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2008 Editors

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Burial

By: Kayla Straight

Burial by self-denial,
condemned to promised black.
Time long since forgotten
to a world rid of its soul.
Understanding lost indefinitely,
the empty-eyed quest left unfulfilled.
The living hell some barely comprehend.
Broken mirrors clinging to life,
heedlessly longing to reflect.
They fill this place she calls home.
Barren rooms, countless cries for help.
Echoes of a soul no one dares to hear.
Endless torture by acceptance.
Inescapable fear cruelly unveiled.
Self-worth so far forgotten,
the withered soul found alone.
Hidden to careless attention,
her eyes the only damned to see.
Escape forever improbable;
my burial by self-denial.

The negative lyrics that rappers put out through their music are so much more powerful than the positive messages put out by MCs in the past. One of the main culprits for this is videos. The images of half naked women, fast cars and fast lifestyles are equivalent to “poison” seeping into our children’s minds and hearts. The result of this “poison” is seen in the attitudes of young people who think the rappers of today are “cool.” They have been manipulated by the lie that rap is the vehicle, which will take them where they want to be and are blind to the reality that the music industry is a business. Record companies are in the business to make money and the bottom line is that the rap industry has many young people believing that they can say and do whatever feels good with no consequences to be paid for their actions. What these artists fail to realize is that they are role models, whether or not they want to be.

So far from glory hip hop has fallen, and I am in agreement with the artist Nas’ song “Hip Hop is Dead” because simply put it is; sadly, rap is alive and well.

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. While reviewing student work, we were often moved to laughter and tears, and this year in particular contains many pieces of personal reflection. 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. The personal essays and the creative pieces – poetry, fiction, and photography - reflect the range of experience, culture, and imagination of the Hudson Valley Community College student. The editors relish the opportunity to travel to and explore the territory each new issue stakes out.

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

Please submit your work to *Threads* electronically. Visit us at <http://threads.hvcc.edu> or email your work to threads@hvcc.edu

Table of Contents

TITLE	AUTHOR	PAGE
Shells	Stefan Matwijec	cover
Yero's Drum	Rosemary Roberts	6
A Garden of Stone	G. Colton Class	9
We Brethren Are	Stephanie Ford	13
Masks	Ben J. Thomas	22
How I Lost My Hair and Found Myself	Rachel K. Jantzi	23
I Am	Erin C. Altekruise	27
Diligent Grandmother	Daisi Liao	29
The Lesson Learned	Molly Hamlin	31
Without Guilt	Romey J. Romano	34
The Great Reliever	Amber Noble	37
Simple Pleasures	Amy Wyrshyhora	38
Insignificant Thoughts on Something Significant	Elizabeth Madden	41
Thoughts by the Lake	Tonia Susko	45
Observations	Angela Snyder	47

time, the reinstatement of the word came by the mouths of black rappers. Today's rap is about demoralizing women, as well as self: "flossing," meaning showing off what one possesses and to say it simply, indulging in life's excesses, especially unbridled sex, with no thought of the consequences. One of the groups that helped in the transition of hip hop to rap was the West Coast group "N.W.A." or "Niggas with Attitudes." N.W.A. brought the glorification of gang violence and drugs to the genre with one of their first hits "Niggaz for Life." The group's name along with the title of the song speak for themselves, do they not? The first time I heard this catastrophe I knew that the future mindsets of our children were in trouble because of the powerful impact that this genre has on young people's thinking. "N.W.A." opened the doors for many groups who would follow their bad example especially because of the money that "gangster rap" generated in the music industry.

Another example of how hip hop has devolved to rap music is through the degradation of women. In particular, Snoop Dog, also out of California, probably has played the biggest part, of late, in glorifying being a pimp. He made the old saying "pimps up, hoes down" an everyday phrase used among young people. Snoop Dog has even taken one of the most notorious pimps in the country, Don Magic Juan, and turned him into a star by having him appear in videos and on stage at award shows. 50 Cent, yet another rapper, is world renowned for his degrading lyrics directed towards women, as well. In his mega hit "P.I.M.P" where he glorifies being free to exploit women through prostitution and stripping he proudly describes his lecherous behavior in the nightclub.

teners to study and seek “knowledge of self” so they would not be overtaken by the power of racism and white supremacy. One of Tupac’s many hits “Brenda’s got a Baby” struck a chord when it addressed the problem of teenage pregnancy and the circumstances surrounding it.

When hip hop first came on the scene, it was not easily accessible to the world as rap is today. You could not listen to it on the radio or turn on the television and see it. There was only one way to enjoy those hard beats, which came from the disc jockey’s turntables and the sweet play on words which flowed from the “MC’s” or microphone controller’s mouth; you had to go to what we used to call a “jam.” A jam was a huge block party where the DJ would bring his turntables outside and MCs would get on the microphone and “freestyle.” Freestyle meant that either the DJ or someone in the crowd would throw a subject out to the MCs, and they would have to rhyme about that subject off the top of their heads. The MCs would have a “battle” to see who had the “freshest” or best skills, and at the end, the crowd would decide who won. That is how an MC won his “street credibility.” The jam was also a way for our community to meet with one another and discuss the issues that so plagued young people.

Hip hop of old was not publicized and commercialized back then and so it was pure and untainted in its intentions.

Unfortunately, hip hop began making its transition to rap by about the mid to late 1980s when you had artists from other parts of the country such as the West Coast bringing their own style to the genre. It was during this time period that black people, once again, became “niggers,” but this

Table of Contents

TITLE	AUTHOR	PAGE
Narration Essay	Tyler Inglis	48
Initials Carved in a Tree	Derek Becker	50
The Farm	Emanuel Shulman	52
Archie	Romey J. Romano	56
The Humane Society	Kate Ann Biskind	57
Untitled	Erin C. Altekruise	59
“Take That Andrew Marvell”	Donna Anderson	61
“Julia’s Lament”	Donna Anderson	62
My Greatest Fear	Debora Meuchner	63
California Breeze	Kristen Gray	65
Creating a Halloween Costume	Beth Hazelton	69
Honolulu Marathon Runners And Attractions	Gail Saddler	72
The Devolution of Hip Hop	Monica Thurmond	75
Burial	Kayla Straight	79

THREADS WRITING AWARDS WINNER

Rosemary Roberts

Yero's Drum

Drum comes running, chasing, bounding
Borrowed legs now heartbeat pounding
Pleading with me, overtaken
Landlocked, stranded, godforsaken

His name is Yero, Yero bullo
From a drumbeat far away
Man of color, African
Came to me, from him I ran

He's darkest sky with no moonlight
His skin raw silk, eyes light of hope
His presence hails me as exotic
His rhythmic pulses are melodic

Orange gauzelike breathy fabric
Draped cross shoulders, deep expanse
Chiseled bare bone, wearing sinew
Heart transparent, crystal virtue

Yero's drumbeat wakened me
Called my name, commanding me
Led me forward, guiding me
Having, holding, hauntingly

The Devolution of Hip Hop

By: Monica Thurmond

Back in the good ole days, hip hop had heart and soul and was a way of life as well. It was about where I came from, which was the South Bronx. Nowadays, hip hop is referred to as "rap" music; however, there are huge differences in yesterday's hip hop music and today's rap. This may seem unbelievable to those who do not know the difference. Let us take a brief journey back in time to compare yesterday's hip hop with today's rap music and explore a little into the devolution of hip hop.

Back in the late 1970s hip hop music emerged out of the South Bronx, specifically, Bronx River projects. Hip hop was not only music to party and dance to; it was driven by the pain of poverty, violence and drug laden, ghetto blocks. The music acted as an escape from our every day realities and made us ponder political as well as social issues, but it also empowered us and gave us hope. If you really want to know how much hip hop has changed, just listen to some of the old school artists' lyrics.

Such an example comes from one of the pioneer groups of hip hop known for their socially conscious lyrics. They were called Afrikka Bambata & the Soul Sonic Force. One of their big hits, called "Renegades of Funk," reminded us how nothing stays the same. Those known as renegades" were also heroes to many. They reminded us not to forget great leaders such as Malcolm X, Sitting Bull and Martin Luther King Jr. Another great group by the name of Whodini warned us about the pitfalls of false friends. Artists like Public Enemy and Rakheim admonished their lis-

several months and know about such things as pacing, drinking before you get thirsty, and “hitting the wall” at the 20 mile mark. While climbing Diamond Head approaching the end of the course, we vow never to do this again. A family member or friend is at the finish line to take our picture, and we can’t wait to pig-out after the race is over. I enjoy eating my personal half-gallon of ice cream.

The last group, the Walkers, plan to do just that – for 26.2 miles! Over 5,000 entrants walk the course practically all day since this marathon does not have an official cutoff time. Some less ambitious opt to enter the 10K walk that starts simultaneously with the marathon. This is a social event, and they enjoy the opportunity to partake in the mass movement of 30,000 people. They get a glimpse of the chaos only participants are privileged to experience during the first ten miles as runners jockey for position on the course elbow to elbow with their neighbor.

Above all else, anyone who crosses the finish line can say, “I completed a marathon”. At the end of the day, whether the Elite or the Walker, you’ve earned the right and sore legs to take the rest of the week off!

He took me with him to the village
Placed me in the smallest hut
Gave me colored thread to weave
Until quite done I could not leave

He spoke to me in native language
French, Fulani and Bambarra
I understood instinctively
To feel the joy we all must bleed

I wove the threads while he watched
Rich gold, deep brown and red of earth
As the pattern shaped the thread
He sent me magic in my head

My fingers worked and told a pattern
Of landscape circling, tightly girdling
Of trees, and ants and sacred youth
It sang the song of ancient truth

He gave me stories of his father
His three mothers, fifteen brothers
He taught me dances while I wove
A tribal rhythm filled with love

Ashes, embers, hearth fire planted
Ripe, dense grain, bounty, harvest
What I learned I can not measure
Days with Yero, nights of treasure

The weaving's done and Yero's gone
From the village, traveled on
In New York, hectic rhythms
Not alone, I travel with him.

Faintly beating, drum in background
Man of color, Yero Bullo

Honolulu, as I am yet only several miles into the race. "How fair is that," I thought; "They aren't even breathing hard!" To the finish line they fly to win, their picturesque long strides a graceful ballet to marvel.

The Japanese runners, numbering in the thousands, perform pre-race activities grabbing the attention of on-lookers. Clad in large, black garbage bags with holes cut for arms and head, they stand out amongst the crowd. By creating such a fashion statement, they were at least staying toasty in disposable jackets. Unique warming-up exercises never seen before consisted of two people standing back to back with arms locked together at the elbows. One person bends forward at the waist, so the other person is now positioned on his back, knees bent in a cannonball like position. This trick is then reversed; the other person bends forward and takes his turn at pulling his partner on his back. I debated for some time the exact purpose of this maneuver, yet it remains a mystery.

Hawaiians, a special group of athletes, have talents unique to their culture. Amazingly, a few run the complete 26.2 miles in "slippers," more commonly called flip-flops by mainland folks. Never underestimate the fortitude and tough feet of the Hawaiians illustrated by Mr. K. in his 70's who runs and completes the marathon barefoot. Others have abbreviated, quick, shuffle-like running steps persistent to the finish. Slow and steady wins the race, in this case finishes, but all Hawaiians run with pride and aloha spirit (love of their land).

The next bunch and largest, I call Middle of the Road runners, my group. We certainly don't expect to win; our goal is to finish and not look too bad. Nearly all train for

Honolulu Marathon Runners and Attractions

By: Gail Saddler

The anticipation of running the Honolulu Marathon kept me awake the majority of the night. I assured myself I trained long and hard and felt prepared to run 26.2 miles, but knew rest was essential. Again and again, I ran the entire racecourse in my mind, through the streets of Honolulu, the turn around point in Hawaii Kai, then the last climb over Diamond Head to the finish line in Kapiolani Park.

An early 5:00 a.m. race start time helped minimize the number of runners out on the course in the heat of the afternoon. With over 30,00 entrants, parking is an issue on a small island; therefore, it's necessary to arrive by 2:00 a.m. to ensure a spot to park. Hawaii's chilly December mornings, in the low 60's, feels a bit colder when dressed in running shorts and a sleeveless shirt. Nevertheless, there was plenty of time to observe the competition, better yet, amuse myself!

The first group is known as the Rabbits, not because they dress like bunnies. From the country of Kenya, they lead the race at the sound of the starting gun. Their purpose in the race is to set a winning pace for a fellow countryman running directly behind. Rabbits train for speed at certain distances, much less than the full racecourse. So, after several miles running a five-mile per hour pace, their job is done, and they drop off so the man for whom they were hired can dart by. Rabbits sacrifice themselves for the good of others.

The astounding athletes, called the Elite runners, chase the Rabbits. I often wonder if they ever need to replace running shoes since their feet rarely touch the ground! The Elites leave the turn around at the halfway point heading back into

THREADS WRITING AWARDS WINNER

G. Colton Class

A Garden of Stone

An Essay of a Place of Significance

On my first visit, it was an early November morning; it was cold with a dull gray sky. Hanging just above the manicured grounds was an obscure white mist, solidifying the surrealism of the place, allowing clarity of sight for only thirty or forty yards ahead. Throughout the grounds in the wide expanse of sparsely forested landscape were giant maple trees with their wide trunks and long branches reaching toward the sky, interspersed with stately white oak trees standing tall and regal with their own branches also reaching towards the heavens. Marking the borders of property were the coniferous hemlocks and pines, tones of cool blues and deep greens, with their offspring of small cones, wooden textures of tan and brown, strewn about as if they had been merely tossed there. Between the pathways of crushed white stone were inscribed granite monuments, of various sizes and shapes, lined neatly in rows of four or five within columns of ten or twenty, each marking a separate section. One particular piece of stonework stood out in a peculiar dance of light and shadow, its gray color with flecks of black intermingled within, with a darker gray square centered within its tetragon shape. I notice the name etched there in great Roman letters, G-R-A-F-F-I-U-S, the maiden name of my guide. There were headstones on either side, but they were of no matter, for this is the marker which we had come to visit. This plot, this 9' x 9' portion of

land, already a place of sorrow and pain, would eventually beckon a deep turbulence within me, a source of raw emotion caught in a mesh of guilt, shame, and remorse.

I would come to know this place well, each blade of grass, in varying shades of green and brown, with a smell of freshness when newly shorn in contrast to the perverse decay below. In the spring and early summer, roses bloomed there, a collage of color bursting forth like oil paints on a palette, arising from the bushes held close to the stone, planted there by the forlorn, the remnants of those who remain.

We walked the pristine white walkways of gravel, past the tall, majestic oaks and towering maples, their countless leaves now fallen and swept away, making the trees seem as though they were many-armed sentinels standing guard over the garden of stones. I remember the story told to me by my guide, a story of a mother, despondent over the loss of her lifeless newborn, taking her own life some nine days after the stillbirth event. Another mother would eventually dwell there—the first tenants, a mother and her child, and the next her child and a mother. Cheryl, my guide on our garden stroll, would come to dwell here just a mere decade later; she was my friend, my love, my wife, and eventually the mother of our children. We danced the dance of life as young lovers do—never knowing that as time wove its curvaceous and troublesome pathway throughout our lives, coldness would engulf us, a reality which befalls those who do not revel in each other, thinking that moments last forever.

The day we married was a day of hope and light, and the day I buried her was a day dark and barren. The light within my heart was snuffed out like the nighttime candles

Right about this point is when we pause for a moment, take a look around us at the disarray we have created, and take stock of where we are. Luckily, Wal-Mart's is open 24 hours. There must be one or two costumes left, and hopefully, they have not been removed overnight to begin assembling the Christmas displays. And speaking of Christmas, we will start next year's costumes *right* after the holidays. By the way, didn't everyone want to go trick-or-treating this year as Pokemon, anyway?

If a glue gun can not be secured, or the aloe gel has been depleted and your fingertips are swollen from burns, do not be alarmed! Ever resourceful, utilizing a stapler is no reason for guilt. You can staple with love. Anyway, it will be dark out. The metal of the staples will be good light reflectors, adding illusions of glittering radiance. While on the subject of sparkle and shine, we would be remiss not to include incredible amounts of glitter and sequins. Liberace was really onto something and created a presence as yet unrivaled. Also, glitter and sequins will be indispensable for covering the holes in the fabric created by the hot glue.

In addition to the incredible costume, the perfect accoutrements can not be overlooked. Since I refuse to let my daughters even play with makeup, Halloween brings the forbidden pleasure of pink eyelids and very cherry cheeks (created with red lipstick). Also, regardless of the attire you choose to create, never underestimate the power of a light saber. What costume can't be enhanced with a light saber that makes the "whuuuum, whuuuum" sound when you swirl it in the air? Even Strawberry Shortcake will be elevated to a person to be reckoned with. Furthermore, and it can not be stressed enough, a cool flashlight is an absolute necessity. Isn't the most important issue safety first? What's more, a great flashlight in the shape of a pumpkin or bat will divert the eyes from one pant leg being shorter than the other.

Now that we have put the pressure on, you must take inventory of your coffee supply. Do not kid yourself; this will prove to be indispensable when it is 3:00 in the morning of October 31st, and there are still two sleeves and a Chewbacca head to be created. This is not the time to realize that you are out of java.

she placed in our bedroom, as she went about her way of shutting the house for the night. I was engulfed by my disgrace in not caring for her as I had during our early days, having become lost in the power and stress of the day-to-day, not knowing that I would never again be able to shower her with the grace and love which was her due. In the rise of affluence, climbing the ladder of accomplishment, studying in the halls of the learned, I neglected that which was most important—the sharing of each other. The porous ascension created frustration, resentment, and anger, overwhelming our relationship, and I allowed the union which bound us to crash against the tide of achievement, the jagged shoreline of mired success.

In the end, the mutter of a pitiful excuse and a deficiency of five minutes; five more minutes to say what should have been said every day; five more minutes to gaze into her sapphire eyes, those shimmering windows of familiarity. In hindsight, I can see that she knew of the important things, having herself lost a significant relation in a previous time. She knew what should be said and when to say it; she knew—when all was said and done.

We comfort ourselves in the belief that we have so much time—that it cannot end as swiftly as the flutter of an eyelash—we believe a continuance is ever-present. We consider that we can make up for our failings, that we are always granted a second chance, never fully aware that in the blackness of cold reality a hole can burrow its way into your heart, into your soul and the musty smell of death will dwell within.

A place of significance is left, splendiferous in all its beauty, accurate in its design, but threateningly ominous in

its nature, foreboding in the tale it tells. The oak and maple trees, the garden's sentinels, are still standing guard, older now, but silently providing a vigil for grieving. When journeying to stroll in the garden once again, a knowing occurs—the leaving will be much more difficult than the arrival; amends will be made once again for the failings of youthful exuberance, and the sorrow will continue for the collapse of such fleeting prosperity. A sharing occurs here now, a reflection of understanding with the knowledge of substance and an awareness of consequence. The guilt is no lighter, the shame is no less, and the remorse is still great, but a love much stronger shines through it as I stand in the garden once more.

Creating a Halloween Costume

By: **Beth Hazelton**

Come October, when children are posed the question regarding their favorite holiday, Halloween will generally be the resounding answer. What other day of the year affords tots the opportunity to dress up in whatever they desire, ring the doorbell of complete strangers, and receive more candy than they can even consume? And because the love for our little ones knows no bounds, in our capacity of Super Mom we become obsessed with wanting to make something really special just for them unlike anything any of their friends have ever even seen. Nothing says love like forgoing the shoddy workmanship of the costumes in the stores and creating from nothing a costume worthy of an Oscar.

As we have witnessed, Halloween has progressed *way* beyond the standard sheet with cut-out eyes that we wore as children, and while I am quite sure that - somewhere in the world - an ingenious Mom has fashioned an entire ensemble from a garbage bag, we are setting our sights higher here. Therefore, a sewing machine and modicum of amateur sewing skills will be required. However, in the event of a severe lack of the aforementioned, there is no need for discouragement! A hot glue gun can prove to be quite the handy gadget and will allow for talents not yet recognized in the creativity department. Although, I must advise that this will also require the acquisition of large amounts of aloe gel for the inevitable burns from the hot glue.

day be answered and different feelings may come forth, but until then, I will use my confidence, to succeed in life. I have always wanted to succeed, but after my first encounter with my mother, she made me only want to succeed more.

THREADS WRITING AWARDS WINNER

Stephanie Ford

We Brethren Are

CHARACTERS:

Emily Dickinson—a prolific private poet, choosing to publish fewer than a dozen of her nearly eighteen hundred poems. Dickinson's poems are unique for the era in which she wrote; they contain short lines, typically lack titles, and often utilize slant rhyme as well as unconventional capitalization and punctuation.

Walt Whitman—among the most influential poets in the American canon, often called the "father of free verse." His work is also very controversial, particularly his poetry collection *Leaves of Grass*, which has been described as obscene for its overt sexuality.

The action takes place at Edward Dickinson's (Emily's father) home in Amherst, Massachusetts on a Sunday morning in mid-June.

ACT ONE

Scene One

A large room, with a door in the left-hand wall. In the middle of the room a round table with chairs grouped about it; on the table lay a few letters, books, stationery, quill, and ink. In the left foreground, a window, and next to it a small sofa with a sewing table in front of it. In the background, a door leads to the garden. The door is open and the bright, blooming landscape can be glimpsed.

WALT is sitting at the table looking at parchment; he is hunched in the chair, his great white beard resting gently on his protruding belly. His pants and shirt look worn suggesting he recently traveled and his boots are noticeably dirty. A church bell rings. **EMILY** enters from stage left clutching many sheets of parchment. She holds them up to her chest almost as if shielding herself. She is dressed plainly in a white cotton dress, her brown hair pulled up into a bun. **WALT** does not notice her entrance. **EMILY** studies him a moment.

EMILY: *(in a quiet voice)*. Thank you for coming, I hope your journey was not too uncomfortable for you.

WALT: *(looking up)*. Long, but comfortable enough. *(Putting down the parchment he was reading. Slowly stands up)* It is a pleasure to meet you Emily. I must say I was intrigued when I received a letter from you. *(small smile)*

EMILY:*(walking towards Walt, but stopping at a distance)*. As I said in my letter, I got the chance to read "Leaves of Grass" and wanted to meet you. I thought we could talk.

WALT: Well, let's talk! I must tell you I like nothing more than talking about myself and my work. *(laughing)* Shall we sit? My old bones have grown incredibly frail I fear and sitting is about all this body is good for these days. *(sitting back down)*

EMILY: *(staring at Walt after a pause)* Oh, yes let us sit. *(sits down across from Walt)*

WALT: So tell me child, what would you care to discuss? My "Leaves of Grass" is my greatest work, spent my whole life perfecting it. What caught your attention?

way to express in words how I felt. I took a good look at her. She had scratches all over her face, scabs, over-weight, dressed in slinky clothes that were too small for her, and her teeth were completely deteriorated. I knew at that very moment all my questions were answered and that she had never tried in any way to contact her only daughter. She was still into drugs, and she was newly incarcerated at a local jail. As I stood there, my stomach tuned over, and I didn't say a word. Extreme tension and silence over came us.

Then, the tears flowed. I could not see how a woman could love something as evil and vindictive as drugs over a human being. How could her love for me not give her the strength to get away from it? And this event was where my emotions took over and my expectations were swept away on the warm California breeze. She thought I was overly happy to see her, and my tears were a sign of forgiveness and joy. These were not tears of joy or happiness but of much despair and disappointment. She came to me and began what I think she thought was the "motherly thing to do" by hugging me. As the conversation started I could only ask why she had never been in my life, and to put me over the top, she had no answer.

Flashing back to when my father decided to speak about my mother in my childhood, he did mention how absolutely beautiful she was. At the time, she was smart, tall, confident, stubborn yet always happy. He said that I had resembled her so much. But if she was confident and stubborn, then why couldn't she love me instead of an addiction?

To this day, I feel no anger or delight when my mother's subject comes up. All my questions might some-

want me? Could any of the events of my past affect me negatively in the future? But, what always got me through those unanswered questions was that somewhere, someone was worse off than I.

Then, one summer, I decided to fly to California to meet all the family I had never met before. Many of these family members diligently wrote to me, called, and kept in contact; where-as, my mother failed at all these tasks. My father asked me why I wasn't angry with my mother for not keeping in contact or establishing any means of connecting with me, but being positive, I simply answered that I could not feel any dismay towards her because I did not know her situation. She could have been trying but, maybe, with no success, but then again, maybe, she wasn't trying. I think it is all in the game of life.

When I returned to California after twelve years, I found an entire group of people waiting for me as I stepped off the platform. I never felt such a surge of happiness. I only knew the five family members in New York, and this opened another gateway to something I never experienced before. I could now say that I found a large family. As my days grew shorter before my return to New York, I decided it was now time to meet the woman of mystery. My California family tracked my mother down and finally got hold of her. When the day came, I knew just how I would act when I saw her. I got myself all psyched up to see the woman who I had never seen before. I would be happy. There would be no other feeling except happiness, right? With all my confusion, I was sure everything was clear. Then, the time came. I stood there as she got out of her old beaten up car. I stood there, no time to breathe, ready to pounce, ready to faint. There is hardly a

EMILY: Many things. Tell me, is city life really all you claim it is? The people, the sights, the sounds?

WALT: Of course! "The blab if the pave, tires of carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the promenaders, the heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor, the snow-sleighs, clinking, shouted jokes, pelts of snow-balls, the hurrahs for popular favorites, the fury of rous'd mobs, the flap of the curtain'd litter, a sick man inside borne to the hospital, the meeting of enemies, the sudden oath, the blows and fall, the excited crowd, the policeman with his star quickly working his passage to the centre of the crowd, the impassive stones that receive and return so many echoes, what groans of over-fed or half-starv'd who fall sunstruck or in fits, what exclamations of women taken suddenly who hurry home and give birth to babes, what living and buried speech is always vibrating here, what howls restrain'd by decorum, arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made, acceptances, rejections with convex lips."

EMILY: It sounds interesting but not a life for me. I prefer the quiet and tranquility of nature. (*glancing at the garden*) "Several of Nature's People, I know and they know me, I feel for them a transport, Of Cordiality." Nature, being one with nature, and all of its creatures is truly spiritual.

WALT: Nature is indeed moving, but the city is as well. Can you not see the beauty in it? (*leaning towards EMILY*) Can not both be equally spiritual? Why, look at the grass! "Tenderly will I use you curling grass, it may be you transpire from the breasts of young men, it may be if I had known them I would have loved them, it may be you are

from old people, or from the offspring taken soon out of their mothers' laps." "Or I guess the grass itself is a child, the produced babe of the vegetation, or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic, growing among black folk as among white, Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same."

EMILY: I see your point. Well said. So you believe we become grass when we die? (*condescending tone*) I am not so sure. Is there really any sort of "after-life" or is dead simply dead regardless of who we are? "I died for Beauty-but was scarce Adjusted in the tomb when one who died for Truth, was lain In an adjoining room— He questioned softly "why I failed"? "For Beauty," I replied—"And I—for Truth—Themselves are One— We Brethren, are," He said— And so, as Kinsmen, met a Night—We talked between the Rooms—Until the Moss had reached our lips—And covered up—Our names—"

WALT: (*leaning back in his chair*) "What do you think has become of the young and old men? And what do you think has become of the women and children?" Surely, you do not believe that they just disappear when they die? That the memory of their life disappears? No, "they are alive and well somewhere, the smallest sprout shows there is really no death, And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it, and ceas'd the moment life appear'd. All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses, and to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier."

EMILY: (*contemplating, also leans back in her chair*) Different than anyone suspects.... "Because I could not stop for Death—He kindly stopped for me—The Carriage held but just Ourselves—And Immortality."

California Breeze

By: Kristen Gray

All I have ever known was my father, the only person in my life since the age of six. Prior to age six, I was unfortunately placed in different "homes" or foster care facilities. From time to time, I would be transferred from family to family as the families only took care of a foster child for small period of time. I was placed in foster care because the State of California severed my eighteen year old mother's parental rights. She took illegal substances, which included methamphetamines and speed, during her pregnancy. Finally, my father won his long fight with the state of California, and the courts told him to take his daughter, leave their state, and begin taking over *his* parental rights. Therefore, we packed up all our belongings, drove cross country, and started our new life in New York.

Growing up, I always asked about my mother because I never knew her. Taken away from her at birth, I had belonged to the state, and I never sustained that post-natal connection that may happen with most newborns and their mother. My father refrained from elaborating on her because he thought it would be best to bury any kind of psychological feelings I might have. He felt it was necessary to be happy in the present rather than focus on the bad from the past.

I have had nothing but a good life in New York. I prospered in high school, developed goals, and maintained long friendships, not only with people but family as well. But, even with all of that good fortune, questions still arose in my heart. Would things have been different? Did she

Since right now my mom is really bad, I want to be home all the time, at the same time all I want to do is run away. Mainly because it is so hard to see her in pain all the time, and to see how much it hurts her to know how hard it is for everyone around her to see her as sick as she is.

This has had many effects on me. The main one being I had to grow up so much faster than normal kids. Since my dad works odd hours, he isn't really home or awake when anyone else is. So since I am the oldest of my siblings (I have a sister that is two years younger than me, and a brother that is 10 years younger), I was the one who got stuck helping my sister with her homework, and then helping look after my younger brother. Then after all of that I would have to clean the house. Because of that a lot of times I wasn't able to go places and hang out with friends. In school, I never played sports or joined in an after school activity because I knew I wouldn't have a ride, or I would feel bad for leaving home. I also never fully got to do the mother/daughter things most girls got to do with their mothers. I either never asked my mom because I saw how much it hurt her when she would say no. Or she would say yes, and then, when it came time to go, she was in too much pain, or she would go and then be down (unable to do things) for the next couple of days.

It is hard really hard, and my mom always tells me that she fights everyday to stay here for my sister, brother, and me. I know that it does give her the motivation to keep going. But what happens when the pain is too much for her to handle? Or it is down to the doctors and they don't pull through?

WALT: (*looking pleased with Emily*) Just so.

EMILY: (*shaken from her thoughts by Walt's interjection*) You have said that we should not be skeptical about God. Why?

WALT: "I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least, Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself." (*Emily looks at him with a mix of understanding and anger*) Ha! Ha! Don't look so upset! "Why should I wish to see God better than this day? I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then, In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass."

EMILY: (*smiling at Walt*) "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—I keep it, staying at Home— With a Bobolink for a Chorister— And an Orchard, for a Dome— Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice I, just wear my Wings— And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church, our little Sexton—sings. God preaches, a noted Clergyman— And the sermon is never long, So instead of getting to Heaven, at last—I'm going, all along."

WALT: We finally agree on something. (*laughing*)

EMILY: (*smiling*) I should have you meet my father. He is a very strict man when it comes to religion and is quite convinced I am beyond hope for salvation. I told him "You're right—"the way is narrow"— And "difficult the Gate"— And few there be"— Correct again— That "enter in-thereat"— 'Tis Costly— so are purples!— 'Tis just the price of Breath— With but the "Discount" of the Grave— Termed by Brokers— Death"! And after that— there's Heaven— The Good man's Dividend— And Bad men—"go to Jail"— I guess—"

WALT: (*laughing loudly*) I bet he didn't like that! Where is he? I will be more than happy to discuss this nonsense of the "elect"!

EMILY: He's at church (*smiling*). Why do you think I wanted you to come at this time? To spare you his inane babbling! I always said "'Faith' is a fine invention For Gentlemen who *see!* But Microscopes are prudent In an Emergency!"

WALT: True, true. He probably wouldn't like to find you home alone with a man. He might get the wrong idea!

EMILY: And what, exactly, is that supposed to mean? Do you think I called you here, at this time, for something other than a pleasant conversation?

WALT: From what I hear, *conversing* is all you ever do. Don't you ever long for companionship?

EMILY: (*taken aback*) My personal life is none of your concern, Sir, and you are old enough to be my father! I believe it is past time for you to leave. (*standing up*)

WALT: Don't take offense! I didn't mean any offense by it. You needn't worry about me. Please sit back down. (*motioning towards her chair*) You've said you have read "Leaves of Grass," correct? Perchance you remember stanza 11?

EMILY: (*carefully studying his face.... After a brief pause, she sits back down*) I do.

WALT: "Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore, twenty-eight young men and all so friendly; twenty-eight

My Greatest Fear

By: Debora Meuchner

Ever since I can remember my mom has been sick. It all started when my sister was born. Since my mom had a cesarean section when she had me she had to have one with my sister. But when the doctors went to close her up they sewed her uterus to her stomach. When they went back in to fix it, they never sewed her up; they just stapled her and left areas open. So what happened was the adhesions started to attack her insides. So now my mom has adhesions wrapped around her intestines.

When you have surgery, adhesions begin to grow (adhesions are just scar tissue). For most people, though adhesions will just stop growing after a couple of days. But for my mom they begin to wrap around her intestines, causing a section of them to slowly close off. Therefore, she is unable to go to the bathroom, keep food down when she eats, and is constantly in pain.

My mom used to be able to go three years between surgeries. But each time she has a surgery, the adhesions come back faster and faster, which results in her getting very ill. So now she is down to about ten months between surgeries. The scary part is that she has only had this condition for about 16 years. Because of this the doctors will not allow her to have surgery until the very last minute; when she is vomiting feces and looks as though she is nine months pregnant. When this does happen she only has about a thirty minute window to get to the hospital.

This is the scariest, biggest fear I have because when my mom gets to the point where she is really bad; there is a good chance that I could lose her at any moment.

“Julia’s Lament”

By: Donna Anderson

I’ve not beheld in ten years long
Those roses red which graced your song.
They dwell far south beyond my grasp
With no support from bind or clasp*
Though they still peep through my white gown
I must confess...it’s further down.
As I recall on these gray morns
My roses red have sprouted thorns.
And age leaves tracks to mark the time
And curdles cream and dulls the shine,
Thy pearls and rubies no longer please...
As they reside below my knees.
Out of season, without song,
My breasts aren’t longed for...they’re just long.
But splendor lost I’ll not bemoan
They’re worth NO LESS than precious stone
My niplets red have ten babes nursed
Ten lives sustained...I shall not curse.
But one thing only shall I lament
Is how far south my nipples went.

*bra

years of womanly life all so lonesome...The beards of the young men glisten’d with wet, it ran from their ling hair, little streams pass’d over their bodies. (*EMILY closes her eyes*) An unseen hand also pass’d over their bodies, it descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs. The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge to the sun, they do not ask who seizes fast to them, they do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and bending arch, they do not think who they souse with spray.”

EMILY: (*Opening her eyes*) Beautiful. So the rumors are true.

WALT: Yes, does that bother you?

EMILY: Not at all. I find your passionate words quite moving. I often find myself lost in those moments as well. “Wild nights—Wild nights!—Were I with thee Wild nights should be Our luxury! Futile—the winds— To a heart in port—Done with the compass—Done with the Chart! Rowing in Eden—Ah—the Sea! Might I but moor—tonight—In thee!”

WALT: Simple and to the point.

EMILY: (*looking at the stationary she brought with her when she entered*) I fear I have not been completely honest in my reasons for having you here. It was not simply to talk. (*WALT eyes EMILY*) I have a favor to ask of you.

WALT. A favor is not always easily granted, but I will do what I can.

EMILY: (*holding out the parchment*) I have a selection of my poetry here and I was hoping you could help me to get it published.

WALT: (*taking the parchment and reading it. After a time, he puts it down*) Your poetry is good, but I fear it needs changing. Your strange punctuation and vocabulary not many will understand, and why are they so short?

EMILY: (*getting angry*) What, should I write more like you to get published?! Long winded, simple-minded, perverted observations! I think not! You talk of my punctuation and verse style! I used and transformed the orthodox hymnal form to express what people see as unorthodox ideas! I guess my work is not ready for the public that so loves your obnoxious drivel! I will not change my work to suit a publisher! I will not! (*standing up*) I would like you to leave now. (*walks toward the door, her skirt swirling in her rush*)

WALT: (*Staring at EMILY. Then begins to laugh*) You have the right of it, child. I will take your poetry and show it to my publisher.

EMILY: (*looking very confused*) You will?! I don't understand!

WALT: (*standing up and looking at EMILY with approval*) You refuse to change or edit your poetry. That is the mark of a true artist, you are not consumed with riches, just your art. It took me years to find a publisher because my work is considered pornographic, and I was told to tone it down. I refused. I would not change my life's work and sacrifice the integrity of it. "We Brethren are" as you said. (*smiling*)

EMILY: (*cheeks flushed, not meeting Walt's eyes*) Thank you! I

"Take That Andrew Marvell"

By: Donna Anderson

Andrew Darling, for Heaven's sake,
My virginity you'll never take.
News has traveled through friends of mine
You've written others similar lines.
It seems your long loves day was meant
For anyone who would give consent.
Your vegetable love will die and wither
Before my garden lets you enter.
Your adorations may work on those
Who find their worth without their clothes.

But what I deserve is for my MIND
To be the part you want to find.
Honor is as Honor does
And yours has turned to ash because
Time's winged chariot has raised a dust
To cloud your vision with grave lust.
My beauty now will ALWAYS be
Available to those who SEE
BENEATH the skin at ANY AGE
Is what's WORTH loving, and WORTH a page
Of poetry for what's INSIDE; for who one is should
be your guide.
With this I take my morning dew
And douse your flame to clear your view.
I'll not be hunted, bird of prey
Devour that! Be on your way.
My future holds that special one
Whose LOVE and HONOR OUTSHINE the sun.

Jordan gasps.

Stephen gets out of the car.

Mrs. Bullard runs in the house and picks up the telephone.

The siren of the ambulance fades in the distance as a tow truck and police men start to clean up the debris from the accident. Soon the only indications of what had happened were the tire marks and blood on the street.

The exhibit is filled with oil paintings. Some are portraits; some are landscapes. The student artist is supposed to talk about her paintings. Half an hour until the exhibit closes, she still isn't there.

A year later, Stephen passes the address where his worst nightmare happened. He, his perfect student, and her dog, all flash in his mind as he passes the fading tire marks on the street.

A year later, Jordan sits in front of a blank canvas. She holds a paint brush in her mouth. Her golden retriever sits at her side.

am sorry for the hateful things I said. I did not mean offense. I was frustrated as you can well understand.

WALT: (*putting a hand on Emily's shoulder*) I do. (*smiling*) And now, I believe I should be heading out. Your father should be coming home soon and we don't want to give him the wrong idea do we?! (*winking*)

EMILY: (*smiling*. They begin to walk towards the door) Yes, you are right. Thank you for everything and I do hope we can stay in contact. I will write, promise you will also.

WALT: Of course, I will write as often as I can spare a moment. (*He exits EMILY shuts the door behind him*).

(*EMILY walks towards the open door leading to the garden. She enters the garden and shuts the door behind her. End Scene*)

Masks

By: Ben J. Thomas

Everyone hides behind a mask. Consciously or not, everyone does. The gangster hides behind a pair of silver tinted aviator sunglasses and a ton of bling as his favorite rap artist does. The cheerleader hides under shiny lip gloss, a layer of makeup, fake laughter and contempt for everyone else. Why do they do it? Don't they realize that all they highlight is their lack of self confidence, that they have the need to be perceived as "cool"?

Gone are the days when a mask used to lend an air of mystery, for today's masks deliver conformity to social norms. Gone are the days when masks used to cover the face, for today's masks conceal nothing yet hide everything.

We all desire to find the perfect companion, someone with whom we can share all our thoughts, ideas, and most importantly someone to take away this inherent feeling of loneliness which is ever present in our minds. But how can we find that companion when all we do is hide our true selves from each other. While we hide beneath these masks of our choosing, others perceive our false selves and any relationships thus formed would not be long lived as it is based on a lie. The most important question in this context would be "Are these masks in place to deceive others, to hide our scars from others or to hide from a cruel world?"

Untitled

By: Erin C. Altekruse

Mrs. Bullard wears a hat and gloves. All day, she had been working on her garden, pulling up the weeds and planting flowers. Her white Siamese cat is sitting in the shade next to her. A girl walks by with a golden retriever. With a polite nod Mrs. Bullard greets the girl although Mrs. Bullard does not appreciate the dog being off a leash. Getting up, she gathers the weeds in her arms to take them down to the road. A silver Honda Civic comes around the corner. Mrs. Bullard frowns disapproving of the speed at which it's traveling. Mrs. Bullard drops the weeds into the garbage can and walks back into her yard. As she climbs the stairs, Mrs. Bullard hears a screeching of tires, a yelping of a dog, and a crumpling of metal.

Jordan wears an oversized NYU sweatshirt, with navy blue jeans and black shoes. Her curly red hair is pulled up into a bun on the back of her head. She's watching a car speeding towards her dog. She tries to get her golden retriever out of the street by yelling his name. He looks at her and wags his tail. The car swerves, missing the dog.

Stephen drives down the road. His class had been very quiet today, which annoyed him greatly. Even so, he looked forward to going to his best student's art show that night. She had shown him some of her paintings, and they were breathtaking. All of a sudden, a dog runs out into the middle of the road. Stephen swerves to miss it. He yells in terror as a body is thrown over the top of the car.

wheelbarrows looked like they had seen better days, rusting from the years of blood, urine, and repeated washing out. Hard to concentrate, to find the cat I am looking for so that its owners can make an ID. Hard to ignore that German Shepherd I was playing ball with the other day. When I'm here it is easy to forget all of the good in this place. So I do what I have to and then rush back to aiding those that are still alive.

How I Lost My Hair and Found Myself

By: Rachel K. Jantzi

Everyone stared at my bald head. I used to be able to blend into a crowd, but suddenly I found that I was the center of attention everywhere I went. And I knew exactly what people were thinking; I was a lesbian, a militant, or a cancer patient, or possibly all three. These are undoubtedly the conclusions that most people draw because, after all, why would any woman shave off her hair? We all know that a woman's hair is her crowning glory, and surely a woman with no hair can't be a woman at all, right? The truth of the matter, however, is that bald women are every bit as womanish as long-locked women, if not more so. Long hair is not only entirely irrelevant to female identity, but the loss of a woman's hair is often a catalyst for a deep and frequently painful exploration of her true womanliness: her freedom, courage, and femininity.

When I first began airing an inclination towards shaving my head, I met with a surprising amount of resistance. Family and friends alike reacted with almost unanimous horror, dismay, and condemnation. My boyfriend Josh was, of course, one of the chief complainants; when asked what prompted his strong objections, he could only answer, "Because I don't like it" or "Because it's not normal. Women are supposed to have long hair." But it was my dear friend Dani who provided me with the strongest objection in spite of her own two-inch locks. Dani not only forbade me to shave my head, but also informed me that if I went through with what she saw as my insane

plan, she would not be seen with me in public. It was the only time we were truly angry at each other.

I was deeply troubled by the opposition I was encountering. It was my hair; had I not a right to shave it off if I chose? After all, it was just hair, and it would grow back. As I told my mother during one heated discussion, "It's not like I'm cutting off an arm!" Despite my arguments, I was afraid to cut my hair and expose myself to the scrutiny I knew a bald head would attract. Thus, it is no surprise that I spent years contemplating baldness before I finally took the plunge.

One of the most defining moments in my decision making process came while I was watching the movie *V for Vendetta*. I was particularly fascinated by the Evey character; a regular, law abiding citizen had her head shaved as part of a prison camp experience that turned out to be something of a massive trial by fire. Upon learning the truth of the situation, Evey found herself fearless and free for the first time, able to act with the courage she had always envied in others. I realized then that my fear of scrutiny and of being noticed was holding me back in life. I knew that by shaving my head, I would be in effect forcing myself into the public eye, thus burning out my social anxiety once and for all.

My final decision was made the day I told my boyfriend's father, John, of my possible plan. He looked at me long and hard, considering unknown aspects before declaring, "Yeah, you should do it. I think that it's erotic." Finally, someone who supported my view! And so it happened: I announced my intention to shave my head. In anticipation of the big event, my boss gave me a pair of earrings, commenting that if I were going to shave my

The Humane Society

By: Kate Ann Biskind

There are four innocuous steps leading up to a big slightly rusting warehouse-like building. Once opening the heavy padlock and scooting my way through the dark doorway, I have to let my eyes adjust to the industrial fluorescent lighting. The first thing to hit me is the scent of laundry, not just the fresh detergent and slightly less pleasant bleach smells but that static charge the air gets in a laundromat. Then I feel the warmth that insinuates itself into your being. My eyes are drawn to the big metal and concrete structure holding dominion over its half of the room. The burning pyre that helps shroud the misdeeds of humanity and, worse, those of this very haven. Where I am headed is on the other side of the cremator.

There are two walk-in freezers; I've seen smaller dorm rooms. When I go to grab the over-sized handle my palm sticks a little bit where I have started to sweat. I rock back on my heels, breaking the seal that holds the huge metal doors on tight. The frigid blast of air and a glimpse into darkness has me quickly going for the light switch. I prop the door up so it stays open. We aren't supposed to do that but I doubt I am the only person who does.

It is a full house. Fuck. That means that I have to go searching through the wheelbarrows for the right body. The wheelbarrows are piled high with the corpses of dogs and cats and other animals that had run out of options. Well, they hadn't but we humans had decided they had. So they were condemned to death and thrown into a wheelbarrow, sometimes in plastic bags, and sometimes not. The

Archie

By: Romey J. Romano

On that day
no words
no lies
our embrace
the first
the last
we knew
our Love
was past

On that day
the tears
we wept
true joy
true loss
the torch
was passed
my Love
was lost.

head, I would need to accessorize. I recognized the undeniable truth without a second thought. Now that I was to undoubtedly be a center of attention wherever I went, it was absolutely imperative that I be well groomed at all times. My head finally shaved, I found that I was spending twice as long to get ready in the morning. My showers might take half the time, but I was now doing my makeup every day, as opposed to once or twice a week. Instead of throwing on a tee shirt and jeans, I found myself changing clothes four or five times until I settled on one of many meticulously crafted outfits involving outlandish styles, bright colors, and usually a skirt. I might have gotten rid of my hair, but my appearance was ten times more feminine than before. Everyone told me how well my new hairstyle looked. I finally felt like my own woman, and for the first time I was happy with how I looked.

The day after I shaved my head, I was reluctant to leave my apartment, being intensely afraid of all the stares and pointing fingers, but once I faced the world, with no veil of hair to hide behind, I found myself feeling free for the first time. Being bald provided me liberation from societal ideals and allowed me to be true to myself. I had already shirked one of society's biggest rules and made a complete spectacle of myself in the process; suddenly my nervous shyness seemed ridiculous. For the first time in my life, I strode into the world with confidence, and it's good that I did, because everywhere I went, all heads swiveled in my direction. As Sinead O'Connor's clipped hair speaks volumes to her explosively alternative personality, so my short hair has become an expression of my freedom from the strictures of society.

It has been five months since I shaved my head, and my hair now resembles a short, slightly disheveled pixie cut. I still get more than my share of strange looks, but now I smile broadly in return; I am aware of the stereotype, and I fully intend to combat it at every turn. In shaving my head, I was able to rise above society's confining definition of femininity to reveal my true self. My self-confidence creates ease within all my interactions, while my sense of freedom gives me the ability to remain calm around others' inflexibilities. Only through renouncing the norm is true womanliness revealed.

frequent arguments.

My mother finally left her second husband and we left the farm on my eleventh birthday; the seven worst years of my life were over. Now, when I see long beautiful stone fences in the country, or mounds of rock piled at the edge of a field, I think of the people who worked into the night for weeks clearing and stacking them. The farm was a place of frustrating endless work that left us exhausted, depressed, and numb with cold. It was a nightmare I thought would never end. The farm was a cold, hard, and lonely place.

either of my two sisters. I fondly remember a framed poster hung on the wall above the stove. It was a picture of a nude woman lying on her side, decorated with markings that illustrated the different cuts of beef.

My mother and her husband slept in the downstairs front corner bedroom. It had windows that overlooked the road in front and the apple orchard on the side. I detested the grate in their ceiling that allowed the screaming sounds of arguments to reach our rooms upstairs. Behind their bedroom, a large closet had been converted to a bathroom. It had a claw-foot, cast iron tub with a showerhead that stood up on curved chrome colored pipe, like the rearing head of a king cobra. Dark copper pipes rose visible against the wall disappearing into the ceiling to a bathroom upstairs.

Narrow steps led to the second floor hallway into my sisters' room, and through their room was mine. I remember the night my sisters unscrewed all the upstairs light bulbs, put on glow-in-the-dark face paint, and terrified me as I made my way through. Eventually, I outgrew them and returned the favor.

At the far end of the second floor was my room with a solitary window. The glass in the window, like many others in the house, was thicker at the bottom and covered with horizontal ripples from age. Beyond this distorted pane was the oak tree and the long road leading down the valley to civilization. On occasion, I could see smoke rising out of the chimneys from two far away houses of the neighbors I never knew. The white plaster walls of my room were bare, only interrupted by the dark red chimney that passed from floor to ceiling. The only solace was the silence created by closing my room's thick oak door, blocking the sounds of the

I Am

By: Erin C. Altekruse

I am of the letter delivered by the postman.

But I am only of the letter when the brother has written to his family that he is alive and earning money.

I am of the food and water given to the infant who is too weak to brush away the fly hovering over his eyelid.

But I am only of the food and water when they are inside the infant's body.

I am of the hair growing on a person's head.

But I am only of the harsh bristles after the person has lost his or her golden locks to cancer.

I am of the woman whose tongue was cut out and the lips of her vagina padlocked closed after being raped by a soldier.

But I am only of her when she receives help.

I am of the refugees when they return to their home-

land.

But I am only of the refugees who return to the same home in a now peaceful and tolerant society.

I am of the soldier when he is coming home.

But I am only of the soldier when his feet are on the living room carpet because only then can he believe the nightmare is over.

I am as old as the first breathing animal.

I am unique -

to

each

living

organism

on

this

planet.

My name ...

... Relief.

three level, faded red barn. Late at night, it was not unusual to see white flashes from an arc welder, or hear the clang of a hammer striking steel from the workshop in the barn. An orange Allis Chalmers tractor, the largest of three, was always parked in front, next to a 500 gallon gasoline tank. In the morning when the sun rose, the cold shadow of the barn would cloak the house and the oak tree where I waited for the bus.

The house itself was built with hand hewn oak timbers held together with wood pegs and built with such precision that it had survived unchanged for over 100 years. Inside the house, the dark golden beams contrasted against the white plaster walls and ceilings. The floors had wide, uneven, oak boards, dotted by the worn, silver color tops of square nails. They squeaked whenever they were walked on, revealing when someone was home. On occasion the nails needed to be pounded down or they would spear your foot. In the center of the living area, next to a wide brick chimney stood a massive wood-burning pot belly stove. It was five feet tall, gracefully curved like a woman's body, and adorned with lavish chrome colored nickel accents. On each side, doors with translucent mica windows allowed you to see the dark red licks of flame in its belly. The stove warmed the entire house through large cast iron grates covering square holes cut into the ceilings and along the tops of the walls.

A small modern kitchen hung off the back of the house like a new outcropping from an old tree. It looked out of place with its two double pane windows and white vinyl siding. Inside the kitchen was a tile floor and all modern appliances except a dishwasher, unless you consider

The Farm

By: Emanuel Shulman

My mother remarried not long after the death of my father. I was four years old when my two older sisters and I were uprooted from the middle class suburbs of Long Island to the farm. The 200 acre beef farm dated back to the eighteen hundreds and was in central New York near a town called Unadilla. It overlooked a valley from near the top of a long set of rolling hills, more than a mile from the nearest neighbor. It was close to nothing.

The farmhouse sat on the crown of a steep embankment about one hundred feet back from the rough gravel and tar road. The plinking sound of car tires flicking small stones against fender wells signaled the rare occasion of a car driving past. The white was peeling from the house's weathered wood siding and the black trim around the windows had rounded edges from too many layers of paint. A solitary old oak tree stood next to the driveway. Its trunk was wider than the width of a car, and its roots came out of the ground like the fingers of a skeleton. I have good memories of waiting by that tree for the school bus, happy to escape, even for a day.

Behind the house, a large garden flourished in the summer with rows of vegetables. The earthy smell of tomato plants blended with the pungent odors of a compost pit where old rotting food was devoured by thousands of maggots. An outhouse as old as the farm stood next to the garden. It was still functional for that occasional emergency, but mainly it served as a tool shed.

Facing the house from across the road was an old,

Diligent Grandmother

By: Daisi Liao

When the sun is just rising and can only be spotted as a few glowing lights, a stooped shadow stretches on the horizon. My grandmother keeps herself busy like a bee, even though she is a seventy year old woman now.

My grandmother is one of the typical Chinese women in their seventies. She has sun-burned dark yellow skin, which she gets from working outside. Her skin is wrinkled, resembling the bark of a dehydrated tree in winter. The responsibility of taking care of the family adds even more silver strands to her already greying hair. Time has carved deep lines in her face making it look like a system of waterways. Her tough eggshell-like facial skin droops down with two small lobes of flesh hanging on each side of her chin making her look like a turkey. Her eyebrows are grey, thin and curved like a half moon. Just below sit a pair of cloudy, eyes caused mostly by glaucoma, but also from years of mending our worn-out clothes under dim light. The eye lids covered most of her eyes, which only give her eyes a slot-like space. On her round face, her nose is dominant. The tip of her nose together with the nostrils, constitute a structure which is similar to three garlic cloves. She has a big pinkish mole along the left side of her nose. Her dull thin lips are dark purple and droop at both ends. Black specks scatter her entire face.

Age-linked shrinkage makes her tiny figure even shorter. Her back is hunched from the toll she loads on her shoulders year after year. There is little fat under her skin

making her appear like a withered flower. However, her stomach balloons in comparison to her tiny match-stick legs and arms. Her chicken-claw-like fingers are crooked and skinny. Long years of housework have left thick calluses on the upper part of her palms and stolen the smoothness from her hands. Because of the traditional Chinese custom of feet binding, my grandmother has extremely small feet. But she has incomparable strength that seems to come from nowhere. She can move a heavy wooden dining room table by herself. She can carry many shopping bags filled with groceries from a supermarket several blocks away without even breathing hard. She does not pay much attention to her appearance and never wears make-up. When I outgrew my elementary school uniform, my grandma quickly adapted it. I laughed so hard at my kooky grandma that I actually cried.

My grandmother is a bee that is busy making honey until it dies. My grandmother is a cow that takes in plain grass and produces nutritious milk. She has dedicated most of her life to taking care of her family. My grandmother is a candle that brings light to us by consuming itself until the end of its life. She always puts our wishes and needs first. She never leaves her duty for her own pleasure in her life. We take most of what she does for granted, but she never complains. I love my grandma.

replaced due to the curled and crackled properties they have assumed. With the outside taken care of, I push on to the real problems, the inside. Most people look at a front door for security and esthetics, and that is what I thought also. This door was used to hide the insides from the prying world.

The whole first floor needs to be gutted down to its bare bones, leaving just the skeleton draped with its skin. The walls and ceilings in every room were covered in plaster and lathe. Tons of plaster had to be removed. Starting from above, I collapse the ceiling. Dust rises into a mushroom cloud then settles as each piece hits the floor. I continue to destroy each room one at a time, leaving a pile of ruins in my wake. This will take a full week to clean up and it did. The bags of plaster debris were removed through the door it came in. No wonder the house settled to one side. The foundation is probably taking a sigh of relief with the weight off its shoulders.

I start by covering the bones with a new layer of skin. I attack each room leaving it conquered with the smell of new paint in the air. I saved the dining room for last. I wasn't sure what to do with the ceiling. With all the plaster and lathe removed, it revealed the original logs used to build the house. I wasn't sure if I should cover them up, hiding them from the world or leave them exposed. I decided to leave it natural. As I started to clean the room, I noticed something. One of the original carpenters had carved his initials into one of the main log joists. It was like an artist signing their work. When everything was finished and picked up, I walked around the house for one last time. I stop underneath the signed log. I pulled out a knife and carved my initials next to his. He is not taking all the credit.

Initials Carved in a Tree

By: Derek Becker

I remember walking into this house for the first time. From what the agent told me, it was built in the 1900's. In fact it was the second house built on this street, back when the town was young in Ballston Spa. It still has its rock and mortar foundation with a surface covered with deep crevices caused by years of erosion. Some of the vinyl siding is flapping in the wind exposing roofing shingles used to side the house in the past. I wonder what lies behind the front door.

I venture inside to see the original molding he painted thickly enough to crack. The doors have also been painted many times. All the people moving out have caused doors to become chipped. In these scars, you can see the palette of colors used throughout its life span. Some of the people must have been color blind to choose such loud colors. As I continued to walk to the other end, it is easy to see the house has settled to one side. If I place a marble in the center of the room, it will roll to the front right of the house. Of course because the way the house was vacated, the marble would leave a trail in the dirt. Dust balls could have been rolled up for making a snowman, life-size. Looking at the ceiling, spider webs are visible in the corners. The drafts in the house cause the webs to bounce weightless above my head. This was going to be a big job. Trying to renovate this whole house by myself would be no easy undertaking.

I start to fix up the outside. From one side of the house you can see the siding pulled back to reveal asphalt shingles used years ago for siding. Other parts of the house are just bare wood exposed to the elements. Those pieces have to be

The Lesson Learned

By: Molly Hamlin

No one else can live your life; but why wasn't I smart enough to take a little advice? Life is a path ripped through a thick entangled jungle filled with entrapments, cleared blindly in the dark. I stick my head in the sand like a scared ostrich, avoiding anything that would challenge the conclusions I have already come to. People tell you how to live; they point out mistakes to a closed ear. However, for lessons to be learned, they sometimes have to be lived. This comes at a high price.

A black, worn chest stood in the upstairs hall. The chest's rough exterior hiding the treasure within, like the black and bumpy avocado skin that yields a creamy green ripeness that melts onto your tongue like whipped cream. Go in the front door of the old farm house, up the narrow stairs that once carried servants, and down the hall to where the chest lived. The chest served as a place to sit while painting my toe nails; once I cursed it for jumping in my way when I was walking to the bathroom. Living amongst this treasure chest, I was completely oblivious and unaware of the treasures within, the fruit that it could yield.

In this chest my father held his keepsakes. One item that it held was a small, velvet sack. The sack was dark red and smooth like a rose petal. Open the sack to reveal a white ball. The bright white gleam of this ivory ball had long since faded and died like the life of the elephant that it came from. This ball fits in the hand and was as heavy as a box of shoes. The cold, ivory ball was hollow and made of a network of webbing. Looking more closely at the outside

revealed that the webbed network was actually an intricate carving of flowers, birds, scrolls, and curlicues. Looking through the tiny webbed holes into its hollow center, unveils another intricately carved ball –it was completely free to roll around inside. Nested inside that, was a third carved ball. Like the layers of the earth if each one were free to rotate on its own. A mystery of Chinese imagination and skill, it was once held in the hands of the fathers before my father. It belonged to men I had never met. It was an irreplaceable heirloom; sentimental value merged with actual cost value.

Go in the front door of the house, up the stairs, down the hall to where the chest of treasures lived. Parts of my grandfather's life were spotting the wooden floor. My father reveals the contents of the chest, treasures I never knew were there: clippings of time, photos that were now yellowed with age, tattered maps, journals falling from their bindings, all laid on the floor as if splattered paint. He sat in the middle of them on his knees. I'd never seen him praying or crying, but I thought he was doing both. My father's face was flustered: pale as a lamb's coat and blood red simultaneously, as if someone put blush and powder on him in the dark. There was an unmistakable panic in his eyes, as he searched my face while waiting for me to react.

Had I seen it? He asked again. As the guilt tried to strangle me, I gasped and the air slid to my stomach like a hot iron stoker. I had seen it; when I had seen it, I did not know it was my father's. The ball was gone. I lost it in a sea

threw up the wall, fastened the braces and fit in the liner. The assembly went smoothly, taking us two hours tops.

At this point, the pool we had spent all day preparing was now ready to be filled. The water truck arrived right on schedule. The fire-hose like tube began rushing gallons and gallons into the pool's center. Generally, the water would push out on the wall, securing the entire set-up. Not this time. After only five minutes of filling, right before our eyes, the whole structure began to buckle. In a panic, my father screamed for the water to be shut off, but it was already too late. The wall had crimped badly all the way around. The liner stretched so tightly that it ripped. Water flooded the backyard. The pool had completely collapsed, and we could do nothing except watch.

Since the only way to move forward from this was thinking logically, we began to salvage any parts we possibly could. We knew the pool would still have to be built, even though it meant starting from square one. By the time we finished gathering the re-usable parts, the sun had gone down and we were out of daylight. The customer was not pleased. Our full day of work accomplished nothing, except setting us back further.

I learned more about myself that day than in any other previous. Starting from scratch, in anything, is not the end of the world. I've realized that to achieve something perfect, the exact way you want it, takes more than just time. Perseverance is the key. Difficulties and failures are going to occur for everyone. Objectives and goals that are set will not always be reached. What truly matters is how you overcome those obstacles. Moving forward instead of backward, thinking positively about the future and not negatively about the past is the ultimate challenge. What's done is done.

Narration Essay

By: Tyler Inglis

I'll never forget the first experience I had working with an above-ground swimming pool. My father has been constructing them for years, and I've always looked forward to assisting him one day. This past summer, he finally offered me the opportunity to do so. The customer's house was in the town of Hoosick Falls, which is an hour and a half trip from my own. With a long day waiting, our goal was to complete the entire job.

We got started early that morning, and my father was already in rush mode. I gathered my work gear and dressed quickly. When we arrived in Hoosick Falls, the arrangements were discussed for no longer than a half hour. The customer came to an agreement with my father, and the deal was settled. After that, we set out to Sunshine Pools in Wynantskill for the packages of parts. Each box was individually loaded onto the back of our pick-up truck, and we headed back to the site equipped for work.

The toughest and most time consuming part of the process came first: excavation. I shoveled and raked pounds of dirt and sod for at least three hours (which seemed like an eternity.) By then my body was extremely tired. This made me wonder why I was so excited to help in the first place. It didn't take long before my physical exhaustion turned into mental exhaustion. I remember my father saying, "just keep going Tyler, keep going" as he watched me struggle. I took a deep breath, put my head down, and continued reluctantly. Eventually once the ground was ready, we began the puzzle-piecing like installation. Step by step, we attached the track,

of liars and thieves. To me they were masked as lovers and friends that had long since faded from my side; I fought for them; I fought for the hope that they had changed. Needy hands helped themselves. I was conquered. The feeling of betrayal – what they had done to me, what I had done to my father, overwhelmed me. I tried to get it back, but it was to no avail. For my father, there was an emptiness left behind. For me, the void left in the ball's place was filled with pain, shame, guilt and regret. Their mocking laughter rings in my ear. I can taste the salt from my wet face.

My father's treasure is gone, but I can't lose the ache in my heart. My heart and mind fills with the many lessons learned. Trust needs to be earned. Family is for always. Wisdom comes with time; ideas change with age. Try to learn from others' lessons. I keep learning.

Without Guilt

By: Romey J. Romano

Hailing from semi-rural Vermont, and coming from a large French-Italian family, the observance of death was commonplace for me while growing up. I was taught by the church and my home that death is a time to feel sorry for others, and that I should feel guilt if I wept for myself. Almost every year of my youth a close family member died, resulting in funeral visits to my extended family in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and upstate New York. At every wake was the same inevitable whispered discussion on how well the corpse appeared, how the relative looked the last we saw him or her, and what last words were shared. After each event I reflected on the whole civilized process of the wake, funeral, and graveyard. I continually asked myself as I matured, for whom do I mourn? Recently I came to three conclusions; I do not lament for the empty shell, but I do grieve for the end of an era, and weep for myself without guilt.

Call it the departed, the corpse, or what have you, we gather to mourn for the clay in the box. I am not disrespectful at funerals or memorial services; however I will point to the casket, urn, or photograph, and state, "There's the lucky one." This statement elicits shock from the people who do not know me, and either wry grins or hidden disgust from those that do. We gather around the empty shell, sadly looking at the empty husk, not realizing that they are the ones who will not have to file a tax return, mow the lawn, or deal with loss. Our faith may dictate what lies on the other side, but until we are blessed with Michelangelo's vision of Heav-

Observations

By: Angela Snyder

The house sits between gentle hills
light gray siding shining against
a background of grass, green as emeralds
its richness a gift from days and days of rain

Clear windows gaze past treetops
wet leaves fall with the heavy
plop, plop of giant raindrops
onto the mirrored surface of wet asphalt.

A woman with her dogs
gazes back at the house nestled
between emerald hills
takes note of the shining asphalt
and the fallen leaves - and walks on

of the lake. You left me wanting, wanting to talk more, wanting to hear you whisper in my ear, wanting to wake up next to you, wanting you.

I can't get enough of you. You cling to my every thought. I think of the next time I will be with you. I think about what you are doing when you are not with me. I contemplate your hopes, dreams, and fears. I think of the nights we laid around, content in each other's presence. I think about the way you look at me when you assume I am not looking. I can feel your stare on me. I wonder what you are thinking, if you are thinking the same things as I. I think about your kind and gentle heart, of your intelligence, your patience, your quietness, your flaws, your accent, your beauty, your hands, the smell of your skin and neck, your tattoos, your determination, your cold anger, your laughter, your passion. I think about how the rain sounds outside your window. I think of our friendship. I think about how you touch me and how you feel next to me. I think about your kisses. I recall all of our conversations and treasure each one. I think of falling on the floor. I think of breakfast. I envision you playing soccer, calculating and athletic, screaming at the ref. Your details, the good and bad, make up you. All of it astounds me, to the point that it is most unbearable. You make me feel smart, beautiful, funny, clumsy, bossy, opinionated, out of control, confident, sweet, at peace. At peace, because I know I can be myself without fear.

I memorize every second I am with you, so that when you are not, I will have only to search my memory and daydream myself into one of those moments, filling the empty space around me with your presence. I want to feel surrounded by you.

en, damned to Dante's re-visitation of the Greek circles of Hell, or the nothingness of Atheism, we will not know our departed ones fate until we meet our own. Of course, I can joke while attending funerals too. When asked by my father in-law what tip to give the priest, I replied, "Stay away from the altar boys." But I digress, avoiding the cold hard fact that I am not weeping for the deceased empty shell.

I grieve for the end of an era, the loss of those moments in time, grasping onto vivid memories of my life to use as a salve on my hidden wounds. My friend Jim died recently, and not so unexpectedly. He was not so much a friend, but more of a symbol of times past. I mean no disrespect towards Jim; however his passing made me acutely aware of the fact that I can never go back, a figurative slap in the face that caught me unaware. He had been sick since I met him in 2006, but as many folks do, appeared to rally shortly before his death. The last time I saw him was at my house with a group of friends, not so gentle ribbing going around a room of men, where I am the child in my actions and age. At the wake, seeing Jim in the casket made me realize that I can never go back, in this case to an era of railroading in my early manhood that was care-free and fun. As an amateur historian this is the same lesson taught to me by inanimate objects as well, whether it is an automobile, a motorcycle, or the sale or destruction of a machine I have worked with intimately. The era has passed; I cannot go back.

In truth, the final realization is that I weep for myself. In February 2001, I met my family in Italy for the first time. A separation of almost 60 years had taken place,

Thoughts by the Lake

By: Tonia Susko

thanks to Joe McCarthy and the Red Scare. One of the first places we were taken was the village graveyard, sitting at the base of the hill that the village of Contignano has sat on prior to 75 BC. Mia amore, my Love, and I wandered around visiting the family I never knew, asking them to tell me of their simple lives as farmers in the hills of Toscana. Great Uncle Giorgio was killed in the war to end all wars; Great Uncle Aroldo was killed while rebuilding Germany after WWII; and Great Uncle Celso was the last brother who died quietly after a night of cards at the village bar in 1992. I did not know these three brothers, their two sisters, or their four brothers, including my own Grandpa Nicolino Romangnoli who died when I was seven months old. I find that I am not mourning for them, but for myself, and for the loss of having never felt the touch of their warm simple hearts.

Forty years on I no longer live in Vermont, calling the "big city" of Troy, NY my home. My family is now much smaller and includes a close circle of friends who are spread out across the United States and parts of Italy. My journeys are now a race to embrace my extended family and inner circle of friends before they become voyages of mourning and loss. Through all of this I have found the answer! I do not have to mourn for the empty shell, I can mourn for my past, and while taught otherwise as a child, without guilt I can mourn for myself.

Last night by the lake was a moment, one of those moments you savor, one you never want to end. I can feel my toes swirling across the water as I sit on the edge of the metal dock, thinking the night was perfect with all its imperfections. The biting of the mosquitoes, Charlie frantically running in circles like a deranged mutt spraying dirt everywhere, you catching me in a silly moment licking a mosquito bite, Charlie barking at a lone turtle in the grass, the cuffs of my jeans heavy with water, the man in the red pickup catching us. I hear the song playing on my laptop (*If tomorrow is judgment day and I'm standing on the front line and the lord asked me what I did with my life, I will say... I spent it with you...*), the buzzing of the dragonflies, the croaking frogs, the eager kids fishing off the side of the dock, all come back to me. Looking back from the end of the dock, I studied you sitting at the table immersed in your work. I can smell the muggy summer air, remembering the fading sunlight as it fell behind the crowded trees across the lake. I can sense your closeness now just like that night when we worked side-by-side on the picnic table. I stared at the screen, but could not focus. My thoughts drift to the crispness of the wine, and how it tasted when I crunched on the red grapes and raspberries. Floating on to you, I wondered what you were thinking of, numbers, accounting, me, leaving, family, school. I clearly picture the daisies as you point out the beautiful yellow centers with their spiral growth patterns. I feel your thin arms around me as you quietly kiss me. I feel your lips, the calmness of you and

a grey area fixed somewhere between life and death; fantasy and actuality. There was a layer of routine expectance and certainty of life that peeled away, for a few fleeting moments, which allowed me to see what few others can and to appreciate what the rest of the world is somehow blinded to: the simplicity of who we truly are as we try to live out a life that is not our own, in a universe that we cannot control.

The Great Reliever

By: Amber Noble

The sun dissects my soul
One free spirit, one careless mind
And as the beams bounce all around me,
One true self is what I find.
When the sun shys beneath the earth,
My spirit will take cover
For the bright rays have faded
We become afraid of one another.
Yet again, the sun will rise
My eyes no longer mist
I am free and unafraid
Such a shine will always persist.

Simple Pleasures

By: Amy Wyrshyhora

The car radio is blasting and my luggage is bouncing around in the back seat as I reluctantly drive down the narrow, quaint streets leading out of Hampton Beach, New Hampshire. As the faint smells of salt water and fried dough breeze in through my open window, I feel a sense of calm and inner peace. Above the marshy land that runs alongside the beginning stretch of highway, birds dance in the air and a few white puffy clouds are floating in the bright blue sky. I pause at the stop sign at the intersection and turn left, accelerating toward home.

It had been a very relaxing visit to one of my favorite summer vacation spots. I am a person who can't stand to be alone or have much of a quiet moment in my life, but at that moment, I was filled with peace and tranquility. I discovered that there is a place to go where nothing really matters except the moment you occupy.

The trip began a few days before at home in Cohoes, New York, with the anticipation of getting away. It was a beautiful, sunny Saturday morning as I packed up my car with all of my beach necessities: bathing suit, tanning lotion, beach towel and sunglasses. On my way out of town I had stopped at Dunkin' Donuts to get my daily Sobe Coolatta (to satisfy my caffeine addiction and give me extra energy for the four-hour car trip on which I had embarked) before I set the cruise control and headed for the ocean.

It had been awhile since I last vacationed with my entire family. I used to go more often, but as other responsibilities such as school and work had come into my life, simple

seclusion into a foreign world. For the first time I knew what it was to see as the blinders I had so ignorantly worn since birth were stripped away. For a period of time I cannot explain in our measured terms, I am unaware if I am still physically living. I float from memory to memory, from loved one to loved one, an outsider in my own life. From this third person perspective it hits me, as I see in undefined colors that warm the soul and enlighten the mind: this life is a beautiful gift. Then, as suddenly as I was ripped out of my known environment, I was thrown back into it. In that instant I can not identify where I am, or determine if I am alive or dead. Slowly, my mind adjusts and I hear the sound of my quick and steady breathing. The colors were gone, but I still remained. Without thought and lacking spoken words I felt myself mouth, "Thank you God."

There are some mornings when waking up proves to be purely relative. The barrier between my unconscious and my reality has been blurred. This dangerous combination results in answers to questions I never intended to ask as realities collide in an amazing display of uncanny feelings and events. There are scenes played out in my everyday life which spark an unsettling notion within my memory that tell me I've seen these people, these places, gone through these motions once before. The perplexity and mystery surrounding time began to fade. Suddenly my questions shifted from "why" to "what now." There is a certain sensation that goes along with waking up and for the first time noticing the sky is blue. Hand in hand, with that moment follows a realization that by all rules of nature and reality, I shouldn't be breathing. I effortlessly fall into

reality escalating around you. Our human minds cannot maintain a consistent conscious thread of understanding between what we are encountering and it actually occurring. In all normality, my experience should have been over before I could account for it. However, in certain folds of time, normality does not apply.

There was the initial crash. Freshly cut grass, twisted metal, and shattered glass all created a mixture of sensations which stimulate every sense known to man and some which are not. This is where most stories skip directly to the end—to the moment where your mind and body recollect themselves, reconnect with reality, and you realize it's over. For me, the initial crash is only the preface to a story written in words I never learned alongside the English language. I will admit that the whole experience lasted seconds, but these moments in other dimensions of time and space lasted what may have been years.

I could see the situation evolve around me disturbingly slow. Each flip, turn, and resulting crash went strangely unfelt. It was as though I was being closely held in the arms of someone vastly larger than myself. I could sense I was drifting between the surfaces of time, the surfaces we try to contain within clocks and day planners. This leads to a sudden deterioration in the rules we unconsciously depend on to live out our everyday lives. To my astonishment, I saw an aspect of my known world casually begin to reveal its God-given secrets. I suddenly realized that we live our lives only in accepted definitions. There are colors that paint our world we are unable to see. Colors without names, and not contained in any rainbow filled my mind and I, like a newborn, came out of my state of comforting darkness and

pleasures often were set aside. I often wondered why I let that happen. I didn't have the answer; so I let the thought fade from my mind.

Normally, I was horribly bored with the long drive on I-90 into Massachusetts and then I-95 North to Hampton. But as I drove that day, I took in the surrounding scenery with appreciation and satisfaction, knowing in a few short hours I would be basking in the sun with the warm sand between my toes. The speed limit was 65 miles per hour on the smooth highways, but my foot just couldn't seem to let up on the gas. My heart beat a little faster as the scenery began to change from long, paved stretches of highway, to bustling avenues lined with seafood restaurants and souvenir shops. Down a few blocks, the familiar waterslide park, fried dough stands, and boardwalk came into view. I extended my neck like a giraffe over the steering wheel looking at the passersby. I couldn't wait to exit my vehicle and join the cheerful families in the many activities around town. As I rolled past the largest parking lot along the boardwalk, my sister recognized my car and waved me over to an empty parking spot. She was waiting with her husband, our mom and our four-year old nephew, with boogie boards and beach bags in tow. It was my nephews first time visiting Hampton Beach, and I couldn't have been more excited to "show him the ropes."

I stopped the car, turned off the motor, and got out stretching the kinks in my back from the long drive. Off in the distance I could hear children screaming with sheer excitement and the waves crashing against the shore. My family and I set off for the perfect location to rest in the blazing sun and frolic in the water for the next few hours.

There was something different about me as I lay in the sun listening to tunes on my iPod. I couldn't even remember what day of the week it was or what I was worrying about on my way out of town. I was consumed by a feeling of total acceptance as my family members talked and laughed around me. There were no rights, no wrongs, just simple banter among family. They didn't want anything from me except some good conversation, a few jokes, and my unconditional love.

Somehow I have been trained to think I need to do everything and that I need to do it right away. As I gazed through the lenses of my pink Chanel sunglasses into the bright blue sky above, I was reminded that it is possible to have inner peace.

I feel lucky to have found such a place and people to remind me that contentment is within my own soul. I will take this lesson learned with me each time my life seems chaotic or unmanageable. Each day as I enter the "real world" of school and work I think back to my last summer vacation in Hampton Beach and reminisce about the simple pleasures: family, friends, and great memories.

Insignificant Thoughts on Something Significant

By: Elizabeth Madden

Ever since scholars began attempting to mold a feasible definition around the concept of time, they've catapulted themselves into an obsession: a fascination with theories of stopping, slowing, and reversing the hours and minutes we've been taught to measure our lives with. In all, tangible reality, a phenomenon such as altering the foundations of time, remains untouched. We cannot fold together its surfaces and walk across the wrinkles created; nor can we peel away its layers and manipulate the controls buried within. As humans, we must humbly acknowledge that, perhaps, we do not even possess the mental capabilities necessary to unravel the mysteries time has kept enveloped within itself. There are unique occurrences, however, for perhaps a predestined few, who unexpectedly discover themselves scratching at the surface of what appears to be the inner-workings of time and space.

There are some days that just feel different. It's a notion that rises up from a deep, desolate and quiet place that cannot be readily ignored. You simply know. This small place within the complexities of your innermost consciousness screams in anticipation. This was not one of those days. No part of my being hinted that by the close of this typical day in my average existence my entire world would hang in suspension.

I remember the smell of the burning rubber first. It flooded my bloodstream filling my body with sudden force. Typically, when engulfed by a life altering situation it takes long drawn out moments for you to process the shifts in