



# ANTHOLOGY

Volume 15  
A Publication of Tarleton State University

# Anthology



A Publication of  
Tarleton State University  
Stephenville, Texas  
Volume 15, Spring 2009

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## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

**S**tudents enrolled at Tarleton State University are invited to submit their work for publication consideration online at: **[www.tarleton.edu/~anthology](http://www.tarleton.edu/~anthology)**.

*Anthology* accepts work throughout the calendar year and is published annually in April.

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# Anthology 15

## Editors' Choice Award

Our Editors' Choice Awards honor three individuals who have contributed outstanding works to this volume. The range of talent demonstrated by these students exemplifies the breadth of creativity at Tarleton State University.

### **OUTSTANDING POET:**

Aileen Blum

### **OUTSTANDING POEM:**

Crystal Sims

*With special recognition for "Winter Memory"*

### **OUTSTANDING PHOTOGRAPHER:**

Lúisa Cossío

## Creative Arts Day Speaker

Tom Dodge

## Remarks on Poetry

It is a tribute to the human spirit that young people still feel a strong urge to try their hand at poetry, an art without a definition on which even poets themselves can agree. It brings in little or no money and expecting acclaim for it, quipped Don Marquis, "is like dropping a rose petal into the Grand Canyon and waiting for the echo." Robert Lowell believed that poetry is "what you can't do." Ezra Pound called it "news that stays new." James Dickey said it is "telling how it feels to be alive on the planet." John Milton, the classicist, said poetry is verse "that succeeding generations will not willingly let die." To Wordsworth, the romantic, it is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility." Leo Tolstoy said that if it weren't written in verses he wouldn't be able to distinguish it from prose. Archibald MacLeish warned against trying to define it. In his poem, "Ars Poetica," he wrote, "a poem must not mean but be."

But leave it to e e cummings to offer the most unusual attempt at a definition (with a striking, but politically incorrect image): Poetry is best defined, he said, by the vaudevillian's question, "Would you hit a woman with a baby?" And his partner's immortal answer: "No. I would hit her with a brick."

Poets, it is said, look at one thing and see something else. They present us with other ways of beholding the world. Some poets are so abstract that we can get lost in their vision. There are, for example, at least thirteen ways of looking at a Wallace Stevens poem (one being a harmonious way; "A man and a woman / Are one. / A man and a woman and a blackbird / Are one") or probably thirteen ways of writing one as well. Sometimes, before beginners find their own unique poetic way, they will consciously or unconsciously imitate the great ones. I used to practice by imitating James Dickey. Another of my favorites was e e cummings. Sometimes for fun, I updated his poems to see if they would go over better with my students.

Anthology 15

Take "Buffalo Bill's defunct," for example. It is a poem stating, with sunless humor, that Buffalo Bill was handsome and famous but no more immune to death than anyone else. Buffalo Bill Cody was still a well-known figure when that poem was written but a mystery to most students today. So I wondered if the same idea could be made by substituting John Kennedy or Marilyn Monroe without losing any of the meaning:

JFK's

defunct

who used to deliver a watersmooth-silver

Speech

and break onetwothreefourfiveheartsjustlikethat

Jesus

he was a handsome man

and what i want to know is

how do you like your blueeyed boy

Mister Death

Or

Marilyn Monroe's

Defunct

who used to sing a watersmooth-silver

song

and beguile onetwothreefourfivesuitorsjustlikethat

Jesus

she was a lovely girl

and what i want to know is

how do you like your blueeyed girl

Mister Death

I think it's almost miraculous that despite seemingly unlimited complicated technological doo-hickies to distract them so many

young people still feel the compulsion to write poetry—an art that dates to a time even before writing. They feel the urge to say, “I am,” in a thousand different ways. Everyone, I believe, loves poetry though many are so out of touch with themselves that they think they hate it. They seem to have no way of knowing that the popular music they listen to is poetry, some good, some bad. But, still, it’s poetry.

“Poetry doesn’t mean anything to me,” they might say, galloping across the dance floor to the country rhythms of Kenny Chesney.

“I think it’s for wusses,” sneers the sports spectator, as he puddles with emotion at the sound of “The Star Spangled Banner.”

“Poetry’s for the birds,” one might say, which is, itself, poetry.

We’re all poets. Poetry is so embedded in us that without it we would all be mute. “It’s raining cats and dogs,” we say, though no one expects to see the beagle dogs and Persian cats dropping from the clouds. “His head is “like a rock.” That halfback “runs like the devil,” is “fast as greased lightning.” A “homeboy” stays close to his “crib.” Quarterbacks throw “bombs” and linebackers “blitz.” A boy and girl “have chemistry” and “sparks fly” when they meet. They soon “tie the knot”; then over half of them “split the sheets”—along with the rest of the property. It may be bad but it’s poetry nonetheless.

A young poet should not give up due to criticism from having written a few poems that don’t scan very well. Even our greatest poets would have to admit that some of theirs, too, are not equal to the ones that made them famous. Despite the magnificent poems of Wordsworth, Milton, Byron, Browning, and most of the other great poets, probably more than half of their published work should be left only to scholars. Even Shakespeare is lucky he’s not judged by “Titus Andronicus.”

So, when you feel Erato calling your name, take up your quill and have at it!

Tom Dodge

[www.tomdodgebooks.com](http://www.tomdodgebooks.com)

Steve Ash

## The Funeral

The light bulbs strained in the darkly paneled room. I stood listening to the hushed conversations of people discussing relatives they hadn't seen in years. Some of them were crying. Some were not. I was not. I was getting restless.

This was the first funeral I had ever been to. My mother noticed my fidgeting and gave me a piece of Wrigley's chewing gum. It was a bribe she often used in church so I'd behave. She always carried chewing gum in her purse. Contented, I found an empty wooden folding chair, sat down, and chewed. The chair had a numbered metal tag on the back, "No.11".

From my chair, "No.11," I looked to the other side of the room. There, framed by flower arrangements and set on a silver stand with casters, was a coffin. In it, I was certain, was a dead body. Morbid as it may sound, I found myself wanting very much to see this dead body. After all, I was just a kid, curious and excited, and with no emotional stake in this person. It would certainly be something to talk about Monday at school.

An hour had passed, and my gum had lost its flavor. After a while, all I could taste and smell was the heavy, unfiltered smoke from too many lit cigarettes. The crowd was thinning, and I could see my mother collecting her things: purse, sweater, scarf. I knew we'd be leaving soon. Across the room, the coffin stood alone. This was my chance.

Now, amidst the childish curiosity, excitement, and fear, I felt a new emotion: conflict. Would it be disrespectful to walk up and take a peek? Who would notice? Who would care? I heard my mother saying her good-byes and then, "Steve, let's go." A voice in my head whispered, "now."

I stood and began walking towards the coffin, weaving my way through the collection of empty wooden chairs. My eyes were fixed, and I could feel my heart beating. I could see the folded hands. They were so small. Again my mother called, louder this time, "Steve, come on." Ignoring her and now standing beside the coffin, I looked inside.

I just stood there, staring, frozen. It was a child, a girl, my age. She was wearing a white dress, she had blonde hair, and there was a white flower in her hands. I looked at her chest to see if it would move, but there was no breath, nothing. She looked as if she could wake up at any moment, yet she remained still, silent, in solemn repose.

I wanted to say something, anything, but what? I could have said I was sorry for wanting to see a dead person, or how sorry I was that she was the dead person. The novelty was over. Now I felt like an imposter, ashamed, like I had committed some sin. Mostly though, I felt guilt. I knew that in a few minutes, I was going home to play, to grow up, and to live my life. She was going outside to be buried, to be dead, forever.

I can't explain why it hit me so hard then or why I feel this sorrow now, or if the grief I feel is on her behalf, or mine. It was forty years ago. I was just a kid with no emotional stake in the death of that little girl. Yet the experience and the image has been with me my entire life—those small hands.

Carolyn Bass

## An Ode to Eagle Man

Boredom has struck yet again in this class.

The teacher is crazy the teacher is nuts,

he stands in the front and preaches his stuff,

over and over he says the same thing,

monotone, monotone, mumble and then,

AMERICAN BALD EAGLE or DAMN THIS CHALK

seems as if it's the only thing we understand,

laughing and laughing at what is at hand

.



Aileen Blum

## Cavernous

Beneath waterfalls of prism rays  
dappling and sweaty shades,  
a flood of affectability  
cracks each pebble producing  
distinct  
epitomes of expression, to  
impress upon them  
a single point.

His fingers  
burrow into a wrinkled head,  
he stoops,  
and no sound reaches him.  
He grasps his pen  
with a hand  
calloused only at the tips where there  
they have met only with the onslaughts of inky wars,  
victories and losses.  
Such muddied craters  
yet transient windows to this mind  
and inside  
such darkened and richened beauty.

The trickling sounds stop  
in fear of knocking down this deaf world  
and a drip as a single drop  
hovers over his door.

.

Aileen Blum

# Champagne

From behind and above,  
the boulder splashes downstream,  
and they giggled, stepping aside, holding  
their glasses.

They tossed their hair  
whispering to each other  
and she hides cautiously, watching them—

Their skin  
glitter like sweet gossamer.

She licks her lips  
and waits for a taste.

Aileen Blum

## The Glories of Righteousness

Some drink the salty ocean water.

Shivering down from caves  
in an arcane purple haven,  
something struck,  
thundered  
at gurgling golden waves,  
rippled it with flaming tendrils and boughs  
and crumpled the ground to ashes.

She blinks. Her pupils dilate in disbelief.

A massacre  
by tubes piercing  
flesh twists inside,  
seeking,  
finally  
gulping down lumps of superfluous life.  
The surgeon's camera kisses the blushing, grinning cadaver.

And  
the physicists work tediously,  
their mindless spider fingers crawling  
over the metal,  
clicking,  
connecting,  
pushing  
buttons here and there to make it buzz.  
It burps and they  
shudder.  
Outside, screaming supplicants bloody their palms on the  
glass, mouthing "Stop."

Yet  
straight-toothed passersby tread carefully to ignore that  
impudent boy,  
that unkempt  
seat warmer in the waiting room,  
writhing inside.

A plush woman judges deeply  
through a sniff of her nose:

Gall  
swells  
his kind.

Pitiful, dirty.

The righteous riot clings babes to their sweated breasts.

She sighs,

“Sun,  
silly sweetness,  
rise.”

Aileen Blum

## The Green Dragon

Closing her eyes, she placed the red bean on her tongue.

A fluorescent lamp swung over the metallic slab upon which  
she lay sprawled,  
her hands by her eyes,  
her knees unnaturally twisted,  
and her skin thin and transparent.

Grey-blue veins  
mapped a civilization out over her belly  
and underneath,  
a womb could be seen,  
pulsating.

He bent over her.

Whispering in her ear to see if she woke,  
gleaming,

he went to work. Together,  
with her under his hands, he felt  
he could do it.

He lovingly peeled back the layers,  
gently filleted her skin,  
and selfishly ravished her muscles until rivulets splashed to the  
floor.

Ah, the seed.

A hemostat found its way into his sticky fingers and he  
plunged in.

A red ocean lay under his heels,  
but somehow, anew,  
thick and warm streams spiraled

out of the pink walls and hid his hand from sight.  
The incisions began to convulse,

wildly twitching and  
sucking  
at his wrists,  
but he dug further.  
Shutting his eyes,  
he felt it.  
Snapping down with the hemostat  
hard,  
he gave a great wrench and out loosed a pulpy lump.

A table leg snapped.

Stepping back triumphant with the seed  
beating in his palm,  
he did not notice the body  
slip off the table  
and into the crimson pools below.

He turned his back.  
A thunderous crack snapped overhead  
and the ceiling caved in revealing  
a tumultuous sea  
raging and threatening to swallow the room.  
Her body rocked on the red sea below.  
The waters reached up to  
his knees.

Another crack.

He dropped the seed.

Another crack, this time beneath.

He had turned around to watch  
this time. Foaming

red waters spit into a boil.  
A small green sprout slithered  
from the current,  
up for air,

a leaf for its head.  
It turned  
towards him and tilted.  
Another crack  
and it was summoned.  
No longer waiting,  
it burst  
forth. The lanky vine swelled into bulging sinewy fibers,  
twisting,  
shuddering,  
passing  
rain down its spine.  
It curled  
and it spiraled  
upward,  
twitching and exhaling  
fresh cold breaths into an atmosphere scorched  
by the bolts.

And then, it was gone.

The man fell to his knees,  
up to his neck in blood,  
and with his hemostat in hand,  
cured himself of his blindness.

Aileen Blum  
Wretched

From the gravel pit of its stomach, a foot is captured, glued in midair like a fly futile in opaque amber struggles.

Stuck in this finite frame, the toes are delicately sliced for easier mastication and the bones begin to show,

gushing of speckled tarnish

accompanied by the molten good which is undone.

The blood is laced. Golden, childish cries beam beacons of truth saying "no...not,"

or so we think,

but all for naught for tangled heavenly hair snake

hell-ward

and in one yawning bite,

consume the heel.





Kari Lanting  
Two Amigos

Pen and ink

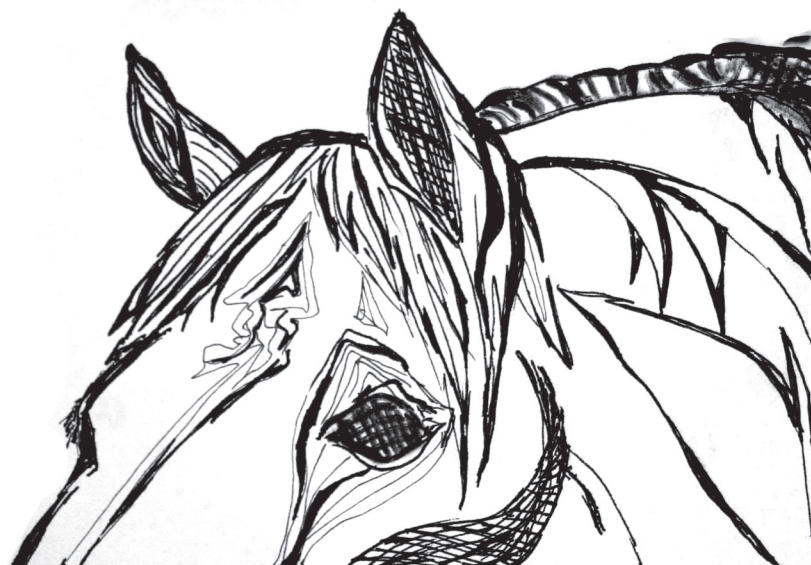


TaLisa Richardson

Kind Eye



Kari Lanting  
Perspective  
Intaglio print



Kari Lanting  
The Gentle Mare

Pen and Ink

Laura Colyar  
The Collection

He wished she could have stayed longer. He had actually enjoyed her singing. She went to Cornell. Or was it Carnegie Melon? For...what was it? Oh, it didn't matter. It never mattered much to him. Those college broads were all the same. They just needed a good fucking. But this one. This one was different, he had to admit. A novel find.

He was buying cashmere socks at Bloomingdales (he could only wear cashmere socks; the cotton ones gave him a rash) when he discovered her. She was at the make-up counter wearing a putrid yellow sweater. He hated the color yellow because it made him think of the slushy yellow piss that slopped into the sewers during New York winters. She never wore the yellow sweater again. He examined her for the next two weeks. Always careful to avoid her eyes. She wasn't beautiful by any means. She had pock-marked skin. And he thought she had once had embarrassing acne. That was why she worked at the make-up counter. She had large green eyes and copper hair. He thought they should be gray or blue. Green eyes were too commonplace. He had to admit, he did admire her hands. They were long and bony with fat knuckles. Like a practiced piano player. Graceful, nimble, breakable.

He always had a way with women. They were lucky he took an interest in them. He didn't really intend or prepare for her like he did the others. Of course, he knew eventually she would be his. The voices told him she would please him. During the holidays he wanted to purchase a cashmere scarf, so he took the taxi to Bloomingdales. Before looking at the scarves, he rounded the corner of her make-up booth. She was especially lonely that day. She missed Ireland and was thinking she felt like a micro cog in a microcosm. He did not know this, but he knew she looked vulnerable. She was fingering the eye

shadows, painting a palate on her hand but frowning like the right hues just didn't exist. It was hunting time.

He bought a gray cashmere scarf and waited patiently as the buxom old cashier painstakingly folded the item till it was the size of a post card. Then she wrapped it in tissue paper and placed it in a white bag with a silver ribbon. In his peripheral vision, he saw her greeting her replacement. As she exited through the revolving doors, he exited just one turning door behind her. "Oh, excuse me, Miss! Miss!" He held up his Bloomingdale's bag. "May I ask you a question? What is your return policy on items?" He knew she'd bite. She came just close enough for him to take out his handkerchief soaked in chloroform.

Even though she turned out to be slightly different than the others, she still needed a good fucking. They always did, even though they pretended to be offended. He never understood why they always put up such a fuss. Those plain Jane, mousy-haired bitches, smarter than him. They never get laid. They would cry, scream, bitch, moan. But this bony fingered young woman waited quietly until he was done with her. He grunted and decided he was hungry enough to begin cooking. He grabbed his filet knife and the blue bucket. She began to get hysterical and this irritated him. The voices told him she was making too much noise. Hurry and get rid of her.

Sitting on top of the blue bucket, he sharpened his knife as a predator preparing for the meal. He liked the thought. He could barely think through her hysterics. What the fuck was her problem? Couldn't she tell he was trying to concentrate? He put the knife to her throat and warned her nicely that if she valued her vocal cords, then she ought to stop using them. She didn't make any more noise and let him finish sharpening his knife in peace.

He went upstairs to boil some water, and when he returned, she looked different. Composed.

She asked him questions about his family. He became visibly bothered by these questions; it was, of course, no business of hers. She apologized and began to talk about her family—how proud they were that she was attending college, how beautiful her sister’s baby was, and how she missed the mossy green hills of Ireland. He told her not to think about these things because they didn’t matter anyway. She turned her face away from him. This did not bother him. As she sobbed she sang:

*How sweet is life but we’re crying  
How mellow the wine but we’re dry  
How fragrant the rose but it’s dying  
How gentle the wind but it sighs  
What good is in youth when it’s aging  
What joy is in eyes that can’t see  
When there’s sorrow in sunshine and flowers  
And still only our rivers run free*

He let her finish her song, and then he cut her throat. He didn’t want to; he wanted to hear her sing again. But the voices told him he needed to hurry up and get rid of her. He began to methodically strip her flesh and toss it in the bucket. Her skin was pale and had no freckles. This aroused him. He lapped the blood that trickled and pooled into her bellybutton but was interrupted when the boiling pot began to hiss.

“All great things are only a number of small things that have been carefully collected together.”

Laura Colyar

## Death by Goldfish

I let it ferment in my mind, churned it over  
like the stomach digests its contents  
and it still left the rotten, sour taste of injustice in my mouth.  
After a long run, after the passing of that nauseous feeling  
of being simultaneously hungry and thirsty, needing  
sustenance,  
after that I brooded. I brooded and I discovered nothing.  
Nothing except that  
dust bunnies are breeding like rabbits in my room.  
I hate cleaning. I hate erasing those remnants of his presence.  
I'd rather sleep in dirty sheets,  
finding comfort from his dead skin cells.

I am tasting gun metal in my mouth  
and I like the taste. I am losing faith  
in the human race. It seems we are all racing to be human  
and no one is winning. Should I be concerned?  
Should I hate myself for hating others?  
I think we are all devolving into apes  
and it makes me ashamed. Makes me ashamed  
that I have to identify myself as human,  
even to a housefly.

I wish I could just shed my skin,  
crawl into a cocoon,  
or swallow a goldfish.

Laura Colyar

## Dove Hunting

forgetting the true child  
eyes were opened  
behind the weapons  
an eagerness  
brilliant as the sun  
smooth ideas  
they will find refuge

ideas  
as brilliant as the sun  
smooth weapons  
behind the fear  
a child with eagerness  
minds were opened  
and she will find  
disappointment  
forgetting true feelings

we carried weapons  
forgetting shoes, cigarettes, beer  
sweating in the brilliant sun  
skies were opened  
hiding behind bushes  
concocting ideas  
like a child in our eagerness  
hoping we will find  
a smooth, true flight

Josh Davis

## Stranger

**M**y eyes open to strange surroundings. Where am I? The mattress I lay in feels foreign. The air I am breathing tastes out of place. Neither sight nor smell triggers anything in my mind. I pull myself from the blanket strewn bed, those colors; blues and tans mingling together in striped patterns confuse me further. I would never choose those. I prefer deep reds and blacks to wrap myself in while resting. My feet touch the floor and recoil at the feel of soft carpet. My own house has hardwood floors, slightly rough. I need to sand them when I get back, but first I must figure out where I am and how I even got here.

I take a few steps and pass an open window, the cool breeze causing goose bumps to spread across my naked body. What? Why I am nude? I never sleep without my pajama bottoms, red plaid. I remember being teased about them because I never spent the night anywhere without bringing them along. I know it is rather silly for a thirty-seven year old man to have such a security blanket, but nonetheless they bring me comfort. I wish I had them now. I quickly move away from the open window, hoping no one happened by and saw me in my birthday suit.

I look around for any trace of my clothing—nothing. There's not even a misplaced sock lying about. I spot the dresser and begin to dig through. Hopefully whoever lives here won't be too upset that I am borrowing their clothes. The first drawer was filled with women's undergarments—some plain, some skimpy. Did I meet someone last night? I open the drawer next to it and find it full of men's boxers. I prefer briefs, but at this point I am not going to complain. I grab a pair and slip them on, then pause. If I met someone last night, then why are there men's clothing here that are obviously not mine. Is she married? Has a boyfriend? Am I the boyfriend? What gives?

I let out a sigh and run my fingers through my hair—it's short. What happened to my long hair? I've been working so hard at



trying to grow it out, it was down to the middle of my back and I always kept it in a pony tail. Did I drink too much last night? No, that's not like me. I don't even like to drink, much less get so drunk I cannot remember the night's happenings.

My heart is pounding in my chest, my breathing short and rasping. Oh no, my asthma. I search the room for my medication. Where is it? I never leave home without my inhaler. Okay, something must have happened, just calm down and try to take deep breaths. That's it, just calm down. My heart begins to settle as the panic attack subsides.

I suddenly feel sick to my stomach and race towards what seems to be the bathroom door. Luckily I was right. I just barely made it to the toilet just as my stomach heaved out its contents. Feeling better now. I head to the sink and rinse out my mouth. Something catches my eye. I look down at my left hand and the gold band encircling the ring finger. What the hell happened last night? I am not a married man!

At this moment I catch my reflection in the mirror. Panic and horror set in. Who is this person looking back at me?! That is not my face! Those are not my brown eyes looking back! That is not my short, curly black hair! That is not my nose! I claw at my face, desperately trying to tear off this fake flesh. My finger nails dig deeply into this false image. Trails of blood flow down in rivers. Good, I will bleed this image! I want my face back! I want myself back! Who the fuck are you?! I smash my fist into the mocking image staring at me. The glass shatters, the shards slicing the hand. That's it! That is how I will rid myself of this terror before me! I grasp a long piece of the mirror in my hands and begin to carve away the face of this impersonator. I know that it is fake because I feel no pain as I peel flesh from bone.

Suddenly my vision begins to blur. I feel dizzy, tired. I try to continue with my task but fall to the cold unfamiliar floor. I can no longer see anything. Everything is black. I can still hear though, but that too is fading fast. I hear soft footsteps entering the bathroom followed by a woman's scream. Then nothing.

Anthology 15

Josh Davis  
Venus Sky

inside hide

living lie

only wishing

venus sky

evening tide

yesterday listing

over side

usurper's pride

revelation trysting

technical sly

innovative mind

aviation drifting

never mine

tainted sign

overture missing

Marsha Decker

## Cravings

I crave its kiss upon my skin,  
a false prophet promising my soul relief.  
Its siren calls blinds me to the truth  
with such sweet seduction.  
Exhilaration fills my body as my pain slips  
away in crimson ribbons tinged with shame.  
The illusion of peace surrounds me, and  
I sink into its false embrace.  
The beast is silent but his mark remains.  
A reprieve has been won, the price is paid.



Portia C. Elrod  
Content

Red clay sculpture, 9" x 4" x 10"



Lúisa Cossío

Contemplative Angel



Rebecca Garrett  
Abbey  
Pencil, 9" x 11"



Rebecca Garrett  
Curious

Clay, 12" x 19"

D. W. Gardner

## As It Should Be

You are the Earth.

I am the Sky.

It's amazing, we even tried.

The Earth stays its course.

Steady and true.

Rock solid outside, that's certainly you.

The Sky isn't constant.

It drifts and it churns.

The Clouds will Rain.

The Lightning will burn.

The Earth inside is molten red.

Its Heart erupts through its head.

The Sky is apparent to even a Child.

Unrestrained and untamed,

Perpetually wild.

But, can there be one without the other?

One has the Sun.

One has the Mother.

Together they create all that is Life.

Just as it's so,

With Husband and Wife.

D. W. Gardner

## The Red Wolf

He came by in Winter time, though he'd been there awhile. I often felt him watching me – a wild and wary Child. It wasn't just a one-way street. I was watching, too. I felt inside his dignity, found in every move. He followed me consistently, as I made my rounds. A quiet peaceful presence, he rarely made a sound.

I wondered why he watched me and why he stayed so close. Then one day I realized, he was there when needed most. When fear showed its face, he'd always be right there. And though I always handled it, it helped to have him near. He was there in quiet times when we were both at peace. He was there when I'd cry and sorrow was unleashed. While I never thought that I needed anyone, he somehow crept inside my Heart with knowing and questions. The more we were together, the more I was amazed, at how much he was teaching me of dignity and grace.

I started looking for him in the stillness of the Night. That's when he'd let me touch him, beneath the Moon's white light. He took me to a River.

We'd run and we'd play. He took me to his hunting grounds – Night became the Day. The Stars shined so brightly, outlined with cold crisp air, but not as much as my Heart beneath his knowing stare. He looked so deep within my Soul, I knew I couldn't hide. He crawled right over all the walls, built long over time.

All too soon it seemed Life's ways did interfere. I heard my Spirit whisper there would be many tears. He was young, and he was wild, the danger it was great. I knew that my presence would be a big mistake. "He needs his own kind," I heard my Heart say, "The Love you feel must let go. There is no other

way." I knew then, I'd have to make him go if I truly cared. There was no room in this World for what we two had shared. Freedom's call was strong; it in all ways had been his gift. I knew with no doubts, he would surely live it.

I began with a plan that I knew would not fail. I started by ignoring him when we'd meet upon the trail. That just wasn't quite enough to break the bond we had. The only option that remained was to make him mad. It broke my Heart to pieces, when I last saw him go. I knew he wouldn't be back, for I had made it so. There wasn't any choice, for I loved him far too much. He was meant to be free and not in Humans trust.

Though some years have passed, I never will forget the lessons that he taught me – there are no regrets. Those Nights were so special; I'm still warm inside. To this day the thought of him, always makes me smile. Sometimes late at Night, my Heart still hears his call. I visit him in my dreams where all the barriers fall. And when I'm old and gray I know, the memory will remain, of the beautiful Red Wolf and the Human that he tamed.



D. W. Gardner

## Swan Song

Fill my Heart full of Grace with words of Light upon my face. A Soul that's strong with Songs to sing. Echoes of Truth. Notes without strings. To feel the freedom found in movement. A Life that's lived in what the Truth is.

Spread my Wings to meet the Current, Waves of knowing in unfurlment. Stretch my neck to greet the Dawn. Feel the strength in Heart's sweet Song. For Grace is found in times alone, Spirit trumpets, "Welcome Home."

Kathleen Gorka  
Island Lessons

The mutton with rice was exceptionally terrible that day. Nevertheless, my Catholic school cafeteria offered two choices of menu—edible and unidentifiable. I believed it was because they wanted us to suffer like Christ. I was not hungry enough for this, so I pushed my way through checkered skirts and white short-sleeve blouses to a trashcan to pitch it. Before I could, a nun, at least seventy, in a navy blue and starched white habit, jerked my arm and expounded how the poor West Indians would have given their only dollar for that meal, but they had to live on plantains, goat, and mangoes. I responded with “Well, they needn’t sister, they can have mine.” She narrowed her brows and would have surely punished me with board time of writing the book of Psalms or half the New Testament or something but a fight broke out and my redemption was granted. Quickly, I broke the nun’s grasp as her attention diverted to the brewing brawl. Tucking down by a palm near a concrete slab, I crouched behind a thorny scrub to watch the ruckus, relieved by my escape. Pointing a finger in my face, a model-like Japanese-American girl about fifteen with long, silky black hair and a strong British-Calypso accent fanned out her skirt and plopped down beside me.

“You o’most were toast. Ma’n I’d ne’er would ‘ave said that to Sister Duez.” She pretended to open a book to study but continued with a brief introduction.

Her name was Lelia, and she was born on the island of St. John’s. She lived there now, and her family was one of the few allowed as permanent residents because it was now a federal land reserve. I already knew that no one was allowed to live on St. John and told her how envious I was. It was one of the most beautiful of the islands. I had snorkeled there and toured the historic ruins of sugar plantations. “Wow! What a privilege,” I

exclaimed and introduced myself, explaining that I was new to the Virgin Isles. She laughed and said everyone knew that from my accent and white legs. Her gift of gab exceeded mine and, before recess was over, I knew that recently her dad had passed away from a rabies bite. Rabies?, I asked, here on the Virgins? No, he was bitten by a bat while stationed overseas in Europe and afterward came home to die.

“You see, it takes a while to die of rabies, at least my dad did. He went crazy first. It was so hard, Ma’an. My mum took it well.” Blinking away denied emotions; she wiped her sleeve up to her eyes. Her mother was Japanese whose family had been exiled in the forties, and after the war they bought property on St. Johns before it became a reserve. So now she lived with her brother, who was twelve, and mother in a small geometric house with her own room and a cat named Cyrene, justifiably.

She gave me her number, and we arranged for a Saturday trek. Though not sure what a trek was, I gladly agreed, desperate to be her friend in this strange new world. We were to meet at Red Hook Ferry Pier. I arrived early and took in the sandy cream beach washed clean by cool clear swipes of waves tickling hermit crabs and white sea urchins out on the rocks. Drifting with the slapping rhythms, my imagination rambled. I envisioned that I discovered the treasure rumored to be buried here. It belonged to a roguish, handsome young pirate who would return to his loot only to find me. Flinging his past lusts aside, he would bestow an emerald pendant around my neck remarking how its resonance matched my eyes all the while becoming more enchanted. He would beg me to join him on faraway quests and exotic adventures declaring he could no longer live without the vision of my flowing hair...

“What, there’s someone waving at me?” I snapped to reality when a stout West Indian lady wrapped in a brightly colored shawl touched my arm, “Hallooo, huney, yes, she wav’ed at you,” only to realize that Lelia was beckoning for me to join

her on the ferry. She had arrived, chasing my daydream away. We ferried over to St. John's talking incessantly as if we had been friends long ago and were catching up on life. Her mother was a librarian and loved to cook. Great! I thought. I liked to cook, and I loved to eat. So did Lelia. The weekend was a whirl of stir-fried island concoctions, baking chocolate chip cookies and devouring everything we made. She taught me how to make a "perfect" western omelet, and I showed her how to juggle the eggs, in the end making a "perfect" mess. She was amazingly talented, and I couldn't get over her sure-footed, easy manner. Constantly smiling and quick with stories, all the while pushing and tucking her shiny long hair aside at every chance, I was immensely envious. Her hair was so black it seemed incandescent, shimmering indigo in the light. She had thin wide lips and a high forehead. In addition, she stood at least four inches over me. God, she could be a model, I seethed. Catching my thoughts and realizing I had said God's name in vain, I silently prayed for forgiveness. Truly, I was perplexed though, as popular girls didn't usually make friends with me. I decided not to worry. Lelia was now my first real friend in the Isles, and I was basking in it. She was fun, gregarious, and interesting. Noticing how the boys followed her around at St. Peter & Paul's High, I began imitating her. Secretly, I noted her funny quips intending them for my own use later with boys I might meet.

After lunch, she said she had to freshen up and after what seemed a long time, she emerged wearing khaki shorts, preppy sandals and a flashy bathing top. I was so jealous of her beauty and thin shape. My own body was still changing in my adolescence, and I wasn't as shapely in the right places, and I was still pudgy in my waist.

We scooped up towels and headed down a narrow paved road where I met soldier crabs, a mongoose, her brother's friends, and everyone else who Lelia knew. The trek turned out to be sort of an island walk-a-bout. Because St. John's could

be driven entirely in no time, adding to the claustrophobia or island fever as it was called, the islanders took up sort of a social street walking where you could meet up with neighbors, buy goods from the native islanders or simply hike up the mountains. This Lelia explained was called “trekking.” We were also going to visit the old Sugar-plantation ruins and then play in the water to cool off. I enjoyed the hospitable atmosphere as people from all ages smiled at me and offered Lelia food. We talked about her childhood and mine. She was an “A” student I learned, and it was expected of her. “What about you,” she asked? I admitted that my parents didn’t exactly care about that, but I tried for A’s anyway. I wanted to attend college. She said she wanted to travel the world as a flight attendant, but they had to be pretty, you know. I reassured her that she was; however, my words were lost and off she rattled onto other subjects.

The next morning we rose long after the sun-laughing, talking, and planning our day meanwhile cooking up another feast. After Lelia again excused herself and spent what seemed forever in the bathroom, I asked her if she was o.k. and was reassured with Lelia’s usual, “No worries!” Racing each other, we ran up a bluff to conquer and explore. It was so easy to like her. Our friendship bloomed and bosom-buddies we were from then on. Each one visiting the other on weekends. She helped with my chores of sanding the hull on my dad’s boat, which we preparing to live on, and I gardened for Lelia, to her elated relief, as she deplored weeding.

I was settling into island life; however, I couldn’t quite seem to adjust to the West Indian Stop Lights. My dad owned a Moped, an island jeep open on all sides and low to the ground. At each stoplight in Charlotte Amalie, a West Indian islander would hop on with all his friends, holding on to whatever they could hoping for a lift. In order to deter this, a driver needed to stay put, allowing the traffic to pass and refusing to give into the hitchhiker. Sometimes it required an additional green

light to deter them. It was the only way, as Dad never rejected them this charity. Awkwardly we held on, squishing together to allow our extra passengers and silently hoping their ride would be short.

Chip, my brother, took up wind-surfing; my dad- scuba-diving; and I learned to snorkel, clean out sea urchins for decoration and eat pate' pies made with the loving, careful hands of West Indian widows that I met while exercising down goat paths. School had become easier, and I had acquired many new friends through Lelia. Life was promising.

Months later, Lelia was staying over supposedly to work on a school project when she began to cry. I asked her why but was shocked by what she told me.

"I throw up my food."

"What? Are you sick? I'll get my mom."

"No, I throw up my food on purpose," taking in a breath and wiping her eyes. "They call it anorexia."

"I don't understand." In fact, I had never heard of it.

"Well, I obviously have never thought of doing that," examining my own waistline. I studied her and in my innocence wondered aloud, "Why would someone as pretty and smart and so together as you need to do that"?

"I need to stay thin. And I'm not pretty," she defended. I didn't agree. We talked for hours about it. She explained how she ate whatever she wanted and then would throw up enough to keep her weight down. "You should try it. It works," she advised.

If Lelia needed to "get pretty," then I was in an awful quandary. I must have seemed hideous to her. I began to scrutinize my chunky reflection in the mirror—shaggy bell-bottoms, t-shirt, and thin straggly brown hair. I was constantly checking for weight loss and pimples everyday, questioning

what the world must think of me. I knew what they thought. I made sure that I avoided my mother's side-reflection mirror, for then I would see what I thought everyone else did—a flat-faced, big-nosed profile of a deformed but blossoming introverted fifteen-year old. Even so, I could not seem to bring myself to such extremes as Lelia had; consequently, I struggled along with my mother's suggestions of coconut, mangoes, papaya, and salads. Running and swimming at the beach became my new companions, and before long I had dropped two jean sizes to a slimmer size seven.

During spring break, we moved onto my dad's schooner moored in Red Hook harbor. Summer vacation had begun, but it would be lonely. Lelia was flying out to stay down island in Barbados with her family for "holiday." Reluctantly, we said our tearful goodbyes, pledging to be best-friends, but I never saw Lelia again. Her wide smile, brown eyes and friendly face would be forever etched in my memory. I never forgot how to make a "perfect" omelet either. Secretly, I thanked her for that, but only that. Now, I too felt ugly and was excessively worried about my weight. A day never retired before I weighed myself or examined my outline in a mirror. I had made new friends at my new home on the Isles, only to become a stranger to myself and later to my family.

Kathleen Gorka

## Old Man Murphy

Old man Murphy could be seen in his yard bent over with sweat staining the back of his pastel polyester dress shirt. The cuffs of his pleated trousers covered in rich black soil were evidence of his labors. He would look up as we passed by, smile out of the corner of his mouth, and wave. "Mom, could I go over and help a while?" I begged. Hearing the usual, "Be home before dark," which of course I never was. Then, of course, no one cared to notice.

As soon as the car rolled to a stop, I would swing open its doors running toward my bike. It took a few tries to kick clear my banana bike off its bent stand, but soon enough I would be off and pedaling. Down one hill and up another I would race until I caught that familiar plot of land in my view. Cutting across a lawn of abundant crab grass, Japanese daffodils and a rainbow burst of bearded tulips, my bike slammed to a stop only to be discarded near a pile of moldy manure. I could not loose time to park for fear of loosing daylight.

Ol' Murphy, as we called him, was very popular with the neighborhood kids, a regular Pied Piper some parents said. Woo the children he did – with tootsie-roll-pops and cherry sodas... and just about everything else our mothers refused us. Candy was not the only lure. At Halloween he would rally us all together to put on a haunted house. It would be a theatrical affair for everyone to come and see. The haunting was competitive too. Each year the newer group of kids would try to outdo the last haunted performance. I did not dare join in, for I did not fit into that gang of teens. Besides, they really did scare me. Christmas would not to be forgotten either. Ol' Murphy's house was filled with frosted sugar cookies, molasses and cocoa treats and kids who came to help with the lights and tree, and small gifts for all. There was always something going



on at Ol' Murphy's, and most of us kept it passionately closed-in, as if it was our very own Never-never-land. Protecting our fort and keeping it somewhat secret from the grownups, we pinky vowed with our fingers hooked together not to tell. Maybe we feared the magic spell would spoil. Maybe we just feared the world, in general, outside. In any case, it was *our* Never-never-land, and I personally savored it.

Setting aside his best gifts of chocolate and cookies for later, he explained, he offered us popsicles in exchange for yard chores and housework. We were enticed to weed gardens, clean out trashcans, and do whatever else he invented for us to do. He would offer these treats and even a story or two when we were finished, and this in particular attracted me. It was in his side-yard bordered by Silver Queen corn and marigolds, with a vegetable garden striving for sun smack in the middle, that I learned about green peppers or "bell" peppers, as he liked to say. He taught me to eat them plucked off the plant like an apple, making sure I would wipe the mud on my dungaree cutoffs first. I do this even now. Oh, how I cherished the most the allure of Ol' Murphy's homemade kool-aid freezer pops in Dixie cups! When the humidity and temperatures in Annapolis rose, so did the number of kids at Ol' Murphy's place, sucking on the icy-cold syrupy sweets.

I noticed that some of the older kids did not have to earn the ice cream bars, but he did not seem to mind. They said Ol' Murphy was just being nice; after all, he had known them a long time. I agreed that he was generous. Besides it was fun to hang out and eat all that candy; furthermore, at ten going on eleven years old, I needed him too. My own parents were always gone, preoccupied with busy lives, which left me on my own most days until dark. The company and conversation of that old man helped subdue an ache of loneliness and neglect I felt. He talked and listened and was the best ol' story teller ever, even if he was kinda' different. Ol' Murhpy could talk about anything as though it was his personal invention and

tell us about anything we wanted to know such as life, parents, boyfriends...even gardening.

He sure was the best gardener in the neighborhood. Why, every year he won the Gardener's Guild award for something. He even won an award for his green and yellow hybrid peppers, which I suppose were the envy of his peers, my own mother being one of them. Yes, he had a green thumb, of course, with our help. On several occasions, he even paid me money to work, and I discovered later that I was one of the few. This boosted my self-esteem, and I endeavored to receive that honor again.

Many seasons passed, and my assiduous determination to be a gardener like Ol' Murphy had honed my skills, and I was now gardening at home for a small allowance. This gave me an idea. I mustered together my courage and approached Ol' Murphy with my proposition. "How 'bout I come work every weekend and you can pay me what you want? I mean if that's o.k. and all..." I stammered. He bent his head toward me cupping his huge hand around a sun-spotted ear. I offered my proposal again, this time a little louder. He only laughed a slow billowing draw, "Weeelll, Kath, No, I don't 'spose I need Ya' all that much but maybe one of 'eese days. Why'n, you're just still a kid. What, you'r'n not much older than 12 or so, I'd say?"

I frowned down at the ground. Admittedly, I was still smaller than most of the ones that hung around his house. Grabbing the hose covered in clay, I continued to move it from one corn hill to the next, still hearing his low grunting chuckle. Most certainly, I still did not understand, but determination brought me back repeatedly. Pulling, raking, hauling until my body hurt, trying for another quarter and dime from him. I would first start up one row and then down the other, yanking greenish brown thorny weeds from their cradles, making my hands smell of dandelion and thistle. Most of my efforts were acknowledged with a wink, or sometimes a thank you, and,

on occasion, there was an invitation to watch movies on his colored console T.V. with the older kids. The latter being a real treat because Ol' Murphy was the only one I knew who owned a color T.V. set.

Summertime faded into autumn, and soon winter passed making room for spring break. I would pass the time by breaking rules my mother said would cause the "homeowners association" to call. My favorite defiance was riding renegade-like on a borrowed pony through the paved streets with my holsters on, trotting across manicured lawns. There was also breaking the ice at the Sand-spit by the boats, hoping I did not fall in. If it suited, then there was always breaking the windows at Willow Hall. Usually though, I ended up breaking ground for onion sets at Ol' Murphy's. These were lonely times because my only friend, Tracy, was not afforded my freedoms. Tracy was especially not allowed down at Ol' Murphy's. Her mother did not like him, but I disregarded her, as she did not like me either. She and the other women rumored about Ol' Murphy being a loner with strange habits, but then, so was I. There was gossip about his wife being gone for some time, leaving him without a woman; however, I discounted their judgment. After all, they did not know him as we did. To me they were just a bunch of shallow housewives who did not have to work and who certainly did not understand people as I did. What did they ever do for the likes of me? At most, they would curl up their noses at children whose parents had to work.

Another year passed though, and the curse of their remarks began easing into my thoughts and nagging. Why did those older kids hang around doing nothing? Ol' Murphy was not that interesting. An answer became clear in my thirteenth year. Ol' Murphy had said that it was o.k. if I came over that Saturday to put in the Big Boy tomato sets. I showed up mid-day to find a group of teens at his house. These were the usual crowd from the lower side of the neighborhood and not the kind I liked. They were already experimenting in "stuff",

including alcohol and weed, which they bragged about all over high school. I had entered inside, something I seldom dared, to ask a relatively important question about the tomato's depth but now felt self-conscious and anxious to get out of there. A teenage sipping on a drink in front of the T.V. told me that Ol' Murphy was in the kitchen, and I followed the faded Oriental rug in the hall to the back of the house. The smell of mold, seed pots, and aftershave greeted me as I found Ol' Murphy sitting at the table. The shade was drawn, and my eyes adjusted slowly to the figure of a girl on his lap. I was immediately embarrassed when I noticed his hand on her chest. She was wearing only white short-shorts and a bikini top and she was straddled between his legs. It puzzled me even more that she was smiling. Glancing around I could make out two other older girls, and they seemed to be enjoying themselves too. Ol' Murphy caught the air of my shame and slid his hand down to his own side. Coolly inviting me to stay and chat awhile, he explained that they were just in the middle of a story. Casting my eyes from his, I apologized for interrupting.

"Ohhh, its allright. You ain't bothren us." My eyes peeked up catching the way his bronzed skin sagged making his neck three layers. Then, I noticed that he had on only an undershirt and his belt was hanging off to one side. I rambled something about coming to plant tomatoes and Ol' Murphy told me to look for them on the table by the green house. Snatching his answer as an exit, I escaped out the back door. The supplies were found, and I furiously started digging the holes, making hills out of mud and not caring a moment of their depth. Dropping the tomatoes into their new home, I worked like that for over an hour. By the time Ol' Murphy came out, I had already planted two full rows. He never said a word but loomed over me with his hands shoved into his trousers. The straw hat shaded his dipped face from the sun as he stared interminably at the ground. I tried to steal an explanation from his expression, but my own eyes were beginning to blink with

wet shame. After sinking a few more starter plants, I mustered up a husky excuse and pushed past him. I was practically running by the time I reached my bike and realized with awkwardness that I had left without returning my tools to the shed.

Still, I never went back. Months later, my girlfriend Tracy and her other friends noticed that I had stopped going up to Ol' Man Murphy's and asked me why. I never expounded but just said that I had other stuff to do. Although to my dismay, I learned they now did. By the time we were fifteen, Tracy's mother did not seem to mind anymore about Tracy's whereabouts, allowing her to spend time down at Ol' Man Murphy's. On occasion, Tracy called me up to brag about all the fun she now had - now that she was older. I understood what I am sure her mother did not. I also understood that age and loneliness alone did not cause depravity and "desperate" extended to my peers. It was a lesson I had learned along with the revelation that my world was no longer childhood play or adventure and neither was Ol' Man Murphy... anymore.

Erik Hartley

## Anxious Moments

Quietly she sits  
Both beautiful and deceptive  
She is unknown to me  
Her thoughts are foreign  
Her presence makes no excuses  
The blue eyes make me ache  
Our eyes collide if by fate  
They welcome mine adoringly  
Perspiration accompanies my quickened heart  
Honey hair gets pushed behind her ear  
The corners of her lips rise  
As does she  
I fall in love everyday

.

Erik Hartley

## Cheesecake and Heartbreak

She hadn't touched her desert. New York cheesecake was her absolute favorite—\$7.95 had never looked so wasted. Apparently, the operation where she had completely aborted my heart was a success; her satisfaction was reward enough, and there was no need for any celebratory cheese-based deserts. I'm not sure if the Geneva Convention would recognize a girl breaking up with a guy on her lunch hour in a crowded restaurant as a war crime, but surely it is a direct violation of human rights, and that is punishable by death in most countries. Remind me later to contact the United States Attorney General's office concerning this matter.

For five years now, those piercing blue eyes have welcomed mine amorously. Now they have been replaced with short subsequent glances laced with both awkwardness and relief. She is still talking, and it could not be anymore ineffectual. I've heard the same song and dance climactically at the end of every relationship that I've had thus far. It very much resembles a concession speech for the losing presidential candidate; they speak of goals, and what must have gone wrong, and what the future might hold. I'm sure the words have merit, but I've already quit listening. It's almost a funny thought: how could it be possible to be in the middle of having your soul raped and still have a genuine concern of how we're to split up our DVD collection?

Erik Hartley

## Deconstruction

I am a constellation of contradictions  
Epically flawed and tragically damaged  
I eat, sleep, and breathe for my interests alone  
I cast shadows on those who oppose my will

No one has ever been as funny as I think I am  
I'll lie to you if it serves my purpose  
I'll date your ex girlfriend  
Not even babies' candy is safe in my presence

However, I endure and try to evolve  
Every day I attempt to compensate  
To bring the world closer to me  
I try to leave the keys in the door Yet



Erik Hartley  
Evil Girls

Who wants a nice girl?  
Their care is genuine  
Their faith is relentlessly true  
Their love is unconditional

I have no interest in these things  
I need contempt and venom  
Spit on me and call me a liar  
Bargain with my love, hold it lightly

My attention sways like a spring willow  
Nice girl, my interest in you is temporary  
Evil girl, you fascinate me, I will be your toy  
The subsequent torture is just, the cycle continues

Jeremy Heenan

## Cascade

I stand before you, looking  
down  
into the arena of your  
deep set eyes.

A bead of sweat caught  
between your long soft  
eyelashes.

You blink, as the bead  
leaps from it's  
perch

and

Begins cascading  
down  
your still flush face.

Swiftly running the  
length of your  
cheek.

Jeremy Heenan

## Flannel

This morning after she dropped Timmy off at daycare, she had gone to the sentencing. Seven to ten was the verdict. Sharon put the key in the lock, turned it, and opened the door. She laid her purse and coat on a nearby chair and shut the door. It was 12:30 now, and she had just enough time to take a nice, warm, soothing bath before she had to pick up Timmy.

She put her hand on the banister and began to ascend the stairs. Slowly she climbed the stairs, letting her hand caress the railing on the way up, tracing the length of it with her fingertips. She paused when her hand passed over a cleft in the wood. Feeling the indentation, she looked down at the railing to Christmas three years ago.

There had been a fresh blanket of snow on the ground when they awoke. The morning had gone well; everyone seemed happy with the gifts. She kept Bill's finest gift for last—A beautiful set of custom golf clubs.

Excusing herself from the gift exchange for a moment, she went and placed the clubs at the bottom of the stairs. Returning, she suggested they all get dressed and go enjoy the fresh snow. Bill was ecstatic when he saw them, but it quickly faded when he pulled the first club from the bag. The four-iron had barely missed her head when it crashed into the banister. She forgot to get graphite shafts.

He did not miss the second time when he brought the blunt end of the club across her face. It broke a tooth and pierced her cheek. She quickly grabbed her face and ran for the car, leaving a bloody trail through the freshly fallen snow. She pulled herself from the memory and continued up the stairs to draw her bath.

After starting her water, she went to the bedroom to get undressed. Pulling her stockings off, she looked down at the mark on her thigh. Bill had asked her countless times to get a tattoo of his name, but she had always managed to get out of the conversation.

The year the patriots lost to the packers in the super bowl, she had cooked and waited on him and his friends for half of the game. By the end of the third quarter his friends had all left. By the end of the super bowl he had drank nearly an entire bottle of whisky.

His anger climaxed at the end of the game when the announcer's commentary bashed the Patriot's preparation for the game. In his drunken state, he tied her down and tried to carve his name into her leg.

She looked down at it, running her fingers over the marred flesh; it had never looked much like his name and had required thirty stitches. She finished undressing and walked to the closet.

Pulling out a flannel robe she put it around her body and buried her thoughts in it. She was eleven and at J.C Penney's picking out a Father's Day present. She walked around for what seemed like hours until she saw the perfect gift. A large mannequin, resembling her father, wore a deep burgundy flannel robe.

The clerk had taken it down for her at her mom's request. She did not want the ones in the packages. She picked out the wrapping paper and had a difficult time waiting until Father's Day to give it to him.

On that Sunday morning, she sat nervously as he opened it. She almost burst when he had said he loved it and put it on, scooping her up in the same motion. She looked up at him as he smiled down at her.

His hair was beginning to gray at the temples, but to her he was still the most handsome man in the world. She hugged him and sighed deeply. She could smell the old spice he always wore. His facial hair tickled her face as she hugged him. Standing in her room her arms wrapped around herself, she could still smell her father on the robe.

She turned off the water and added some bath beads. It had been years since she had felt this at ease, and she planned on taking full advantage of it. She decided to treat herself to a glass of wine.

She walked out of the bathroom and glided down the stairs, she couldn't remember the last time she had felt this safe—as safe as she had felt as a little girl with her father, not fearing anything, holding his hand.

As she made her way into the kitchen, she noticed the bag she had put together for the goodwill was open. Timmy must have been playing around with it this morning; he was still too young to understand what was going on. The nine months she had carried him had been the best months of her recent life.

Bill was as nice as could be. He waited on her hand and foot while she was pregnant. She had hoped the pregnancy would change things, and it did for about nine months. He had slapped her in the face in the hospital room over a fight about the name. That was the first time she realized he would never change.

She searched the cupboards for a wine glass. Most of their dishes had been lost to Bill's fits of anger. After a few minutes, she managed to pull out one of the wineglasses from a set they had received on their honeymoon: complements of the hotel.

She filled the glass and took a sip; she brought the glass down and stared into the dark liquid. Deep into the liquid at the hotel sink, as she spit the blood from her mouth.

Bill welcomed her early into his style of husbandry. She looked down at the tooth, as it lay in a puddle of blood in the sink.

She took another drink rolling her tongue around in her mouth and feeling the artificial tooth it had been replaced with. Sharon leaned her head back and rolled it around as the wine started to relax her muscles.

Breathing deep to help them relax, a familiar smell caressed her nose, the kind of smell that stands in the woods at the edge of your memory taunting you to come and find it. She took a few more deep breaths as she searched the forest. Wandering through her deep under-brushed mind, she stumbled over the bag for the goodwill. She was almost sure Timmy hadn't been playing with it.

She kept searching, remembering her entire day. She slowed as she came to a clearing in her thoughts. She used her key to get in the house, but she didn't remember hearing that familiar click as she turned the key.

She quickly opened her eyes as the smell jumped from the woods into the clearing with her. Bill had worn the same five dollar Stetson the entire time she had known him.

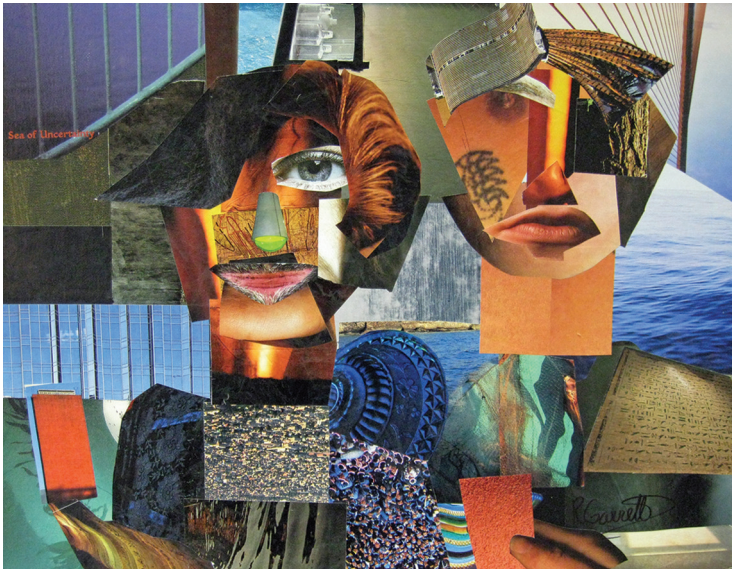
She turned on her heels quickly running for the front door. As she turned the corner out of the kitchen into the living room, she ran headlong into a flannel-covered chest. She fell back hard on her backside. She didn't have to look up. She knew who it was.

That red flannel was on the top of the bag she had put together to send to the goodwill. She slowly raised her head, amber locks falling in her face. She stared up at him through tear-filled eyes. She started to sob thinking of Timmy at school all alone, and no one there to pick him up.



Rebecca Garrett  
Boys with Cups I

Acrylic, 16" x 20"



Rebecca Garrett  
Boys with Cups II

Collage, 16" x 20"



John Michael Cassidy

Spider



Lúisa Cossío

Wrapping Vines





Jenna Murray  
The Man  
Who Laughs  
Acrylic, 24" x 36"



Mark Martin  
Stellar Chaos

Oil, 30" x 40"



Lúisa Cossío

Red Rose



Kari Lanting  
Facade of Color  
Watercolor



Luisa Cossío

Red Bridge



John Michael Cassidy

Runs on Long Hollow Creek



Marissa Díaz  
Stare  
Oil, 18" x 24"

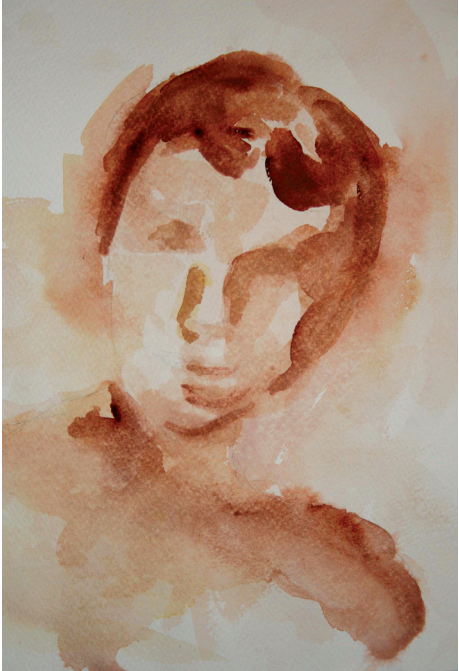


Kate Cox  
Dappled Grey

Acrylic, 16" x 20"



Portia C. Elrod  
Rainstorm  
Acrylic and spray paint,  
24" x 36"



Kari Lanting  
Unsure Image  
Watercolor



Marsha Decker  
Still Holding  
Oil, 10" x 10"



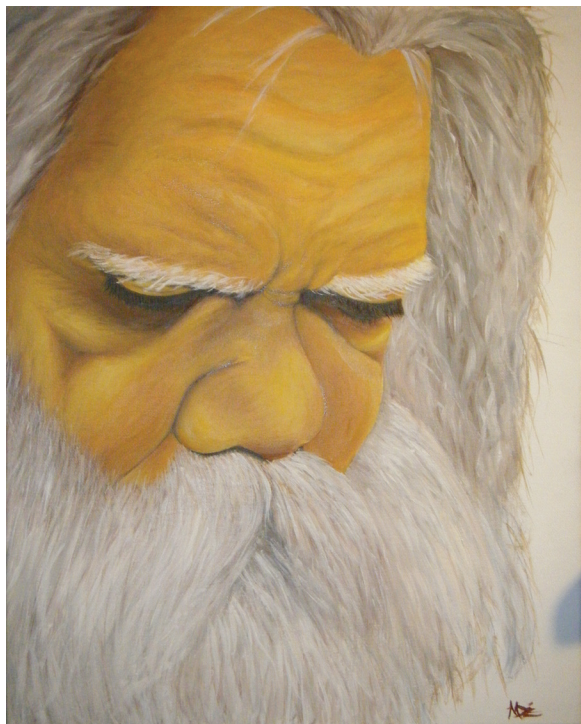
Mark Martin  
Lean In  
Mono print oil on  
rice paper, 8" x 6"



Portia C. Elrod  
Blue Willows  
Acrylic and spray paint,  
36" x 58"



Kari Lanting  
Santa Elena  
Adobe  
oil



Marissa Díaz  
Man  
Oil, 18" x 24"

Brad Morgan  
Ghost Story  
Acrylic,  
30" x 26"







Christopher Mayes  
Desert Oasis



John Michael Cassidy

Chattanooga Shale



John Michael Cassidy

Fresh Coat



Lúisa Cossío  
San Francisco Beach

Johnathan Hendrix

## Cognitive Dissonance

I was at the store

I saw a blind man

Looking at a rack of magazines

I tasted something funny

It tasted orange

Not like the fruit but the color

I was asked what I thought about

Something which did not matter

I said on a scale of one to ten I'd give it the square root of two

I talked to a friend

Who no longer takes drugs

Because he says he was so high he hit a new low

Johnathan Hendrix  
Zeno's Rabbit

Prisoners have their dilemma.

The rest of us,

we're just trying to make through the day.

All asking the same questions,

trying to decide what action should be taken.

Reason your way through it though and,

well then you're just chasing Zeno's rabbit.

Wade Jacobs

## Life Lessons

### Learned the Hard Way

In the far northwest corner of Oklahoma lies the Oklahoma Panhandle. This area is widely considered to be No Man's Land. It first received this name because it was not officially part of any organized state or territory. The truth is, however, that the area's extreme conditions and wild reputation as a hideout for outlaws, who were outside of any official jurisdiction, made it a place where hard-working, honest people would not want to live. This is the place of my youth.

I first came to No Man's Land in the early 1970's, long after the area was finally settled. Settled is, however, a relative term because the land and the people still had a reputation as being wild and unruly. To this day, the area is still thought of as being full of people who march to a different beat. I had moved here with my family, who were in the cattle ranching business. This is where I first met up with the group of friends, who would go on to terrorize the people and wildlife of a three state area.

The characters involved in this misadventure are Henry, this would be me; the Maphet brothers Speedy and Earl; Eric Bond; Kelly Childress; and Richard Dunn. What I am about to tell is true; however, the names have been changed in order to protect the guilty.

No Man's land in the seventies was a land of few rules. The ranch that I lived on was sixteen miles down a dirt road from a town that had a population of 150 souls. Our nearest neighbors were the Bonds, who lived about seven miles from our place. The next closest were the Maphets, followed by the Dunns. Childress and his family lived the farthest away, that being about twelve miles. Being raised in a very rural area has a lot of advantages for a young boy. One of these is that all of us knew how to drive a truck with a standard transmission by the time we were thirteen. We were often "let loose" with the truck to travel to just about anywhere we wanted to go.

Another advantage of this lifestyle was that we got to use guns. We were all taught from a very early age how to safely handle firearms. I don't know what this says about our parents, but knowing what I know now, I don't know how wise it would be to turn loose a bunch of thirteen and fourteen year olds with trucks and guns; however, this was just what our parents did. Add beer to this mix, and the problem only gets worse. Everyone knew about Limroe Felkins, the local bootlegger. It was never a problem to get beer. Since we were so young, he would not sell us any kind of hard liquor, only a small amount of low point beer. This was, however, enough to power us into some wild and completely insane activities.

## Part II

### Never Put a Live Deer in a Volkswagen

As fall was approaching that year, our collective attention was naturally drawn toward deer season. This was the first time for all of us to hunt deer. I do not know why, but we were never taught anything about hunting by any adults. I guess that it was something that was supposed to be learned by doing. We did learn several valuable lessons by doing things this way; however, I would not recommend this technique.

The day before deer season started was a dreary, cold, and wet day. This had absolutely no effect on our spirits. We were looking forward to the next day's hunt. For reasons that I cannot remember, the only person who could come up with transportation for the next day was Dunn. He was somehow able to talk his mother into loaning us her Volkswagen Bug. I am not sure what he told her, but I am sure that it had nothing to do with deer hunting. Dunn made the rounds the next morning picking everyone up. This was well before daylight. Try to imagine six boys with guns inside of a V.W. Bug. Space was of great value inside of that car.

With everyone finally loaded up, we headed for our hunting ground, which was up on the Cimarron River. We arrived at our destination just before sunrise. Since this was our first deer hunt, we were not to sure what to do next. Since Dunn was driving, he said, "Why don't we just drive around and see if we can see some deer?" Since it was so cold and wet out side, Earl, who was not one

to expend energy without a really good reason, said "Sounds good to me." We all agreed, and we spent the next hour and a half driving this Volkswagen through places where a Humvee could not go. In several places, we bottomed the car out on a high spot, but this was no problem. We would all get out and simply lift the car up out of the ruts, move it over, and sit it down on level ground.

After driving around for what seemed like forever, Speedy hollered out, "I see some deer!" Upon hearing this, Dunn slammed on the brakes and sent everyone crashing into the front seat of the Beetle. When we finally got things sorted out and got outside of the car, we saw several deer that were at least 500 yards away. We were not at all deterred by this distance. Everyone leaned over the top of the car and began firing at the deer. It is at this point that Bond shoots the radio antennae off of the car. This only slows us down for a fraction of a second, and we resumed our shooting. It must have sounded like a young war was starting. We paid no attention at all to what we were shooting at. We were just concerned with putting lead down range. It was at this point that I saw one of the deer go down. I screamed "we got one!" to which Childress replied, "Sure as hell did." We all loaded up into the beetle as fast as we can and raced over to where we saw the deer go down.

When we got to the downed deer, we noticed that we had shot a fat doe. The only problem with this is that it is highly illegal to shoot does. At this point, we realized what we have done. Childress exclaims, "Let's get the hell out of here before the game warden shows up" to which we all agreed. Speedy and Earl grab the doe and throw her into the back seat of the car and we all piled in to make our get away. Speedy, Earl, Bond, and I are sitting on the deer in the backseat; Childress is riding shotgun; and Dunn is speeding away from the scene of the crime. We are not exactly sure what to do next. It is at this point that Earl says, "Did you feel something move?" to which Bond replied, "I think I did." We started to examine the deer and noticed that she was still breathing. Speedy and I started to look for the bullet hole when we found that she only had a slight crease right between her ears.

I looked at Dunn and noticed that he had a horrified look on his face. He slammed on the brakes again and throws six boys, six guns,

and one deer in to the front of the V.W. It is now, that all hell broke loose inside of that car. The deer was only knocked unconscious. The deer was frantic, and so were we. She was trying desperately to escape, and we are only too happy to oblige her, only problem was that no one could seem to find the door handle. Childress yelled, "Somebody shoot this thing!" to which Speedy says, "I would if only I could reach my gun." It was total hell inside of that car. Earl is finally able to reach the door handle and finally provide everyone with some much needed relief. One of the last things that I noticed was the deer speedily leaving the area. After somewhat gaining my composure, I started to look around. I noticed that everyone was standing outside of the car in various stages of nudity. It seemed that the sharp hooves of the deer had ripped our clothes to shreds. This does not even compare to what was done to the interior of the V.W.

I am not sure what kind of explanation that Dunn came up with to tell his mother about what happened to her car, but I do know that it was a long time before we ever had the opportunity to use any of the Dunn's vehicles. For months after that episode, anytime that Dunn needed to go anywhere, he had to ride with someone else.

### Part III

#### What is it with Animals and the Inside of Automobiles?

With one valuable life lesson under our belts, we decided set our sites on various other outdoor adventures. That same winter, we decided to earn some extra money by running a trap line. This money was needed to keep us in good standing with Limroe Felkins. Once again, the only problem we had was that none of us had any experience whatsoever in running a trap line. We solved this problem by allying ourselves with the best trapper in the country, an old drunk by the name of Ed Simons. We affectionately named him Dirty Ed, because you could smell him coming for miles. Dirty Ed could catch anything, and he agreed to teach us how to trap if we would give him part of our take. We readily agreed to this arrangement.

After several weeks of riding the trap lines with Dirty Ed, he decided that we were ready to strike out on our own. He set us up with traps, scents, baits and everything else we would need to be successful trappers. We first set out our traps along the Beaver River



just south of where we lived. It was not long until we began to catch coyotes, bobcats, raccoons, and possums. We were doing very well with our venture. We were happy; Dirty Ed was happy; and so was Limroe Felkins. This is when we caught the ringtail cat. We had never seen a ringtail before and were not sure about what we had caught. It was Dunn's idea to keep it alive. "What if it is some kind of rare animal," he said. "It would be a shame to skin something that might be more valuable alive." We agreed with him, but we were now faced with a dilemma. How do you get a ringtail cat out of a trap alive without him ripping you to shreds? I don't know if any of you have any experience with ringtails, but the best way that I can describe it is as a tornado disguised as a cat. These animals are wild. Childress finally comes up with the idea to use welding gloves, which come up above the elbows and are made with heavy leather, to release the cat.

Although this was his idea, he was smart enough to talk the Maphet brothers and me into being the guinea pigs. Armed with their gloves and with me holding a toe sack, we approached the trap. The cat went wild. Earl was finally able to grab ahold of the cat and somewhat subdue it, and then Speedy grabbed the cat by the back of the neck. With them holding the cat, I was able to release the trap. After a long session of cat wrestling, we were finally able to get the "cat into the bag." What happened next is kind of hard to explain. Dunn said, "Boy, I sure would not want that thing loose inside of a car" when you could just see everyone's mind beginning to work. Bond said, "I wonder if we could get it into someone else's car" because we sure didn't want it loose in ours. It was then that we came up with the plan.

The plan that we devised was to put the cat inside of a suitcase. This is much easier said than done. The operation of transferring a tornado from one container to another is very complex. We first had to "let the cat out of the bag" without letting it loose. Childress, wearing welding gloves, first grabbed hold of the cat while it was still inside of the bag. After opening the bag, Dunn and I, also wearing welding gloves, grabbed the cat. The Maphet brothers and Bond were standing by with the suitcase. We carried the cat over to the suitcase and very quickly made the transfer. It was shortly after this that we realized that all that we really needed to do was to open the bag and put everything inside at once. The cat would have gotten out of the

sack and still been inside of the suitcase. As they say, hindsight is 20-20.

With this part of the operation complete, we went to phase two. Phase two consisted of transporting the suitcase to a suitable location in order for us to spring our trap. This was done with the Maphet brothers truck, as any transportation from the Dunn family was still strictly off limits. About fifteen miles to the north was U.S. highway 167. We thought that this would be a perfect location to implement our plan. We found a good spot with lots of trees and brush that provided cover and also a good view of the highway. We placed the suitcase by the side of the highway and took cover in the brush and waited to see what would happen next.

Several cars passed by the suitcase and slowed down as if they were considering grabbing the case; however, none of them did. We were about to give up on our plan when a big Cadillac with Mississippi license plates came flying by. The car went past the case by about fifty feet when the brakes locked up and the car came to a screeching halt. Tires began squealing and smoke was billowing from the wheel wells as the car reversed directions. The car came to a stop next to the case; the back door came open, and a hand reached out and grabbed the suitcase. Once again, tires began to squeal and smoke was billowing from the wheel wells as the car accelerated down the road. It did not get far.

I did not see any attempts by the driver to stop the car. The car was only going maybe fifteen miles per hour when all of a sudden all four doors flew open and bodies began to exit the vehicle in a frantic way. The car went into the ditch and came to a rest undamaged about 200 feet away. This was the last that we saw of that ringtail cat. It was all that we could do to keep quite so that we would not be detected. After a quick check to see if anyone had seen what had happened, the men returned to their automobile and headed off into the sunset. At this point, we could no longer contain ourselves and had to bust out with laughter.

It seems that right after this episode, the affected parties reported the matter to the local law enforcement. The next day, "Crazy Ray," the district game warden, went out and rounded up all of "the usual suspects." The "usual suspects" only included our bunch. It

seems that we were considered the only people crazy enough to put a ringtail cat inside of a suitcase, but due to a lack of evidence (the suitcase was abandoned by the side of the road) they were unable to pin this one on us.

#### Part IV Why do Shotguns Need Plugs?

The start of dove season was always a big event for us. The season always started on September first. This was the first chance that we had to legally get out into the field and hunt after a long hot summer. The very best location in all of No Man's Land for hunting doves was only about a half of a mile from my house. It consisted of a pond with several acres of sunflowers surrounding it. Doves were drawn to this location like a magnet. There is no way that anyone in our group would miss the first day of dove season. Everyone would gather at my house, usually in the afternoon, as this was always the best time to hunt. My mother would always feed as a big meal right before we would hit the field.

One regulation that we had a hard time following was the regulation to plug our shotguns. What a plug does is modify the gun so that it will only hold three shells, instead of five. This was way too cumbersome for us as we did not want to waste time always loading our guns. All six of us had unplugged shotguns. As the afternoon progressed, we were getting really close to bagging our limit. This was when "Crazy Ray" the game warden decided to pay us a visit.

The very first thing that Ray did was to count our birds. He was very surprised to find that we were under our limit. Had he waited another fifteen minutes this would not have been the case, as we were not known to let something like a bag limit stop our hunt. The next thing that he did was to check our guns for plugs. As I mentioned previously, none of us had our guns plugged. He was very happy to find this out because now he finally had something to charge us with. Don't take me wrong here. Ray was always a very fair man and would always give us the benefit of the doubt. This being said, he was always willing to issue a ticket.

When Ray checked our hunting licenses, he found that Dunn and Bond were under the age of sixteen. If he were to issue a ticket

to them, this would require them to report to juvenile court and basically cause a lot of trouble for them. He told them that since this were the case that he would not issue them tickets. He asked the rest of us to follow him to his truck so that he could write us our tickets. While Ray was issuing us our citations, we hear Dunn and Bond open up shooting. This goes on the whole time that Ray is busy with us. Ray knows that with this extra shooting that we would now be over our limit. He runs back down to the tank and finds that Dunn and Bond had killed ten more birds. This did in fact put us over our limit. Ray asked, "What in the hell do you boys think you are doing?" To this Dunn replies, "Well, you already said that you were not going to issue us a ticket, so we thought we should just keep on shooting." This was not the right thing to say to Ray. He took all of our guns, all of our birds, and left us fuming mad. He was still a good sport about it and did not pursue the issue through the courts. He gave us our guns back the next day and hoped that we learned our lessons. The very next week, all of the game wardens in the district were over to Ray's house for a big Dove dinner, complements of us. Another life lesson well learned.

## Part V Conclusion

Many years have past since my days in No Man's Land. The life lessons that were learned during those formative years have served me well. Our old group has dispersed and gone our separate ways. Eric Bond is still living in his family's old ranch house. He has taken over the family ranching operation. Earl Maphet is working in the oil field and has been married and divorced three times. His problem is not that he can't stay married; the real problem is that he can't stay unmarried. Kelly Childress is the High School principle at Wakita, Oklahoma. Speedy Maphet teaches history at the University of Central Oklahoma. We buried Richard Dunn at the ripe old age of seventeen. He was killed while driving drunk. Another life lesson that we all had to learn.

I left Oklahoma shortly after we buried Dunn. I had always wanted to live in Texas, and now I had my chance. One thing that people need to learn from all of this is that actions have consequences. The most important thing in life is to always learn from your mistakes.

Jennifer Kinnear

## Cigarettes and Coffee

I breathe you in like cigarettes in the morning,

All I am missing is the warmth of the coffee.

Like all my bad habits, I am sure of you to stay.

You should not look upon me in that way

Just because another turned my head for a brief instance.

You are not the raging wind in March that will soon die off.

Nor are you the diet I started with the best of intentions

Until temptation came along.

Nor could I in the best of words compare chopsticks to a fork

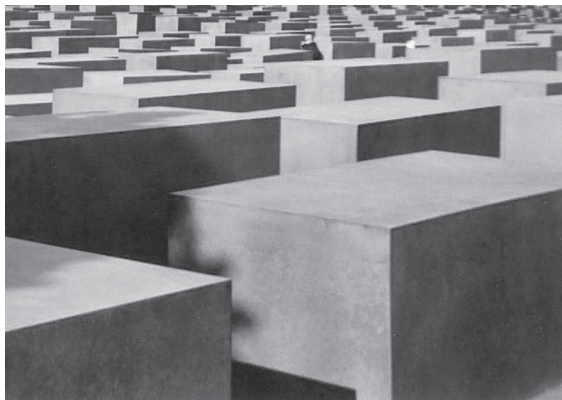
Or a Monday to a Sunday morning on our porch.

There is safety when finding someone new.

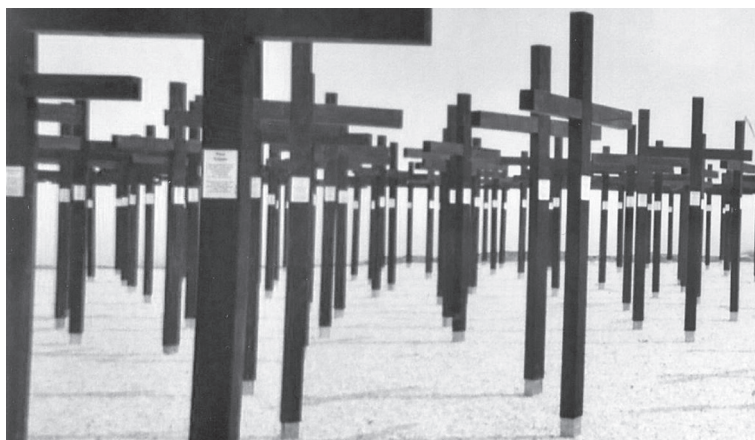
A once brief embrace from a lover passing through

May be less dangerous than the stranger passing by

That smells like you.



Andrew Johnson  
Memorial



Andrew Johnson

Lost Hope



Melissa Bilby  
Desires of a  
Bored Mind  
Sharpie Marker on  
Drawing Paper,  
9" x 12"



Bailey Drake  
Shoe of  
All Shoes  
Pencil, 9" x 12"

*Bailey Drake*  
Nov. 4, 2007

Karí Lanting  
Baker Beach

Crescendos of waves washing up and receding back.

Gulls and pelicans singing over the water,

diving for fish in the cool late summer morning.

Crickets add to the cacophony of sounds,

mesquites buzzing about after the rains.

Humidity in the air almost thick enough to see.

A slight breeze waifs off the water and over the dunes,

the tall straw colored grasses sway in the wind.

Clouds adorn the horizon, like castles in heavenly realms,

speaking of ancient truths that stand on the deep,

blue green ocean,

far away realms.

Peace in this nature.

The early sun glistens off the water in the east.

Jewels dance across the horizon.

Rows of beach houses solidly stand on stilts,

each painted a different color,

like jars of penny candy in an old soda shop.

And the waves washing away all shards of thought that might muddy the way.



Luke Morgan  
Cake in the Corners

It lingered for days,  
that sweet, indulgent smell  
of chocolate.

A silent ghost resting in the corners  
of my kitchen,  
the fragrance of last night  
haunts my heart,  
and I know  
there will be many more scented spirits  
to burden my soul.

Baked while most of the world slept,  
it was not a last minute endeavor,  
but a planned pairing  
of eggs and flour,  
batter and pan,  
icing and cake  
you and I.

Slightly burnt, made with love,  
it provided an opportunity  
for an exchange  
that never occurred.

A conversation in which  
a frail page of existence's  
cookbook is turned,  
and what remains unsaid  
is said,  
what remains undone  
is done,  
what keeps me up  
in the days darkest hours  
is brought to light.

Luke Morgan  
Death of an Optimist

Rocking back and forth  
in the old oak chair  
who's reliability he never questioned,  
the age-shriveled lover of  
ladies, liquor, and life  
took his final sip of scotch  
from the half-full glass,  
reminiscing of days past,  
awaiting days yet to be lived.

As the pain seized him,  
sending his tiny frame  
to the dirt-covered  
wrap-around front porch  
floor, he smiled.  
The antacid in his checkere  
shirt pocket would relieve him  
he thought.

Unable to lift his scrawny,  
tree-limb arms to reach  
for the reprieve resting in  
his front pocket,  
the old man realized  
this was not heart-burn,  
but heart attack.  
And he was not heartbroken.

Closing his thin eye-lids  
the old man shut out  
the world he loved,  
and prepared for the world  
he prayed for.

Amongst the buzzing of knats,  
the chirping of crickets,  
the hum of flourecent light-bulb  
and the smell of summer air,  
the world lost  
another optimist.

Luke Morgan  
Early Evening Musings

I sit in my bathtub,  
lights off,  
radio on,  
shower curtain closed,  
water warm,  
and I wonder:

Is this what it was like  
during those formative nine months?

No light to illuminate  
the temperate fluids  
encasing my body;  
a faint, indistinguishable  
sound, filling my ears  
with an incomprehensible  
something.

I seem to be lacking  
a life sustaining cord,  
but it rings,  
and I see its urgency  
illuminate the room.

I answer, only to be greeted  
with the sound of  
an automated voice  
reminding me  
life has a price.

Moments later, once again covered,  
once again part of this world,  
I walk across the living room,

dodging old magazines, who's pages  
once informed me of  
current events, but now remind  
me of previous truths,  
previous realities,  
previous hours spent  
trying to come to  
an understanding of  
what it is  
to be.

The clock reads 7:00 p.m.,  
and I become aware of  
the gentle creeks of  
my feet meeting aged floors,  
and I worry of disturbing  
those below.

But it is Friday.  
Faint exaltations  
radiating from beneath  
indicate a flavor of the week  
has been chosen.  
Hungers are being satisfied.  
I am prematurely tired.

Lying in bed,  
I interrogate God  
before offering myself  
to sleep.

Answered by neither,  
I am left pondering tomorrow  
to the sound of dusty fan blades  
slicing air.

Luke Morgan  
The Great Flood

The air grew humid  
as the sun took its leave.  
The breeze picked up,  
and slowly, with a low crack  
the sky began to cry.

The fit lasted for days.

With each passing hour  
the sobs grew louder.

The winds wailed  
with abandon.

Dirt drowned in the sorrow  
of the distressed downpour.

Roads rendered unnavigable  
in the torrential tears  
became the resting places  
of past lives.

From rooftops, muted shouts  
of those left with nothing  
rang through the saturated air.

And the Heavens refused to listen.

As the final plot of land  
was kissed with the sky's  
somber lips,  
the mournful clouds  
parted.

Reflected in the flood,  
The moon looked on.  
A silent companion,  
watching as the water  
began to take  
its leave.

Luke Morgan

## Hair

My father is a generous man.  
He gave me height, manners,  
a knack for dreaming,  
a romantic side,  
and the belief there is always something better  
waiting around the corner.  
He did not, however, give me hair.

Nearing fifty, my father still has  
shielded scalp.  
Though gray has snuck in over the years,  
his crown remains sheltered.

I, on the other hand,  
a young, angst-ridden  
twenty-something, am left  
watching as hairs commit suicide,  
diving from my brow  
with each scratch, wash,  
and comb.

White coat-wrapped doctors  
have suggested stress  
as reason for the untimely deaths  
of my head's former companions.

As I've gotten older, learned, and loved,  
I find myself unsure.

I've aged wrong.  
I've gained the wrong knowledge.  
I've loved the wrong women.  
I've sat alone in unfamiliar places  
and cried.

The doctors diagnosis  
seems dead on, but a different culprit  
comes to mind.

One minuscule meal a day.  
Curved fingers forced down throat,  
body worked past exhaustion.  
Actions taken to carve  
a new niche for myself.  
Actions possibly responsible  
for the black string exodus.

A friend suggest genetics,  
and reminds me of dominant  
and recessive traits.  
My premature balding  
a mere expression of code.

Frustrated at the existence  
of so many possibilities,  
so many answers,  
I bring my shaking hands to my head,  
grab tufts of hair,  
and pull.

Luke Morgan  
The Process

I sit quietly awaiting my turn in this circle of confessions. The sun beams through a large wall-length window, looking out on an atrium filled with foreign flowers and exotic shrubs. The room's remaining walls contain sepia toned photos of solitary trees and lonely bridges. The nervous scraping of shoes against sea-foam green carpet fills the room. Having been admitted late Saturday night, this is my first group session with the in-patient psychologist. Upon entering, Dr. Walters, a perfect example of the floundering young professional trying to navigate her way through her chosen career path, informs me, as well as my fellow weekend admittances, that openness is key to recovery. Now, here we all sit, waiting for our turn to bare our souls. I had honestly hoped for a less attractive therapy leader—one lacking long, flowing auburn hair, large green eyes, pouty red lips, and perfect legs contained neatly in a knee-length emerald skirt.

Jane, a hollow-eyed soccer-mom starts the soul stripping by rattling on and on about her busted family. Her teenage sons have evidently discovered pot; her husband has evidently discovered online-pornography (though I doubt this is a recent development); and Jane has evidently discovered the importance of going up the tracks instead of across the street when it comes to wrist slitting. Why your sons' preoccupation with recreational drugs and your husband's self-gratification would be reasons to off yourself are beyond me; however, what strikes me most about Jane's story is her lack of planning. Failing at life is one thing...but failing at death...that's just sad in a non-empathetic way.

Dr. Walters stares silently at Jane, appearing to soak her in with her doe-eyes. Hesitant to speak, Dr. Walters taps her tooth-indented pencil against a yellow note pad before



scribbling a few notes. Looking up from her pad seconds later, she signals for the next patient to speak.

A rather rotund, balding middle-ager named Thomas follows Jane. After years of failing to pick up women, failing to keep a job, and failing to manage his weight, Thomas had made a makeshift rope out of a vintage 70's t-shirt, strung it over a shower rod, tied it around his neck, and jumped off the side of the bathtub; however, man's best laid plans often go awry, and in the end, Thomas found himself lying in the bathroom floor, a bulbous, purple knot forming on his brow where his head hit his unfortunately placed bathroom sink. The shower curtain rod had broken, much like Thomas' dreams of death. Finishing his story, Thomas, another textbook case of the failed death conundrum, shifts his beady eyes towards me. His face red with embarrassment and shame, Thomas nods, a subtle indication of his story's conclusion and my story's beginning.

I look around the room. The sexy eyes of Dr. Walters, the hollowed eyes of Jane, the beady eyes of Thomas, and the ravenous eyes of an elderly woman who has found her station at the end of this line all stare at me, attempting to size me up, diagnose me, understand me before I say a single, well timed word.

"Umm...hi...my name's David. Three days ago I downed a bottle of Adderral, and, as planned, I ended up here before you all."

Shifting uncomfortably in their poorly cushioned seats, the other patients seem taken aback by my opening statement. Dr. Walters slowly uncrosses then crosses her legs, runs her fingers through her hair, and quietly says, "Continue."

\* \* \*

Closing my guitar case while listening to the shrill vocals of some punk wannabe showcasing his lack of talent at the weekly open mic night, I can't help but feel disappointment. Tonight's set was a total bomb in my book. The crowd had

reacted in the worse way possible; they hadn't reacted at all. Cheers let you know you're on to something; boo's and jeers let you know you've got it all wrong...but silence...silence tells you nothing. A silent audience can mean a multitude of things. Shock...boredom...confusion...indifference...all emotions often accompanied by silence. Having premiered three new songs, silence is not what I needed. It had been a packed house. Some fifty to sixty people had stood shoulder to shoulder in front of the dimly lit, makeshift stage housed in the back of Vince's—a local coffee shop slash lounge where the trendy tended to reside from nine to one every Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday night (open mic night Tuesdays and Thursdays, local band showcase on Fridays).

I don't hear her footsteps among the buzzing crowd; nor do I see her slender shadow in the dim glow of the faux Tiffany lamps resting upon small IKEA-bought coffee tables, but her presence is inescapable. Some would argue it is her sweet perfume perforating the air around her that draws my attention to her existence; however, I know it is something different; something that goes beyond the senses; something vaguely describable yet borderline incomprehensible. It is something from deep within, resting alongside my strongest feelings and emotions. I turn to meet her gaze and once again find myself a prisoner of my secret love and her inescapable radiance.

Looking into her soft blue eyes, I can't help but recall the minuscule moments we've shared that mean nothing to her but worlds to me: An impromptu escape to the city park, where I stood silently, watching her feed white-feathered ducks and enjoy life; her accidental lifting of her shirt when removing a hoodie, where her lack of embarrassment revealed how comfortable she had become around me; a late-night trip to the only 24-hour convenience store in town, where we agreed to spend fifteen dollars at random and where we purchased the red hula-hoop that hangs on her oak bedpost; the children's coloring book that got her through finals; the poster of turtles

playing basketball that was too random to resist; and the pop-rocks that reminded us both of what it was like to be unburdened in this world. These moments, comprising a large section of what has become a creative gold-mine, now stands before me in the embodiment of everything I love in this world: Alex.

Her smile, infectious as always, cheers me up considerably. "Nice," she says, genuine enthusiasm emanating from her single, soft spoken word.

"They were all silent. I coulda' heard my mother pouring her night cap back home had I finished a few minutes earlier," I state, the doubt slowly leaving my mind as I stand before her.

"Silence is golden."

"What's gold to me?"

"Gold would have value if for no other reason than that it enables a citizen to fashion his financial escape from the state." She quips.

"Huh?"

"William F. Rickenbaker."

"Way to go miss unemployed economist. What's someone of your stature doing in this modern day den of sin?"

"I came to see my favorite sinner, though I'd hardly call this place a den of sin. Maybe a house of slightly impure intentions but only when you're performing."

We both laugh. I watch her fight with a strand of hair that's found its way to her lips. "Lucky hair," I think. Then, as the lamps' low glow hits the diamond band upon her left ring-finger, sending a dazzling display of light rushing across the room, I feel Sisyphus' boulder settle in my stomach, and I know I don't have it in me to push it uphill any longer. My

other creative muse rests on a single, smooth finger—part of a well-manicured set.

I had met Eric four months prior at an art show hosted by a mutual friend of ours. He had come across as well-mannered and intelligent. His knowledge of modern artistic movements was much more sweeping than I had anticipated. Though I'd prefer to think of him as the embodiment of everything I hate about human beings (thus setting him up as a stark contrast to Alex), I can't help but be a realist. Eric is kind. Eric is gentle. Eric is genuine. Eric stands as a stark contrast to me, and for some reason, I find it impossible to loathe him for it.

He and Alex had met while attending a conference concerning the housing market. It being Alex's first business trip, she had found herself disoriented and intimidated amongst her older, more experienced colleagues; however, Eric, a young, ambitious entrepreneur, took notice of Alex's insecurity. Inviting her to dinner at some high-class, New York restaurant, where the menu changed day to day based as much on the season as the chef's mood, Eric drummed up an authentic self-confidence in Alex. He had proposed six months later in his parents' front lawn beneath a winter-kissed tree, decked in white Christmas lights, snow falling aimlessly through the bare branches. Without hesitation, Alex had responded with an excited "YES!"

Eric isn't here tonight. I imagine him sitting silently in some high-rise, staring out of his office window, watching as the city below slows its pace. I then envision Eric swiftly picking up his plush leather office chair and throwing it through the glass, glancing at the framed photo of him and Alex that accompanied their engagement announcement, bolting through the fragmented pane and plunging into some uncertain darkness. Its thoughts like these that keep me from reaching the level of goodness associated with Eric and his personifications of positivity.

“Walk me to my car?” Alex asks, bringing me back to Vince’s, back to the coffee and sweat scented room containing a plethora of dreamers and their loner-composed entourages, back to my self-imposed prison of angst.

“Sure,” I say, placing my arm around her waist and navigating her through the cramped shop. Exiting Vince’s through the hand-print covered door, a rush of warm July air greets us. A temperate breeze stirs the sun-burnt leaves seeking refuge upon Vince’s overcrowded parking lot. Reaching Alex’s Capri Sea metallic colored Toyota Corolla, I notice a change in her aura. Her effervescence seems slightly diminished. Leaning against her door, Alex stares past me with a vacant gaze I’ve never witnessed.

“David...what do you do when you realize everything you’ve been working for is a lie that you’ve created for yourself to make it easier to wake up in the morning?”

“I write a song about it and pray it isn’t received with silence.”

“I wish it was that easy.”

“Nothing is easy. If it were, then I’d have stopped writing and performing after my first song,” I reply, watching as her gaze returns to me, her blue eyes shaded with sorrow.

“Had I not gone off and gotten my master’s, had I not taken that job in the city, had I not thrown myself into the sea, where do you think I’d be?” Alex questions, an excitement rising in her voice.

“You’d be stuck here, possibly working as a barista at Vince’s, serving lattes to people with big dreams and little talent—people who don’t give a damn about anything aside from your efficiency at filling their order...people like me.”

A dense cloud vacates its post before the moon, allowing its tender beams to reflect off Alex’s tear-stained cheeks. Together

in the silence, we become lost. I am unaware of what to say. She struggles with spinning her thoughts into words. A new cloud takes it upon itself to veil the voyeuristic moon. Once again encapsulated in the darkness, Alex finds what she's been searching for.

"I'd be with you. I'd be content. I'd be happy knowing that even though the people I tend to may not give a shit about me, I'd have you to come home to at the end of the day. I'd have you to love. I'd have you to be loved by."

Something leaves me. Its absence is barely noticeable at first, but standing in the darkness, it becomes apparent. The void from which my creative juices flow has been barred up. Watching Alex throw her engagement ring across the parking lot, tracing the moon's reflection as the ring sails through the air, embracing the woman I've silently loved for so long, I become whole. The need to find myself in music no longer seems compulsory.

\* \* \*

"And that's why I downed the bottle of Adderral. You see, without my muse, there could be no music. Without music, I wouldn't have an identity. After finally having the world work in my favor, I was unsure of where to go. Alex had driven off shortly after our embrace on what she perceived to be the road to happiness. I had driven home, allowing the wind rushing past my open windows to take the place of my usually booming stereo. Reaching my apartment, I had sat in silence, contemplating my future. From my seat amongst scattered, lyric covered pages reading the lines of an unfinished song, I realized something: I no longer had it in me to finish this song, nor did I feel the need to. Perplexed, I wandered to the bathroom and without reason opened the medicine cabinet. It was there I found the bottle. Given to me by a hipster-acquaintance who advocated the use of chemical substances, both legal and illegal, to attain a state ideal for creation, the

Adderral rested amongst bottles and boxes of common pain relievers and antihistamines for months. The time had come to give it a try. The state I was going for was near death, and according to the medics summoned by a frightened Alex, near death was the state I attained. So now here I am before you all. Last night Alex visited me. Her left ring finger once again glistened. Her relationship with Eric restored to its former glory through what must have been an intense conversation. She didn't say much really. Just that she'd miss me and hoped I'd be out in time for her wedding. I think...I think she'll get her song now."

Dr. Walter's looks at me with a clinical expression. Devoid of any real care, she seems relieved I'm done speaking. I look at Jane. She appears bored and disinterested in everything I've said. Thomas seems a bit more interested, but with a life as dull as the one he's lived, he'd probably get excited over me telling the story of the three little piggies. Dr. Walters turns to the elderly woman, who has patiently been awaiting her turn in this circle of confessions. Eyes closed, the woman looks as if she is composed of skin stretched tightly over bone. "Ada," Dr. Walters shouts a bit louder than she intends. Nothing.

Ada was pronounced dead at 3:45 this afternoon. Her aged body finally collapsed under the strain of multiple suicide attempts and a broken heart. Her husband, a consultant for the nation's largest fitness equipment producer, had died of a heart-attack five years prior. The light of her life, without him, she had felt life not worth living. They had had two sons; however, one, a criminal defense lawyer, had been killed in a drive-by shooting, a victim of what the investigators ruled bad luck but what most felt was occupational hazard. The other, a child prodigy whose piano playing skills had landed him a full scholarship to Julliard, had run away at the age of sixteen, leaving Ada's once glowing household devoid of the gentle nocturnes that once filled the air. Unlike Jane and Thomas, Ada was persistent. Unlike Jane and Thomas, Ada had succeeded.

Luke Morgan

# Stricken

~~Lines marked through lines~~  
letters

words

thoughts

rendered null

with a single ~~stroke~~

Revision,

we call it.

the silencing of

ideas

poorly conceived

initial insights

poorly focused

first impressions

poorly realized

with pen

against paper

~~we kill~~

and create

ourselves



Luke Morgan

## Waiting Out Winter

On a weather-worn bench  
in a neglected public park  
sits a silent girl.

Arms wrapped around knees,  
sweater two sizes too large,  
she waits.

Her eyes reflect  
a silent land.

A world of naked trees,  
fallen leaves,  
and snow-covered sidewalks  
stretches out  
before her.

Devoid of life,  
borderline gray,  
the sky hangs.

Consuming dreams,  
devouring half-formed hopes,  
the cold wind cuts.

Receding into herself,  
the girl searches for  
the sun's rays.

They're too faint.

Her world too cold.  
The ice refuses to vacate  
its station

in her heart.

Her soul is frostbitten.  
Her fire in hibernation.

Like the seasons,  
she is not extinguished,  
just waiting out Winter.



Luísa Cossío

True Love



Kate Cox  
Workin' at Charlie's

Acrylic, 18" x 24"

Terrie Seybold  
On the Farm

She walks among the trees  
full of innocence and laughter  
Leaves, brightly colored, mark the change  
of season, on the farm

She skips along the stream  
filled with joy and wonder  
Stones, silky smooth, alter the flow  
of life, on the farm

She roams across vast acres  
focused on the beauty surrounding her  
Creatures, eyes bright, break the silence  
of days, on the farm

She stops amid the ruins  
feeling of history and heart ache  
Barns, drooping sadly, mark the change  
of reason, on the farm

Terrie Seybold  
Perspective

Burned toast

The dark rich color of caramel,  
slathered in salty butter,  
crispy, chewy, savory flavor,  
delicious to me.

Burned toast

The dark blackened bread,  
soaked in fatty butter,  
crunchy, soggy, wretched flavor,  
disgusting to you.

When She Speaks

Words spoken, melody and mood

On and on and on,

Birds twittering constantly, endlessly

Eyelids becoming heavy, sleepy, tired

Words continue, melody and mood

On and on and on,

Lulling the listener, sleepy, peaceful

Sing song sounds bombarding the senses

Meaning lost, words go on and on and on...

Crystal Sims

## Apollo Under Glass

Mentioned in casual conversation with Homer  
he who once did great deeds  
he who once brought each day anew  
remembered no more  
revered no more.

He who is portrayed by elementary students  
wearing a white sheet toga with a sun broach,  
(borrowed from someone's Great Aunt Ethel who  
was specially recognized for her bake sale goodies)  
You lay forgotten in your greatness.

The arrows that brought plague to Greece forces  
rot beside silent lyre and branch of laurel  
The deeds are recorded, the triumphs noted  
but are read by few, remembered by less.  
Your name holds no power.

Captured are you, with ancient beliefs  
and no one to want to set you free.

.

# Crystal Sims

## Beauty Treatment

Shower

Shave

Band-Aids

Exotic Summer Rain

Behind ears, on wrist

Between— ahem

Curl hair

Straighten

Re-curl

Hairspray

Breath shallow

Coughing

Think of cancer

Dress, dark blue

Remove deodorant stains

Fight static cling

Toner

Moisturizer

Foundation

Powder to reduce shine

Blush to a warm glow

Tweeze to a forced shape

Kleenex to combat tears

Rings, necklace,

Earrings, Bracelets, Anklet

Remove Anklet

Hose for smoothness

Heels for height

Aspirin for heels

Big smile

A small twirl

One compliment

Crystal Sims  
Bits of Copper

Thoughts gone astray  
lodged at the corners  
of my mind, forgotten  
for the moment, remembered  
if ever

A passing face not worth  
my time or my energy,  
Important- maybe.  
Recognition sparked  
by a segment of insanity

deemed living, a thought  
for a penny, dreams never to be  
life lived in longing  
seems worthless—  
a bit of false copper



Crystal Sims  
Pushed:  
The Tale of Marjorie May  
Oliphant

God does not push people down stairs for reading trashy Gromance novels. At least Ben Piper didn't think that his God did things like that. He liked to think that The Creator has better things to do and leaves the pushing of people down stairs to the lesser angels and such. Mrs. Margery Oliphant, however, held another opinion of her God, who she claimed was the same as his God. Piper remembered his daughter's last Girl Scout meeting that Margery attended. She spoke to the girls saying, "Look here little children of little faith. I am living, and hobbling, proof that our God is a vengeful and wrathful God! He led me to the straight and narrow at the age of 57. It is not too late, for anyone! He'll get your attention, even if He must push your sorry souls down stairs. That is the kind of God we have, willing to do anything to save the wretched scum that walk His good earth." He remembered that day well, it was just over a week before Margery became a local legend, without the help of God.

At first people in the seven church town, with a collective congregation of 200 on Easter and or 232 on Christmas, smiled knowingly at the ramblings of a notoriously personal woman who was embarrassed to talk about why, at the age of 57, had to go in for hip-surgery. Then people speculated if her husband could afford her surgery on his pension, since she never had an income in all thirty-nine years of their marriage. Others declared that there was no way he couldn't afford the surgery since all he bought was beer and paid the satellite TV bill. Many thought it funny that she no longer sat on the bench by the old wishing well reading Nora Roberts's books covered in brown paper cut from grocery sacks, but rather the Bible with "KJV" boldly printed on the spine. Some made jokes about the small hickory cane not being able to support

her ample size, let alone her new hip. Still others chuckled to think of a small round woman standing before a congregation giving testimony about a God that went around pushing over-the-hill housewives down steps. People didn't realize that Margery was serious when she spoke of what exactly transpired on the fresh cemented steps of the local library. No one really believed her until Nurse Sabrine Stevens, who commuted the forty-mile drive to the hospital every day, let it slip a few days after the incident that the poor woman had what looked like bruises on her back. Yet, everybody knew she had fallen face first; Jessie Roberts and Michael Napper on break at the Feed-Seed-and-All-Night-Necessities store saw it happen.

With this revelation of news, the questions and curiosity of locals began to seep around the town, like gossip dripping from a fount and oozing under every door seal. The whispers started to gather in kitchens making cookies for the school bake sale, in the teachers break room drinking coffee, under the swing set and monkey bars, amongst the pews before the pulpit. After just a couple of days, eyes followed Margery from the moment she left her house. By the beginning of the next week, three quarters of the town had memorized her schedule.

On Monday, while she sat on the sturdy oak bench reading her red-lettered Bible, Council Woman Janise Wolfe approached Margery. It should be noted that Janise Wolfe was no longer on any real council, she had been on the County Fair Board for a number of years, but now she was on the School Board and nobody really considered that a council position. Nevertheless, the title bestowed on her while she was head of the Fair Commission stuck years later.

Council Woman Wolfe waited politely for Margery to finish the passage she was on and then asked, equally politely, if Margery would like to talk to the ladies group about the trails of surgery for a woman in her prime, this Tuesday night. After a slight hesitation, Margery agreed.

That next night, at the meeting of the First Ladies Auxiliary for Those who Help Themselves, cookies were served at six, debate concerning whose cookie recipe was best continued until six-thirty,

and Margery walked into the room at seven. She was wearing a long lavender cotton dress, with a simple cotton sweater that bore the likeness of yellow spring flowers on its breast pockets. Her make up was heavy, but tastefully done; the purple-tented eye shadow showed well with her dress. She stood as straight as possible, with her cane held firmly in her hand, and yet she still managed to give the impression that she was a good two inches shorter than her five foot one inch frame. She gave the impression of trying to have good posture but being drawn into her self. The ladies parted en masse before her as she made her way to speak with Council Woman Wolfe who stood at the front of the meeting room, dressed in jeans and a loose fitting scarlet blouse.

“Thank you Mrs. Oliphant for coming. I love your dress. Very becoming,” the Council Woman said. She felt like a harlot wearing a neon sign in her oversized blouse and minimal makeup. She, briefly, contemplated if God, in His assault, had given Margery an aura that made all others around her feel despicable, or, at the very least, inappropriately dressed. She pushed these thoughts aside and said, “Please have a seat; we are just about to begin. Or would you like some refreshments, Anna Jane’s snicker doodles are quite tasty. No? Okay, then if we could all find our seats let’s begin.”

They opened with the reading of the last meeting’s minutes. Opal Early, a retired superintendent of the local high school from the fifties who had never married, acted as the treasurer and the secretary for group for the past five years and she took offense if anyone corrected her figures or minutes. New business was discussed, mainly the Labor Day celebrations coming up in September: 1) their annually hosted Pancake Dinner and 2) the float that would be representing the women’s organization in the local parade. Anna Jane offered her husbands flat bed trailer; the older ladies rejected this idea because they did not want to sit on hay bales and ruin their nicer dresses. Larissa Trimler offered to ask Mr. Rochelle Johnson if they could borrow his recently purchases pristine antique 1947 Plymouth Special Deluxe (dark turquoise with real leather seats), since he had offered to give her a ride and she was sure he would agree if she asked him. This idea was rejected because only three people would be able to ride in the car and the

other eight members of the organization wouldn't be in the parade at all.

"Ahem," a silence, not unlike the shuffling stillness that sometimes falls when a long-winded preacher delivers his closing prayer, engulfed the meeting room. "I know I am not a member, but perhaps you may think about the trolley the Chamber of Commerce just purchased. I know they are looking for somebody to clean it up, just minor cleaning really. It runs fine, just needs to be washed, maybe waxed. Some of the seats need the fabric stitched back together. They may let you borrow it in the parade, if you are willing to clean it..."

The vote was unanimous. It was decided that calls would be made the following week and next Tuesday, if all went well, a date would be chosen to clean the trolley. If the Chamber did not agree, it was decided that the Ladies Auxiliary would ask Anna Jane's husband for the use of his trailer. The older ladies decided they would rather be in the parade and uncomfortable than not at all. They tabled further discussion on the speaker for the Pancake Dinner until next meeting as well, since it was getting late and some ladies had to leave to fix dinners for husbands who didn't know how to survive one night alone in the kitchen.

"Now it is my great privilege," announced Council Woman Wolfe, "to step aside and allow Mrs. Margery Oliphant to speak with us about her recent ordeal." A hesitant applause gave soundtrack for Margery's assent to the podium.

"Ahem," she cleared her throat nervously. "Well, Council Woman Wolfe asked me here to speak about my hip surgery. I don't know much about it, I was under anesthesia you know." She chuckled slightly, cleared her throat again, and continued, "I wasn't scared to have the surgery done though, not with the knowledge that I know have. I can still feel His hands on my shoulders, guiding me, helping me. Pushing me in the right direction. I know some of you are skeptical about my claims that I was pushed by God down the stairs, but I am here to tell you the truth: God pushed me to get my attention. I am pushing you to repent and lean back on God's hands as I have done."

She closed her eyes and braced her hands on the podium for support. "We're all deplorable creatures who deserve to break our necks as we fall down to Hell. We deserve the punishment that is waiting at the end of our fall, but do not get me wrong, we are pushing ourselves there. God is not pushing you to Hell; He is pushing you, more like a nudge, to get your attention. I was lost in my evil ways, reading from sinful books of sinful deeds, and He had to get my attention. I was lost in my world of filth and Fabio. My sisters in Christ, hear my words and listen to what I am saying: we're all teetering on the steps of Hell and if we do not see this, then we shall all fall from the hands of God. The Lord saved me that day; He saved me from a fall far worse than that which I have endured. I gladly went to surgery, I gladly go under the knife of man, to bear the scars, and—" She choked for a moment on her own emotions, "And bruises so that I may bear witness to all. God is willing to push us to show us the truth, to show us His love."

Her right fist raised to strike the air and bring her point home: "He is a vengeful and a wrathful God, we deserve the Hell that is waiting for us. Do not wait as I did, all these years, and have Him have to physically push you to get your attention; focused on Him now, for the salvation of your souls. You may not be as lucky as I have been. Repent, it is the will of the Lord."

To say that a thunderstruck silence ensued after this speech would be an understatement. An open mouthed, breathless, wide-eyed state of shock might be more appropriate. Larissa Trimler unsteadily rose from her seat and spoke, "Thank you, thank you so much. I have never in all my Presbyterian years heard the Lord's message put in such a way. You've made me realize that I shouldn't be insistent towards Mr. Rochelle Johnson just because he is available and so is his bank account. You've opened my eyes; your experience has changed me. I don't know what to say, oh, thank you Margery."

A small voice from the back of the room said, "My snicker doodle recipe is from a box. I just have to say that. I didn't mean to mislead anyone; I mean it is a perfectly good way to make cookies. I've always felt it was wrong to claim it as my own, but the praise

I received from them made it seem okay. I'm so sorry. Thank you Margery, I didn't have the courage to say that until just now."

"Sometimes while I'm reading the treasury report I see a miscalculation. I always fix it before the next meeting." Everyone turned to look at Opal Early as she made this declaration, "I wouldn't really mind if someone said anything; but after the meeting, not during."

One by one the other ladies stood and told the group something personal that they had never said before. Each felt as if hearing from Mrs. Margery Oliphant had given them courage to say what they wanted. After all, after a speech like that, it felt okay to say anything because nothing could be as profound as what they just heard.

Finally, Council Woman Wolfe rose and said, "Ladies, I feel that we have all witnessed something so thought provoking and meaningful that we are obliged to do all we can to share with the others in this town. I have always felt that as a public figure I could do more. I just never have, and the shame of this weighs heavy on my heart. I would like to invite Mrs. Oliphant into our organization, and, if she accepts, to be our honored speaker at the Labor Day Pancake Dinner."

Eagerly all looked up at Margery, who was still clutching the podium, "I will have to discuss this with my husband. Is it okay if I have an answer for you next week?" She seemed to be in shock from her own powerful speech. They all agreed that it was more than okay, stated their hopes that she would accept, thanked her again, and the meeting came to a close at 7:48 on the dot. Ms. Opal Early noted the time carefully, so that she wouldn't make any mistakes at next week's meeting.

The following Tuesday, Margery wore a dark blue long sleeved floor length dress. It had green roses embroidered on the collar and the cuffs. Her olive eye shadow tastefully matched the details. She gladly accepted the group's invitation, both to be in the organization and to speak at the Pancake Dinner in three weeks time. Larissa Trimler called for volunteers to make pancakes, seven

of the ladies agreed to bring at least two large cake pans full. No blueberry. Plain pancakes only.

Anna Jane brought the news that the Chamber had agreed to lend them the trolley. Council Woman Wolfe was about to close the very productive meeting when Margery stood up. She had been sitting quietly for most of the meeting, nodding at appropriate times and frowning slightly at others. "Would it be okay, Council Woman, if we closed in prayer? After all, God is with us always, and we need to acknowledge Him, even if the name of this society is for those that help themselves."

"Why, of course. Would you do the honors?" The Council Woman was the last to lower her head; she silently kicked herself for not making this suggestion when it was the obvious thing to do.

The ladies of the First Ladies Auxiliary for Those that Help Themselves met the Saturday before Labor Day and scrubbed the Chamber's trolley till it shined. Council Woman Wolfe wore a good T-shirt and non-hole jeans and still managed to feel underdressed next to Margery in her auburn button down three-quarter sleeved blouse that was bespectacled in a Robin's Egg blue paint mixture. Margery explained that this was the color of her kitchen. Her husband had told her that if she wanted it done she would have to do it herself. The ladies congratulated her on having completed a task most women would have insisted their husbands hire a crew to complete. She nodded, smiled, and asked each in turn to describe their own kitchen to her for future decorating ideas.

Ronnie Jenkins, the owner of the Hardware store located in the back Carol Jenkins' Beauty Boutique, had to send out a special order early the next week for Robin's Egg blue paint. Four separate ladies had asked him if he carried any, and when he asked why the sudden interest, all the ladies told him that Mrs. Margery Oliphant's kitchen was that color and they admired her to the point that they thought it wouldn't hurt to have their kitchen, or at least the border, that color. Each was going to do the job herself.

The next morning, being a friendly citizen, Ronnie told the men he drank coffee with about the ladies' sudden interest in Mrs.

Oliphant. By noon, the small town gossip that had started to die down started back up again. Wednesday morning, Bill Hornworthe told the men's group that Margery had been to speak to the Sunday school at the Baptist church, and then gave a brief testimonial at the Methodist service. Arnold Richards mentioned that he saw her talking to a group of teenagers that had taken to hanging around her bench beside the wishing well. Sheriff Piper recounted the basics of the speech she had given to his daughter's Girl Scout troop the previous Friday. By Thursday, the facts from Margery's amazing encounter, and her astounding conviction in her faith, spread through out the community and into the surrounding areas. The preachers were calling each other on the phones, speculating about the size of the coming Sunday's congregation, and taking friendly bets on which church's would be the largest. Some were predicting over 250 people to be in services come Sunday. Nobody even dared to guess how many people would be in town the night before for the Pancake Dinner.

Yet, Ronnie, who had lived on the same street all his life, couldn't help but wonder about Margery's sudden change of social circles or the sudden appearance of a social life at all for that matter. For the past thirty years that the couple had lived in the town, Margery had been nothing more than a housewife. They had no children, and she hardly ever left the house unless it was to go sit on the bench by the wishing well and read. She continued to go even after the well dried up some twenty years back. Her husband, Calvin Oliphant, eight years her senior, had been a manager at some gravel yard, working his way through the hoops and was able to retire at the age of 63. That was two years ago. Since then, and before that, there was never any word from the Oliphant house. No one trick-or-treated there. The Christmas decorations were minimal. Never a manger scene, that much was certain. The only events that Ronnie could think of that he'd ever seen Margery and Calvin at together was twice a year at the Lutheran Church. He didn't remember seeing them there this Easter. By the end of the week, on the Friday before Labor Day weekend, Ronnie had stopped his wondering and written off the whole event as a religion-makes-people-different kind of thing.



The float of the First Ladies Auxiliary of Those who Help Themselves was fifth in the parade line up. Sister Margery Oliphant sat at the very front of the trolley, waving a fifty-cent American flag and wearing a patriotic red blazer over a white cotton top and dark blue slacks. She chose more natural make up, but still heavy on the eye shadow. Other ladies in the Auxiliary also wore heavier eye make up, but only, as they explained, so their faces would show better in pictures.

The local newspaper reporter, who moonlighted as a telemarketer though nobody acknowledged this fact, snapped over fifteen pictures of the ladies on the trolley, all the while saying "Big smile, that's right, come on show the people your cane!"

Children shouted greetings and the neighborhood teenagers not on other floats hooted and hollered loudly from the crowd. The fire truck, four floats back, sounded its siren and the horses at the end of the parade line up jumped at their reigns. The high school band played the school song over and over to the drum major's constant cadence of "Get in step: Left, Left, Left, Right, L— I Said get IN STEP!!!"

At seven o'clock that night, Council Woman Janise Wolfe began the Annual Labor Day Pancake Dinner. She said the opening prayer herself and then, mostly to expel the anticipation that hung as a tangible fog in the room, she immediately turned the microphone over to the evening's Honored Speaker: Mrs. Margery Abigail Oliphant. Margery stood to her full height before the podium. She seemed not to be leaning on her cane; she held a large stack of prepared notes. Ronnie Jenkins marveled at how she seemed to have grown two inches in the past two weeks, others marveled at how it was they had never seen this great woman before.

Margery's eyes were lit with the fires of importance as she began her speech, "My dearest brothers and sisters in Christ, I'm honored. I knew there was a reason for my being. I have felt this for some time. The day God pushed me down the stairs was the day I was born anew. He saw that I was living in sin, in filth of my own making, and He knew He had to do something drastic to get my attention. He gave me a push in the right direction. I have

since then been changing my life completely around! We as mortal sinners cannot see the pathetic existence of our lives. We know not that the Earth carries our physical and spiritual weight with contempt. The Earth is horrified at our being and she shudders when a new sinner is born. I am living proof that God loves each and every one of us enough to—“

The corkboard on the wall lit up with the opening of the community hall's door. People turned, curious to see who dared to arrive late, in the middle of such a powerful speech. Calvin Oliphant, in his old work crew jacket and holding a beer, leaned casually against the back wall. His eyes were hooded, his face turned towards his now silent wife.

“—to, um, to be pushed for our greater purpose. This is what I am saying. Listen to me, hear my plea.” Margery finished speaking in a hesitant and hurried voice. Then, leaning heavy on her cane, she descended from the podium and worked her way through the crowd to stand by her husband. The Council Woman rose to thank their honored guest. The audience members, listening politely to the Council Woman, saw the light shine on the corkboard and then darken with the closing of the door.

Six hours later, at one-thirty AM Sunday morning, Sheriff Ben Piper knocked on the Oliphant's front door. His beeper sounded from his belt clip; therefore, he was looking down when the door opened. Distractedly, still trying to turn the noise off, he said, “Mr. Oliphant, I'm sorry to bother you sir, but a neighbor heard a noise and—“

Sheriff Piper looked up and choked on an intake of breath. Margery Oliphant stood in the doorway, her head tilted slightly to the left, wearing a light green sleeveless nightgown. Rusty crunchy specks splattered her breast. Her eyes were circled black. Her shoulders and upper arms ranged from fresh dark purple to sickened yellow. Her knuckles were white; her fingers reddened gripping a gun's handle. Behind her on the floor, face up with his eyes separated by a gaping black hole, laid Calvin Oliphant in a congealed pool of blood.

“He pushed me.”

Crystal Sims  
Symbolic Flame

Wax from the Unity Candle  
dripped, and oozed, and pooled.

The Flame twisted, sputtered, flickered with  
breath from a hundred sighs, it reflected the  
wet choking gasps, it shimmered with tears.

He smiled.

She smiled.

Those that watched smiled foolishly.  
And I, I watched the candle burn.

My tears began to drip, and ooze, and pool.  
The Flame had twisted, sputtered and flickered out.

Crystal Sims

## Waiting in the Apple Tree

The lady watched from the darkness of the apple tree's clothed boughs. She leaned casually, with practiced ease, in a saddle of the highest branch. There was no wind to show her presence amongst the thick spring leaves and blossoms; yet, her shade-filled drapery twisted in deceptive living patterns.

The three children danced on the ground, jumping between patches of sunlight. A girl child, her twin brother, and their friend romped with effortless ease. The friend pushed the girl and she returned the favor. The brother bore the shoves of both with good natured patience, never initiating the attack. Grins swallowed the three faces, gaps showing darkly against bubble-gum flavored whiteness.

There were fresh scrapes and developing bruises on the sister's right arm and elbow. She sat down heavily at the base of the tree and said, "Okay, I got the most leaves. Twice. So, what are you going to do?"

The friend was picking at a healing scab, "I caught the cat, remember? It was going under the tool shed and I caught it. So, what is he going to do?"

The brother was laying on his back watching the clouds roll by overhead. He was twisting the cotton with his mind, fluffing a rabbit's tail, when he heard his sister say, "Well, what's a good one? How 'bout knocking down the wasp's nest in the front yard?"

"We did that last month. We can't do that; think of a new one." The friend and the sister sat side by side, wondering what would be a good dare; something original, something spectacular to add to their list of accomplishments. The three had a reputation to maintain; their pranks and dares were the

envy of all the other kids in their class. They no longer thought of themselves as “three,” but as The Three. They were never apart; it was an unofficial pact they’d made early in their friendship. Sometimes they’d have to take turns in a dare, but they all did it. Always.

On Monday, the sister had seen the cat creeping along the back of the orchard’s fence. The cat was a trespasser and needed to be caught. She bet that it could be caught in less than three minutes. It took three minutes and twenty-seven seconds, but no one was counting. On Thursday, the friend wondered if the limbs on the oak tree beside the swing set couldn’t be touched when someone jumped in mid-swing. It took four tries, but the sister finally managed it, and held a handful of leaves as proof. After one had done it, the effort seemed easy for them all. The dare became realistic, and now it was Friday; what could they do on Friday?

“Let’s see what’s in the top of the tool shed,” the friend suggested. That was a dusty, unexplored corner of their realm. They’d have to find a ladder, a flashlight, some water for the long exertion, maybe some food in case they became stranded. The friend was envisioning ancient finds: perhaps a skeleton, a treasure map, or at least a dead bird. It could be a real adventure.

“Bill locked it. He said it was dangerous,” the brother spoke, not taking his eyes from beyond the tree’s limbs.

“Well, how about we fill up the kiddie-pool with soap bubbles, and see how high we can get them. You know, like that lady did on TV.” The sister’s eyes glazed slightly remembering the feat with admiration. She had a suspicion that the lady used something other than dish soap and garden-hose water, but that wasn’t going to stop The Three from trying. They could do it if they put their minds to it. Maybe they would set a new world record for highest soap column and get on TV, it could happen.

“Mom will be home soon, and she won’t want the yard to be messy. Bill is supposed to barbeque tonight, remember?” The brother didn’t even bother looking at her as he spoke. There was a plane passing overhead. He knew it was going super fast, but it looked so slow, or maybe he was going by, and the plane was sitting still. He didn’t want to take his eyes off it, just in case. “Besides, the babysitter wouldn’t let us. I heard her telling Mom about some four year old drowning in an inch of water.”

“Well, duh. Four year olds are babies. We’re not three. We’d be fine,” the friend’s eyes rolled towards the sister for agreement.

“Yeah, but Mom is a little crazy about things like that. Ever since Bill came home with her, she’s been all ‘Don’t do this’ and ‘Don’t do that,’” the sister agreed with her brother, disappointment in her voice. She wanted to make a soap giant.

“Then, what do we do? I’m *BORED*,” the friend said. He produced the last word with a groan that made his friends feel their own restlessness. They were always bored when school ended and they had to go stay at the twin’s house while the babysitter did her algebra. When Mom got home, she would half-heartedly debate the value of “x” until Bill arrived. Then Bill, the babysitter, and the twins would walk their friend two blocks down the street. The babysitter would keep walking, and Bill would turn with the twins and walk back two blocks. Five days a week, every day, the routine never varied.

“We’ve got to do something, we’ve still got an hour before Mom gets home,” agreed the sister. She scooted over and laid down beside her brother, wondering what he was looking at. She liked the clouds too, but they couldn’t hold her attention like they could her brother’s.

Reluctantly the friend reclined on the brother’s other side. There was no breeze to stir the limbs above their heads, and

it was hard to see the sky through the leaves. "Let's climb the tree."

"Lame," said the sister.

"Mom would get mad if we break any of the blooms off. She likes the apples," the brother said.

"But your mom won't be home for another hour, and the babysitter is busy with her books. Come on; I dare you to go first," the friend had raised up on one elbow to face the brother.

The words had been spoken. "*I dare you to go first.*" They would all go now, it was inevitable, but the brother would go first. He stood, dusted dry grass off the back of his faded pockets, and turned to face the tree. He looked up into the silent gloom. He couldn't see beyond the shadows of the shade.

With a shrug, he reached up and found a handhold amongst the joining of the tree's three largest limbs. Using both hands and a hop, he pulled himself higher. Small white flowers on emerald cushions swallowed his sneakers. He became aware of the air suddenly chilling around his shoulders.

Below him, his sister's voice sounded gleeful, "We can't see you anymore! Go to the top; see if you can see the neighbor's yard!"

He climbed higher, careful not to disturb the delicate apple blooms. His legs and arms reacted to the shouts of, "Higher, go higher!" Then, looking up towards the daylight just beginning to filter between the top branches, his foot slipped and he felt himself falling. Blossoms succumbed to his flaying, failing, attempt at flight. The limbs bruised his back, his sides, his gut, his head—

He never hit the ground. The Dark Lady cradled him gently and sang him a sweet, dark lullaby that only he could hear.

Crystal Sims

## Winter Memory

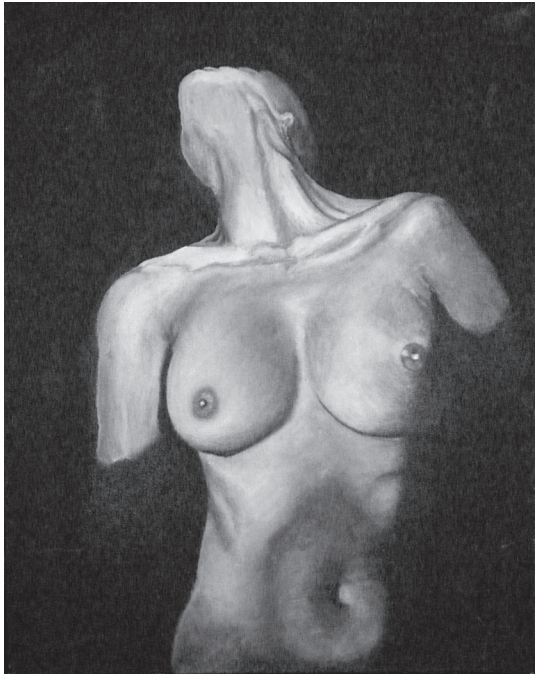
Rancid dry air forces itself through previously frigid lanes  
to coat my long-ago-scarred hands that lie on  
the wheel, waiting for heat to penetrate the six layers of  
cloths that I need to swallow my being.

My bones ache and my muscles tense with forgotten ice,  
my hands automatically smooth the rough towel blankets,  
I feel the rocks, and twigs, and dirt staining my worn jeans,  
the yellowed placenta cold against my thin flannel shirt.

The buck had slipped in with the ewes a few months early  
and it was the coldest winter on record  
There was not a clean towel in the house  
and we never slept more than four hours a night  
Our beds, couches, every milk crate, and laundry basket  
held a cold bawling lamb, fed with powdered milk and  
coffee which we drank to make it through the frozen nights  
The sheep shook their solid coats, a sound of distant thunder  
Their wool blended with the skiffs of snow, with the  
mounds of frozen sheep, and lambs, and inedible hay

I smile, with sorrow, when winter comes  
and my heart aches to return home.





Marissa Díaz  
Darkness  
Acrylic, 11" x 14"



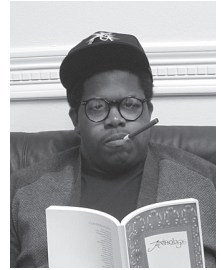
Luísa Cossío  
Perfume

## Editors



*Ryan Farrar* is a graduate student and graduate assistant of English at Tarleton. Formerly published in *Anthology*, this is his first year as a staff member. Ryan has also edited the 2005 volume of *Marine Creek Reflections* at Tarrant County College. His research interests include dystopian and modern literature but do not fail to extend to other areas such as post-structuralist rhetoric. His independent activities include crafting creative literature, playing electric bass, and keeping physically active. He is also a closet enthusiast of Stephen Hawking.

*Jahmichah Dawes* is a senior at Tarleton where he is pursuing a degree in fashion merchandising. He has aspirations of running his own sneaker shop. He is a connoisseur of sneaks, bikes, cardigans, caps, specs, and decks (long boards). He has enjoyed communing with the other editors and will cherish these memories FOR-E-VER! He bids you adieu trusting that you'll keep it cope (copacetic that is).



*Henley Phillips* is a senior English major, an ephemerist, a bagist, and a lover of the outdoors. Short fiction from the Mid-twentieth Century is his favorite mode of literature. Upon graduating, Henley plans to travel the world and "drink life to the lees." He is currently enamored with bicycles and can probably ride a wheelie longer than you can.

## Publication Directors

*Benni Konvicka* and *Marilyn Robitaille* are professors in the Department of English and Languages. They have been co-publication directors of *Anthology* for the last fourteen years. Since founding the journal with students Jimmy Hood and Cris Edwards in 1995, they have read hundreds, maybe thousands, of submission and worked with student editors from a variety of majors.



# Acknowledgements

We extend heartfelt thanks to each of the following people for their help in making this year's volume of *Anthology* possible:

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We chose the flower motif for the cover because of the etymology of *Anthology*. The word *Anthology* comes from the Greek words *anthos* (flowers) and *legein* (gather). The definition, according to our dictionary, is a collection of prose, poetry, and visual arts.

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