

Sudden Stops

Pouring

It's o'four hundred

Snake in the Pool

If My Mouth Could Think

America: The Modern Icarus

Undefined

Never Coming Home

Born to Trouble

I No Longer

Yesterday Before Tomorrow

As So You Know

Summer Nights

Renewal

Down Home

My Mind

Daddy's Garden

House on Balmmer Street

A Woodland Catastrophe

Running from Gloom

Renaissance

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RENAISSANCE

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STUDENT AWARDS

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Poetry..... Terri Register

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Renewal	1	Terri Register, Associate in Arts
<i>Possibilities</i>	1	Ashleigh Stafford, Associate in Arts
Yesterday Before Tomorrow	2	Terri Register, Associate in Arts
<i>The Time is Ripe</i>	2	Nancy Ceja, Associate in Arts
Undefined.....	3	Christina Wardle, Associate in Arts
Never Alone	4	Lisa Hankins, Associate in Arts
<i>Then Play On</i>	5	Ashleigh Stafford, Associate in Arts
<i>Bug Eyes</i>	5	David Brantley, Associate in Arts
Granny’s Light	6	Tina Benton, Office Administration
<i>Basket and Shell</i>	7	Nancy Ceja, Associate in Arts
<i>Patience</i>	8	Jovon Michael Moore, Associate in Arts
Lost Somewhere in Imaginary Time.....	9	Jeff Williams, English Instructor
Pouring.....	9	Mike Kimbrell, Associate in Arts
Rainbow Brite	10	Theresa White-Wallace, Secretary, Language/Communication Department
<i>Hat Hep</i>	11	Courtney Wegman, Associate in Arts
Just So You Know	11	Ashley Whitehurst, Associate in Arts
If My Mouth Could Think	11	Iris Davis Robinson, Human Services
America, The Modern Icarus	12	Blake Brady, Associate in Arts
<i>Dog God</i>	13	Jovon Michael Moore, Associate in Arts
Sudden Stops.....	14	Graham Parker, Associate in Science
<i>Wayfarer</i>	14	Courtney Wegman, Associate in Arts
Somewhere There’s a Path.....	15	Jeff Williams, English Instructor
<i>Building Door</i>	15	Karina West, Associate in Arts
<i>Dogwood</i>	16	Ashlyn Hall, Early College High School
<i>Beauty</i>	17	Ashlyn Hall, Early College High School
i no longer carry your heart with me.....	17	Terri Register, Associate in Arts
<i>Stuff of Dreams</i>	18	Amit Lal, Associate in Science
White Flower Fields.....	18	Rebecca Hines, Information Systems
My Mind	19	Terri Register, Associate in Arts
Genius Has Abandoned Me	19	Robert Linley McCoy, Associate in Science
<i>Celtic Crosses</i>	19	Ashleigh Stafford, Associate in Arts
Saturday	20	Amelia Rawlings, Associate in Science
<i>Renaissance</i> Editors’ Routine 2010	20	Jeff Williams, English Instructor
<i>You Lookin’ at Me</i>	21	Katina Davis, Math Instructor
The House on Dahmer Street.....	21	Theresa White-Wallace, Secretary, Language/Communication Department
What I Did Over My Summer Vacation.....	22	Anita Collier, Medical Office Administration
Somebody Helped Me Along One Day	23	Roethyll Lunn, English Instructor
Summer Nights	23	Arianna Thong, Associate in Arts
<i>Buffet Escape</i>	23	Katie Cottle, Associate in Arts
<i>Waiting</i>	24	Tyler Worrell, Associate in Arts
Life-support.....	24	Jeremiah Ingram, Associate in Arts
It’s You	25	Arianna Thong, Associate in Arts
<i>Picasso Joni</i>	25	Courtney Wegman, Associate in Arts
Almighty Ruler	26	Harris Brogden, Associate in Arts
Haiti.....	26	Nicole Denise Hughes, Associate in Arts
<i>Crazy Hair</i>	27	Karina West, Associate in Arts
Snake in the Pool	27	Ashley Whitehurst, Associate in Arts
The Tainted Embrace	27	Patrick Eason, Associate in Arts
<i>What’s Left</i>	28	Karina West, Associate in Arts

A Woodland Catastrophe	28	Jordan Howell, Associate in Arts
Death for the Unnoticed Beauty	29	Kiri Smith, Associate in Arts
Jake the Snake	30	Stephanie Williams, Special Credit
How the Mighty Have Fallen	30	Kiri Smith, Associate in Arts
Daddy’s Garden	31	Terry Jones, Medical Office Administration
<i>Forest for the Trees</i>	31	Tyler Worrell, Associate in Arts
Listen.....	32	Alexis Alday, Associate in Arts
<i>Frost’s Woods</i>	33	Joy Pearce, Secretary, Admissions
Down Home	33	Terence Davis, Associate in Arts
Running from Gloom.....	34	Rachel Hines, Associate in Arts
<i>Closed</i>	34	Amit Lal, Associate in Science
<i>In Shapes</i>	35	Nancy Ceja, Associate in Arts
Pyramid.....	35	Jeff Williams, English Instructor
It’s o’four hundred	36	Gina Willard, Medical Office Administration
Never Coming Home	37	Elizabeth Morrisette, Associate in Arts
Born to Trouble	37	David Roberts, Associate in Arts
<i>Reflect</i>	38	Jovon Michael Moore, Associate in Arts
Life Time Love.....	38	Wendy Turner, Medical Assisting
You Get What You Ask For	39	Candace Jones, Associate in Arts
<i>Flower</i>	39	Amit Lal, Associate in Science
A Dull Boy	40	Lisa Hankins, Associate in Arts
<i>In Motion</i>	40	Ashleigh Stafford, Associate in Arts

The Renewal

We live to die
Love dying to live
Somewhere in between
Growth becomes a reality
Sometimes short lived

We await our rebirth
Cracked cocoons
Awaken new beauty butterflying
Arrival from the longest journey ever
Inward
Then out
Into a world of irrelevance
We are never too young
Or even old for that matter to learn

Indifference has a blank face
But familiar nonetheless
A perfect polluted reflection
*Nothing is as it appears
or as we hoped for it to be*
Desires misguide
And we follow willingly
Cowering with false content
Never asking for much
Or aspiring for more

We just float
Barely above concrete grounds
Nothing to cushion our countless falls
Torn wings waving
Treading wild winds that carry us off course
We crash
We burn
To do it all again and again—renewed

Terri Register



Possibilities

Ashleigh Stafford

Yesterday Before Tomorrow

I've been busy
Trying to get elsewhere
Here and there
Leaving the silver linings
Wrapping my dreams to tarnish quickly
Loud contemplations killing silence
Counting mortal minutes on a standstill clock
Time is moving somewhere fast
In a ton of nonsense
Filling imaginary voids
But between pauses
In this moment
I realize I have arrived
Present in the now of living
Pacing
Moving
Regardless of what was
Or what will be

Terri Register



The Time is Ripe

Nancy Ceja

Undefined

Just as the stars don't belong to the Earth
as the air doesn't belong to humans
I don't belong to this world.
I am not yours to define.
You did not create me.
You do not validate me.
One person, place, or thing cannot make or break me.
My destiny isn't written in the stars
my future is not determined by my past
and my existence is not justified by your profile.
I know it makes you more comfortable
to set boundaries and place me in them
to determine who I am, what I want
what I have to offer by your preconceived notions.
You sleep better at night knowing
I've been tucked in my little place.
Wake up!
I want you to be uncomfortable!
I want you to wonder, to be confused
because then maybe your mind will open
and you will see truth.
I don't fall into your great order of things.
I won't stand in your line
because it's going nowhere.
I won't hold my tongue or quiet my yell
even if it scares you
because it's my voice to be heard
and someone is going to hear it.
With every word that makes you uneasy
I'm unraveling the ties that bind deeper thought.
Watch out!
I'm changing the rules.

Christina Wardle

Never Alone

The blades of grass
Tickle my skin
As I sit here in silence
With my notebook and pen

Fallen bark
On the ground
Pine needles and cones
Lie around

Gumballs, twigs, and
A Blue Jay's lost feather
Lie beneath the sky
In this beautiful weather

Looking up
The sun now in my face
Captured by the warmth and
Its tender embrace

The trees give birth
To a rainbow of colors
And decorate the ground
With the leaves' fallen brothers

Sitting in silence
Beneath the trees
The air is clear
With a gentle breeze

All alone
Sitting on the ground
Complete solitude
No one around

Or so I thought
That is to say
Was I sitting here alone?
Ha! No way!

For lying beneath me
On the ground
A city of life
Scurries around

A brown little spider
A red little ant
A mosquito that wants me
But have me she can't

*Go away mosquito! *Uhg.* (back to my
composure)*

A grasshopper jumps
A little bug flies
Ants and spiders
Of all different size

A roly poly that is walking about
And that STUPID MOSQUITO'S
determination
That is not going to work out!
Squish

Ah, so much better
Now where was I...? Oh yes!
I'm sorry
I just had to get rid of that pest

Of course, I must note
The birds in the air
Soar above me
Without a care

Sharing their song
Of the evening day
While the crickets join in
With their song to play

And now a frog croaks
By a nearby pond
Completing this symphony
Of unique song

While sitting here in awe
And complete fascination
I have enjoyed admiring
God's splendid creation

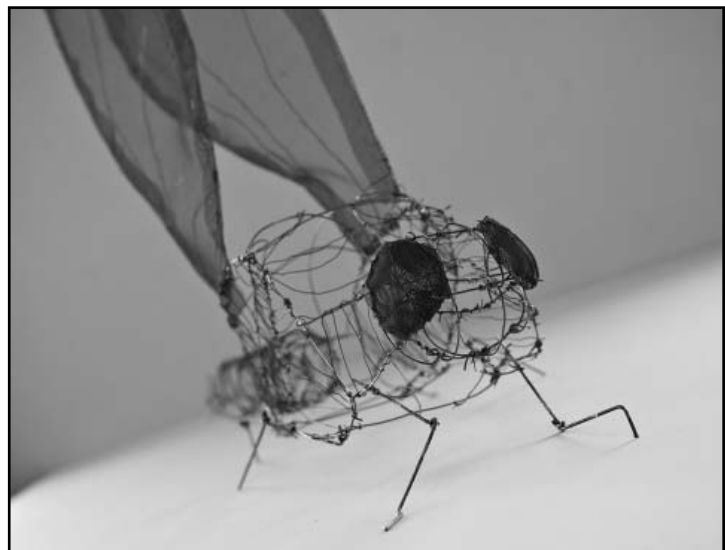
But the sun is now setting
And I must go home
I enjoyed my time of solitude
Though, I was never alone.

Lisa Hankins



Then Play On

Ashleigh Stafford



Bug Eyes

David Brantley

Granny's Light

Tina Benton

The clock on the wall read 7:15 a.m. when the light above my desk started to flicker in its now familiar way—on and off once, then on and off once more. My lips formed a sad smile, and I quietly whispered, “Gran” into the emptiness of the showroom. Had anyone else been in the dealership at the time and heard my talking to the overhead light, calling it Gran, he no doubt would have called the men in the white coats to take me to the local nuthouse. I would have completely understood. I did feel a bit crazy talking to a light blub. Three weeks earlier, as my precious grandmother’s health began to decline, the light above my desk began to flicker briefly then come back on and function normally for the rest of the day. Inexplicably, when it happened, I murmured, “Hi, Gran” and continued with my duties at the dealership. This little ritual would continue until the day of my grandmother’s death.

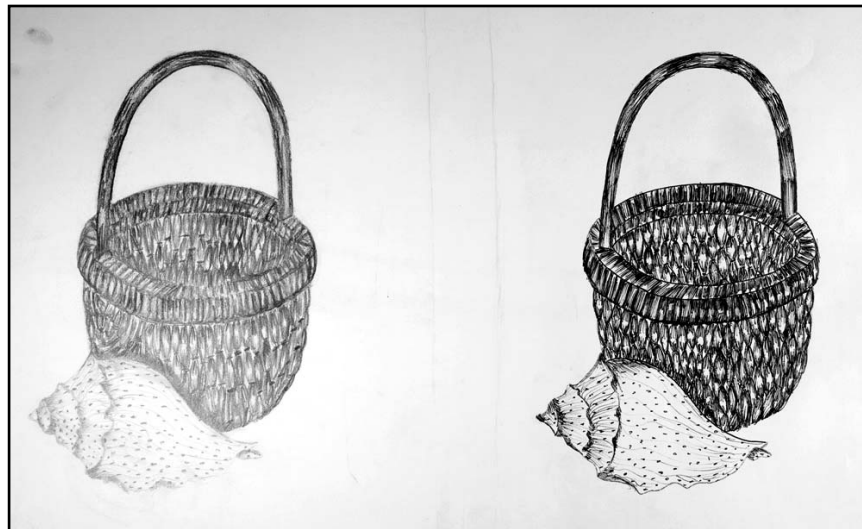
My grandmother’s name was Harriet Lamb, but to my sister, Theresa, and me, she was always “Granny.” A tiny little thing, only five feet tall, gray hair swept back in a bun, with spectacles high up on her nose, she looked just like the character “Granny” from *The Beverly Hillbillies*. She was just as feisty, too. My mind wandered back to days long past when Theresa and I would get her all riled up, and she would chase us all around the house with whatever she could get her hands on. She used her bedroom slippers, a wooden spoon, and the thing that I feared the most: The Texas Flyswatter! The swatter on that thing was the size of my *Webster’s Hardback College Dictionary*. I have never been to Texas, but if they have flies big enough to have to use that thing, I’m staying here. We knew she would never hurt us even if she had been about to catch us, but we had the biggest giggle fits watching her in hot pursuit, armed and dangerous.

Seeing her now, after having two small strokes and then falling and breaking her hip, I knew she would never be able to chase us again. She was confined to a hospital type bed where she lay very still, drifting in and out of consciousness, lost in her own lonely world. She was unable to eat, only able to accept drops of water occasionally from an ear syringe. I know she would have been mortified had she been aware of what was happening to her. Many people asked us why we didn’t put her in the hospital or hospice. She wanted to be at home, in her own bed, with her loved ones always near.

As my granny approached her final days, she would have brief moments of lucidity. On one of these occasions, she turned to my mother, who sat beside her on her bed, gently stroking her hair, and asked her where I had been. She said she had been waiting for me to come spend time with her, and I was nowhere to be found. When my mother relayed this to me, guilty tears sprang to my eyes. It was true; I had been avoiding her. I couldn’t bear to see my once fierce and feisty little granny looking so frail and weak. I didn’t want her to die, so I dealt with the situation by not dealing with it. I had been selfish, only thinking about how I felt, giving no thought to my grandmother’s feelings. She needed to know that I loved her.

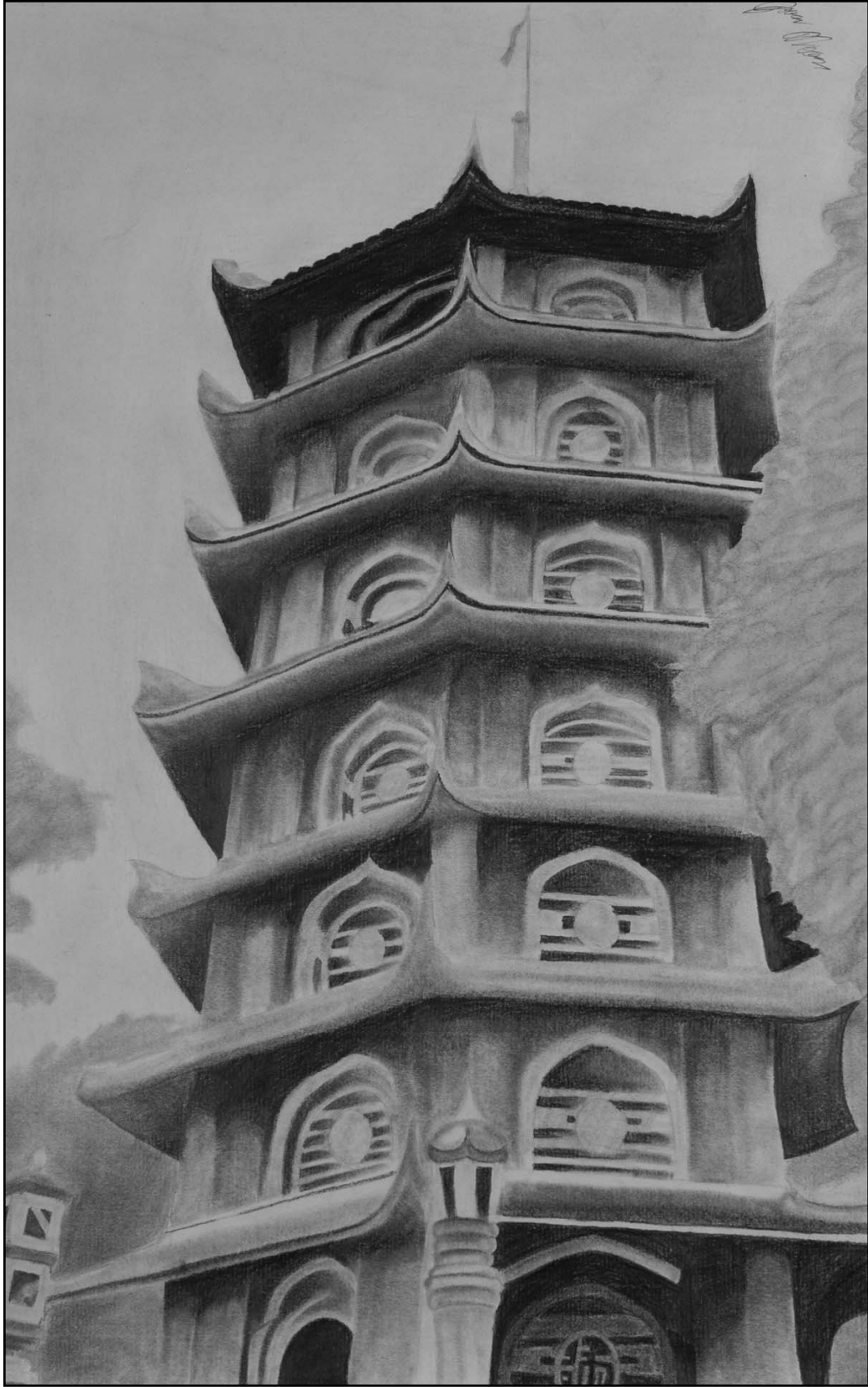
That night as my family gathered for supper, I said that I wasn't feeling well and excused myself for the evening. Instead of going to my own room, however, I started toward the little room at the other end of the hall where my grandmother was. I hesitated for a moment, took a deep breath, slowly turned the knob, and let myself in. She lay quietly in her bed, looking up toward the left hand corner of her ceiling, the ebullient smile of a child lighting up her face. I followed her gaze, trying to see what it was that had her attention, but whoever, or whatever it was, it was not for me to see. She appeared to be listening to someone. I knew that time was running out for me to tell her how I felt. I approached her bed and gently took her delicate hand in mine. "Gran," I said, "it's Tina. I'm here." Her eyes never left that spot on the ceiling. I was heartbroken. I had waited too long, and now she didn't know I was there. She would die thinking that I hadn't loved her enough to spend time with her before she was gone. I decided that I had to say the words anyway and prayed that some part of her would still be able to hear them. I told her how much I loved her and thanked her for taking such good care of me; I thanked her for loving me even during my teenage years when I had been so horrible to her. I apologized for any pain I may have caused her and then told her how very much I was going to miss her. I stayed with her for a little while longer, listening to the reassuring sound of her breathing. Finally, I stood up and gave her a lingering kiss on her cheek, surprised by the coolness of her skin. Tearfully, I made my way to my room. Those would be my last moments with my grandmother.

I was brought back to the present time by the unexpected flickering of the light over my desk. I looked up in surprise, then noted the time on the nearby clock: 8:00 on the dot. Why was it flickering again? Since the day it began its little game with me, it would flicker on time each day, and it had already done so today. As I pondered this thought, the light bulb glowed a brilliant white, seeming to double in size, and then burst into tiny pieces on the showroom floor. Somehow, I knew that she was now free and on her way home after a brief stop to tell me good bye. Momentarily stunned, I pulled myself together, and quietly whispered, "Goodbye, Gran."



Basket and Shell

Nancy Ceja



Patience

Jovon Michael Moore

Lost Somewhere in Imaginary Time

These are the hours that should live
ones that are not mere whispers or
rising steam from tea cup rims

not ones void of all but entropy
or simple inertia of unconscious life
empty decanters where once was wine.

Hours must have joy or flow with tears
or dreams that flash then supernova
light which burns, recreates, illumines.

I stare at hands on a stove top clock
watch seconds wander and minutes
step off and drift lazily to the cosmos

or white stucco villas by calm seas
and dull, disappointing waves. Somber
hours that should've never been born.

Jeff Williams

Pouring

I can't stop thinking about you
The way you move and your straight-laced smile
Please don't stop singing the songs of feeling
I am a man who can listen a while

Before I met you, my world was clouded
Walls had collapsed with me inside
But now there's a light in the darkness
Your eyes command stars and open skies

How do we end this perfect moment
Well, here comes your chance to blow my mind
No good is regret if there's a tomorrow
The water stopped at just the right time

Mike Kimbrell

Rainbow Brite

Theresa White-Wallace

My sister called me just before 6:00 one morning. I knew something was wrong when I heard her voice. “Oh, Theresa, I colored my hair last night and it’s a hot pepper red color. What am I going to do? I can’t go to work like this. I don’t know of anyone who has ever had this happen to them.”

My mind went immediately to my mother. How could my sister have forgotten? I was eight years old when my mother decided to have her hair frosted like one of her sisters. I remember my mother’s coming home in tears. Her beautiful dark brunette hair had turned orange. My mother blamed the beautician for using the wrong color. That was the first and last time frost or color touched her hair. Looking back at old photos, it’s not hard to spot the year my mother had orange hair. In every photo, her face was either covered up with a book, hand, or lawn chair.

Food Lion didn’t have the color that my sister uses, so she chose another. That was her first mistake. My sister is a natural red head, and her roots have darkened as she has gotten older.

I proceeded to give her advice even though I knew she wouldn’t take it. I told her to call the beauty shop when it opened. They would know what to tell her to do. My sister said that she didn’t want to wait that long since she had to go to work. Instead, she called a lady at her church who fixes hair. The lady fixes hair, but she is not a beautician. My sister called me back an hour later just to say that she was going back to Food Lion to get the color that the lady had suggested. I knew that would be a mistake, but saying anything at that point would have been useless.

I received another phone call at 2:30 that evening. This time, my sister was in tears. Her hot pepper red was now bright purple. It took everything out of me not to laugh out loud. My sister had gone straight to the beauty shop after the purple incident. The minute she walked in, everyone stopped. Mouths dropped open. Oh, how I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall when she walked in! The beauticians got together and decided what to do. My sister was told that brown was the only color that would cover up the bright purple. The results left my sister in tears. Her hair was now a copper/brownish color with a purple tint when she got out in the sunlight. “I can’t go to work. I can’t go to church. I can’t go anywhere until my hair grows out.” I really wanted to fuss at her for not taking my advice. Instead, my heart went out to her. I told her to go back into the beauty shop and ask if and when they could strip her hair. I then suggested that she go downtown to the wig shop. I also forewarned her that she might not find one. She didn’t want to go alone, so I picked her up after work. I prayed all the way there that we would find the perfect wig. My prayer was answered. My sister was very happy as we headed back to her work place. I happened to look down at her feet as we pulled up into the parking lot. “Where’s your purse?” Again, I prayed as we headed back to the wig shop. Nothing is ever simple with my sister.

Two weeks later, my sister got her hair stripped, and all is well with her hair. My one hope is that she has learned from this painful experience. But don’t be surprised if in a future issue of *Renaissance* you read “Rainbow Brite II.”



Hat Hep

Courtney Wegman

Just So You Know

I used the last
Of the money
In the money jar

Which was all
We had left

Please forgive me
I'll replace it
But just so you know
It was totally worth it

Ashley Whitehurst

If My Mouth Could Think

If my mouth could think
I would need no brain
If my mouth could think
My tongue would be tame
If my mouth could think
Would I care what others feel
Letting them know that what's
In my heart is real
If my mouth could think
Would my foot still go there
Or would I have a kind word to share
If my mouth could think

Iris Davis Robinson

America, the Modern Icarus

America—the bold, the beautiful, the wench
Home to the dirty, the poor, the greedy, and the rich
Who is most important?
I don't think anyone can say
The middle class always visible
But off the field, on the bench
The country is politically torn
Now more than ever
Caught up in the politically torn fervor
On one side? The left-wing, tree-hugging, Communists!
On the other side? The right-winged, Bible and gun-toting Rednecks!
Who's right one may say? That's all up to the observer
All I know is that it takes two wings
The left and the right, to fly
So why don't we put the feathers on that eagle and try to soar high?
Feathers of white, the color of a peace dove
Feathers of brown, still bloodstained from the past as a reminder
Not a nationalistic, communistic, or fanatical movement
Just a little movement at all
And we could soar high
Over the clouds and into the sky
Towards the sun
Where perhaps our doing would be undone
For perhaps our wings are like that of Icarus
Perhaps our wings are made of wax
And as we fly towards the trap door in the sun
They are all the while melting like an accelerated candle
And only while we try and continue to fly will we have realized that
They are gone
And we'll call out asking
“Why have our wings failed?”
But no one will be there to answer back

Blake Brady



Dog God

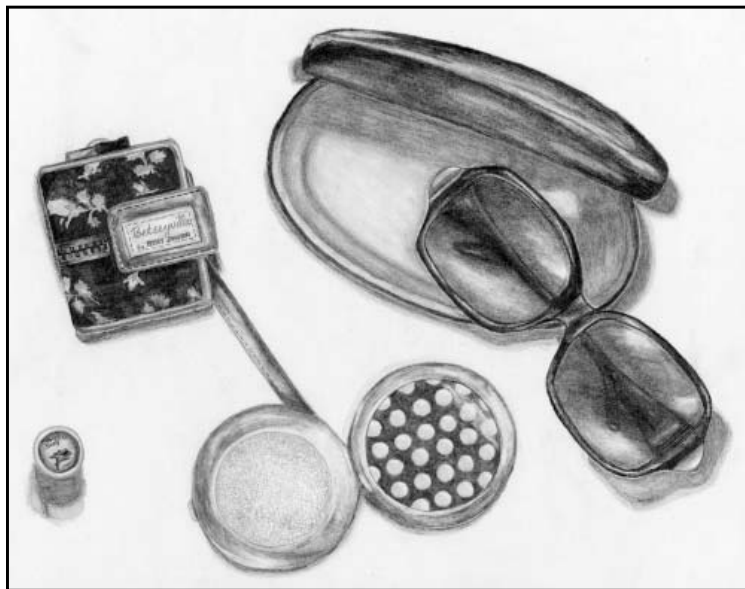
Jovon Michael Moore

Sudden Stops

When the vibrant days of youthful years
were plentiful there was something
now i cannot grasp what
which kept my eyes open. All things
beautiful and all things glowing
the light of which shined the brightest in her.
And like a moth i was trapped
and blindly dived forward into a dream
of my own perception, my own fate it seemed.
Whose love flowed like water into my heart
until i couldn't tell her from me.
i drank her again and again.
Through strife we over (came and went)
like a traffic light. Caution!
It's that stop start (and go) i was dying for.

And then it stopped. One could say the light
had faded from me. The air that i breathed
became more suffocating. It was she
the light of which shined no more.

Graham Parker



Wayfarer

Courtney Wegman

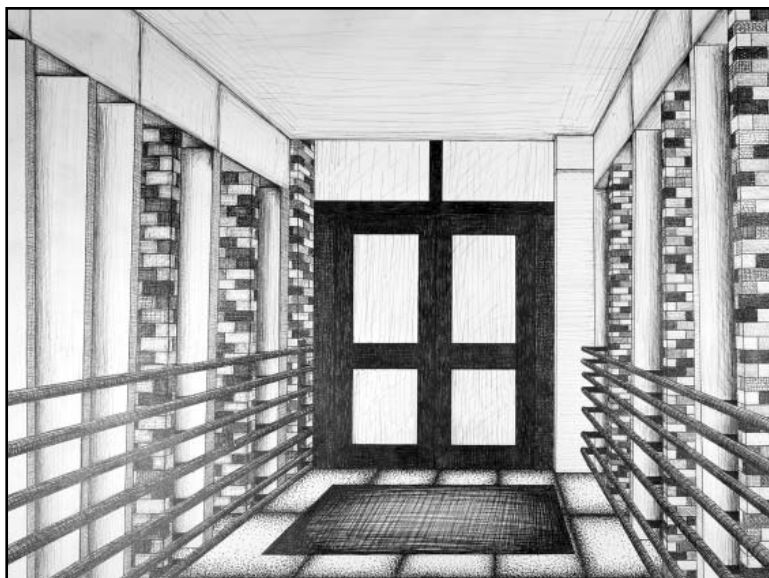
Somewhere There's a Path

He's walked among the pawnshops, watching moneylenders trawl for refuse, and he's seen the curios destroyed in the exchange, lost among the ruins of the old way, and he's grown tired waiting for things to be different, for there is nothing to be lost and nothing to be gained now in the shadows of the falling sun, watery and cold in the December sky, and the bitterness flows like alcohol from a bottle of Campari.

"There're dreams to be had somewhere," she'd said, "somewhere there's a path, a path to the open sea, a beach with no footprints, only seagulls on wing. In the ocean breeze we'll throw ourselves upon the waves and swim among the dolphins, play games with sand dollars, find driftwood, lie upon a bed of sea oats, wait as the lunar tide slides water on our feet." And for a moment he believed her, just as he'd believed in the mornings he was free, awash in the blissful time between waking and reconnecting.

It was cold when the songs dried up, frozen like an arctic spring, when he no longer fought the music of silence which echoed liked an absent clarinet or piano with no strings, and the claxon drove him to ground, to the streets where the moneylenders prowled, where the worn prostitutes put themselves up for sale, where the worthless paper rained from skyscraper windows. "Somewhere, there's a path," he says, and drifts hollow into the crowd.

Jeff Williams



Building Door

Karina West



Dogwood

Ashlyn Hall



Beauty

Ashlyn Hall

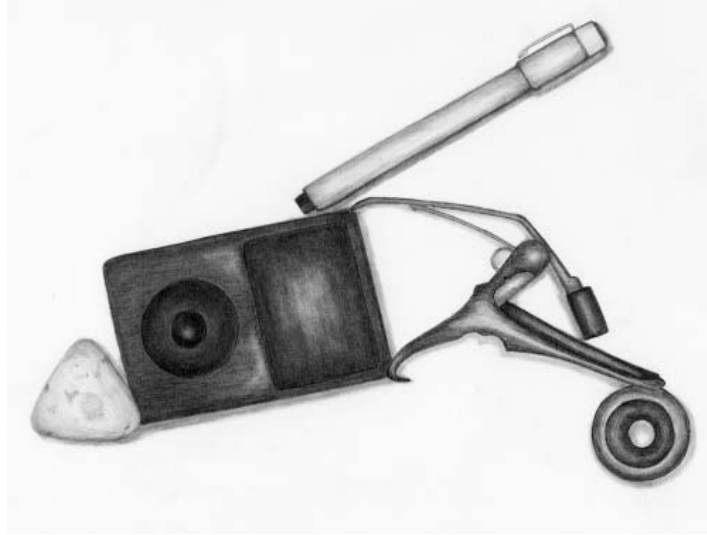
i no longer carry your heart with me

i no longer carry your heart with me
(i no longer have the heart to care)
for it was as if i were bearing the weight of ten worlds
(and the weight of ten worlds has finally devastated my existence)
my screams of agony are silent against the atmosphere
losing you has become a repetitive hellish nightmare
(long lasting images)
these are the memories left of you

there is no light in love
(and i have found serenity in the darkness)
you are far
far and out of my reach
(in a universe of disappointments)

i no longer carry your heart with me
(i no longer have the heart to care)

Terri Register



Stuff of Dreams

Amit Lal

White Flower Fields

Rebecca Hines

It was the stroke of midnight when my slumber deepened. I was upon the line of dream and fantasy, walking upon the silver thread of the imagination. I was taken into the wings of the seraph that seduced me into a longing dream state. There I lay, an angel clothed in an ebony black dress like the deepest hour of midnight in a field that was picture perfect. I was trapped in a scene that belonged to what seemed like an undesirably beautiful masterpiece, a tour de force created by the hand of a nameless artist. I was lost within a deep field of snow white flowers. The diminutive colorless flowers masked the ground and were spread out as far as the eye could see. Yet around the edges of the field was a lingering fog that played in the distance, making the scene look as if it was trapped in a frosted glass orb. The flowers gave off an innocent glow, making everything around them so innocently pure and radiant.

I could hear the sound of thunder softly singing in the distance. A storm was starting to awaken upon us, creating a sense of comfort upon this monochromatic scene. I could feel the soft white petals brush against me. Their velvety texture caressed my faintly tan bare skin as they danced with the rhythm of the storm's breeze. The untamed wind stirred their intoxicating fragrance into the open air. The sweet addicting scent hung in the flawless atmosphere which triggered childlike memories like a weak haze in my mind. I breathed in the delicious scent with every breath I took as it played upon a remembrance of a forever lost pastime, making me feel so strangely naïve. The growing strength of the ominous storm set the whole scene completely off balance. The cool frosted fog closed around us, fading everything away. In my darkness I felt the fresh crisp kisses of the unseen falling rain.

Unwillingly, I opened my eyes, tearing away from my new world of fantasy. Awakening from the bewitching spell, I found myself back in the reality which I must call my own. Never again have I returned to such an amazing landscape, such a vivid breathtaking dream.

My Mind

My mind is always cluttered
A closet with no space
Holding on to the old
Without room for the new
With a need to replace
Rearrange
My pen is running dry
As my notebook falls apart
My toes are like icicles
The faucet drips are tiny taunts
The neighbor's baby is crying
Planes are roaring
As a dog barks
I am a train without tracks
Did I mention my mind is always cluttered?
I meant to write something meaningful

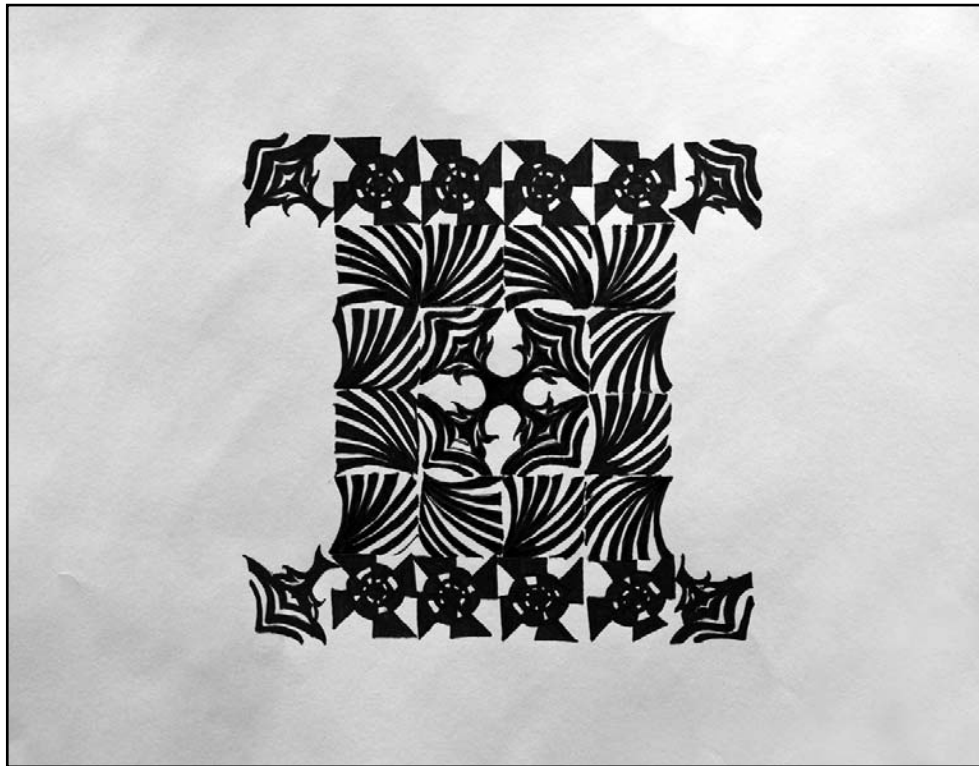
Terri Register

Genius Has Abandoned Me

My creative genius has abandoned me
Left me cold and hollow inside
Like the shell of a once lavish home
Decayed by time, leaving only stone

My creative genius has abandoned me
Left me poor and bare
This home used to be full of activity
Now nothing is here

Robert Linley McCoy



Celtic Crosses

Ashleigh Stafford

Saturday
Amelia Rawlings

While roosters crow, each one trying to outdo the other, ducks quack incessantly, vainly attempting to drown out the sound of the roosters. Mother Nature kisses me good morning with a gentle breeze on my face. As I open my eyes, I know there is no going back. I'm stuck in the real world for fifteen to sixteen more hours. The sound of bacon sizzling combined with the smell of Mother's French toast tells me that it's Saturday. I roll over trying to grip onto the comfort of my adventurous dreams, the warmth of homemade quilts, and the laziness of the night. Sadly, it is in vain. After a brief battle with my conscience, I throw back the quilt of plugs to further investigate this breakfast, secretly hoping that we're having either rooster or duck.

Upon my arrival, I find no creature of feather for breakfast. However, I am not dismayed, for my mother has mouth-watering pure vanilla French toast, thick maple smoked bacon, fresh eggs recently scrambled, home grown pears cooked in brown sugar, and ice cold orange juice all prepared. When I walk into the room, my nostrils flood with the smells of what she has so lovingly prepared. My stomach tightens from sensations of hunger. My legs go weak knowing that I will have to wait nine hundred more seconds until my sisters and father make their presence in the kitchen a reality.

Having kissed my mother good morning, I offer my assistance in whatever will get breakfast on the table faster. I am handed a can containing coffee beans and start the machine that will magically turn these beans and some water into my father. Civil war breaks out in my mind between the half that wishes for sleep and the half that does not. The sound of the water slowly and steadily dripping into the pot tries to put me to sleep while the sporadic popping of the bacon fights to keep me in the land of consciousness. The deafening roar in my stomach forces me to stay awake.

The fifteen minutes go by quicker than I had originally expected, and my taste buds are flying high as my tongue offers up the food to my palette for further analysis. With every bite, I silently sing the praises of my mother's cooking. Conversation at the table is joyous, and I admit my happiness at everyone's decision to rise and embrace the morning. As I look at my now empty plate, I sadly add up the hours until I can eat breakfast again.

Renaissance Editors' Routine 2010

Kathryn takes a comma out. Jeffrey starts to scream and shout.
Jeanine watches quite bemused by the punctuation feud.

Jeff Williams



You Lookin' at Me

Katina Davis

The House on Dahmer Street

Theresa White-Wallace

On my way to work one morning, I saw an empty house on Dahmer Street. The house was pastel and trimmed in white. It was the cutest little house I had ever seen. There wasn't a sign in the yard, so I didn't know if the house was for rent or for sale. For two years, I drove by the house, and for two years it stayed empty. One day as I was driving by, I noticed a car parked in the driveway. Someone had moved in.

By this time, I had become very interested in the house. Two weeks went by. The windows were covered in sheets. When weeks turned into months, I told my husband that it just didn't make any sense. He told me I was being nosey and to quit staring at the house. I figured the family was probably poor and even thought about leaving some curtains on the front porch. I became more suspicious when I noticed there was a truck driver in the family. With such a nice truck, to be sure they could afford a pair of curtains at the Dollar Store.

Over the course of a couple of months, the screen doors on both the front and side disappeared. Obviously, these people were rough on doors. I finally got a glimpse of the occupants before the year ended. They looked normal and even had a dog. And then the digging began. Each week the hole in the back yard got bigger and bigger. I told my husband that I just knew that was where they were hiding the bodies. "Mark my word," I said. "One day Goldsboro will be in the news, and I can say I knew something was going on all along." Again, my husband said I was being nosey and to quit staring at the house.

The windows finally got blinds, but that too didn't last long. When summer came, flower pots sat on the front porch. That's normal, I thought. Then, they started putting up a fence that blocked any view of the back yard from the house next door. What more proof did my husband need? Bodies were being buried!

I had to take a double look as I passed the house one morning. The once cute little pastel house trimmed in white was now being covered with shingles, and the color was hideous. Even my husband agreed that they had ruined the look of the house. I guess they thought the same thing because a week later, they started painting the house. I assume they ran out of paint, though, because only half of the house got painted, and it has been like that for over a year.

If I were Nancy Drew, I would have solved the mystery of The House on Dahmer Street long ago. Of course, I am still waiting for the 6:00 news.

What I Did Over My Summer Vacation

Anita Collier

I just recently returned to the U.S. My friends and family hadn't seen me in four months; they didn't even notice I was gone. That's my support group for ya! I ran into a friend of mine the other day at Walmart. She said, "I haven't seen you in sooooo long. What did you do— fall off the face of the earth?" Well, as a matter of fact, I did fall off the face of the earth. I was drunk! Hey, it happens! Don't laugh; it could happen to anyone of you at any moment. Now I know where all those missing people who suddenly disappear go. Christopher Columbus had it right after all. The earth really is flat.

Falling off the face of the earth was quite a trip (this has nothing to do with LSD). It was a loooong way down to the bottom. By the way, hell is NOT in the center of the earth; if it were, I could have roasted marshmallows in the fire and visited a couple of people I know. If I had known sooner that I was going on a trip, I would have packed and brought snacks and a magazine. Also, I would have brought a lot of deodorant for the sinners down there! It was an exhausting, backbreaking climb back up to the top. I hadn't sweated so much since gym class in the 5th grade.

When I finally reached the surface of mother earth, I ended up in Zimbabwe—Africa for those of you who flunked out of geography class. I attempted to speak Swahili to the natives until I realized they were calling me an Americano fool in English and laughing. When I want to get a laugh out of someone, I can't. Go figure!

I had to hitchhike across the ocean to get back home, and let me tell ya, seafaring men are not sympathetic at all. I tried to flag down a tug boat, but the crew were all down below deck, getting drunk on whiskey. Never drink and drive! And those cruise ships! The crew won't pick you up unless you have a ticket. All the passengers were very cheerful. They had been drinking.

They wouldn't throw me a life preserver, but they did toss me a bottle of tequila, Jose Cuervo, which was better than getting a ride. I ate the worm first. I figured I needed the protein. Floating around out there, I felt just like Tom Hanks in *Castaway* except I didn't have a soccer ball named Wilson as my best friend. I kept an eye out for Gilligan and the skipper, too, but no luck there.

A Russian tanker finally picked me up. The crew were all drunk on vodka. They thought I was the mail order bride they had ordered. I learned quite a few Russian words during my stay! Things were going fine until I realized they were going the wrong way. I've never been to Moscow, and I hear it is quite lovely this time of year, but I abandoned ship.

I paddled around in a life boat for quite awhile; by the way, rubber life rafts can actually be a lot of fun even if you don't know where you're going. You'll have to try it sometime. Eventually, a yacht came by and picked me up in the Gulf of Mexico. They needed a servant. Apparently, their former maid had thrown herself overboard. They must not have tipped very well. The yacht people didn't pay union wages, and the rum supply was running dangerously low, so after they paid off the custom's officer, I had them drop me off in West Palm Beach. I had plenty of rubles to spend from my stint on the Russian tanker. I hung around there and did the Margartaville thing for awhile. I love those drinks with the little umbrellas in them! I mainly wanted to get back to the U.S. because they serve beer here...and cheeseburgers. So here I am, with a hangover, but at least I have a really nice tan now. That's what I did over my summer vacation.

Somebody Helped Me Along One Day

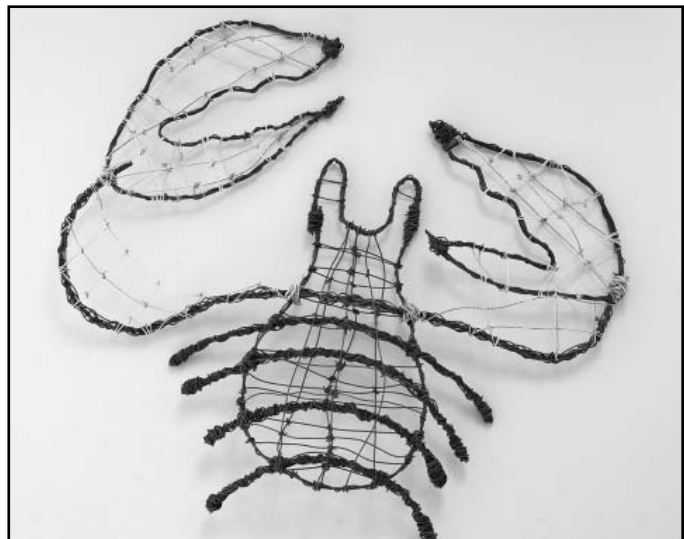
Somebody helped me along one day
gave me a little encouragement as I went my way
allowed me a time to learn and to know
and set time aside for me to grow

Roethyll Lunn

Summer Nights

Summer nights
Groovy gardens
And slippery rocks
High class fashion
And painted skin.
Two deep breaths
And one quick glance.
Running through a field of flowers
Swimming through a field of trees.
Summer nights
Drunken fights.

Arianna Thong



Buffet Escape

Katie Cottle



Waiting

Tyler Worrell

Life-support

You were supposed to be my life-support system
Someone that I could always depend on
Now they are telling that there is no cure
But my cure is you

You were supposed to be my life-support system
Someone that I could always depend on
Now you're telling that you wish to abandon me
Obsessed with this war called love
I thought you cared about me

Now I finally see you don't give a care about me
It's a catch 22 for my only cure was you
For my final battle plan
I got to be with you

You were supposed to be my life-support system
Someone that I can always depend on
Now they are telling that there is no cure

Jeremiah Ingram

It's You

I love the white birds,
The ones that fly past
And seem to not notice a thing.
That swoop down to the ground
To catch innocent bugs to take to their young.

I miss the white car
That was once mine.
It would break down more than
Any other car I owned.
But it was mine, making it my everything.

I remember the white shirts
That you would always wear.
They felt so soft against my cheeks
And smelled so fresh.
I suppose it's you I miss more than those shirts.

Arianna Thong



Picasso Joni

Courtney Wegman

Almighty Ruler

I am ruler of this town
I should be presented with a crown
Throwing plates against the wall
And smashing them on the ground
Doing whatever it takes
To gain control of everyone around

I am a force to be reckoned with
I sit high up on my throne; I'm worry free
My only thought is "Should I show more sympathy?"
I trample the weak and fragile
Shattering them to pieces like dropped glass
Gaining control isn't an easy task

I am willing to stop at never
I am witty and clever
I make sure all of my jobs are complete
One word to describe me isn't sweet
I try to be honest and fair
My main goal is to give everyone a little scare

Harris Brogden

Haiti

Are you the friend as I saw you
Coming to my house saying
I'll write you back as soon as I
finish helping my family and my
schooling? I promise with a deep
compassion in my heart. That was
the last Sunday you told me, my lady
as I thought of your eyes staring like
red ruby sapphires in the ocean.
I tried my best to keep you.
Dearly Beloved, as I love you
I want to have one...last...kiss...
before the earth ever crumbles into clay.
I'm the bronze king of Port-Au-Prince.
I'm still waiting for your kiss.
Now, the quake arrives
and I don't know how to survive.
When will you trust my love again?
When will you write your next letter?

Nicole Denise Hughes



Crazy Hair

Karina West

Snake in the Pool

He slithered in the water
Back and forth,
Glimpses of yellow, brown, orange
Zigzagging away from me;
Oh how sneaky he was
As he teased me.
He slithered his way to the steps
Wrapping himself around them.
I chased him with my net.
When he swam to the trap
I saw the little corn snake
Slithering in fear.
I enticed him with my hand
Gliding it over the clear glistening water.
As he poked his brown head out,
I pinched it between my fingers
And over the fence he flew.

Ashley Whitehurst

The Tainted Embrace

The time was autumn. The cool breeze scattered
the brown leaves. The ground crunched
beneath as I walked an axe in one hand,
a saw in the other. I was planning to clear
the back brush. A snake scurried suddenly
in tall grass for retreat. I seized him
with my tools, throttled his head and tail.
A neighbor saw, glanced in terror, and yelled
“He’s poisonous!”
“You better throw him!”
“My God, please don’t let him get killed!”
I threw him off in an instant! I ran in disbelief.
Heart pounding, emotionally poisoned.

Patrick Eason



What's Left

Karina West

A Woodland Catastrophe

Jordan Howell

A crackle of thunder split the quiescent darkness of the forest; a storm was approaching. The distinct and frantic chirping of birds and chattering of squirrels could be heard emanating from the tall pine trees that dominated the forest. Lightning, like spears of furious light, punctured the night air, producing more echoing blasts of thunder. Rabbits scurried through the undergrowth, desperately trying to find their homes. Every animal, from the deer to the snake, retreated to a place of shelter, and as the last owl found its refuge in the hollow of a mighty oak tree, an overpowering jolt of lightning sundered the menacing clouds that loomed overhead. The clouds separated, releasing torrents of rain on the forest. Gusts of wind meandered through the complex arrangement of trees and tossed leaves and twigs into the air. Swirling heaps of pine needles barraged every tree and bush. As another blade of lightning shattered the air, the volatile storm unloaded an array of hailstones on the innocent forest. They descended into the foliage, nailing down leaves, tearing branches, and pelting every plant they could find. The forest creatures watched and listened in horror as their precious community was destroyed. When the last field mouse bowed its head in sorrow, a final streak of lightning slithered through the ebony clouds. The whirling winds gathered together in the center of the forest and dissipated instantly. Crawling from their refuges, the animals stepped into the moon's light to behold the tragic destruction. The forest, now drenched by rain, had been ravaged, but the animals returned to their routine habits. The sun would rise in the morning to restore everything to order.

Death for the Unnoticed Beauty

Kiri Smith

Sitting on a hill. Feeling the coolness of the wind on my skin as the last of spring makes way for the first of summer. The vibrant blues, reds, and purples of the flowers excite me in a way that only the beginning of the warmth can bring. On my hill, the trees around are tiny indeed, for the hill I sit on is taller than the highest-reaching of those trees. Green, yellow-green, and some pink clutter the land as far as the eye can see. Tree tops are exceedingly beautiful in the spring, but sitting beneath one is even better. Shade surrounds me, making it a little chilly for my preference, but something about resting up against an old oak soothes my mind. Watching the sky fade from a brilliant blue to a pumpkin orange, I stand and walk around my comfort tree. I see something ominous in the distance. Dark grey smoke crawls up the sky as if it were a hand stretching out to strangle the life around it. Something bad is on its way.

As the days grow swelteringly hot, it becomes almost unbearable to go visit my peaceful area. One day turns into two, then three, and before I know it, fall is fast approaching. As the stress in everyday life grows, I decide that it is past time for my comfort place. Taking my normal route, I was surrounded by the thick green of the forest. As I start my incline to that one and only hill, it takes my breath away. Wind rustling through the leaves of the trees, whistling of the blue jays taking flight, and the slight trickling of the nearby stream are music to my ears. My hill is finally in sight. A few more steps to the top, and I'll be there.

At first glance, everything seems normal, but a chill soon goes from my head to my toes that is not due to the cold. Not everything is right in my humble abode. I creep around my favorite oak tree not wanting to see what is on the other side. The gorgeous thick canopy starts to dwindle away. On the other side of the proud oak tree, life is virtually nonexistent. Machines now sit sturdy and sound as the new masters of this land.

Slowly, I fall to my knees as the cold tears of sadness leak from my eyes. What once was a proud land is no longer thriving. Standing, I turn and run as fast as my legs will carry me away from the death and destruction of my once harmonious kingdom. I run through the trees and across fields back to town. Street after street blend together as tears continue to blur my vision. Just like every other dull boring house, mine doesn't make a statement of itself. Running up the stairs, I throw open the door and head straight to my room. That night, I cry myself to sleep.

Life has passed me by: exciting, inspiring, and interesting as I fight for the land that others don't seem to understand anymore. As the years pass, I have yet to return to my own personal sanctuary, but being afraid of what I might find keeps me away. I know that I need to visit one last time to remind myself of why I have fought for what I have. I make the long journey to my once childhood home. I now take a new highway through the forest that no longer exists. I see my hill approaching as the land lay naked. My proud oak tree still stands, alone and isolated from its once powerful kingdom. I used to see it as the ruler of this land, but now what I see is its imprisonment in a future that was never chosen.

Jake the Snake

A flowing creek, woods dark and deep
he sometimes finds solace here.

Expertly, he'll climb a tall tree
or pause to rest on suspended branch
as if an arbour across the creek.
On a summer day you may find him here
catching a ray of warm sunshine.

Reptilian eyes make no pretense
to disguise as he strikes out at his prey.

Slithering sliding, endlessly gliding
he scours the ground before hiding
in his beautiful wooded glade.

Jake led a solitary life
in his beautiful wood and glade
contentment abound, no human around
for he was happiest here.

What caused his confusion
on that hot summer day
when he weaved his way up
the back deck and under my door?

Jake met his fate on a cold tile floor
never more to roam and explore.

Stephanie Williams

How The Mighty Have Fallen

Tall and proud I stand
As tall as the ocean is wide
Graceful as a cheetah in the middle of a hunt
Different in the wind
Branches flowing gracefully from side to side
On top of a hill I sit
All alone and on my own
But accepting of the life I live
Standing my ground for centuries
Watching each day pass by in a blur
There once were many of my kind around
But soon as man came around
We began to dwindle
Slowly at first my brothers fell
Faster and faster as the years progressed
But wait my time grows nigh
A man yards down with machines is near
I look out at this vacant land
Once so vibrant with life
Now as bland as a desert
I start to fall painfully awaiting my end
I hit the ground
Once a proud tall tree I stood
Now just a piece of wood

Kiri Smith

Daddy's Garden

Terry Jones

Daddy's garden was a combination of hard work and love. Every year, Daddy loved planting a garden. After sunrise, he would put on his Turtle Shell hat and start getting his red Farmall tractor ready to till the land. Chugging along preparing the rows, he would plant the seed in the dark, rich soil. Daddy grew long purple hull field peas, Blue Lake green beans, both red and white Irish potatoes, small green butter beans, white corn, big red tomatoes, short pickling cucumbers, golden yellow cantaloupes, and large green striped watermelons. He carefully watched the green shoots coming up through the fertile ground. Daddy always planted White Silver Queen corn because it had a sweeter taste compared to other types of corn. The cantaloupes, with their orange color and distinctive flavor, were a scrumptious treat. In our neighborhood, out of all of the watermelons grown with their rich red color and delicious sweet juicy taste, Daddy's were the best. Hard work—well worth it—was preparing the array of vegetables and putting them in the freezer for the winter months. Using the frozen vegetables to make a rich homemade vegetable soup on cold winter days was wonderful. Smelling the aroma and seeing the steaming pot of soup on the stove made our mouths water. The memories of Daddy's hard work and the love he put into growing his garden will always be special to me.



Forest for the Trees

Tyler Worrell

Listen

Maria Alexis Feby Cabuno Alday

As I walked by this wretched hall, I saw a girl staring at nothing inside a music room. I ignored her. I tripped. I got up. Our eyes met. For a split second, I saw something familiar. We stared at each other's eyes. No words were spoken. Our glaring game was stopped by a sudden noise. I picked up my phone. I finished my talk. She was gone. I wandered inside the room. I did not see her.

During the following days, I went back to where I had seen her, but every time, I was disappointed. Once inside the room, I was alone. To pass time, I listened to music. Sounds were everywhere from left to right, up and down. Loud music blasted at maximum volume. Walls vibrated. The bass banged so furiously that my chest felt two beats: one from my stereo, the other from my heart. Music filled the room. Electric guitar played solo. Drums made multiple beats. Bass guitar thumped madly. The room was still intact. Sound flowed in and out of my body. I felt each and every beat of the music. I was back in the world that I knew I wished I lived in.

I listened to different genres from ballad to metal. All depended upon my mood. In a good mood, I listened to love songs. In a bad mood, I listened to rock songs. I never listened to anything in between; it was either mushy or suicidal. Sometimes, the music would get so loud that I was oblivious to my surroundings.

Startled by a loud thump from behind, I saw her. She looked different. But when I met her eyes once again, I saw it, the loneliness. I got up and walked toward her. My eyes did not leave hers. I tried to speak, but nothing came out. I had so many questions but no answers. I choked from my own saliva. I went back to the stereo behind me. I pressed the power button, and sound blasted from the stereo again. She stared at me, confused. I stared back at her. I said, "Listen." That was exactly what she did. She listened. I listened. We listened. It was not awkward, but relaxing.

Through music, I saw an escape. Through music, I was at peace. Through music, I gained a friend. Through music, I could express myself. Unlike others who could express themselves through writing lyrics, composing melodies, and singing songs, I could not. I concentrated only on what I thought I did well and what I needed. That meant listening. While my mouth had a hard time getting across my thoughts, my ear knew when to listen.



Frost's Woods

Joy Pearce

Down Home

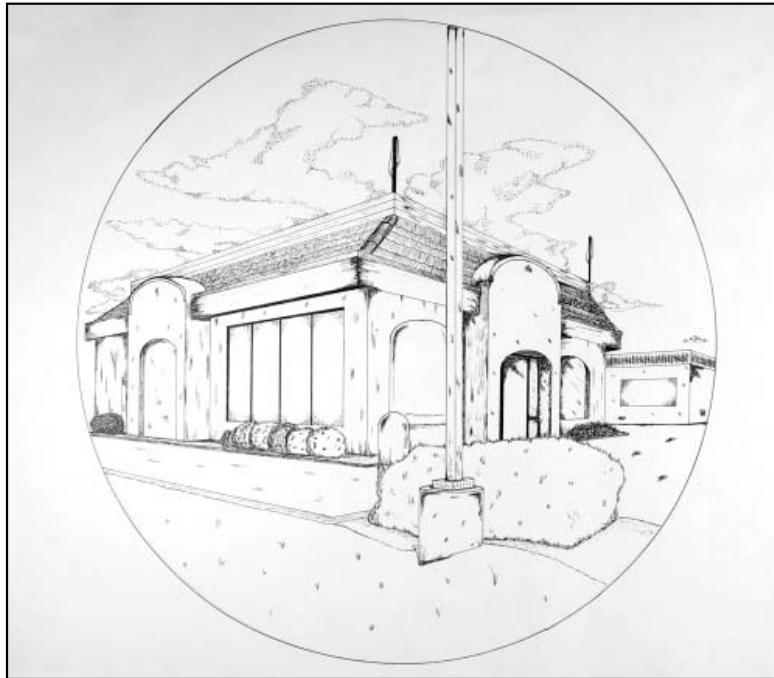
A simmering pot of vegetable soup
With chunks of ham meat thrown in for flavor
Brought down from a boil
Now only small bubbles rise to the top and burst
The aroma of freshly cooked blueberry pie
Drifts throughout the kitchen
While Dad washes up from a long day at the mill
Mom rolls out the dough for biscuits
Fire roars in the hearth, brightening the shadows
The crackle of wood echoes
The children rush to the table
Eager and headstrong
But still remember their prayer
After supper Dad pulls out his pipe
And tells stories of the war
But only the funny ones
While Mom knits a broken seam in his pants
And hums to the tune of "Amazing Grace"

Terence Davis

Running from Gloom

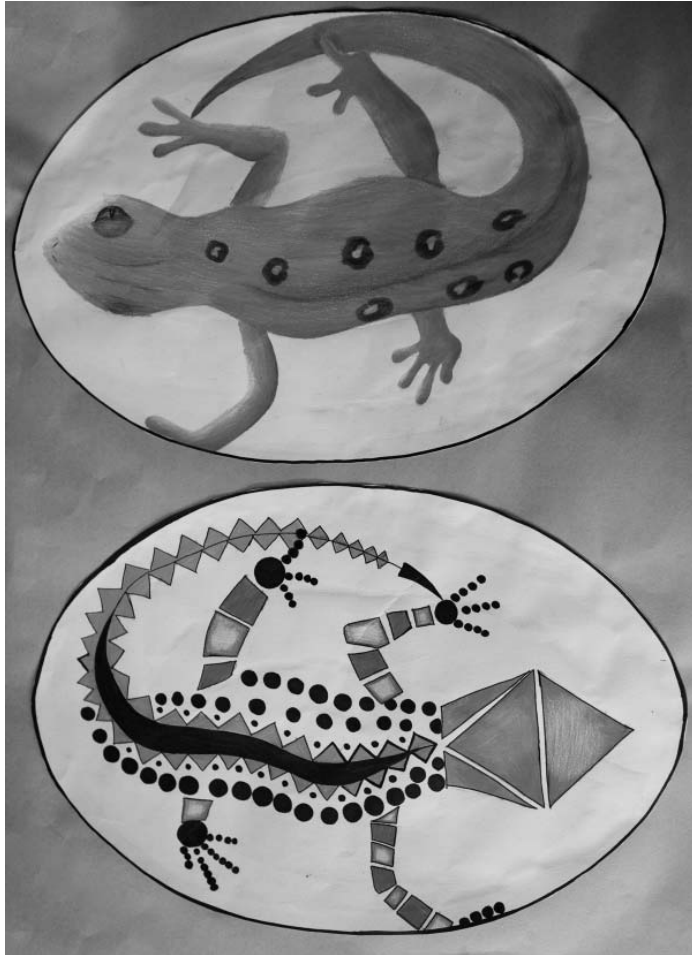
Rachel Hines

A small single bird flies through the gray sky to find a warm, dry place to hide. I look up to watch him and feel the cold mist tickle my face. Curious to see if the mist could taste anything like it smells, I stick out my tongue. Sure enough, it is the same, crisp sensation. My hands in my pockets and coat pulled tightly, I walk on listening to the velcro-like sound coming from my sneakers. I travel beneath low trees that let down heavy drops of rain that gather on its bare branches. Seeing dogs in their dog houses with their heads down and their sad eyes makes me feel ever so depressed. Just like every other creature out in this friggin' weather, I want to feel the rays of the sun on my skin. Just the day before, everyone was wearing short sleeves, soaking up the sun in all its glorious warmth. Some were riding down the road with the windows rolled down; children were playing in yards, and the dogs were following behind them. Where are the excited children now? Kicking a stick into a puddle in the road, I feel a drop on my forehead. This is not mist but a rain drop. It trickles down my nose and bounces off my lip as I face the gloomy heavens almost as if to dare them to pour rain on me. The heavens accept. Now splashing through the thick rain, I see the earth fly by me like a blinding flash of lightening. Beating against my face and clothes, the rain will not ease. I can no longer see the houses or the lifeless front yards. I can only see my feet, the water they kick up, and the path that I am set for.



Closed

Amit Lal



In Shapes

Nancy Ceja

Pyramid

A pyramid is a color
of sand and heavy stone
the color of burnt gold
under a desert sun

*Come with me, she'd said
we'll dance on soft wet grass
watch stars blinking in
slow rhythmic chants*

but now in this old townhouse
the town's pale winter light
streams through white drapes.
I shield my eyes

*see will-o-wisps of fog
to a yellow moon fly
past the stars of the hunter
rising into the sky.*

and climb beige-colored stairs
boards creaking in the gloom
to my little chamber
narrow as a tomb.

Jeff Williams

It's o' four hundred

It's o' four hundred just the darkness of the night.
She's already up with the day on her mind.
She puts on her uniform and ties up her boots,
Picks up her rifle, she's a soldier trained to shoot.
With her Kevlar on her head and a bulletproof vest,
Her gas mask on her side, there's not time to rest.
Out of her barracks, she's prepared for her day,
Looking out for mortars that come flying her way.
Halfway across the world, her family lay asleep.
In their mind is their soldier, fighting for the free.
Steadily she marches with her head held high,
Being a woman in combat, all odds she must defy.
Strong-willed and determined, she will be all she can be
Living the core values of the United States Army.
As months go by, more responsibility she bears
As she watches over soldiers that are under her care.
Holidays pass and a new year begins.
It's been ten months since she has seen her own kin.
Letters and pictures are what she uses to get by
Another ten more months, taking it one day at a time.
Each new soldier she meets, a different story she hears,
One of a man deployed seven out of twelve years
Another of a girl who had to leave her baby behind
And what keeps her going is her baby on her mind.
And one of another soldier who is as proud as can be,
The fifth generation serving in the US military.
She watches as more soldiers come and more soldiers go
Trying to keep their heads up until it's time to go home.
Twenty months down, and another day more,
Serving side by side the Air Force and the US Marine Corps.
It's o' four hundred, just the darkness of the night,
Already up with her family in sight.

Gina Willard

Never Coming Home

It's been well over a year now
since I first heard the news
and your uniforms still haunt me
in the closet untouched and unused.
The love I make is empty
his kisses are all the same
his touches make me violently ill
I am disgusted, distracted, and ashamed.

I see them as they watch me
staring through their pity-filled eyes
but as they hang their pretty ribbons
of smooth, shiny yellow foil
they can judge me all they like.
It means nothing to me anymore.
Because as I lie alone in our bed
sleepless on my tear-stained pillow
surviving here lost without you
gets harder every day.

Yes, I know
the others suffer, too
but with or without you
their life will soon carry on.
Do they know how hard it is
to live each and every day
waiting for and loving a soldier
You know is never coming home?

Elizabeth Morrisette

Born to Trouble

Born to trouble, Motown turmoil
Drawn to a world of order and regulation
Saw sights that make the blood run cold
Some things the eye isn't made to see
The mind has no delete button
Moral corruption, forgiveness lost
Patriot despair
More sleepless nights, post traumatic, huh
So hot I can smell the burning sand
The family collection of flags wrapped in pine
Why won't the dead die? Bring that up in group
Writing letters about heroic sons
Still wake in sweats
Ready to go back

David Roberts

Life Time Love

How do you explain the bond we share?
How do you tell someone how you feel?
How do you tell others you care?
How do you help them understand it's real?

You were my "first" in so many ways
So many many years ago
You brightened my heart for so many days
That I thought you would always know.

I thought you knew so long ago
How deeply you touched my life
I would have gone wherever you'd go
I would have loved to have been your wife.

But life interrupted our happy times,
And we both went our separate ways
We grew apart not a crime
It's just that I missed those happy days.

Now 23 years have passed us by
Marriage, divorce and children
I've found you again and although I cry
It truly is a happy cry.

The minute I saw you again I wanted to cry
Because those feelings from so long ago
Came alive inside my heart when I looked in your eyes
I never wanted to see you turn and go.

When you told me that you had been looking for me
All those years ago, I wanted so much to
Hold you tight and kiss you for all time.
A new beginning "no more wasting time!"

May our lives be fulfilled with happiness
May I be the one to keep love in your heart
May we never have to look again
May we never part.

Wendy Turner



Reflect

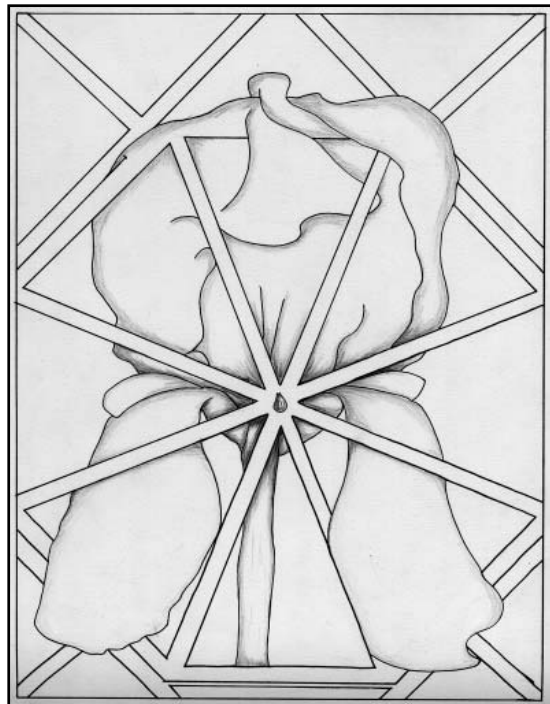
Jovon Michael Moore

You Get What You Ask For

Candace Jones

“You better get ready!” my sister screamed flying past my car with hers while spinning tires in the driveway. She was leaving the house as I was coming home to what I felt like was a world war filled with bloodshed and hate. I understood the implications of those words. Getting out of my car with serious hesitation, I started to walk to the front door like a timid dog with its tail tucked in between its legs. Easing into the house, I could feel the tension breathing down the back of my neck. Trying to make a safe escape, I heard the sound of his footsteps inching closer and closer with his heavy construction boots pounding the floor, followed by his untied shoe strings dancing behind them. With a lump in my throat, I felt as if I were in an intense game of hide and go seek, my room being the base. With an abruptness, he approached me with a turkey sandwich and a lingering stench of alcohol. As he looked me up and down with an undeniable hate in his eyes, I felt disgusted, not only just by him but also his eating habits: the way he chomped down into the sandwich, leaving scattered bread crumbs imbedded in between the hairs of his salt and pepper beard and spit clinching from his top lip to his bottom. His words started down on me like a heavy rain jolts down onto a tin roof. I waited patiently as he wore me down with every insult I imagined he could think.

Later that night, I wrote in my journal. I wrote about my life, my hopes, my dreams, about him. I documented every harsh word he had thrown my way and how I wanted the harsh words to stop. It was at 10:03 p.m. that night when he had a stroke. After his seeing a speech therapist and struggling with the simplest of words, I often wonder, who got what was asked for, me or my dad.



Flower

Amit Lal

A Dull Boy

In attempts to make
My parents proud
I don't give in
And run with the crowd

I don't sit in class
And text all day
But I take notes and learn
From what the teachers say

After class
I have no time for fun
So I march myself
Back to my home

Back up the stairs
Into my little room
Sit at my corner desk
Where my life is consumed

Eyes all red
From lack of sleep
Lack of nutrition
No time to eat

White-lined paper
Pen in hand
All this repetition
Makes my spirit so bland

Burdened by
the need of success
Lack of sleep
Maximum stress

No time for friends
No time for fun
No time for anything
Until school is done

But continuous catastrophic waves
Of schoolwork are caving in
Suffocation under these waves
Of due dates and isolation

All this school is hectic
And makes me depressed
But right now I can't worry about it
I must study for another test

Lisa Hankins



In Motion

Ashleigh Stafford