in my mind. It’s hard to look away as Homer runs over to Bart with his hands around his throat; Bart’s eyes pop out of his head along with his pink tongue. A Covergirl commercial then comes on and is now my opportunity to refocus on my essay. I turn the television off and it does so with a crackle.

Just when I thought noise had departed, the heater clicks on with a roar. The fan blowing the soothing warm air clatters like an airplane flying too close. My white poodle and longhaired chihuahua bark with their small tones each time the heater clicks on. The yelping, more so than actual barks, rings in my head like a bell. I need to be more secluded. I walked down the short hallway to the bathroom. I shut the door and lock it behind me. The bathroom is all white, very crisp and clean feeling. It reminds me almost of a sterilized laboratory. It’s small though like an individual cell of a

penitentiary. The temporary isolation is quiet and a much-yearned peacefulness embodies me. With distractions now a thing of the past, I should be able to write, or one would think.

The silence is a still noise, almost deafening if you will. With it, my entire mind goes blank, as my lined paper was. As I try to write, I begin to grind my teeth. The scrapping sound resonates to my head. The tension of attempting to write now causes me to sweat. The salty drops begin sliding down my forehead. I can feel my armpits grow moist. It feels wet like a dew on the grass on an early fall morning. My drive to be a decent writer is causing me to become very high-strung. I think to myself, "Just calm down", and I rise to turn on the copper faucet. I need to relax. The water is cold, so cold in fact that it stings my hands as I fill them up. I splash my face with the freezing water and it hits me like millions of tiny needles. I turn the faucet off and it creaks like an old wooden door. I patted my face dry with the soft pink, terrycloth towel that provides me with a bit of comfort. Now back to writing, or lack-there-of. As I attempt to think of a topic, I hear a drip. Drip, drip, and drop. This of course will not do.

I move to the bedroom in hopes of finally finding no physical distractions. The dogs are still attempting to intimidate the clicking heater. I enter the bedroom and once again lock the door behind me. Finally with no diversions, I am left with another question, what can I write about? The issue of a lack of topic floods my head like Hurricane Katrina. Words become prevalent but make no real sense. In an attempt to comprehend my own thoughts, I close my eyes and visualize the

words. The letters flutter in front of my eyes like butterflies. They appear in the form of small scrabble pieces rather than insects. The mutated creatures begin to smashup. They hit with such force, like two trains colliding head on, causing me to possess a headache like no other before. The pain from this makes it impossible to think, let alone write. A topic is all I need and just one to start. The scrabble letters move together now forming words, the words transforming to ideas, then possible ideas for topics. They all seem so juvenile and uninteresting: birds, flying, planes, crashing, dying. These are not the works of a college level writer in my opinion.

I pick up my pen and press it hard onto the white lined pad still with my eyes closed as if I'm in a trance of some kind. I tell myself to open my eyes and write. The paper soaks in the black ink like a sponge causing a dime-sized area of messiness. I abruptly open my eyes to see this, and quickly walk to the living room to retrieve the yellow colored box of Kleenex. When I return with the fistfuls of soft Kleenex, I glance down at the lined pad. Suddenly, I realize, my actions and writers block are a descriptive essay in itself. A relief comes over my entire body as I feel I've overcome this writer's block. I hurriedly begin to write as to not leave out any of the tremendous details that make up my story; these are my thoughts, these are my actions, and this is my essay.

An Improbable Teacher

By: *Carrie Smith*

My 10th grade English teacher, Ms. Thibedeau, with her long nails and flowing bohemian skirts taught me what iambic pentameter is and a bit of an appreciation for Shakespeare. Mr. Carr, my driving instructor, (that really was his name) taught me to signal first, and then brake. Although these lessons have stayed with me for a lifetime, nothing compares to the lessons that I learned at Double “H” from my most improbable teacher, Abbey.

It was my first summer at camp in 1998, and I had heard a lot about this “magic” at camp throughout orientation and the first half of the summer. But honestly I wasn’t feeling it yet; all I was feeling was tired and emotionally drained. I was working 16 hour days. My white staff t-shirt looked like a Jackson Pollock canvas, with a splattering of stains, and I wasn’t sure of their origin. I wanted to be back in the comforts of home, eating corn on the cob and smelling the sweet salt air of the Atlantic Ocean. My perspective all changed when Abbey came into the Fox cabin during the fifth session. Since the campers were critically ill, the counselors receive a profile on the each of the campers beforehand to get pertinent medical information. I don’t remember what the profile said about Abbey; however, I do remember being shocked when I first met her.

To describe Abbey physically will not do any true justice for her soul and spirit. Abbey was about four feet tall and when she walked she was very

hunched over and supported herself by placing her hands on her knees resembling an old lady or Quasimodo, more than a 12 year old little girl. Abbey relied on a red glittering mini scooter, complete with a piercing high pitched horn, to get around. Abbey's joints were malformed. Her body could not metabolize a specific lipid, so it left deposits of tissue all through out her body, including her brain. The deposits caused severe mental delays and the inability at times to remember things or engage in conversation. Abbey couldn't see very well because of cataracts, so the expression on her face mimicked a porcelain doll, blank and rigid. When Abbey did smile or laugh though, it was as sweet as the first cone of cookie dough ice cream of the summer. While down at the barn, Abbey would often explode into a fit of giggles just from the mere mention of the word "poop."

In a matter of hours, Abbey had me wrapped around her little finger and she was wrapped around my heart. I have many memories from that week with Abbey. Abbey pretended to be Peter Pan on the ropes course; she stirred the chocolate chip cookie batter; she rode her scooter on rabbit speed never the required turtle speed inside, and she sang "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" in the talent show.

When Abbey appeared on stage the last night at camp, friends from the cabin, each dressed in a different color, formed a human rainbow behind Abbey who was dressed in a costume of a sky blue dress and sparkling red ruby slippers which she chose. All of Abbey's physical and mental disabilities disappeared during the song. For too brief a moment the entire audience, along with Abbey, were transported somewhere over the rainbow, where anything

was possible. I watched with tears in my eyes and joy in my heart, like a proud parent. Abbey sang with the poise of a ballerina dancer and the vibrato of an accomplished opera singer. The entire audience, even the youngest campers were hushed in awe, until the conclusion when they erupted in a deafening applause that could challenge any NASA shuttle's takeoff.

Over the years I have had many parents thank me, the counselor, for impacting their child's life. However, that week Abbey was the teacher. In a matter of one week Abbey taught me about unconditional love of yourself and others. When I heard about Abbey passing away, I cried. I cried for the loss of an innocent spirit that touched everyone she met. I cried for the people that never got to meet Abbey, and I thank Abbey for making me a better person. Prior to meeting Abbey, I took so much for granted. I didn't appreciate how fortunate I was, and I didn't allow myself to enjoy the moments of life that, like the morning dew, are gone suddenly and swiftly. From Abbey I learned to never estimate the power of any human being to make a positive impact in the world despite mental or physical challenges. I know that Abbey is now somewhere over the rainbow playing, smiling, and giggling. Maybe someday I will be lucky enough to join her. Until then, I will continue to teach Abbey's lessons about life – how to accept yourself and others completely despite our imperfections and to never take for granted the beauty of pure joy. Abbey was perfectly imperfect, and she was the best teacher I ever had.

World of Loneliness

By: *Livina Hudson*

As a child growing up in Ghana, I didn't know what life was all about. Until I was 16, I thought life was just going to school, coming home to eat, and sleeping because my parents were taking care of the bills. I didn't have to care about anything else, but school. Today, however, my life has changed because of a different school experience.

When I was in Ghana and in junior high, teachers were very strict and students were smart. However, I was not one of the smartest. I was scared to speak in class and too embarrassed to answer or ask any questions. The teacher would be so upset if I answered any question wrong, and students would laugh. What made things worse was that I didn't get any encouragement from my teachers. They rather looked at me and said that I would not make it in life if I was not smart. The teachers also said that the world is all about being smart, and that's how the system works. It was really hard for me, and I cried everyday. I was helpless and didn't know what to do.

My life was miserable. I didn't have any friends to talk to or have fun with. I began to think I would not go anywhere in this world that seemed only for smart people. I was living in fear. I believed everything will turn out perfect for those who are smart. I separated myself from everyone, both in school and at home.

I tried to study hard to pass my entrance exams to high school. While I was waiting for my results to go to high school, I was scared I wasn't

going to pass, so I was praying to God to help me pass. I did pass and was able to attend high school. I was happy somehow, one way or the other.

My fear grew more because I knew I would be meeting very smart students in high school. Teachers in high school didn't care much about those students who needed help in the areas they had troubles with. I thought it was going to be different from junior high, but nothing changed. Things were still the same as junior high. There was no student and teacher interaction, and if I asked too many questions, it gave the impression that I was not smart, so I had to keep what I didn't understand to myself and let it go. I couldn't ask any of the students to help me get what the teacher was saying because they would ask why I didn't understand. Wasn't I paying attention? Meanwhile, there were a lot of students who couldn't get the teaching, but then no one came out to say anything. Fear, anger, and pain were what I was facing every day. I never mentioned this to my mom, but she realized some thing was bothering me. She asked if every thing was ok with me at school, and that if I didn't like my school or my teachers, she would change my school. I said to myself it doesn't make any difference. That is how the system works. Don't you get it? It doesn't matter which school I go to or what kind of teachers I might want to have to teach me, they are all the same.

My mother was getting worried about the whole situation of my being quiet all the time, but her love for me kept me going. I encouraged myself not to be in fear anymore. I began not to care about how many mistakes I would make or how many students would laugh at me. I started

living in my own world, but I was not rebellious. That is the good part. I was relaxed in class and around students. I didn't care if I answered any questions wrong if the teacher asked me. Deep down I was hurting. I said to myself who cares if I made mistakes? The world is for the smart people, anyway, and I am not smart, so I will just deal with it. But my mother told me she cared and that I should let her know whatever I wanted to do.

I completed high school in December 2000. In January 2001, my mother told me that my sister, Ivy, and I would be traveling to the U.S in February, and Abigail my other sister would be going to London. I asked why. She said my father and she made a decision that Abigail and Ivy and I after completing high school would have to make a change of environment and that is to travel to a different country and attend college. Again, I asked why. She told me we needed it because there were no jobs after college, so there was no way she would let us spend another second in Ghana. She said the world has so much to offer us and that we need to take that chance. I asked her, "So why did you and Daddy take so long? Why didn't you let us attend high school in the U.S?"

She said that it takes time for the visa to get done. I said, "Mom, so all this while you and Daddy have been planning this?" And she said, "Yes."

I said, "Hmm, Mom, how come you never told us?"

She smiled and said, "Your father and I didn't want to disappoint you girls in case the visa didn't work out."

I asked, "Mom, did you and Daddy pay a lot of money for the visa?"

Mom said, "Yes, we did pay a lot of money. That is how much sacri-

fice we made.” I smiled and hugged her, and she said, “ I knew you hated it in school.”

That is the reason she never stressed me out with my report card, I said to myself. All this while mom knew I was suffering in school. I came to the U.S with my sister Ivy in 2001. We stayed with my dad in New York City. Things didn’t start out right for us. Ivy signed up to go to Job Corps in 2002, and I signed up in 2003. I attended Delaware Valley Job Corps in Calicoon, New York. I was so nervous and very scared. I actually made friends with all races. I could not believe I had students from all walks of life to become my friends.

The teachers were very caring, and they are ready to answer questions. I had to take a test to see the area I needed help. I knew I wasn’t going to do well. I was so used to whatever teachers said to me. But these teachers told us not to worry about the grades. We are taking the test to focus on an area we are weak in. I was surprised. They are not going to be upset. Students are not going to laugh if I didn’t score high? I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. So education could be that fun. Teachers are ready to accommodate every student and answer their questions; what a different world! This is so much unlike back home where the whole continent will know your grade and make you feel like the world is coming to an end. From that very moment my life was changed.

I have gained some confidence, and also, I realize it doesn’t matter how many mistakes I make. I can always become who I want to become in life if I don’t give up on me. I had never had anyone tell me I could make it.

Those teachers told me I was smart made me feel I was so very important. It means a lot to me.

My fear and nervousness went down, and my world of lonesomeness began to decrease. I am still struggling with my past educational experience, but I know things are different and better now. I am taking greater educational risks now. I am in college and can do the work even though sometimes it is hard for me to understand the teachers. I am just smart as others and can see a great future and education in it.

Two Pink Lines

By: *Jennifer Pushee*

Wednesday morning, 5 a.m. I'm lying in bed

Rob's in the bathroom, razor in hand,

Shaving cream smeared

"Just take it" he says

Jaw opened wide

"What could it hurt?"

I roll my eyes and turn to the side

3 days late

No big deal

I start thinking to myself, maybe they didn't get it all

Maybe the cancer spread, what else could it be?

"Don't you want to know for sure?"

I hear Rob's voice in the distance,

as if he heard my thoughts

"Alright" I say

"But its a waste of time"

3 days late

No big deal

And now he's in the shower

I'm standing over the sink,

Looking at a blur of faded bright pink

"Well?" I hear him say

"This one's broken"

"It can't be right, I can't be, they all said I would

never..."

He pops his head out,

And a tear falls from my cheek

Two bright pink lines stare back at me

Positive.

The Freedom Run

By: *Zachary S. Reiff*

It was a Sunday morning, I was up with the sunrise. I sat at the kitchen table and watched the morning come. Like every Sunday morning this was my time to escape, it was time to go for a run. I had been running for over a month, loving the feeling it gave me. The feel of the cool breeze upon my face, and the fluid movement of my muscles as I took each step.

It was 8am; I laced up my sneakers and walked to my front door. The morning seemed heavy, it was dreary, and yet the sun still shined. My eyes still hung low, and the breeze had drawn dull. I stretched slowly each muscle, as I tuned my iPod to that special playlist. I adjusted my watch, took one deep breath and began my journey.

Each step got me farther from home, and yet each drove me closer to freedom. As I took in the surroundings of this ghostly town, I felt a sense of serenity. There I was, running through yesterday's city, with eyes wide, as time stood still. I passed all the usual places, and saw all the usual people. I passed Starshine as she worked the corner, and Crazy Maybelle with her shopping cart of cans. This was my city, and as my ears heard Dylan singing "Blowin' in the Wind," I was floating in the breeze. As I reached my halfway point, I noticed in the distance, what would serve to be the ultimate test of character.

I approached the next street, and I could see ahead of me two men and two women in a soldier's stance. I wasn't sure right away what they were doing, but could recognize the knot beginning to form in my stomach. As I

approached I knew that something wasn't right, "Eve of Destruction" began to blare out of my earphones, and I noticed one of the men, bending his attention my way. I ran with my head down. I watched my feet advance me closer and closer, and it became slow motion. The music in my ears drew silent. "Hey, you?" The world stopped. Everything around me faded to black. I was a long way from home.

As time stood still, he spoke again. What he said didn't register right away. I felt my mind struggle to attain his words, but then it hit me. Like bullet's bark the words came clear, "How's it feel to be alive?" I was paralyzed. I realized he was yielding a sign: "Abortion=Murdering Jesus' Children." All became clear like a sudden rush to my brain, for the decision wasn't hard at all. "What," I replied, "What did you say?" As he began to repeat himself, I felt my eyes begin to stray towards the other protesters. They were heckling a group of young women walking by. I felt violated. I looked back at him and fired off the only words I could muster, "Fuck You." That was to be the only thing I would say to him. It's all I needed to say. He was speechless. My words cut like a knife. In those two words, I gave justice for every woman that ever had to suffer such hateful torment. In those words I gave myself the freedom to breathe. In those words was my heart, and the courage to stand up for my beliefs. Then I went home.

As I sat on my bed and peeled off my shoes, I began to feel safe again. I looked back at what happened and smiled. I knew that this day was unlike any other day for I had become a voice in the world. I was presented a choice: to be silenced or to stand up. I chose to stand up, and now I'm going to run with it.

What Makes Me Thankful

By: *Tamara L. Greene*

I work in an environment of extremes. I am an Emergency Room Technician in a local hospital. The department consists of over 45 beds, upwards of 200 staff members, multiple dedicated providers, and visitors too numerous to count. The beds are divided into areas, 12 beds in the trauma area, 17 in the medical area, 5 less-urgent spots, 8 pediatric rooms, an eye, ear, nose, and throat room, a room to collect evidence for sexual assaults, and a room for pelvic exams. We are the regions only Level 1 trauma center. This means we not only serve patients from the capital region, we also receive the sickest and most injured of patients from hours away, some reach us by air via helicopter, some by private vehicle, some by ambulance. The staff here is witness everyday to the tragedies that nightmares are made of. We are forced to share news that will tear apart a family, information that will change someone's world forever, and grief that makes our own hearts ache, brings tears to our eyes, and makes us go home and tell our own families how very much we love them.

As I think about the assaults on my senses, I realize there are many. I see so much – blood, tears, and sometimes even sweat. I see the frantic flash of emergency lights as the slice through the night. I see the rhythm of the cardiac monitor slow, and then stop, as a soul slips quietly away. Other times I watch a the people crowd around the bed, each working as feverishly

as they know how to save someone else's loved one who is leaving too soon. Othertimes I see a Mom, rocking her child, tears silently falling, as she wishes for one more good night kiss, one more sticky fingerprint on the window, one more snack before dinner- praying this nightmare would end, all the time knowing it won't. These are the times I quietly slip away leaving her to grieve in peace, to shed some tears of my own. Other times I see the smiles as they hear "good news, nothing is broken," "The CAT scan was negative," and "you are/are not pregnant."

The smells are perhaps the most powerful. Vomit, feces, blood, feet that haven't known clean socks in many weeks, diesel fumes from the ambulances and fire trucks, Chinese food or McDonald's someone snuck in, the breath, heavy with alcohol, the infected smell of strep throat, the down-draft from the helicopter which brings with the distinct smell of it's fuel. I smell the unmistakable smell of death, as it creeps and lurks in the hallways. I smell fear, stark, bare, in its' most primal form.

Sounds surround me. Radios, pagers, overhead announcements, alarms, call bells, sighs, sniffles, voices that shout, whisper, and sometimes laugh. I hear shuffling feet, "thanks for everything" and "thanks for nothing," children playing, the feet in the jammies on the tiled floor. I hear the rotors on the helicopter as it pierces the air, ambulance sirens as the approach, the once-heard-never-forgotten wail of a parent finding out their child has left them here on Earth. The noises continue around me, as I work through them. One patient at a time, one brother, sister, father, mother, lover, friend, child at a time.

Saving Seats

By: *Brittany Sener*

Where does this line go? To me, it seems nowhere.

Do you have that same notion? Why can't you

believe? Or even think... think about

yourself and five years where you'll be.

I bet here. Just like him.

I'm going. I think I'm already gone.

Maybe I'll visit you one day. I'll probably choke

and see him in you. You already are him.

I say dig yourself out while you still

can. I did. Wasn't easy, but I

tend to manage.

I'm better now. Realize what I've done to

myself, yet don't regret much.

You're enthralled in yourself. The more of them,

the better.

I'll sit here for the next three years hoping

you'll see something. Anything. Smell

the coffee to get rid of the

perfume in the air. You might be shocked.

You can join me if the day comes.

I promise, I'll wait.

The Big Blue Shoes

By: *Tara S. Harmon*

As a child growing up in the late sixties and early seventies in a house with seven children, you had no time to be picky about what you had to wear and what designer's name was on it. Nonetheless, I was very particular about the way I looked and how my clothes made me feel. My hair and my clothes were always pressed and my sneakers always matched what I was wearing. Those were just a few habits that were picked up from my mother. She made sure when we left the house, we looked our best. Given her standards, I was really puzzled as to why she one day decided to come home with those big blue shoes.

There was the box--big and blue with white stripes and the word "Jox" written on it. I was embarrassed; the first thing that came out of my mouth was, "I am not going to where those things." What would people think if they saw me walking down the street or in the hallway with these shoes on? I knew that I would be the laughing stock of the middle school. Who wouldn't laugh at someone wearing big blue shoes? Not only were these things big and blue, they also had a big white toe. The first thing you would see, even before me, was a big white toe. They also had big white stripes and the word "Jox" written on the side and the back of the shoe. I was so humiliated because she made me wear those shoes every day of the week. These shoes were a far cry from the Converse "Chuck Taylor's" I had always

been used to my father buying me. Maybe he should have taken her shopping since he knew what I liked to wear.

Wearing those shoes was like wearing Ronald McDonald shoes. They felt and looked like they were big and floppy. They basically made me feel like I was walking around like a clown. I felt like a celebrity in the worst way. These shoes brought so much attention to me. People were pointing at them and making bad jokes. Everything you could think of, they did. Life for me at eleven years of age was ruined as far as I was concerned. I felt like an outcast. Even though we were not poor, having to wear these shoes made me feel that way. No one wanted to be around me because of the big blue shoes. Wearing those shoes made me feel like I had a disease. Making the choice to buy the shoes, I felt that because of this my mother was the worse person on earth. She made me wear those shoes--no "if, ands, or buts" about it. My mother although very wise and stern, she was not always aware. I was determined to rid myself of these shoes one way or another. That's when I decided to do what I had to do. I decided to make them into something she did not like

Knowing my mother was particular about how we looked when we left the house, I knew that if I had a tear in my shoes or they were really marked up, she would not want me to wear them to school anymore. Let the changes begin. Everyday for at least two weeks I made some change to my shoe that made her look differently at them. I started with the white stripes first. I colored in each one with a different color. Next, it was on to the big white toe. I colored each one in with black ink. The word Jox on the

sneakers had multiple colors. Finally, I did the one I knew would get to her; I decided to slice the side of one of my shoes with a knife. I knew when she saw that a child of hers was going out in public with holes in her shoes that the shoes would be in the garbage; I was right. After school that day, she told me that I needed to throw those beat up things in the garbage, my dad was bringing new ones home after work. Finally, I felt real again. I felt like I was able to breathe. The "big blue shoes" were gone and the Chuck Taylor's were back in my life. After that, my mother continued to buy my clothes and keep them nice and ironed, but never thought about buying me anymore shoes.

The Last Day of Summer

By: *Elizabeth Madigan*

It wasn't really her room. It was a bed room in her parent's house, but I never saw it that way. To a stranger its might have felt cramped. There were no windows and the bed was much bigger than any seventeen year old girl would ever really need. To a friend it was cloud nine and a place of freedom and innocent schemes. To anyone else it was a small bedroom in the basement of an average sized ranch. The bed and dresser seemed meant for each other and fit together like the two hands of soul mates. The carpet on the floor seemed more like glue, holding everything together and perfectly in place. The color of the walls seemed divine and impossible to picture in any other shade. The bright light shined filling every corner of the room without effort or worry.

After the accident it became the same to everyone. It transformed from a place of chance and dreams to a place of questions and devastation. The pictures on her wall transformed into hieroglyphics, undoubtedly permanent and as still as she would remain. She died on what became the last day of summer for all of us. All the hope and excitement that remained from the beginning of summer seemed to run away from our minds. It all went away and hid in a place that I still haven't found. The effect of the tragedy

compared to the Midis touch. That is, if you could imagine the entire story completely opposite, with every soul reached for being completely turned inside out.

As I walked into her room for what was the last time nothing stood out. There was a smell of change but not a positive change in anyway. Like the flowers taken out of a vase leaving behind the dingy water that the colors previously distracted. Her bed seemed to have been moved closer to the door. It too could have just been looking for a way out. The small light in the ceiling that once seems to compensate for the lack of windows seemed so regretfully dim. Pictures spewed across the bed like evidence of an investigation with the answers right in front of my eyes. There was nothing bright, nothing happy, no answers to be found.

As I began to see it as a stranger there seemed to be no room for anything or anyone. Like the corroded arteries of a heart there was no more room for love or chance like there was before. The bed and dresser that once seemed to fit like a puzzle seemed so completely out of place without ever being moved. The carpet that once promised to hold it all together lost all of its purpose. It looked closer to me than it ever had before. Nothing seemed real; it became a museum over night with the price of admission being complete heartbreak.

Fall

By: *Matti Bowen*

She is sitting on her bed filing her nails. The emery board is small and pink and just starting to wear down, in the single track her nails have followed. She puts it beside her on the bed, blowing the dust off of her last finger, and looks at the envelope again. It's large, and a kind of mustard yellow that makes her wonder why the word "manila" sounds so much like vanilla; an oddly pale word to describe something so un-white. She crawls across the rumpled bed and grabs it by one edge, cradling it on one palm, trying not to bend the paper. The address is already on it, but she's waited for the stamp until now. That will somehow make it official, she thinks, because once the stamp is on there's no way she can't mail it. That would be a waste of thirty-nine perfectly good cents. Eventually she will get up and hunt for a stamp among the piles of papers on her father's desk, before finding the roll of little American flags waving in the unseen breeze, framed against a sky too pale for her own October weather.

Later, she is outside and freshly showered, her damp hair piled high on her head, a loose strand clinging to her cheek. The envelope is with her too, a companion among the fallen leaves and wind and dusky, still early sky.

The neighbor's dog barks once and she looks over her shoulder giving him a little smile. He wags his tail and strains against the long black leash they have looped around a tree. She reaches the empty intersection but stops anyway, raising one hand to the post of the street sign and looking both ways. She goes straight, then turns down an avenue that will take her to main street and the coffee shop and eventually the post office. As she walks, she notices how quiet things are for a Saturday afternoon. There are almost no cars, so she steps from the sidewalk, and makes her way down the edge of the road, purely because she can. Once on Main Street, she steps onto the curb again and catches sight of herself in a shop window; her dark wet hair, small eyes, and of course the yellow envelope tucked under one arm.

In the coffee shop, it is crowded and noisy, and there is a boy behind the counter she has never seen. She smiles as he slides the small white plate across the counter and he smiles back, just the corner of his thin lips turning up in a kind of meaningless, automatic gesture. There is nowhere to sit, so she leans against one wall, bracing her foot behind her, and begins to eat. Suddenly she remembers a day last winter when she ran into a friend down town, bundled in his black wool coat and hat, carrying a white box, like the kind you'd put a sweater in, under one arm. She had been surprised to see him, walking down the sidewalk so far from his house in the middle of the night in late December. He had stopped to wish her Merry Christmas, but had kept walking, as if he had expected to see her all along. Her mind

goes blank, filling with the swirling white snow of that December night, as she tries to think of what his purpose could have been there and what her own had been for that matter; or if either was even important. She is startled back to the coffee shop by the loud sharp sound of the envelope slipping away and landing on one edge before flopping down softly to the floor. She bends to pick it up and survey the damage, wiping off the trace of grit from the floor on her knee. She realizes she isn't hungry and asks for a bag before heading back out. In the few minutes she was inside, the sky had grown lighter, and a kind of electricity has filled the air, tensing her skin and filling her head with a kind of hurried, whispered buzz.

She walks with a purpose now, toward the post office, breaking into a loose, easy run in the final block. She stops short, deciding whether to go inside or not. She decides against it and chooses the big, blue mailbox instead. Flapping down the front and laying the letter on the tray, she pauses, suddenly nervous about what this will mean once she lets go. She weighs her options, her mind whirring in a massive circle of possibilities, and lets the handle go. She hears the clatter of the metal and the soft swish of the falling envelope as it lands on the cushion of other letters, and marvels at the great effort something so simple takes. She is awestruck, really, of the pile of great importance that is inside that box. If every letter is as important as her own, then a virtual goldmine of thought is locked away in that blue box.

She is in the park now, sprawled out on the grass, flushed with an inexplicable exhilaration, and an odd sense of peace. There are even more leaves here than on the sidewalk. Scattered across the grass, are bright red and yellow scraps of autumn that you can see and touch. She can feel the dry leaves between her fingers without even touching them, the papery, dry texture ingrained somewhere in memory of her skin. There is a slight breeze, carrying a faintly sweet, familiar smell across her face and over her bent knees. Picking up the brown paper bag and resting it on her stomach, she thinks of the friend she saw last December. She pulls out half of her now cold breakfast and wonders where he is now, and smiles at the thought of him, that tall specter suddenly made solid as he approached through the falling snow.

On Removing a Sliver

(a children's poem)

By: *Katherine Powers*

My pick fingers pluck like tweezers

while a cringe as I pinch up your skin

If larger it would be much easier,

to pull out the wood- sharp and thin.

You are young, I can fool you with magic

I blow soap bubbles into your palm

Deeply I breath as I'm yanking,

Frantically urging your calm.



Strawberry Juice

By: *Rosemary Nelly Roberts*

I found you
in the kitchen
head back, eyes closed
half smile
juice still on your chin.

You had taken
the last strawberry
fragrant and ripe
savoring its flesh

Feeding
your senses
and soul with its
burst of life.

my mouth
found the red
droplets on you

Needing
to taste
the meaning of
the juice too

Inserting myself
into your
strawberry moment

you knew
I had saved
the last strawberry
for you.

The Singing Gardener

By: *Nancy Warrick*

I often spend time with my neighbor's child. She was recently adopted through the Albany County fostering program. The removal from her first home was a result of various abuses she encountered during her first nine months of life. She finds it difficult to communicate when she is frustrated. Together, we have used a tool that helps not only her but me as well. We sing our feelings and about activities of our time together.

On days when I can see that Arianna is being aggressive, I invite her into my back yard. This is usually a good spot because it's quiet. The yard is surrounded by flowers and vegetables. This creates a place of serenity, no disruptions and free of inhibitions. We usually start by picking through the vegetables. While singing, I ask what kind of day she had. She sings her response which is usually that she had a good day.

Sometimes, I can tell by this response that she is holding back and her body language indicates that something is still bothering her. I sing that I had a great day. However, the cat got sick, and I sing out a big yuck! Arianna giggles and sings that she wishes she had a baby brother because her

classmates have brothers and sisters and she doesn't have any. She sings she can't wait for the ice cream truck. I sing, "What are you going to get?"

She responds in song, "Dora the Explorer ice cream bar with bubble gum eyes."

I sing, "What are you working on in school?"

She sings, "I'm working on nap time and my alpheebits!" with emphasis on the "ee" in alphabets.

While this singing conversation is happening, we continue picking tomatoes and green peppers. When I see the basket is getting full and that Arianna is not acting as aggressive, I sing one last question, asking her if she would like to help make salad for dinner.

Arianna loves to help me in the kitchen as Mom and Dad do not let her do as much in the kitchen. As we prepare the dinner, we continue by talking of various things, usually questions from her about my cats or my fish. All of the sudden she breaks out in song that she is staying to have dinner with me and the cats. I suggest she will have to ask her parents. She calls home and sings that she is having dinner with me. Then she sings into the phone, "I'm not being silly, I'm singing!"

She then hands me the phone. I find myself explaining that we sing conversations and tell Dad it is okay for her to have dinner with me. I sing, "Thank you" and Arianna knows that it is okay to have dinner with me. She proceeds to giggle and dance at the same time. She pulls out her

step stool and declares that she is setting the table. We now have to make decisions.

I ask, “Do you want tomatoes in the salad or slices on the plate? Oh, and the green peppers, how do you want those cut, rings or strips? How about the salad dressing? What flavor do you want?”

I know not to ask any more questions because the look she is giving me indicates she is concerned for me because it is just a salad. So I opt to make green pepper rings instead of strips for the salad and put all the salad dressing bottles on the table and let her taste and choose her flavor.

We are now talking, instead of singing, which lets me know that she is feeling relaxed and not frustrated. As we talk over dinner, I ask if she has started reading in kindergarten. I realize as Arianna breaks out in song, she is changing the subject. She seems to be proficient at changing the subject. I try again, asking if she is able to play and have nap time.

Arianna responds, “Oh, yes, that’s the most ‘portant part of the day.” The quizzical look she gives and the seriousness of her response tells me she believes everyone has play and nap time. Don’t they?

I also realize how my own mood has improved, unknowingly relieving some stress, since we started this exercise. Additionally, the uninhibited laughter and innocence of this five-year-old child creates a joy for me. Perhaps hope for her and the future of her world.

When My Stars Were Black

By: *Josh M. Bauscher*

I am but
A thought,
And good if lost,
Not much.
I rally a cause;
My smile vain,
Should life my
Blood or veins strive vainly
To touch.

Woven 'midst
The musket smoke
And born a bullet true,
I was Freedom's banner
Bought in blood a mutineer;
I am red, I am white,
I am blue.
Flown as high as hope,
I stand vigil over children
Who cross their hearts to me.
Buried six-feet deep,
I consecrate a patriot
Who died a slave
To Liberty.

Seasons Change

By: *Jeffrey Hebert*

As the former Prime Minister of France, Georges Clemanecaeu so simply once put it, "Everything I know I have learned after I was thirty." For those approaching this seasoned age of thirty, there are sudden realizations of what our life will be like ahead. We come to a paradox where we try to erase those same lines of aging that we so desperately tried to engrave just a decade ago. As the sun sets on these days of long hair and empty pockets I await the morning of a new margin, and a new propriety.

One of my fondest memories as a child were road trips. But more than that were those trips with my father, just the two of us riding shotgun in the emerald green Plymouth station wagon with the flashy tape-player stereo and the faux wood paneling running up the sides. It's these times that are most memorable as a child—even if you only do it once.

Every year since time I can remember, my family and I would go to my father's annual company picnic at The Great Escape in Lake George, NY, held appropriately on Father's Day. With its big roller coasters, larger-than-life fairytale characters, and the tall cones of neon-colored cotton candy, it was in some respects the "Disney World of Upstate New York." Other than a week's vacation in Maine every August, this was in every respect, *our* Disney World.

One particular year, as spring slowly gave way to summer, came at a time when I was around ten or eleven years old. This also came at a time when my brothers and sister, who were older than I was, weren't hip to hanging out with their parents all day at amusement parks. Yet, as the summer began to blossom that particular year, the warmth and the sunshine were nowhere to be found.

All it did was rain that year and Father's Day was no exception. The cold, damp air and steady showers didn't discriminate—not even for holidays. I knew what this meant as my mother decided against going and I sat, staring out the front window at the car, the rain, tapping on its roof and the puddles surrounding its tires. But my father knew what this meant to me and, disregarding the weather, we went anyways—just the two of us.

Despite the rain we had a really fun time. We ate hot dogs and cheeseburgers and even ice-cream sandwiches. We rode all the rides that we could until well in the afternoon, as the day grew older, and the park was closing. We exited the park and headed for the car, with my ticket stub in one hand and my dad's big hand in the other.

The ride home was quiet. I don't remember much about what we talked about—if we even talked at all. But what I do remember was the warmth of the car's heater softly blowing on my cold, damp cheeks, and what it felt like to be alone with my dad, for one day to feel the calm and shelter a father gives to a child.

The car coasted down Columbia Street in Cohoes and onto Masten Avenue where we lived. Dad leaned over and nudged me from my sleep and said, "Wake up Sunshine. We're home."

These are the times I cherished most. When you were just a small piece of the much larger picture of the world and little mattered. I had that innocence of a child that I would later discover that I couldn't recover. But as we grow older our lives take on a whole new character and we remember these days, looking back, and we approach the transition where our roles as children take on a different meaning. It wasn't until eighteen years later did I fully appreciate *how* things would change.

As the summer gave way to fall in 2006, the Boston Red Sox were winding up the season with a few home games before the close of business for the year. My father had called me with news that he had scored a pair of tickets to a game—good seats down on the field. This was a rare treat for him and my mother and I were excited for them.

A few days after he called I was over at their house visiting with my mother when she asked me if I would go with my father to the game instead of her. I politely declined knowing what the tickets meant to her and my father, yet she insisted that she wasn't up to going and the ticket would go to waste if I didn't go. I felt bad about accepting my mother's ticket but she was persistent and insisted that she would go next year, so I accepted her offer.

That following Sunday I arrived at my parent's house where my father was waiting for me in the driveway with his coffee in hand and a pair of tickets tucked safely in his shirt pocket. I hopped up into my truck as he crawled into the passenger seat. We backed out of the driveway and headed for Boston.

It was a sunshine-filled day when we arrived just as the gates were opening to Fenway Park. We handed the attendant our tickets and headed for our seats, though not before I grabbed a pair of Fenway Franks and two large cups of ice-cold Boston Lager. We ate our hotdogs and drank our beer, and listened to the crack of Red Sox bats blasting baseballs and scoring runs. We cheered and we clapped from the first inning to the last out in the ninth.

It was at least a half-hour before we even got out of Boston. A backed up train and a long walk to the parking lot, though, gave us time to unwind all of our excitement from the game. When we finally reached the car at the terminal lot the sun had slowly begun to descend. My father hoisted himself in the car, stretched out his tired legs, and let out a sigh. I navigated my way from the lot to the Massachusetts Turnpike when I turned to him and asked him which way we had to go to get back to New York. “Go west, young man,” he said, and let out a chuckle.

We went west to New York and headed home. As I studied the directions he had written down I thought of directions of another kind—of the road that life was taking us now. As I grow older, so does my father. And it calls me back to my childhood when I was so dependent upon him and rested safe under the wing of his protection. Yet as I turn thirty-years old I am made aware of the responsibilities of adulthood and that some day I may need to take care of *him*.

“Go west, young man,” I recalled. I smiled and looked over at him. He was asleep.

The Snow-Globe

By: *Sarah Worden*

Today my mom asked me if she was on my shit list. I had to explain to her that I had just been busy lately, and that, no, she wasn't on my shit list. She said it was in my tone. She asked if I was coming over for Christmas dinner and if I was bringing anyone. I never bring anyone. She knew the answer but she asked anyhow. That's how she does it— she asks to measure the tone in my voice. I said yes, and then no, I wasn't bringing anyone.

Normally my mother and I don't ask each other direct questions. But it's come to that point. Normally I try not to talk to her as to not provoke any questions and she doesn't ask directly as to not seem too obviously concerned. I'm her only daughter and the youngest of three successful siblings, so she can sometimes be overbearing. Plus, I happened to have been so black a sheep in the family that they painted me neon green. It didn't help any that I got in trouble a lot when I was younger, but the least they could do is give me a chance. I'm not the baby in the family anymore; my oldest brother just had his first child.

Now, I work as the editor for a magazine called "Facing Time." I'm on deadline constantly and have to rush to relax. I worked hard to make it happen, though. I have a corner office the size of the winter cabin I've always

wanted and sometimes I catch myself daydreaming about the way the snow would fall when I'd go there in Novembers over my birthday. I always wanted to be able to have some place to go.

My parents and I live far away from each other, but close enough that the Christmas visits are mandatory. My father always says that I don't visit enough. I stop by their house for a few hour's worth of twenty questions, gift opening, and pop my head into my old bedroom to quickly recall how it used to be. I like the visits, even though they leave me feeling frustrated and angry at the world and myself most of the time. I think about going more often, but it's only a thought.

I like my old room better now, with the oversized bed and white, white all over. I like the writing desk and the Queen Victoria dresser I picked out when I was little but hated so much as I got older. I love it now, how the room is like a dollhouse. Everything in it is clean and exaggerated, overflowing with purity. There's a mirrored, sliding double door to the closet that makes the room even bigger and reflects the window on the other side of the room. Light bounces everywhere in the daytime, making it glow even brighter, like the sun through a cloud. The wallpaper my mother put up right after I moved out fifteen years ago has little blue flowers on it that sit against a textured background, and if you stare at them for a while, they seem to dance around on the wall and the room spins with little swirls of little blue snowflakes. Fifteen years ago, I didn't like being in that room. Now, it reminds me of how I've gotten out of there. I don't know how I feel about that.

This Christmas I have just two days to take the train to Boston and back to the office to get back to work on the magazine. I enjoy the train ride this time of year, with the snow freshly fallen on the trees and houses that I pass. I always catch an early train to make sure I get the fresh snow, so everything is covered and people are quiet. I listen to the sounds—first of the push of the train taking leave then of newspapers rustling and of people adjusting in their seats, and I begin to stare out the window. I wonder how many snowflakes have fallen to create so much snow.

I scheduled an extra day this year at my parents when my mom sent me a snow-globe for my birthday this past month. When I called to thank her, she couldn't finish telling me she loved me. The snow-globe had a little cabin in it that resembled the one I've always wanted. I look at it every day from my office chair. When my mother cleared the lump from her throat, she told me that no matter how far I get in life, it's where I end up.

I had a plan—one that would get me somewhere farther than snowflakes.

