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Spring 1997

### 1997 Spring Quiz and Quill Magazine

Otterbein English Department

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Quiz

&



Quill





# Quiz and Quill

## Spring 1997

This year's *Quiz and Quill* represents a lot of hard work and dedication from the staff, who spent hours on end pouring over entries, typing entries into the computer, proofreading, and making corrections. Much thanks to all the staff, who made my job easier by being active, reliable, and eager to help. As well, thanks to Dr. Bowman, who proofread for us, and to the judges, who had the difficult job of choosing to award only a few of the strong pieces that were entered.

In keeping with the past few years, we received even more submissions this year than last. This made the process of selection a hard one, as many of the pieces reflect the tremendous talent of the writers here at Otterbein. It is with great respect and appreciation that I thank all those who submitted to the *Quiz and Quill* this year. Thank you for sharing your work with us. And to those who were published, my congratulations. It truly is an honor.

The *Quiz and Quill* is an important tradition here at Otterbein. The yearly issues have always reflected the changing times as seen in the changing lives of the students. Especially in this, the Sesquicentennial year, I hope we will listen to what these students have to say, and make their messages a part of us that we will take and carry forever.

Dr. Rittenhouse has been a wonderful advisor this year, encouraging, guiding, and (occasionally) bullying us into doing what needed to be done. Without him, this magazine would not be, and I thank him for his dedication.

This edition of *Quiz and Quill* is dedicated to my family, who have always been there for me, and who have provided me with lots of writing material. Thanks.

### Editors

Beth Honeycutt, Editor  
Lara Spendiff, Layout and Design Editor  
Amanda Greaves, Associate Editor

### Staff

Mercedes Baltzell  
Jen Gray  
Carolyn Smith  
Kimberly Steehler  
Elizabeth Triplett  
Courtney Vanderpool  
Sarah Woodson

# 1997 Quiz and Quill Contest Winners

## Poetry

First Place No Award

Second Place "April 16, 1955" by Lynn Byard

Third Place "IO" by Bryan Thao-Worra

Honorable Mention: "burnt sienna" by Pamela Reed, "Enough" by Freda Chaney, "History's Game" and "Anger" by Bryan Thao-Worra

## Roy Burkhardt Religious Poetry

First Place "Magic Wanda" by Benjamin Hauck

Second Place "Metropolis" by Bryan Thao-Worra

Third Place "The Garden of Eden Edition (Issued Bimonthly)" by Matt Sharpless

## Short Story

First Place "Questions to Answer" by Jennie Keplar

Second Place "Sweetest Fruit" by Aaron Martin

Third Place "The Onion Boy" by Bryan Thao-Worra

Honorable Mention: "The Word" by Bryan Thao-Worra, "Wood Blocks" by Matt Sharpless

## The Walter Lowrie Barnes Short Story Award

First Place "Cross" by Bryan Thao-Worra

Second Place "Shadows" by Bryan Thao-Worra

Third Place "Fictions" by Bryan Thao-Worra

## Personal Essay

First Place "The Walk" by Teri Dumas

Second Place "Suggested Topics on Page Twenty That Have Freed the Writer Within" by Kimberly Steehler

Third Place "For the Kids" by Kyle Mossman

Honorable Mention: "Living in America" by Amy Marie Voellmecke, "Lessons in Education" by Bryan Thao-Worra

## Louise Gleim Williams Newswriting Contest

First Place Stories by Brian Batch

Second Place Stories by Allison Swickard

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### For the Kids

Kyle Mossman

Kids say the funniest things. At age five, I informed my mother that I wanted to be a bartender when I grew up. Then, for a while, I wanted to be a professional baseball player. It's normal for children to have these kinds of fantasies — the baseball one, I mean, not the bartender one (that's just plain weird). As I grew older and more mature, my aspirations turned toward a career in writing or teaching English. But it wasn't until two years ago that I discovered my true calling. I realized that I have better things to do than pour drinks for pathetic strangers. My mind and body were too delicate to be subjected to the rough-and-tumble world of professional sports. My hands were not meant to type keys. My thoughts, my ideas, and my voice were all too precious to be wasted on a classroom of slack-jawed yokels. I could not be limited by the confines of an ordinary life. I was born to be a rock star.

With this striking revelation came great peace of mind. No longer did I have any need to worry about my future. The course was set. If I've learned anything about rock stardom, it's that one needn't try very hard to achieve it. Rock stardom usually comes to those who are not expecting it and, often, it is bestowed upon people who don't even want it. I soon realized that, if I wanted it too badly, I would never achieve it. So I decided to just lay low for a while, play it cool, and wait for rock stardom to drop in unannounced.

In theory, this was an excellent plan. As long as I made no mention of my revelation to anyone, and as long as I put

absolutely no effort into achieving my dream, it was bound to come true. Yet, after weeks of this steady routine of doing nothing, I grew impatient. I browsed all the major rock magazines at the local drugstore and, much to my dismay, none of them featured my face on the front cover. No one had begged me for an exclusive interview, and I had not yet been attacked by swarms of hysterical, star-crazed teenage girls on my way to school. One time, a stray dog followed me home, but that could hardly be considered progress.

Slowly, I realized that I would need to pursue a new strategy. I needed to do some serious research, to observe rock stars and to learn their ways. For two months, I abandoned the standard high school curriculum in favor of a strict regimen of FM radio, *Rolling Stone Magazine*, and MTV. From this research, I learned many valuable things about what it means to be a rock star. First of all, modern rock stars generally look bored (I was already quite good at that). Second, almost all of them know how to play some sort of instrument. So I decided that I, too, would learn how to play an instrument. But which one?

It took a lot of soul-searching and countless additional hours of MTV to decide. I noticed that the drummer is always stuck in the back, hidden behind huge sets of equipment. Bass players enjoy the privilege of standing in front, but are rarely graced by the spotlight. Also, from my reading, I learned that no one really gives a crap about the bass player. I was rather fond of the slide whistle — but who was I kidding? Everybody knows that there's no room for a slide whistler in a rock-and-roll band. So the choice was

clear. I would learn how to play the guitar, the six-string, the ax, the hammer of the rock gods.

I was seventeen, still living at home with my parents. I had not yet told them of my ambitions, but I did tell them that I wanted to learn how to play the guitar. I was hoping that they would forbid me to do so. I hoped that they would scorn me for even entertaining the idea and lecture me on the evils of rock-and-roll music. That way, I could have rebelled against them and had that whole "teen angst" vibe going for me. As it turned out, my mom and dad were very supportive of the idea and bought me a nice acoustic guitar for Christmas that year. They even paid for private lessons at Peeler Music, a popular hangout for local rock enthusiasts. To this day I still resent my parents for denying me the rage that might have fueled an early ascent to superstardom.

Learning to play the guitar was a humbling experience. Since it *was* my destiny and all, I assumed that it would be easy and that I would become a very good guitarist in a very short amount of time. Not true. In the first lesson, the instructor, a man young enough to be my older brother, asked me if I had ever played the guitar before. I said "no". Then he asked what kind of music I was interested in playing. "Rrrock!" I declared in a voice loud enough for the whole store to hear.

My instructor's name was Jeff Kohlman. He was extremely talented. He could play "Stairway to Heaven" wearing oven mitts on both hands, and he made sure I knew that. Jeff was the lead guitarist for a local glam rock band (big hair, leather pants, smoke machines, etc.). At the time, I was unfamiliar with his band, and, even

now, the name of it escapes me. He informed me that his band was "really big" in Texas and Japan, but that they hadn't really caught on in northwest Ohio. At first, the two of us got along smashingly. He taught me the basics of playing guitar. I nodded and smiled. We had the ideal teacher/student relationship until, one day, Jeff tried to teach me how to play jazz chords. "Jazz chords my ass!" I shouted. Obviously, I could not afford to learn anything that might sidetrack my ambitions and stunt my growth as a rock star so, at that moment, I abandoned formal training for good and resolved never again to trust anyone over the age of twenty-three.

I, myself, am almost twenty now. I still dream of being a rock star, but, recently, my priorities have shifted. Now I realize that, in my line of work, the cultivation of an image is far more important than the music itself. I still play my guitar from time to time but, now, I conduct my rehearsal sessions in front of a full-length mirror, experimenting with various hairstyles and perfecting my sneer which, incidentally, is coming along quite well. Lately, I've been spending most of my free time trashing hotel rooms and punching photographers in the head. It doesn't matter that they aren't trying to take pictures of *me*. I need the practice.

Meanwhile, people ask me why I don't try to write songs, why I don't take voice lessons, why I don't try to get a band together. I, in turn, ask them why they don't just shut the hell up and leave me alone. After all, I don't try to tell them how to become bartenders or English teachers or whatever they want to do with their sad, ordinary lives. I don't care what anyone else thinks. I was born to rock.

*Now Listen Here—An Inner-City Introduction*

*Amanda Greaves*

I am High School.

I am  
straight up  
tight  
in your face  
throwin' salt in the game  
you'll be sweatin' me  
for the rest of the year.

My Voltaire readin' eyes  
get to watchin' your books blush.

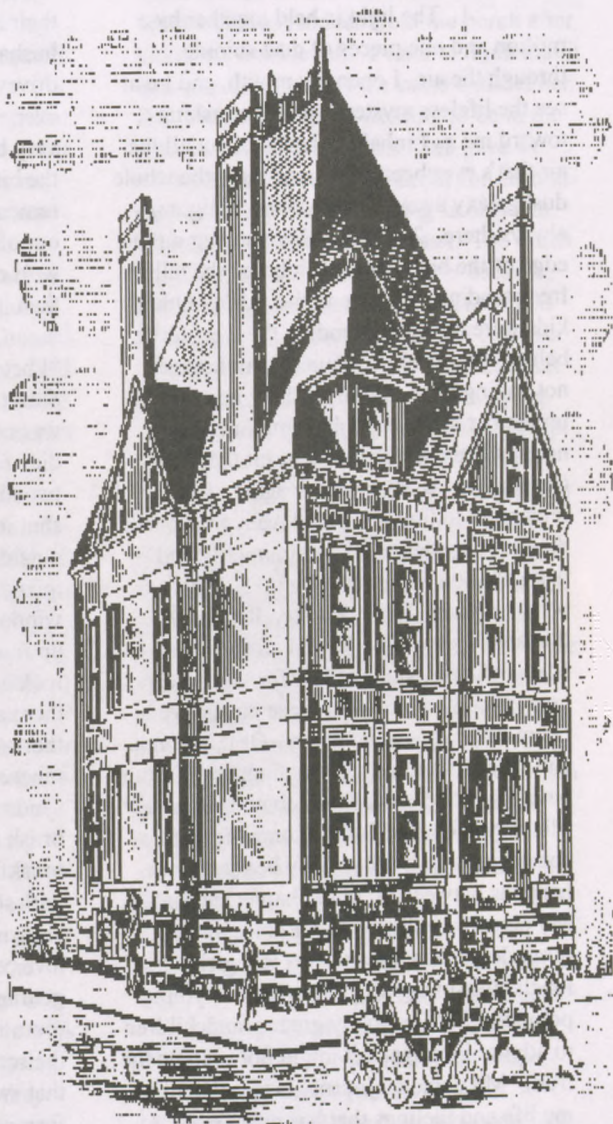
I am a chicken head  
wearin' Crypt-smashin'  
Blood-beatin'  
shoes  
that stepped out of my  
Ghetto  
as the 5-0  
laughed and  
laughed  
cuz a Ghetto  
just don't go that fast...

Now listen here...

The truth is  
I am  
emotionally-incorrect  
politically-incorrect  
educationally-incorrect

So give me some props (I think)  
and we'll  
moon the public education system  
of the world.

Any questions?



**Suggested Topics****On Page Twenty****That Have Freed the Writer Within***Kimberly Steehler*

1. The light is held together by a million and one pieces of dust shining through the air. I open my mouth, and I can see the lifeless mystery particles rushing toward me as I inhale. Then I let out all the air that's ever been in me and blow the whole dust galaxy away. But the beam of light is always there. 2. I remember pausing on the edge of the high dive and it being the tallest free-standing structure in the world. Other kids were already ascending the wet ladder behind me, so I had to jump. I remember not having been told to hold my nose, and I remember how I thought something in my nostrils had exploded when I hit the water, certain that I'd never breath again. I remember telling my friend Abby that it was the best experience I'd had in my life and that she should certainly try it. 3. My personal journal has almost-yellow pages that are seven years old, and all that I've been and have wanted to be for seven years now is scrawled through those pages like a poem that may end someday. Or it may not. But it can't have a happy ending, and it can't have a sad one because it's about someone's life. My life. And I think someone said something about life usually being what happens between all of the happy and sad. My personal journal is a nuisance and a reminder of how mean I was to a girl at my lunch table in eighth grade. It's everything pompous that I wish my great-grandchildren to admire in me, and it might not even be the truth. My personal journal is an account of my life and feelings that has never been typed. 4. In this town it is easy to find things that are blue, but more difficult to find people who are blue because most of

them haven't come close to that kind of realization yet. They have blue mini-vans, mostly. And blue denim jumpers and blue candlesticks on their tables and blue bibs for their babies and blue lights to help their husbands see when they pull into the driveway. 5. I used to come to this place every night with my friend. We sat on this very bench that's uneven and we'd scrape off the bird poop before sitting down. I remember the night that a female cat came out of nowhere and made us laugh because we'd never seen a cat in heat before. And then, the night there was a ring around the moon, while the rest of the sky was black. "I bet that means we're about to die." We didn't say good-bye that night because there was no need to sleep if we were about to die. 6. Every morning I wake up exactly two minutes before my alarm wakes up. I shut it off and stretch and yawn. I look outside to see what color the ground is today, and I put my cheek against the window so that the cold shocks me. I end up running to the bathroom. While I pee, I look at myself in the mirror to make sure there aren't any dark circles under my eyes that could mean pneumonia or mono or tuberculosis or cancer or chronic fatigue syndrome. I am healthy again today, so I brush my teeth. I brush them before breakfast so that my tongue isn't coated with something that might keep me from enjoying the texture of cereal. Because I love cereal. Cereal is the best part about getting up. 7. The Priest-family's living room is never the same place twice. Well, the scenery mostly is. There's a long couch that swallows you because only some of its form is left, and that's where Joyce sits in her tee-shirt and underpants, petting their cat and reading a whole book every night after work. There are food and travel guides

on the coffee table in case a guest needs to learn about the cheap restaurants in Savannah. A piano that holds greeting cards, a fireplace, graduation pictures, cat toys, fake plants, long curtains. It's a gathering place where normal people feel inadequate. In their living room,

Odd is King. 8. I like leaving. Even if I'm in a nice place, my favorite thing is to leave. I think of the nicest places I've ever been, and I think of the relief when it came time to depart. It doesn't matter where I'm going, I just love leaving the other place to get there. 9. My first memory is of going with Dad to the YMCA. I had never been in a pool before. I was small and skinny. Dad held me in the water for awhile, but then he wanted to swim on his own because he used to be a lifeguard. He was a very good swimmer. He didn't take me out of the water, but just told me to hang onto the side of the pool real tight. He'd be right back. I thought my fingers were slipping. I thought I would drown. I screamed and never wanted to go swimming with him again.

10. I have loved some people in my life. My mom. Then I loved my little brother because I couldn't imagine anyone else ever wanting to. Then I loved Abby because she thought I was the best. Later I loved her because she was Abby. Then I loved my step-dad. Then Brent. Five people. All of the others just mean a whole heck of a lot to me. 11. The streets in my town have old pumpkins rotting on the curbs under the snow. Alongside the rotting pumpkins are some cars that sometimes run. People walk on the streets to get to where they're going and to find out how I'm doing when they pass me. Sometimes I think they even care, and the sun gleams off the windshields of the cars. 12. I don't remember much about grandma Cookie except that she always

gave us cookies. The whole family watched the 4th of July parade on her front porch, and after she went to the nursing home, Mom moved us into her house. But we never watched parades from the porch after Grandma Cookie left. I want to think that it was because it wasn't the same without her. But, really, we started wanting to be in the parades because the Lions Club gave us each a Susan B. Anthony dollar for decorating our bikes. 13. *Swimming* is only fun when there's someone to splash. Too much has been learned about *the stars* because, like faith, knowledge makes it a little less miraculous. The most *frightened* I've ever been is when Beth died and I realized that my parents couldn't keep me from dying. *Green places* are ideal on every day except Christmas. I *learned about sex* from my friend Janelle, who relayed the information from a book her mom bought her, and I believe that my *first sexual experience* had to do with Big Bird. The closest I ever felt to God was on the back of a horse, in a valley, right after I learned the details of the crucifixion. *Little Women* is a book that changed my life because I honestly thought I was Jo. Physical endurance is only real-life useful for one activity...and, also, when being chased by a wild animal. I had a teacher she cried about a book, but I remember how her mascara ran all over her face. 14.

"I think I will bathe."

In what will you bathe?

"I think I shall never be clean."

Then I'll throw you a line

Of rope with some soap

And watch you try in vain.

15. I have decided that I am not a cow, not a chipmunk, not a fox, not a horse.

I am human like Natalie Goldberg.

## Maw's Oatmeal

Beth Honeycutt

I made oatmeal today  
tried to re-create scent,  
taste  
of childhood.

It was the first time I'd had it  
since you died—  
I tried it once before,  
but couldn't eat it—  
bland and tasteless;  
nothing like yours.

I only liked oatmeal when I was with you.

I never really cried for you,  
tears just wouldn't come.

Mom said,  
"Just add sugar. She  
added sugar to everything."  
But it was more than that—  
you simmered everything in love.  
So I tried it with your special touch  
and I was back in your kitchen again;  
warm and aromatic  
checkered curtains floating in the breeze  
screen door slamming as we ran in and out.

And my oatmeal was as good as yours  
this time  
sweet and creamy;  
and only a little bitter

from the tears.



## My America

Bryan Thao-Worra

"And I can't forget, I can't forget

I can't forget but I don't remember what"

Leonard Cohen, "I Can't Forget"

My father was Hmong, and many of our people fought for America at the encouragement of the CIA. We lost thousands to the war protecting troops in South Vietnam by disrupting the flow of supplies traveling secretly through Laos on the Ho Chi Minh trail. When Nixon's policies required a reduction in bombing in North Vietnam to begin peace talks, most people forgot that this meant an increase of bombing in Laos in areas held by the Pathet Lao communist forces.

For the Hmong, when the war in Vietnam ended, the final stages of the war in Laos were set in place. With the withdrawal of American support, the guerrilla army of General Vang Pao found itself pushed back further and further without adequate military or even medical and humanitarian support.

As the communists pressed forward, we watched as our women were raped and beheaded, as our children were crushed to death with the heavy rice mills we used in our villages. It was during this time that sons were ready to shoot their parents who were too old to run, rather than let them be captured by the communists.

Bombs, poison gasses, torture and starvation were the fate for many of us who were caught and convicted of "war crimes". Our children were crippled to teach our people the lesson for defying the communists.

A few of us were able to escape to the U.S., to Australia, and to France and Thailand, but many

more of us were not, as they sat on the improvised airfields waiting for the C-130 cargo planes we were promised would come to rescue us. Planes that never came.

When we arrived within America, response to us was welcoming in some cities, but less so in others. Newspapers would run headlines warning its small town residents of the Hmong invasion and how we would disrupt life there. People would write letters to editorials telling us to go home, and that we are not needed in this country.

This confused the Hmong who remembered a time when they would plunge through occupied territory and fight their way through well-trained regular army enemy forces and back through that same territory to rescue downed American pilots, often losing 10 Hmong for every one American returned to his family.

The Hmong even heard these hateful things from Vietnam veterans who did not know we had been fighting for them in Laos, because of the secret nature of the war.

The press painted pictures of us as mercenaries, or as puppets of the CIA. They did not understand that the fighting would have affected us even if we hadn't chosen sides, and that many of us believed that our friends in the United States would make it possible for us to succeed and secure peace and freedom once we had all won the war.

In this country, we are asked to forget about the past. To go on, and live lives like regular, ordinary Americans, as if nothing happened, and none of this made a difference.

It is unbelievable that we hear American children repeating the same mantra, "Communism isn't a bad idea in and of itself, it's just that..." while they rattle off the examples of communist despotism as if they

were exceptions to a people who in a room of 100, when asked if they had lost a family member to the war, 100 would stand forward.

For many years, our children hung their heads in shame because they were not taught the history of their role in the war, and looked on their parents in embarrassment because they were Hmong.

I find myself being told that I must encourage my people to become U.S. citizens in a nation that barely seems a home to them. As I walk through the streets, I am forced to ask myself if I can do so in good conscience.

The great push I hear is for the Hmong to stop calling themselves "Hmong-Americans" and to just call themselves "Americans". This from the same nation where someone once wrote: "I believe that all minorities should have equal rights, as long as they know their place." This from a nation where as immigrants we are asked on citizenship tests to know more about U.S. history and government than its own children can answer and pass.

I look back at the contributions that have been made by immigrants. The founder of Intel, the chip manufacturer that made it possible for computers to be present in every home, was an immigrant. As was Einstein, whose quantum theory opened the way to whole new worlds of possibility in the sciences. In the arts, I see the work of Maya Lin and Mikhail Baryshnikov added to the great body of culture that America has given the world, among countless others who have flourished within the freedom and hopes that served as our beacon to a better life. Immigrants all.

And now, we see people as inconveniences, rather than rewards of potential.

I see people demanding that

potential citizens be forced to declare the skills and benefits this country can gain from admitting them. How many great contributions have we lost because in one moment, a man could not answer because he did not have the chance to explore his own potential at his own pace? And if not him, his children? Or the generations to follow all of them? Einstein began life as a simple clerk and a watchmaker. What would have happened to the world if he had been asked what we ask now?

The lack of vision is staggering and appalling.

We are told to hold our tongues even as the dream is cut away from us. Can we not resent?

For my father, I do not know if he would have chosen to come to America had he lived. I remember the question a young freshman woman at college once asked me during a panel on immigrant experiences:

"If you could choose to do it all over again, would you still choose to come to this country?"

I gave the politic answer, the polite answer, even as I think we all knew that choices are never so simple. The life I have lived here has been rewarding, without doubt or regret, but it has not been without challenge.

I was asked by Hmong elders why I chose to return to help my people when I could have lived a "safe" life among the Americans and never gotten involved in all of the problems we face in the years ahead.

For me, as I look at their families, I see my own within them, and I know that if I did not choose to help, it would be too terrible to face my own children as they grow and ask who they are.

I wrote a poem once, trying to

reconcile the great challenges we face as we try to preserve our culture as is our right, even as we encounter so many new groups, so many voices clamoring for attention, trying to gain our support, trying to bend us to their ideas of the model American:

Silence equals death

But my people died for trying to say too much.

Can we relate?

Losing our letters left us no choice but to improve our memories—

Our tongues passed on in whispers, for the spirits did not

Protect the ones who sang in the field. In time that made

Sense as the bullets came rushing in, an appreciative critic.

The hand outlined against the moon, giving us away—

Taught us not to point at it.

Secret heart, as guns point to keep you silent, what

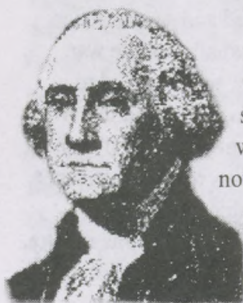
Are we to do, illiterate vessel?

They'll shoot us anyway.

Can we help but SHOUT?

In a nation where I can be told that "I'm as good as any real American" as a

compliment when I have lived here almost all of my life, how can I not work to create a better society for my children where one day, they will not have to feel they are part of a mirror world, reflecting, yet separate?



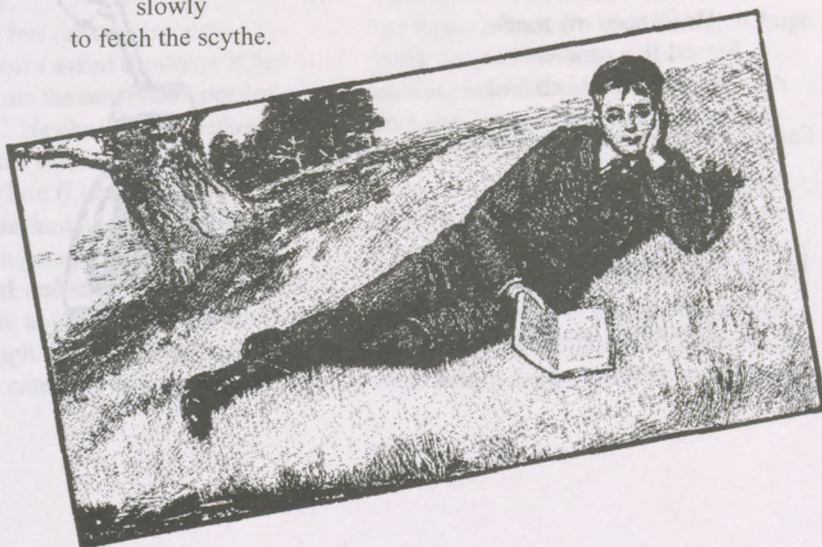
# Enough

Freda Chaney

Looking up at leaves,  
I find that I am satisfied  
with simple green, godly  
in its keeping me secure  
belly-up on  
the weathered swing.

And so much  
can be said  
by Holsteins  
leaning into hills;  
the black and white  
of things make no mistake  
of who you are  
where you're going,  
where you're not.  
The trail back to the barn  
is brief.

And what about  
the lazy rye  
sleeping under certain sun  
heavy for harvest?  
Tomorrow  
it will be there,  
and I will walk  
slowly  
to fetch the scythe.



**The Garden of Eden Edition (Issued  
Bimonthly)**

*Matt Sharpless*

I felt God this evening dancing on my  
pillow

Tick, tick, tack. Tick, tick, tack.

I sang 'Moonshadow' with him for the  
love of Jesus

Moonshadow. Moonshadow.

He touched my head with a thorny  
crown.

Hick, hick, hack. Hick, hick, hack.

I posed naked for his Garden of Eden  
edition.

Tisk, tisk, task. Tisk, tisk, task.

I bit his apple.

He jumped my rope.

I lit a candle.

We choked and choked.

East of Eden played with Giant on T.V.

James Dean, James Dean.

Elvis Lives! burned out the speakers.

Hounddog, hounddog.

Love Me Do rolled with Beethoven.

Yah, yah, yah.

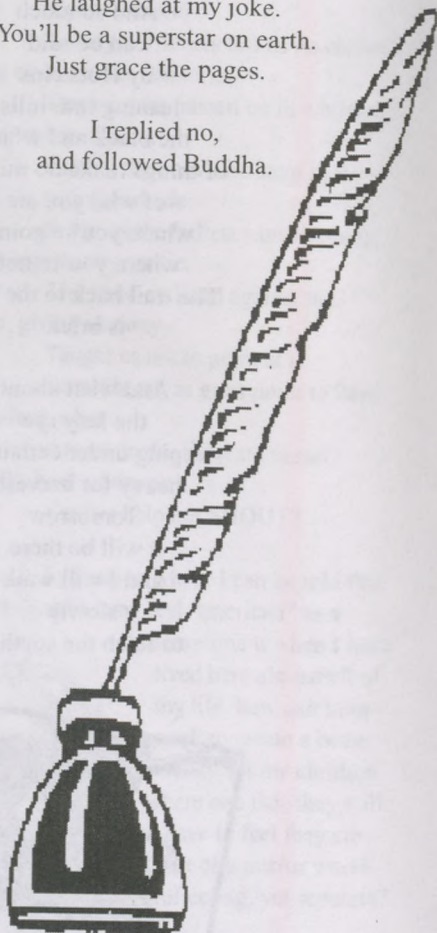
Pearl jammed in a place called Nirvana

Blah, Blah, Blah.

I cried for freedom.

He laughed at my joke.  
You'll be a superstar on earth.  
Just grace the pages.

I replied no,  
and followed Buddha.



## SWEETEST FRUIT

*Aaron Martin*

I was in my apartment relaxing after a typical day at work, and had just gotten off the phone with my fiancé, Naomi. Paul Jackson was in the CD player, and I was drinking papaya juice. I was feeling real good, until I remembered a community action committee meeting a friend of mine asked me to attend. I didn't want to break the mood I was in, but I couldn't talk myself out of not keeping my word. Plus, I thought the committee was a good idea and wanted to be involved. Once I had gotten ready, I called my friend to get a ride—my car being in the shop—but he wasn't home. I could either take a cab, or catch a bus. Cabs take too long to come and cost too much to get you there, so I bundled up and headed for the bus stop. A quarter after eight on a cold, February night, and there I was sprinting to the corner. Back when I was in middle school I would always have to run to catch the school bus because I got up late more often than not. Thirteen years later I was back at it. I got on the bus, got a transfer, then watched the city go by.

The bus came to my stop. Before I got off I asked the driver if he knew what time the other bus I needed would arrive. He checked a schedule and told me the last one left twenty minutes ago. I asked him if I could ride back to where I got on, and he told me he was on his way to the garage. I stepped off into the hard wind, and snow that had started coming down, as if the streets weren't covered enough. Ten miles from the community center and eight from my

apartment—my feet screamed at the thought of walking in either direction. I needed a cab after all. The stop was near a military base and neighborhood. All of the houses looked warm, and I wondered if the occupants would be warm enough to let me use the phone.

A lady joined me at the bus stop. She asked me about the arrival of the next bus. I broke the news to her, and we joked about out miscalculation.

"You wouldn't happen to know where a pay phone is, would you? I need a cab."

"About four miles or so down the road, by the base gate." An empty expression froze on my face, then she continued, "But you can use the one at my place, if you like. I live around the corner."

I blew a sigh of relief, "I really would appreciate that. I do not want to be walking in this weather."

"I don't blame you."

As we started walking I mentioned I was from South Carolina, and not exactly used to cold weather. She said she was really not used to it because she's from San Diego. We got to her house and continued to chit-chat as she unraveled her layers of scarves once inside. A large black dog ran up to me and started sniffing my feet and legs. "King won't hurt you, he just likes to check out any visitors."

I patted his head, he calmed down and went into the kitchen. Ryan showed me where the phone was, and went to the bathroom. When she came back I informed her that the dispatcher said it would be at least two hours, maybe three before a cab would be available.

"Something about the airport closing."

"Well, take off your coat. I'll get us some hot chocolate."

"You don't mind a stranger being in your house?"

"King will be all over at my slightest scream, so I ain't worried. But you can still wait out there if you want to."

"That'll be alright," I unfastened my coat. "Thank you." She hung up my coat, and went into the kitchen. The living room was filled with African art and books. On top of a bookcase was a picture of Ryan and a man in an Air Force uniform. In the picture Ryan looked something like Naomi. Rich-brown skin, athletic figure, and strong facial features. Ryan also had her hair braided, now and in the picture. I always thought Naomi looked best with her hair down.

"How's about some music?" She asked coming from the kitchen.

"Sure." I had a seat, "How long have you been married?"

"Six years, what about you?"

"I'm engaged. The wedding is next month." To my surprise she had put on Paul Jackson. All I needed was my recliner, and my juice, and my night could pick up where it left off.

"Excited?"

"I'm getting to the point where I just want it over with."

"I know what you mean," she laughed going back to the kitchen.

I was in a rocking chair, and laid my head back to let Paul's guitar just glide over me. The meeting would be over by the time I got there, so I pushed it out of my mind.

Ryan came back with a tray and

caught me rocking and humming to the music, "So you like Paul too, huh?"

"I can't help but relax when Jazz is on," I helped her set the tray down.

Ryan took her mug and sat on the floor. We began talking about music, she turned out to be a bigger Jazz lover than me.

As we sat there sipping and talking I found out she graduated from Howard, and got her masters in Education from Bethune-Cookman. She was a history teacher at the base high school. When she asked about me I was a little skeptical about telling her I only had a B.A. and was an assistant manager at a sporting goods store. We looked to be about the same age, and she had gotten further along than I had. Naomi had her Masters also and got on me a lot about going back to school to get mine. She said she wanted someone who was on the same level as she was. I would go back, someday, but it just wasn't the right time. After I had said all that, Ryan said degrees don't mean a thing, and went on talking.

We had an easy conversation going. She had a great sense of humor, and I soon found myself telling her things I had only recently told Naomi. Nothing monumental, just stuff that I got the impression Naomi wouldn't care to hear about. I felt relaxed around Ryan, and I could tell by her demeanor that she was feeling the same. King had come out, and was resting his head on her lap. With her head back on the sofa cushions, she ran her hand over his back. High school, first loves, family, goals and dreams were some of the topics we shared upon. By a quarter after twelve it felt like talking to

an old friend. I caught myself listening for the cab, but so much time had skated by I didn't know if one had come and gone or not. I called the company again, and he said the airport had been really crowded and a cab would be there as soon as possible.

"I hope Naomi will be as happy as you are after six years," I said sitting back down.

The smile on Ryan's face slid off. "If you turn out to be a husband like mine she won't be." I didn't know how to respond to that. The way she had been talking I assumed her life was close to being exactly the way she wanted. She sat there for a moment, then went on, "Y'know, there was a time when I would hate when Corey went on temporary duty. But these last few times I've been looking forward to it. When he's not here I have the place to myself, I can read or do whatever I want in peace. When he's here he always has his buddies over watching the game, or playing cards. He doesn't expect me to serve them, but sometimes I just want him here to myself. And when we go out we're with other couples. Friends are fine, but damn. Seems like the only time we're alone is when we're in bed, and even then King gets on the bed as soon as we finish," she rubbed him playfully. "So when Corey leaves, I just close myself off. At least I get some time to myself, if not with him."

"I didn't mean to interrupt your self-time."

"Like I said, there's a phone four miles down the road, if you want to be out there."

I was hoping that the topic would change since we had touched on one that

was unhappy for her. She sat her mug on the table and leaned forward. "I wonder if he's lost interest in being married? He doesn't neglect me or anything, but three or four years ago we spent a lot of time just being ourselves..."

Listening to Ryan started me wondering if down the road I would lose interest in being married to Naomi? There were some things about her that annoyed me a little, but I loved her. Still, would I continue to want to be with her for the next sixty years? Would those little annoyances ever become too much for me to deal with? Would little things about me ever become too much for her to deal with? We seemed like we were pretty good for each other. We communicated well, I knew she would be there for me as I would be for her, plus we could make love like a chef preparing his prize-winning dish.

"...You ever feel like that?" I heard Ryan ask.

I shook the smile from my face. "Yeah," I said, even though I wasn't sure of what she had been talking about.

Ryan went on talking, and I went back into my thoughts. Only this time, after that idea of sex, that's the direction my thinking went in. My mind floated to memories of marvelous nights and days with Naomi. There were times when our love making would be smooth and gentle to show how much we cared for each other. And then there were times when it would be furious, and explosive to show how much we turned each other on. Either way our sex was never bad.

As I got flashes of different love scenes, it became Ryan I was with instead of Naomi. My memories of my fiancé

turned into fantasies of this very attractive woman who had opened the doors of her home to me. I shook the pictures from my head. Ryan was off limits. Her marriage may have been a bit rocky, but my relationship was strong. Even if she was the kind of person who would betray her husband, I was not going to betray my fiancé...what's her name? Naomi!!

So what if

Ryan and I had connected spiritually in a short amount of time, she was married and I was engaged. We were both committed to other people.

However, I couldn't help wondering what a physical connection between us would be like. My eyes traced from her bare feet, all the way up to her braids, and back down not missing an inch. Nevertheless, this was a woman who let me use the phone and wait for a cab in her home out of the blackness of her heart. How could I take advantage of that?

"...I wish our lives came with a rewind/erase button," she shook her head and laughed. She looked at me and caught me staring at her. Our eyes locked, and for that instance I was lost in her essence. I told myself to think of Naomi, my love for her, the wedding, but the desire to have a taste of Ryan overpowered all of that. She broke the stare and reached for the tray, "Let me go warm this up."

She stood up, and for some reason I did too. We stood there, her with the tray in her hands, staring at each other again. Then her eyes dropped down, and got big. In the midst of all my thoughts about sex, I had given myself an erection which was detectable through my pants. Now I was embarrassed. I tried to

discreetly move my hands

over the bulge, but Ryan, with her eyes tracing over me, set the tray down and came to me. She nudged her hand between mine and gently slid her palm along my erection. I slid my hand up her back to her neck and pulled her to a kiss. Our lips slowly parted, and her hand started sliding with a little more pressure. I

felt her kiss from my head to my toes, her mouth was sweeter than I could have ever hoped it would be.

I put my other hand on her back, and slid both of them down to her behind. She moaned a little, then started unfastening my shirt—following each button opening with a kiss on my chest. I let my shirt fall to the floor, as she began unfastening my pants. She tugged down my underwear and began caressing me. I started assisting her in removing her shell, giving a light nibble to each surface that became exposed. She only had on stretch pants, a large sweatshirt, and a bra, so within moments our warm bodies were pressed tight to each other. I guided her



back to the floor, planting kisses from her head to her toes, then back up her legs to her inner thighs. With that salty aroma filling my nostrils, I took my time exploring her womanhood. In her orgasm, she clamped my head between her thighs and pulled me into her with both hands. I could feel her every muscle contract, then she fell flat back to the floor. She laughed, then sat up, grabbed the pitcher of hot chocolate and guided me back to the floor. The hot chocolate was not warm as she poured some onto my chest. After she kissed up the pool she made, she poured more around my waist and thighs. She kissed that up, then poured some into her mouth and slid my manhood between her lips. I felt like I was going to explode right away, but she made sure I didn't so she could fill her mouth with chocolate two more times. When she emptied out the pitcher, I laid her back and plunged inside of her as far as I could go. The deeper I went, the deeper we both wanted me to go as I tried with every sensational stroke to fill her world. She began meeting my thrusts, and our act of lust became a dance of love. After three position changes, she was again on her back. Sweat poured from my forehead, and her chest glistened as her breathing became shorter and heavier. We feverishly climbed the last mile of our mountain of passion and teetered on its peak for as long as we could until we unwillingly fell off and drifted back into reality.

We laid there exhausted. All of the conquered thoughts of Naomi flooded my mind. I used to mess around with other women when I was younger, but I had never cheated on Naomi. Not even so

much as a kiss from another woman. Now there was not an inch of Ryan's body I hadn't kissed.

She was laying with her back to me. "Sex with Corey has become just that—sex. There's no real closeness between us. We don't spend anytime just talking and keeping up with each other."

I knew I should've gotten her off that subject when I had the chance. But now it was too late, for possibly everything. We got dressed in silence. I placed another call to the cab company and the dispatcher told me one should be there momentarily.

Ryan was sitting in sort of an upright fetal position. I asked her if she was alright. She said yes, but I didn't think she was. I asked her if she wanted to talk about it, she just shook her head no.

Twenty minutes later a horn blew outside. At three in the morning the cab had finally arrived. Ryan walked me to the door. As I put on my coat I tried to read the expression on her face, but she kept her arms folded and her head down. Our encounter had really gotten her down. I felt bad for adding to what she had told me was already a clouded situation.

I fished a business card from my pocket, "Here's my number at the store, and my home number," I wrote it on the back of the card. "Call me if you ever want to talk."

She looked up, "Is there anything to talk about?"

"If there wasn't, we wouldn't have been so quiet."

She nodded and took the card.

I had never been so happy to get

home in my life. I had one message on my machine. It was from Keith, asking me why I hadn't made it to the meeting. I hoped it would have been from Ryan, and was thankful it was not from Naomi. I tried to figure out how, or if, what had happened affected my feelings for her. I was still in love with Naomi, but I had run the risk of losing her for good if she ever found out. She was not one for giving second or third chances. That firmness was part of what drew me to her in the first place. I wanted to believe that she was still my everything. But, if that were true, where did Ryan fit—and why was I looking for a place for her to fit? That night my eyes never did close.

The weeks passed without a call from Ryan. Not a day went by that I didn't wonder about her—how she was doing, what conclusions she had come to, what had she done about Corey? I had to force myself to not go by her place, and let her deal with the situation the best way she saw fit. I had done enough to compli-

cate her life. If she never called I would just have to accept that that was her decision. Besides, what was I going to do if she did call? Someone that I felt a deep connection with, granted, but, something that may never be, could it?

At our wedding reception all I thought about was how happy she had made me by becoming my wife. When we were opening gifts we came across a box that had only my name on it, with no indication of who was giving it. I unwrapped it, and it was a box of hot chocolate. I played off knowing who it was from, and accused Keith of planting a gag gift. All the while Ryan overwhelmed my mind. I wasn't sure what she meant by it, but I assumed she was letting me know she was alright, in whatever decision she had made. I saved the box, just in case we ran across one another again on a cold February night.



# IO

*Bryan Thao-Worra*

Trying to live within the turn of the Wheel and the Screw  
Our books collect dust, and fade.  
Paper is a dying commodity of exchange,  
And people will give you credit to know that.  
Raw meaning is lost as the mind oxidizes,  
Infrequently polished with flag, sackcloth and the spit  
Of ideology and dogma.

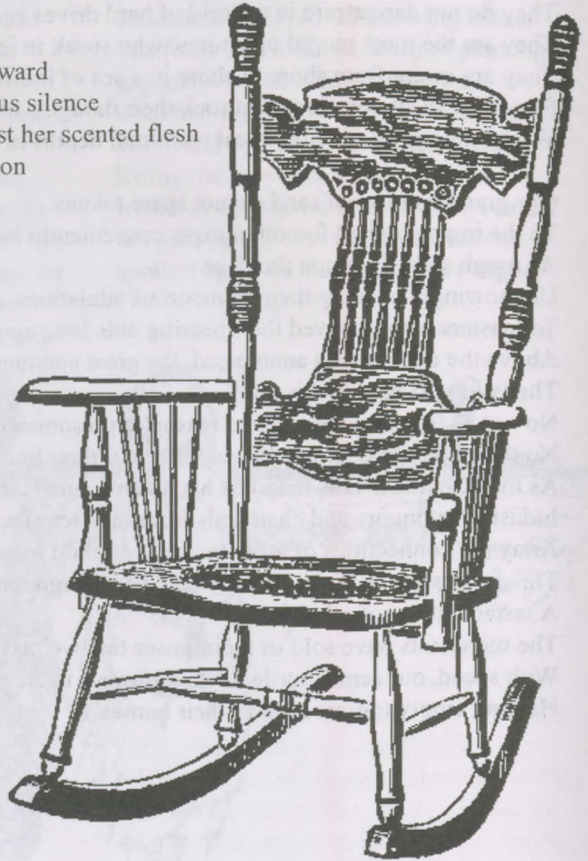
We burn to learn, throwing the promise of ash  
Into the meals of hungry children who no longer want anything more  
Than the truth of a home entertainment system.  
They do not dare aspire in a world of hard drives and hard times.  
They are the most mortal of futures, who speak in icons, not queries.  
They are swept from shore to shore in a sea of information,  
Swaddled in silicon chips that rock their thoughts to sleep  
While they travel over the great nocturnal depths in plastic ships.

Our grand empires of sand cannot spare tokens  
To the impoverished forgotten mass conveniently huddled  
As rough statistics upon the page  
Unknowingly heaving their clamorous adulations  
To masters who removed their hearing aids long ago.  
Above the din, a cry is announced, the great announcement for our age:  
The laws will pass in this land...  
No one shall travel who has no reason to go somewhere.  
No one shall travel beyond the confines of their home,  
As the scientist makes manifest his dreams, and teaches his children to dream.  
Industrious liquors and chemicals from the factories swirl and melt  
Away the connections of atom to atom, of child to parent.  
The dreams of the Safavids have now been forgotten,  
A testament to our scholarship.  
The merchants have sold us their lenses that we may observe their lessons:  
With speed, our semis hurtle down highways in an explosion of marketing,  
Hauling empty trailers back to their homes.

**The Bath**

*Sara Sowers*

By candlelight  
    she bathes  
Watery reflection embraced in sweet warmth  
    Angles, curves, legs  
        disappear  
    Faces, voices,  
Melt away, and are carried up  
        in the steam  
    What a spirit, a beautiful scent,  
Not height, nor width  
    More whole than that  
    More human than this  
Eyes closed, softly, lips tilted heavenward  
    Embracing herself in glorious silence  
Tiny waves of soul vibrate against her scented flesh  
    She tastes the heady liberation  
        of the bath.



## Fictions

Bryan Thao-Worra

Watching the Academy Awards wasn't something we did often, but tonight was an exception because I wanted to see if Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* would win Best Picture. Despite the threat of having to catch up on my sleeping during Dr. Knowle's lecture in the morning, I was staying up until the very end.

When the end came and celebrity announcers gushed over the candidates, I found myself muttering.

"Idiots. It's not the fact it's a Western that's important. It's a meta-story. A brilliant meta-story. It's not just the deconstruction of Western themes that makes it so important!"

"What's wrong?" Mindy asked from behind while she curled about on the bedding.

"*Unforgiven* is about the stories we tell people—the relationship between what we want people to believe about ourselves and the truth. Everyone wants us to believe their version of who they are—Clint says to us, 'I'm not like that anymore.' The kid says he's a cold-blooded killer. The sheriff insists he's upholding the law and just trying to build a house. Not to mention the Duck of Death! In the end, the film takes each and every story and shows us the flimsy foundation on which they're built. *Unforgiven* tells us you can't avoid telling these stories, though. Morgan Freeman doesn't try to tell anyone he's anything, and in the end, he gets killed by other people's stories, and he dies retelling the same myths that trap us into our identities. The only hope a man has is to live up to the stories we tell each other, and hope he's strong enough to carry it off."

"Hun," Mindy intoned with her

usual appreciation for my lit-analysis mode. "It just won Best Picture. What's wrong with that? It won."

"But not for the right reasons," I sighed.

"And that's important to you isn't it?"

"What kind of a lit-major are you!" I said, laughing as I took a pillow and flung it at her.

"A good one, but not a lit-phil major, and for good reasons! You're looking too deep into this. It's just a story!" she said, pouncing at me with a snarl of righteous mock fury.

\* \* \* \*

Even as I'm laughing, I think about how important stories were to people. Throughout our history, we were passing on even when we had nothing else. Centuries ago in China, when they took our letters and killed our scholars and everyone who could read, our stories survived. Passed from the lips of a mother to her infant, from the elders to the young men of the village, in the quiet of the shadow, beyond the ears of the enemy. Our stories were there. They educated a whole people who were not allowed in schools.

They were the seeds of our hopes, and our warnings too. When we first began coming to America, there were many whispers of those who had gone before—like the son the elders would not name, only whisper of, because of a secret fear another might follow him.

The son of a powerful man, he had been the first sent to the safety of the new world, to pave the way, and like his father, protect us and help us to stand united on a foreign shore when we joined him. He was to

bridge between our worlds, who instead fled into the deepest heart of American society, renouncing his name, denying his family, howling he has no ancestors we share with him. The elders don't know why he fled, or what inspired his hatred of his people, only that now, no one can find him, only the ghosts of his anger that passed into the hearts of several of our children who also fled to join him. I suspect who he was, but I don't dare name him either. People make choices.

Now, there's a new story of another that has begun being told. One who came even before him. His father had been of our people, though his mother was not. I have heard dozens of speculations about who his father could have been because no one seems to remember him. He could have been just a civilian. He could have been half-Chinese, or a bat. He could have been a Communist, or something we shouldn't ask questions about. But the stories are all the same: The father was dead. The mother, for reasons not unforgivable, but neither completely understood, placed the child into care of an American living in the old country at the time of the Fall.

The child was taken to America before any other one of us even dreamt of these shores. For over twenty years, he was raised as an American. Now he has returned to help our people. Although I have not seen him yet, they say he grew tall and thin as bamboo with hair long and wild as a feral man. By sight, few would instinctively say he is of our people. Unable to speak our tongue, they ask how he can be one of us. And many hold him in suspicion that one such as him should choose to return even as our own fly from us. But his ancestral clan has reclaimed him, and stories I've heard people speak of his great compassion and the name that found its

way to him—Karshia. "A piece of the heart."

Running to, running from. Legends sometimes became reality for us, and reality became mythic in other times. I have never met either of these children, and I strongly suspect they might not be real. Even if they don't really exist, the greater truth of their being and the message it entails does.

We had stories at our poorest times. When giving a child a potato for a toy was considering spoiling him. We'll have stories until the end of time.

\* \* \* \*

My first fight in America had been over a story.

The year was 1983, and my family had arrived two years earlier from Ban Napho, a terrible refugee camp, but one of the only hopes for us as we fled the revenge of the Communists. I still recall the filth in the rice the authorities doled out to us—swarming with insects and fecal matter that we had to do our best to eat. The awful stench of the dying. The sight of frail bones threatening to tear through the flesh of our starving. The terror to discover that in the night, from across the river, assassins had come into our camp to slay our leaders in their fitful sleep. Many of us clung onto stories of relatives who would come for them soon, even as others sent word of the awful heartbreak of separation from their family they had been promised would be reunited with them once they arrived in America. Somehow, we made it, in spite of it all. Few of us would say because of it all.

My family adjusted my age by a year to give me extra time to become familiar with English and American ways in school. I had been fortunate to be able to practice some English in the camp from the American workers helping us.

My parents constantly urged me to

study, and every night I spent hours trying to read the books, trying to pass the grades. My age helped considerably. The elders are not as quick or easy to adapt to the industrialized culture of America.

For most of the second grade, my school career had passed without incident, many regarding me as a quiet, polite child. Teachers were helpful for the most part, and encouraging.

One day, a substitute had been brought into class because the regular teacher had to have surgery and would be gone for a while. After making the obligatory get-well cards first day, the second day we were given a new project. We were to draw pictures of our favorite hero and tell a story about them.

Everyone was choosing G.I. Joes, Arnold, and even turtles. Turtles, of all things!

I chose Ed Buell.

Mr. Buell, or "Mr. Pop" as we called him back in the old country had come to us in 1960 after the death of his wife. An old man, they say he was once a farmer in a state called Indiana, but now he was retired. A notion that was totally alien to the elders, but they found in him perhaps more of a kindred spirit than in the other giants who had come to walk among us with their new ideas and American ethic.

Mr. Pop came to us formally as part of U.S. AID, a group helping the old country out before the main fighting of the war took place nominally in agricultural development, road construction, medical assistance and a bewildering variety of human services that most of our elders never even knew we needed at the time.

Back then, I knew of Mr. Pop because all our people respected him for never forcing his beliefs on us, and for genuinely

trying to help us. Not by giving us guns, but by teaching us first aid. Not by showing us how to drop bombs, but by setting up schools. Our people's first nurses are directly a result of his encouragement and support.

When we were sick, he talked to the giants and ordered the medicine for us that everyone else told us wasn't there. Mr. Pop joined us in our ceremonies not as a guest, but as one of us, and stood up for us when times were at their worst.

There were many questions about Mr. Pop, and whether he had the same "Company" connections as Air America employees or the other Americans who never wore uniforms but always had a distinct military bearing, who hated it when Mr. Pop addressed them as "Colonel" in a neutral country.

Whatever the case was, the fact are that Mr. Pop's help went far beyond what the U.S. AID mandate recommended. When the money wasn't available, he used his own retirement funds to pay for the services we needed. He was one of the Americans who stood with us in person on the same fields as our brothers and families were being cut down by enemy fire, treating the wounded and getting the others to safety.

When the Fall finally came, rather than return to Indiana, he stayed with us until the day he died. He gave up his safe life, and for all normal senses of the word, his citizenship, to bring America to our people. Not just the land, but the dream.

Ed couldn't hold a candle to Schwarzenegger though, at least as far as Ryan "Rusty" Collins was concerned.

"He's not real," Ryan squealed, "He's just a stoopid old man..." and then

promptly ran to the teacher to inform her of the man I was drawing.

When both of them came over, Ryan continues pointing at me, telling me to draw a picture of real hero. The teacher asked me who the man in my picture was. I told her: "Mr. Pop."

She then said that I should be proud to call my father a hero. As proud as I was of my father, however, that wasn't who I had drawn and I kept trying to explain to her that it was "Mr. Pop" even as Ryan kept making faces at me and telling me how "stupid" the old man was. The teacher kept nodding her head going "I understand," even when it was clear to my second grade mind that no, she didn't really, and somehow that was important.

I don't remember the exact moment when my young fist connected to his young face, but push came to shove, or rather, a whole lot of shoves, and we both found ourselves sitting across from the other waiting to be called into the office of our principal, Mr. Heindl.

Young children had a notorious habit of mispronouncing Mr. Heindl's name as Mr. Hand. Years ago, one particularly enthusiastic group of upperclassmen made a huge green construction paper hand which hung on the wall behind him signed by all of the students of that year. To those of us who remained, it shone like a beacon of pending corporal punishment, although it was supposedly illegal.

In his sternest voice, Mr. Hand explained to us the teacher's version of what happened. He told us that such behavior would not be tolerated and that we will be punished even more severely if it happens again. He told us to apologize to each other.

Back then, I wasn't about to

apologize for anything I wasn't sorry for.

"Say you're sorry."

"No. I'm not."

"No? Well, you're going to be if you don't apologize to this boy!"

After more than a few tense seconds, I finally broke down and said "No."

Which had Rusty dismissed and sent back to class and me sent to detention for the rest of the hour, then cleaning erasers after school until my parents could come pick me up and hear about how I had been a discipline problem and steps, they, as good Americans, could take to ensure that this doesn't become a bigger problem in the future.

My parents were perplexed when I explained to them in our language about how the whole fight started over Mr. Pop, and so nodded politely at Mr. Hand, said as many polite thank-yous as they could, and drove off.

"I don't understand. Mr. Pop is a good man. They should know Mr. Pop," my father said in the car. "But you stay out of trouble, too. Or it causes big trouble for all of us and we have to go back. You study hard. Maybe someday you can tell them your story and they'll believe you."

We didn't say another word for the rest of the ride.

\* \* \* \*

As Mindy rests in my arms, exhausted after our pillow fight, she looks up into my eyes. "You've just always got to win, don't you."

"Not always," I say.

"It's all just stories, you know. They don't mean anything," she says teasingly.

"Nothing?"

"Nope, nothing at all," she yawns, and drifts to sleep, smiling.

**La commedia e finite**

*Rocco D'Ascenso*

The outline of her overused body still lies next  
to me  
and is no longer warm to the touch.  
I force myself to roll over.  
My foot touches the hardwood floor  
chills run through me like water through a sieve.  
I see my clothes lying  
in the corner of the room where they were so  
callously thrown  
a casualty  
of the previous night's cheap cranberry wine and  
cheaper cranberry sex.  
I put them on.  
The coarse rainbow that begins to surround me  
already irritates my skin.  
I look up.  
This once pure white face is reflected  
streaked with pink  
and I can feel my flesh  
reaching  
desperately trying to grasp the  
clean air  
The quick touch of a cloth and another coat of  
paint  
I begin to smile  
remembering the words she spoke to me as she  
walked away  
an eternal echo in my brain.  
"You're not a man"  
"you're a clown"

laugh  
clown  
laugh

**STRANGE NEW MAN IN TOWN**

*Tom Garloch*

When I grow up  
I have two choices:  
  
If I'm in New York  
I'm going to mass every week  
In a great old gothic cathedral  
Like St. Pat's.  
I'll meet the Italians and the Irish  
Who speak Latin in the night  
With the Halloween and apple cider  
Of dark European dreams.  
  
If I drive myself through the deserts,  
It's the golden adobe  
And the New Mexican voodoo cemeteries  
Of my lone uncle's photos.  
I'll meet the vacqueros  
With their Impalas,  
Fante's senioritas,  
And mesquite trees twisting in the sun  
  
And the romance of atmosphere  
Will fill the vacancies  
With God of course.

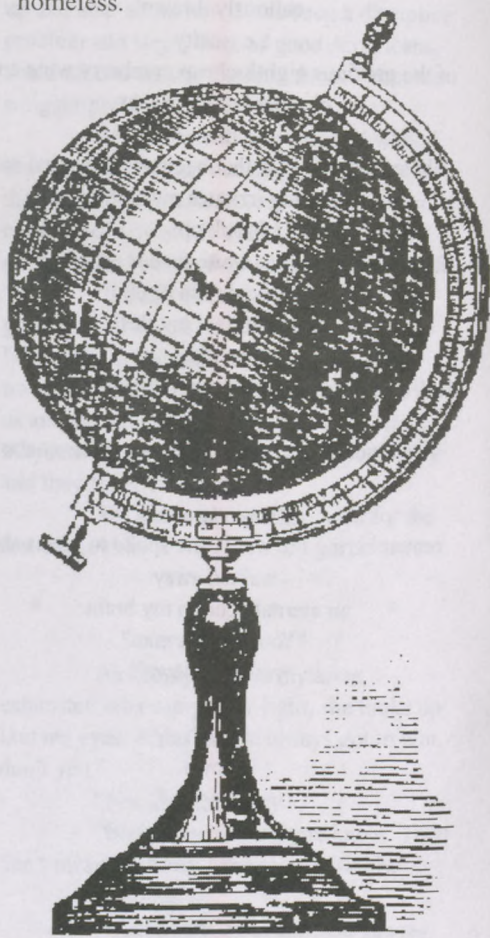


**Metropolis**

*Bryan Thao-Worra*

The architecture of identity is composed  
Of the mortars of deed, time and space.  
A man is rarely a cathedral, but surely  
More than a mean hovel of mud.  
If bricks are the consequences of action  
We have the material for the Pyramid of  
Cheops.  
Are these walls, however elaborate,  
Made to invite us in or keep us out?  
The first barbarian at the Great Wall of  
China  
Was immortalized by Larson in the Far  
Side;  
What of those who encounter our  
impregnable edifice?  
Shall they discover we are only a walking  
Magenot,  
Or the Kabba at the Dhu-L-Hijjah in all  
its sublime simplicity?  
What dervish shall dance with the sensei  
In the shadows of our being, glimpsing  
The terror of the Architect as the founda-  
tions  
Begin to creak? What hand shall dare to  
grip the ladder  
To ascend and peer through the window-  
panes to the center  
Of our labyrinths?  
Boxed and packaged within walls

We are a city, you and I.  
The skylines of the world.  
We are the children of the Architect  
Seduced too often to believe ourselves  
Too frail to attain the age of landmarks  
Collapsing as a matter of principle, more  
Than a necessity, urban renewal in an  
Age of empty buildings barred to the  
homeless.





burnt sienna

Pamela Reed

my favorite season has always been  
autumn:  
complex in her interminglings of the  
obvious.  
dancing for no-one but the pleasure of  
the  
wind in her hair and the power of  
shaking  
her mane in the glory of sun.

my favorite crayon has always been  
burnt sienna:  
humble in her interminglings of the  
obvious.  
tasting the bitterness of cocoa and the  
heat  
of cinnamon, she sings and sways to the  
rhythm of fading summer storms.

and if i had to paint a picture of my  
father:  
complex and humble in his  
interminglings of the  
obvious,  
i would carefully chose the softest,  
well-worn paper,  
run it gently between my hands,  
and draw falling leaves of burnt sienna.

## Situations

*Courtney Vanderpool*

"I'm not sure I'm doing the right thing," I thought to myself for the millionth time since Karen and I had come up with our scheme. I sat in the parked car looking straight ahead, not able to bear the thought of what I was about to do. "How did thieves and robbers do it?"

"Well Jerry, my man, they don't usually steal their own kid's stuff."

I recognized the little devil that often interfered with my good intentions. He was the ultimate bad guy, New York con-artist extraordinaire. He thrived in the darkness of my cerebral hemispheres, making sure to weave self doubt through any reservations I had about anything at all. His first appearance was when I was ten and my older cousin offered me a cigarette. But that was another story.

Shut up! I silently screamed to my non-brain. He was the last thing I needed now. Where did you get a New York accent anyway? I've lived in Ohio my whole life.

Reluctantly I turned my head to face the Northwest Memorial Library. I sat looking out at the familiar blue bicycle resting lazily at the bike rack. The red and white streamers dangled and swayed from the handlebars in the warm breeze making the bike seem to give me a friendly wave.

I closed my eyes and could visualize teaching an eight-year-old Alex to ride. She really was so cute looking up at me, "Daddy could you show me one more time how to slow down?" I smiled laying my head back on the headrest. Slowly I turned once again to gaze at the apple of my daughter's eye. The electric blue paint sparkled in the afternoon sunlight. The smile

sank as I again saw the lock and chain were nowhere to be seen. The silver spokes of the front wheel and the metal rack remained unlinked causing my eyes to close in frustration.

"Jeez, Alex! I showed you so many times," I said in a low voice, gripping the wheel and strengthening my resolve. She had to learn. At least this way she would understand, and I could avoid a ten-year-old's broken heart and the cost of a new bike.

I stepped out of the car and walked to the bike rack. The bike seemed to look sad now, as if it were being punished. The white basket's opening gaped like an open mouth in shock. "Please," the streamers warned me away, "she didn't mean to forget! She's only ten!"

"Yes, but a ten-year-old who can ride to town by herself can lock it up too," I said, embarrassed I was justifying myself to a bicycle. I picked it up, carried it to the back of the Chevy, and put it inside the trunk. I tied it down to assure it wouldn't fly out while I drove home.

I began to feel more ridiculous each time I stopped at a red light on the way home. The bell my daughter and I had assembled together gave a light tinkling sound every time I tapped the brake, reminding me of my felony. Sighing I reached down to turn on the radio. I flipped past the rock stations to find a simple solution to a much bigger problem.

Easy listening jazz filled the car. "Another red light paused my journey to a broken heart." I grimaced at my thought. Now there is a song lyric for you. I reckoned that one rivaled any country tune I'd ever heard. I had truly become pathetic. All I needed was some ugly golf pants and I would be my father—the ultimate lyricist. He always could find an expression to bring the sappiness out in

any situation.

I glanced out the window, and in the blur of passing buildings and trees, a silver sedan caught my attention. I watched the familiar metallic box on wheels pass, and held up a solitary hand to my wife. Her face was grim as she shrugged her shoulders at me. "She's heading to the library," I thought. "Karen and I have become quite the con-artists in our old age. Now, this is child abuse." The bell tinkled as I turned in the driveway.

I pulled the car into the garage and turned off the ignition. The silence was overwhelming. I rubbed my head trying to ease away my steadily growing headache. I could feel the patch of skin at the top with no hair. I looked into the rearview mirror to make sure I couldn't see it from the front. My fingers smoothed over the brown hair. Luckily there was no gray. Remembering the bike hanging out of my trunk, I assured myself there was still time.

After placing the bike in the back corner of the garage, just as my wife and I had planned, I felt my stomach tighten. I walked into the house with my mind blazing with questions. How would I handle my sad little girl? How could I not cry along with her and beg her forgiveness for tricking her this way? I made my way past the kitchen into the sun-filled living room. I sat down in my brown, leather easy chair. Settling back into its worn contours I tried to eliminate my guilt, but couldn't. Her face pouted and her large brown eyes filled with tears in the image in my head. I could hear her sweet voice saying, "Why, Daddy? Why?" I felt my nerve begin to crumble. "I'm just a dad! I can't handle the pressure of this!" My New York, con-brain re-entered the picture.

"Yo, man! Blame it on ya wife.

She can take it."

No! No! No! I couldn't do that to Karen. We were co-conspirators. I had to share in this one. There was no way out. I was just going to have to face this head on. I was doing the right thing. I had to be. At that moment I heard the driveway gravel's crunch. They were home.

"Daddy!" Alex's voice called uncertainly from the back door.

"In the living room." I waited for my victim with a mixture of remorse and determination.

"Daddy." Two tear stained eyes peered from around the corner. She ran into my lap full force. "Daddy, I'm sorry. My bike is gone! Someone stole it from the library." She sniffed a few times.

"Oh Sweetheart, I'm so sorry." held her tightly before asking the fateful question. Gently I pulled her away from so I could see her eyes. She rubbed her eyelids with the back of her hand and sni-  
again. "Did you forget to lock it up, Alex?" I tried for innocence. I really did.

"I . . . um . . . No. It was locked Dad." Her large brown eyes looked into mine without an ounce of guilt. I sat quietly in thought.

"Really, Alex? Are you telling me the truth?" I had to give her one more out. Maybe she was scared.

"Yeah, Dad." Her eyes did not leave my face. "But, you know, like I was telling Mom on the way home," my wife entered the room with a strange expression, "even though I really liked that bike, I think I was getting too old for it."

"Too . . . old?" I sputtered. Suddenly I couldn't quite grasp what she was saying.

"Yeah, you know Kim Johnson in

my class at school. Well, she just got a ten-speed. She let me ride it once and it was great! Dad, did you ever ride a ten speed?"

I was baffled. My tongue weighed a thousand pounds. I wasn't quite capable of making any words quite express the way I was feeling. My daughter took this as a good sign. She kissed me on the cheek and hopped off my lap. Some part of me heard her say something about a phone call to someone, while the rest of me was still trying to figure out what had happened. I stared after her bouncing brown ponytail in awe as she bounded out of the room.

My wife stared at me from the couch she was sitting on across the room.

"So, Karen, how would you like a bike?"

April 16, 1955

Lynn Byard

Neither of them were smiling standing in front of the pulpit. She in a shower-curtain flowered dress, he in a loosely woven tan suit.

Their hands interlocked and posed not knowing the cue to let go. Her dark hair curved an "s" on her brow his crew stood waxed at attention.

There's a tree-lined baptistery muraled behind them, waiting patiently. They hold their heads above the water, they have for forty-two black and white years.



# **Magic Wanda**

*Benjamin S. Hauck*

Mother called Wanda, a woman in New York.

"Wanda's a healer," she said,

"She's healed people who were in trouble."

I'm naturally a skeptic, but I let my mother be.

I mean, it's her phone bill—

as long as it's not *Psychic Friends*.

Wanda's part of a prayer circuit.

People in need call Wanda—she hears their stories,

then passes them onto the circuit.

The people on the circuit pray for those needy,

then, soon, the needy can feel relieved.

All those caring circuitemen, all their dialed-in benevolence,

really helps, as my mother testified.

I decided to play a little joke.

I prank-called Wanda.

I told her that my mother fell ill, and that her prayer circuit failed.

My mother had died.

I faked sobs and threw accusations.

I was really cruel.

Wanda believed me.

She sobbed too.

The next day, my mother showed me the strangest thing.

It was a card, addressed to the family:

"With deepest sympathies  
upon the passing of your mother.

—W."

Mother said, "Grandma's surgery was

successful,

I don't know what they're talking about.

Whoever it was, rang once, left it in the door,

then took off in a taxi. I tried to flag it down, but—"

She suddenly turned, and walked to the kitchen.

I heard the lift of the receiver, and many buttons pushed.

Mother waited in stillness.

Then, with an exhalation of breath, she hung up,

without a word.



## The Walk

Teri Dumas

We had just returned from a long walk, my husband, daughter, and I. It had been a beautiful day of sunshine and warm breezes. Summer was almost over and we were trying to enjoy the weather while it lasted. We had spent the day lounging around mostly. Our three sons were off at their grandparents and with only one child to care for, instead of four, we found life a lot easier. As I walked into the house, laughing about something silly that our little girl had said, I heard the phone ringing.

"Where have you been?" my sister demanded. "I've been trying to get a hold of you for an hour or so." She sounded kind of frantic and as if she had been crying. My thoughts went immediately to my boys. Todd, my eldest, had fallen out of my parents' barn loft when he was five, breaking all three bones in his right arm and had been hospitalized. Jeremy, one of my twins, experienced a flare-up of appendicitis yet another summer and we had rushed to his side only to get there an hour or so after the operation was over. Now, with my sister sounding so terribly distressed, my heart screamed in terror.

"What has happened?" I heard my voice say calmly.

"The boys are okay." Relief! "Mom and Dad too." All in the space of a few seconds the feelings of anxiety were washed away by the feelings of total relief.

"Is there someone there with you?" she asked.

It wasn't over. I had thought it was over.

"Yes," I answered.

"Cejuana and Greg were killed while on vacation in South Carolina today in an automobile accident. The girls survived the

crash. They were in the back seat with their seat belts on. Susanna has a broken leg and Tonja is okay physically, but no one can get her to talk."

I cannot explain the rush of feelings that blasted through me like a runaway train. Anger that fate could be so cruel. Pain at the realization she was gone. Guilt that I had been so relieved that it was not one of mine; not my children, not my parents. Everything crashed in on me as I fell into my husband's arms, sobbing uncontrollably.

Cejuana was my first cousin on my father's side. She was named after my aunt and uncle, Ce- for Cecil and juana- for Juanita. She was the child that they had longed for, going through several miscarriages before her conception. My uncle Cecil had died five years previously of brain cancer. Now my aunt would have to endure this loss of her daughter, her only child, without his arms around her. I remember wondering how she would ever bear the pain.

Cejuana had grown up with cousins for sisters and brothers. Most of my father's sisters and brothers lived in the community, and although a few lived out of state, there was not a summer that went by without seeing them all at least once. We would all squabble as much as we would play nicely, it seemed, which bonded us more as siblings than cousins. My aunt interrupted more than one fight over who got to play with which doll or who had to be the mean ugly dog who chased all of us cute little kittens.

Life at Cejuana's house was always fun. She had her bedroom upstairs in an old frame house. Her parents' bedroom was downstairs on the other side of the house so whenever we had a sleep over, we would stay up and giggle as much as we liked because they could not hear us anyway. Her dad had a greenhouse in the back yard that was always

fun to sneak away in whenever early spring turned into summer. We would climb the apple trees in the front yard and talk through can phones, telling our deepest secrets that we had to yell to hear.

She became one of my dearest friends as we frequented each other's homes during our childhood years. I remember in the summer, we would play house in the creek by her house. The rocks would become the walls and furniture, and the plant life would be the food. She had a red bud tree that by the middle of the summer produced wonderful "beans." Polk berries would do for "fruit" and were good to write secret messages on the rocks as well. I don't ever remember us having a real picnic with real food, and I don't remember ever caring! She was just fun to be with.

Right outside her front door was a money tree. The blooms would mature and there would be in their stead, an opaque coin. We would gather these and play store. She would get things from the house and try to sell them to me. She wanted to always be the storekeeper or the teacher or the movie star. I was always the lowly servant person or the consumer or the student. This went on for years until I learned to say, "I won't play unless we take turns," which sometimes worked, and sometimes didn't, you know how it is with only children.

As we grew older, our ideas of play matured. I remember the time we decided to make our own film of Romeo and Juliet. She wanted to be Juliet, of course, but yielded to my reasoning that since she was a foot taller than I, it just wouldn't look right. Her father filmed it all after hours and hours of practicing the only the lines we could remember. For some reason, we did not see fit to actually read the play. We watched our film over and over pretending to be young starlets on the way up. The last time I visited her, she said we had to

get our hands on that reel and watch it again. Now Juliet will watch it alone.

As teens we would take long walks up her hollow or mine. We would enjoy the hills and all the wildlife that made their homes there. We would always have dogs tagging along. Cejuana was so soft hearted and took in every stray that came by. Later she did the same thing with people; always rooting for the underdog and trying to help anyone in need. We'd walk for hours at a time, talking about girl stuff for awhile and then find ourselves talking about life changing stuff a few minutes later. With the sun on our faces and the wind at our back, we were sure we could accomplish anything and had all our lives ahead of us!

We continued our friendship into our adult years. I would go over to her trailer with my three sons and they would play with her two daughters. She lived right behind her parents' house in a trailer so our kids played in the same greenhouse and creek where we had played. While they played, we would sip our cups of hot tea in the winter and iced tea on the hot summer days. Tea and kid time, we would call it.

Sometimes, she would bring her girls over to my house and I would drag out the art supplies. They would dabble away using the inborn creativity we were sure came from our genes. We would catch up on what was new within the families, but would always end up with the woes of being a woman compared to the relative ease of being a man. We were young, but wise.

On one such visit, she announced that she had recently read a book that, in essence, said if women would be quiet and do everything that their husbands wanted, remembering at all times never to question him in any way, marriage would become less stressful. It worked too! She learned to never say no and her husband went about happy as

pie, doing everything that pleased him. Cejuana stayed at home singing songs like "Whistle While You Work." She developed this idea into somewhat of a life philosophy. Our talks were not as lengthy after that.

I moved to Texas a few years after that. Nothing could stop our friendship though. Christmas would not pass without each of us buying the other a little something. Neither one of us had much money, so the "something" was usually a tea towel or some homemade goody. Birthdays would not go by without a card and a letter. It wasn't a whole lot, but it was important to the both of us that we continued to show the love we had shared throughout the years.

She went back to school to get her teaching degree and began to teach in a local high school. I remember later complaining that college took so much of my time and besides, at my age, did it even make sense to return to school? Whenever I am struggling with the desire to throw up my hands, I remember her simple answer, "The time will pass anyway," and then I get back on task. She was never one to pull punches. I really miss her insight and candidness.

We had slacked off on communication so much in those last years, that we only talked once a year at our family reunion. Both of our worlds revolved around our children's lives, who were now teens, and we claimed that time was the enemy, not neglect. I would say that I would have to come over one of these days and she would say that anytime was good for her. It just never seemed to happen.



Finally I made up my mind that the next time I came to Kentucky, I would go and see her, no matter what. My mom had planned a special dinner that day and expected me to be there in time to eat with the rest of the family. She acted kind of perturbed that I was taking some of *her* time and giving it to someone else. I shut my eyes and my ears to her complaints and drove the three minutes to Cejuana's house.

We sat and talked far beyond the time limit I had set with my mom, as we all knew we would. We had our cup of hot tea and talked about what had been going on in our lives the past few years. I remember her saying that it wouldn't be too long until we would be sitting on her front porch in a couple of rocking chairs, telling each other about our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I laughed and said that maybe we'd both have more time then. She nodded in agreement.

Finally I had to pull myself away, and with a promise that I would not be so long in coming to see her again, I got into the van and started down her driveway. Looking back over my shoulder, I waved and smiled. I can still see her waving back to me from her front porch, the two rocking chairs moving ever so slightly with the wind. Two chairs that, in my heart, will remain empty forever.

I was not able to keep that promise. The accident happened only two months later. I do, however, try to get down to her house to see her mom and her girls now and again. Her daughters are doing okay now, but for awhile it was a tough struggle. The oldest's leg healed okay and with therapy she is able to walk normally. Her mother's seat had broken loose inside the car and had smashed up against her leg. The memory of her dying mother lying on top of her is something that required a different kind of therapy.

The younger of the two slowly began to communicate, but is still very introverted. She talks mostly through her sister and refuses to go anywhere that she might be asked questions. She looks just like her mom did at that age, so I think her grandmother clings to her a bit more than normal. Maybe just to hold a small part of her husband and her daughter for a few short seconds of time.

"What does not kill us, makes us stronger," they say. Makes me wonder what other lies "they" tell. This tragedy made no one stronger. It made a happy woman with a daughter and two grand-daughters be sucked into a situation not unlike a taste of hell itself. It stripped the girls of the love and affection that no one could lavish on them like their mamma could. It blasted a hole too big to ignore in every family gathering that we have had since that fateful day. Lastly, as selfish as I know it to sound in contrast to the other grief, it took one of my true friends and left a void that no one will ever fill.

All I have left are the memories, bitter-sweet as they are. I see a stray dog and I think of his loss never to have known her. The red buds bloom every spring, but not without me singing the song we laughingly sang as teens, "When You Need a Friend." I can smilingly skip rocks across the pond, but never without thinking of her normal retort that my rock only did five skips and her rock will do six at least.

Well, Cejuana, the one with the unusual name of love, the one with the unusual gift of love, I am glad to have known you. Although we will never sit on your porch and sip tea as we tell each other about our grandchildren's antics, one day, my friend, we will take a walk together on golden streets and will talk only of things that make us smile.

## Questions to Answer

*Jennie Keplar*

I am sitting in my father's new room. Unlike the last few that he has had, it is private, and he doesn't have a roommate. His window overlooks the courtyard and the statue of St. Francis. Finally, it has stopped raining, and the tears on the window are rolling down slowly. The hallway is bustling with busy nurses, doctors and patients eager to get out of their rooms.

Dad's skin is pale and very oily with a yellowish tint, as if he just bathed in Betadine. He has a classic case of "bedhead;" matted in all directions, giving him owl ears. The doctors have restricted him from eating or drinking until he fills his colostomy bag. He has been sucking on ice slivers from the nurses' station to keep his mouth moist. Now, though, he sleeps for a while, and I won't disturb him, as rest is so rarely found in this place. There's a Newsweek in my bag, to keep me occupied for the moment. However, my thoughts wander from the magazine. A picture within it's pages has triggered a floating scrapbook, to open up and allow me to remember. The picture is of a blond-haired child sitting in her father's arms, safe and happy, as he reads her a night-time story. It's a literacy campaign ad, telling parents to read with their kids. The caption reads, "Daddy and His Little Girl." My dad would read to me when I was that small. He'd pull out the Edgar Allen Poe collection I had checked out from our school library. This alone could account for my ironic

and dark sense of humor. Alas, I was once that child; safe in the arms of my protector, never afraid of losing my security.

My father wasn't always so ill. He used to be the superhero of my dreams. He saved me from bullies in the neighborhood and he took me to visit the geese on weekends. He used to draw cartoons of Winnie-the-Pooh, on a napkin, next to the bowl of cereal that he poured for me to find when I got up on Saturday. My dad worked late at the from hours spent in the Biltmore Lounge. I rarely saw him during the day. He was always in bed when I came home from school. One of the memories in my scrapbook is of Mom taking me to the post office at night. Dad would appear through the turnstiles and share dinnertime with us. I was most proud of my Dad then. He would be the only worker whose family was there to see him, and he showed us off to them, with his chest swelled. He always had a grin as wide as the moon when he came to see us. I was his prized achievement.

So now I stare at my father and see how different he is from how he looks in my memory. Since the first operation, he has lost the hulking broadness in his shoulders. His shoulder bones are hardly covered with any of the muscle and fat from before. His legs are spindly and pale, with blue and red veins peeking through his sheer skin. He has lost the boisterousness that I remember teachers remarking about after parent-teacher conferences. Dad used to brag to me, as I got older, that he could still turn me over his knee and give me a whipping. Things have changed since then. He has fear in his voice when he talks about

surgery. The kidney transplant failed, and he is afraid that there is worse to come.

My father and mother divorced when I was eleven. One afternoon, in the early days, before custody was decided, my father came to our house while Mom was away at work. He told John and I that he needed to take us somewhere and that we would be back before Mom got home. He didn't bother to tell her that we were going someplace with him. He wasn't concerned about whether or not she would worry. John and I got into the car with him and we drove to a nearby trailer park where Dad's friend lived. I forget his name, but I remember that he used to be very heavy and, by this time, he was thin, due to "health problems." (Read: cocaine.) Dad drove us downtown to a tall, mirrored office where his lawyer's office was. John and I cowered in the back seat as the slimy friend talked about events and people that only he found interesting. We parked our dirty, green Chevy at a meter and walked inside. John and I were still in our school uniforms. John's sandy blonde hair was mussed from running around outside, and his little forehead was beaded with sweat. His cheeks were chubby like a Reuben's angel, and red with a frustration that he could not yet pronounce. John carried his backpack with him like it was filled with his only possessions; high on his back, making him hunch over a little. We followed Dad into his attorney's office. The guy's name was Ralph. The waiting area was wall-to-wall burgundy: burgundy carpet, wallpaper, upholstery. The biggest window looked out onto down-

town Broad Street. I kept looking out, thinking that Mom was down there somewhere, looking for John and me.

Dad's friend walked into the office first and talked to Ralph for a while. In the meantime, John and I grilled Dad about what we were doing. Was Mom going to worry? What are we talking to Ralph for? Did Dad ask Mom if we could talk to Ralph? Dad said that everything was going to be fine, and that all we had to do was answer Ralph's questions. Finally, the friend came out of the office, and it was my turn. My stomach hurt like it did when I went to Dr. Wehe's office for a throat culture. I slinked into the chair across the desk from Dad's creepy attorney. He started by giving me a summary of what he was going to ask. Through his little introduction, I couldn't help but notice his head. It was covered with little red polka dots healing flesh from a hair transplant procedure, earlier in the week. Dad might've mentioned it, but I didn't recall. Looking across at Ralph, I felt like I was watching an advertisement for accident attorneys. He had papers strewn about his desk, a picture of frogs next to his framed college diploma, a gold-plated desk with swivel pens, and scabs on his head. This guy was all about class. Then, he started to question me about my home life. He wanted to know if we were fed regularly and if our house was well-kept. Of course we were fed regularly, and yes, our house was well-kept, but I began to squirm. Here was this man, whom I've never met before, asking to me to tattle on my mom. He asked me about the mass of dirty clothes on the basement floor, where we did laundry. Was my mother negligent in

doing household chores? I wanted to cry. At a point in my life where I was learning the basics of Catholic guilt, this just seemed too much. While trying to shift my gaze elsewhere, I happened to notice that Ralph had a tape recorder buried under papers. This was the point of no return. I had visions of Mom being in court, on the witness stand, and Ralph bringing forth the incriminating evidence—The Tape. Mom cries out a plea to not separate her babies from her. Dad in dream sequence slow-mo, laughs and puts his arms around John and I as we cry helplessly. When I snapped out of my horrifying vision, I realized that Ralph had asked me a question which didn't make any sense. He wanted to know if John and I ever had to go to the creepy friend's trailer, because we didn't know where Mom was, and have him feed us. I asked him to repeat the question. He did so, and I realized exactly what was on Ralph's agenda. He was going to scrape up anything he could find to make my mother look bad. If "The Finger" were in my gesture vocabulary, I would have used it on the slimeball across the desk, in his used car dealer suit and bad scalp job. Needless to say, I had never set foot in Bozo's trailer.

After John talked to Ralph, we left for home. Dad took his lying friend home to the mobile home in question, where we allegedly had peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. We stopped by a fast food place and got dinner before going home. I was worried because Mom was supposed to be home by this time, and we weren't there yet. Dad tried to joke about the frog picture on the wall of Ralph's office and about his hair transplant and

how Dad's friend shouldn't have made up those stories. John and I were silent for the entire ride home. I could hardly breathe from the weight of guilt on my chest. Jon talked to us Matchbox cars, as was his usual custom in situations that he couldn't handle. As we pulled up in front of the house, Dad noted that Mom's car was parked there and that she must be home from work. Duh. It was apparent that Dad's acute sense of the obvious was in high gear. The demon of shame was pounding on my stomach, making me want to vomit. John and I filed into the house, followed by Dad.

Mom was in the kitchen, calling everyone that might know where we were, crying. She nearly fell in the floor when we came in. Mom had come home, expecting John to be playing and me to be doing dishes, only to find that we were gone. She feared that Dad had kidnapped us, or worse, that someone else had. Suddenly, flashes of scenes from *The Shining* came to mind. I thought she was going to kill Dad, not that I would've blamed her. Mom and Dad had a gigantic fight in the dining room, while John and I took to our usual hiding places for when the parents fought. The memory of what happened later has mostly been blocked out, but I do remember Mom giving me the third degree about what I told Ralph. I couldn't recall saying anything wrong, but Ralph's questions were so leading that I wasn't sure. Afterwards, I thought of ways that I could've possibly escaped going with Dad. Every plan was so incredible, but I blamed myself for not using one of them. It was hard not to feel ashamed for going with him. I only had to remind myself that Mom was working three jobs at minimum wage, and I'd feel like a jerk. She worked in a sign shop, engraving

sign for businesses, and if she was really lucky, her boss would give her a nickel raise. The one person that I had to thank for all of this grief and shame was the one man whom I loved and had the most faith in: My father.

Now, I watch over him as I return from my reverie and compare past to present. The man lying in the bed is the very same man who asked me to betray my faithful and loving provider. He is the one who refused to go to one of my high school plays because he was angry that I no longer came to visit on the weekends. This pale, fragile man told me that he wouldn't help me pay for college because I wouldn't work hard enough. However, he is also the one in my mental scrapbook who pulled me through the snow in our inflatable raft, long before John was born. He cheered me on at softball games and took me to cheerleading events. Now, new questions arise. Do I feel bad about his suffering? If I show him love, will it be wasted? Did he ever think that the day would come when I could choose whom I loved? He tells me that he loves me no matter what he does, but what speaks louder: his actions, or his words? *Do I still love him?*

I am looking for something to focus on because I am no longer able to deal with this issue without crying. The room is devoid of anything non-clinical. I notice my hands. On my left hand, I am wearing two rings; the mother's ring that Dad and I gave Mom for Christmas in '76, and Mom's engagement ring. When Mom gave

these to me, she told me that they no longer had good sentiments behind them. They were a reminder of when we were a family and they were in love. The family ring has Dad's stone in it still, therefore, it would be a lie for her to wear jewelry that signifies a unit that is no more. The engagement ring is a bond broken; sparkling and hopeful, but empty of the love that it once symbolized. I wear it now because it is a reminder of what once made my life full and what now makes me who I am. It is a reminder that my dreams and hopes need not give way to circumstance. The sparkle and hope can still thrive without the pain and possibility of compromising my vision of greatness. My folks tossed their plans for something better when Mom was unexpectedly pregnant with me. The rings are a constant warning to never duplicate that mistake, for it only brings bitter venom later when the product of one's actions comes back to haunt.

Dad writhes in his slumber, trying to be comfortable despite all of the tubes that he is attached to. He looks pitiful and helpless, unlike the father of my past. The scrapbook is closed now because I don't want to cry, in case he wakes up. I think of what will happen when he is gone. Will I be sorry for not reconciling with him? Do my grudges run that deep? I may one day regret trying to escape his lectures about why I need to learn more about cars and how I will feel bad for not getting along better with my brother, now a high school dropout. Once he is gone, I will have lost the chance forever.

How can I not forgive him, or at least give him a chance? He is only human and I should be more sensitive to his soul.

It is getting late and I can't stand to wallow in my memories. He is resting comfortably and it would be terrible to wake him now. My purse is on the bed table, next to the get-well cards from family members and Dad's new wife, whom I have lovingly renamed "Bambi Jo." I get my coat and purse. For possibly the last time, I look at Dad and blow him a kiss good-bye.

The corridor is quieter, since visiting hours are almost over, and slowly, I walk towards the elevators. In a very weak, but clear voice, someone is calling.

"Jenny?"

The elevator doors close.



# Judges

## Poetry and Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry Contests

**Robert Pringle** writes poetry and has been published in various literary magazines.

## Short Story Contest and the Walter Lowrie Barnes Short Story Award

**Ceci Gray** was a Creative Writing professor at Otterbein College for several years. During that time, she re-instated the traditional Strawberry Breakfast, and revived the Quiz and Quill. She is now a full-time campus minister at OSU and teaches Hebrew at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. Currently, she is editing a book on management and writing the September issue of God's Word Today magazine.

## Personal Essay Contest

**Marty Saveson** was a professor of English at Otterbein College from 1983 to 1993. During that time, she also served as advisor to the Quiz and Quill.

## Louise Gleim Williams Newswriting Contest

**Patti Bitler** has been a copy editor at The Columbus Dispatch, for nearly 20 years. She has a B.A. in journalism, and an M.A. in English with an emphasis on writing instruction and theory.





