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Spring 2001

### 2001 Spring Quiz and Quill Magazine

Otterbein English Department

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Quiz and Quill  
Spring 2001



# Quiz and Quill

Otterbein College  
Westerville, Ohio

Spring 2001

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## *Editor's Note*

The following people were essential to the creation of this year's *Quiz and Quill*:

1. Our entire staff. Everyone made immense contributions and worked tirelessly to create the magazine you hold in your hands. It wouldn't exist without them.
2. Everyone who submitted to the magazine and/or attended a reading this year. The reason there is a staff—or a magazine—is because of your interest.
3. The men and women of the U.S. Space Program and Armed Services. Aim high!
4. Dr. Bailey. Fearless advisor. Wise leader. Cookie-purchaser.
5. The Quiz and Quill cookies themselves. Without their sustenance—whether plain, heart, or smiley-shaped—I doubt much more than grumbling would have been accomplished.
6. Everyone who remembers their first pet fondly. My first pet was a goldfish. His name was Goldie.
7. Our readers. There is some fantastic student writing in here, and we hope that you enjoy it.
8. Finally: anyone who has been forgotten or intentionally left out, or who felt left out by the first seven notes—thank you, too. Your assistance was invaluable.

**Start reading!**

## 2001 Quiz and Quill Writing Contest Winners

### Short Story Contest

- First Place: *Civic Duty* by Jordan Lowe  
Second Place: *Catsup and Relish, No Onions* by Rebecca Rossiter  
Third Place: *Giving* by Kimberly M. Lowe

### The Walter L. Barnes Short Story Contest

- First Place: *Honor and Principle* by Tom Steckert

### Personal Essay Contest

- First Place: *Sometimes the Shoe Doesn't Fit* by Stacy Campbell  
Second Place: *On Giving Up Caffeine* by Ellen Beversluis  
Third Place: *Political Affairs* by Jason Christopher Walker

### Poetry Contest

- First Place: *Midnight* by Ryan Parrish  
Second Place: *The Winds* by Melissa J. Tipton  
Third Place: *What I Would Say at Your Funeral* by Matt Glaviano

### Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry Contest

- First Place: *Exhale* by Rebecca Rossiter

### Playwriting Contest

- First Place: *Cary Grant Wasn't Gay . . . Was He?*  
by Stacy Campbell  
Second Place: *A Shade of Gray* by Michelle Casto  
Third Place: *Do You Believe in Magic?* by Julie Kirsch

### Louise Gleim Williams Newswriting Contest

- First Place: Rachel Bell  
Second Place: Marian Jarlenski  
Third Place: Kristin Kauffman

## Writing Contest Judges

**Short Story Contest and Walter Lowrie Barnes Short Story Contest**  
**Candye Barnes** will be published in *101 Damnations: Your Guide to Personal Hells*, forthcoming from St. Martin's Press in 2002. She has taught fiction writing at The Ohio State University.

### Personal Essay Contest

**Martha Sims-Lovely** teaches writing and folklore courses at The Ohio State University but still finds time to do some of her own writing, both on research projects and with a local playwrights group. One of her monologues will be published summer 2001 in a collection of monologues for young people.

### Poetry and Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry Contests

**Douglas Gray** is the director of the Downtown Writers Network in Columbus. His 1994 poetry collection, *Words on the Moon*, is available from Mid-List Press of Minneapolis.

### Playwriting Contest

**Doreen Dunn** has won two Ohio Arts Council Playwriting Fellowships, a Mary Anderson Center for the Arts Fellowship, and The Columbus Dispatch's Short Play Contest for her 400-word dance-theatre piece, *Excuses*. Her most recent full-length play, *Lillian and Ethel*, won the Attic Theatre Center's National Playwriting Competition and was produced in Los Angeles in October 2000.

### Lousie Gleim Williams Newswriting Contest

**Patti Kennedy** has been a reporter for Suburban News Publications and formerly was an Assistant Director of Publications/News Information in Otterbein's Office of College Relations. She has taught newswriting and desktop publishing at Otterbein and is working to establish her own desktop publishing firm, Simplicity Publications.

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Pool hall, bowling alley,  
waiting room perfume—  
fills the air seductively with  
second-hand aromas.

Orange ember  
works its way down  
the shaft  
from sizzling tip  
to golden band.

ash

and waft this sick-sweet  
miasma

clinging incense  
to nostrils and  
clothing—

even while  
entropy dissolves  
this  
    writhing  
phantom ballet  
into shadowy  
    lung-  
        coating  
            flavors.

## Midnight

*First Place, Poetry Contest  
by Ryan Parrish*

Head on chest  
Two in one  
A marriage  
Bodies close  
Twisted  
Tied  
Dream to Dream  
Drifting

Her in mind  
Two in one  
A marriage  
Flutter eyes  
Quiver  
Rise  
Dream to Wake  
Drifting

Night on glass  
Two in one  
A marriage  
Glowing light  
Window  
Pale  
Wake to Wake  
Drifting

Sleep in skin  
Two in one  
A marriage  
Tremble lids  
Dwindle  
Fall  
Wake to Dream  
Drifting

Kiss on hand  
Two in one  
A marriage  
Gentle lips  
Tender  
Soft  
Dream to Wake  
Drifting

Scent in sheets  
Two in one  
A marriage  
Sweet perfume  
Quiet  
Love  
Wake to Wake  
Drifting

Palm on cheek  
Two in one  
A marriage  
Whispered voice  
Soothing  
Hush  
Wake to Dream  
Drifting

Room in rest  
Two in one  
A marriage  
Arms around  
Silent  
Warm  
Dream to Dream  
Drifting

## You Amuse Me

*by Jamie Bell*

You say I amuse you  
You amuse me, too  
A bad boy  
Turned good  
But not too good to have a little fun  
With me  
A refreshing influence  
You are  
Around a messed up girl like me

Ask me how I'm doing  
And my mother, too  
Want to know if I've read any good books lately  
And did I hear about that far-away war  
Maybe I can come over after work  
And have some tea  
Read you some of the songs  
I've been working on  
While you strum your guitar  
Content with my company  
Ask to go to the museum with me this weekend  
A cultural refresher course  
Watch a movie before we call it a night  
Talk about the plot  
Joke about the commercials  
Rehearse our favorite scenes  
Turn out the lights  
And go to bed

Take off my clothes  
So you can have that fun of yours  
Ask me how it was  
After you've already declared yourself the king  
The king of what,  
I want to know  
Maybe I'm too easy for myself  
Finding sex to be an accessory  
To your self-esteem  
I can please you man  
But you'll never be able to please me

Did you ever think  
That maybe I pretended  
To be your girl  
Just to find some comfort

In knowing I made someone's day  
 Too bad it was yours  
 And not my own  
 But don't worry about me  
 I can find comfort in just about everything  
 These days  
 Of mine  
 I stumble through with blinders  
 To keep me from becoming bored  
 With all these games

Take a walk though the park  
 And figure out our day  
 Maybe we'll meet up at a bar  
 Later  
 Or just stay in  
 Have a quiet night  
 Listen to some music  
 Debate who sings the blues the best  
 I say Joplin  
 In all of her rawness  
 There's no competition  
 You say Miles Davis  
 He's the man  
 He can show all those so-called musicians  
 What life really is  
 Has more talent in his little finger  
 Than those hippie women have in their breasts

What's the definition of insanity  
 You ask me  
 To keep the conversation going  
 So that maybe you can have seconds  
 Or thirds  
 Before you're ready to go to sleep  
 Lay your head  
 On my shoulders  
 I ease your mind  
 Entertain myself with random ideas  
 Carelessly they come out of my mouth  
 And you discover the pinned-down rage  
 Of a woman with too many thoughts

After all this goes down  
 I'll just have to ask  
 Can I still be your girl  
 After you know all my  
 Little secrets?

**Callisto**

*by Cara Elise Bonasarte*

If  
I  
could live on  
Jupiter's moon, Callisto,  
I would  
plant a flower  
and look down at poor  
Jupiter.  
At its  
yellow, blue, brown, tan, and red  
clouds.  
clouds  
Clouds incessantly  
churning with whirlpools and hurricanes.  
But.  
I would sit down  
on the quiet, dusty moon of Jupiter  
and dream about jumping on Saturn's ring  
and back again...

## Poem to My Lost Muse

by Stacy L. Brannan

~for A.R.W.

You are the memories  
that flap hard against  
the backs of my eyes  
like so many brightly-colored  
Tibetan prayer flags.

Days when calm  
hugs the world,  
                    warm and soft  
                    like a great blue sweater,  
I read books,  
drive to work,  
                    the air sits still,  
and I do not think of you.

Then the wind begins to blow,  
running its cool, clear  
fingers through my hair,  
or kissing tiny goosebumps  
across my shoulder blades,

and the flags snap,  
and I remember,

and though I do not know the words,  
the prayers are sent up,

waving,  
into the air.

## Black Shading White

*by Shannon Fishel*

I like to wear black underwear,  
the temptress kind,  
satin and lace kinked into the figure of seduction  
like a dominatrix with a lashing whip of sensual sadism.

It's just a little bad,  
the plaid-skirted Catholic schoolgirl rebelling  
with the leathered motorcycle boyfriend,  
black underwear makes me feel naughty.

So I can forget my icy white life  
the unsophisticated naif of perfect grades  
perfect family, perfect future, perfect goals  
and a crisp white-linen-sheet-spotless reputation.

Shading the shock of virginal purity  
from the prying eyes in a socialite's circle,  
my black underwear, like Batman's mask,  
hides my identity of innocence from view.

## The Winds

*Second Place, Poetry Contest*

*By Melissa J. Tipton*

The path of the swirling air dances on  
taking one in dizzying circles. With  
highs, lows. To nowhere, somewhere and beyond,  
straining with hurried step and perfect pitch.

Softly striking, yet moving with great force.  
Predestined by powers unknown, or not?  
Causing the dancer to move in her course.  
Choreographed. The perfect sequence taught.

Great composers strive for the likes of such  
which naturally makes all of nature dance.  
The dizzying wind to which all must move  
Earth and sky with a compassionate touch,  
the greatest powers subsided in trance.  
Forces her to blow with all movements smooth.

## Sometimes the Shoe Doesn't Fit

*First Place, Personal Essay Contest*

*by Stacy Campbell*

At seventeen, Dad already worked in the factory. He pushed a broom and slopped a mop up and down the long, tan, bleak corridors that reeked of paint fumes. He vowed he'd never spend more than a year in a place like this. Once he graduated from high school it would be all over; he would go to college.

At night Dad would escape to the solitude of the room he shared with his three older brothers. Taking off the heavily soiled work clothes, he'd go to the dresser he shared with Larry and pull out an oversized, over-worn shirt and jeans that had been passed down from brother to brother. Then, as the rest of the family settled before the television watching Red Skelton, he'd stretch out under his blanket on the old full-sized bed that he shared with the three older brothers. There he could lie facedown, propped up on his elbows for hours as he sketched uninterrupted.

As he drew, he dreamed about his future. He'd go to art school after he graduated. Then he wouldn't have to slave away for minimal pay like his father had done before he died. He'd be doing something he loved. And no Campbell had ever done that before. Dad's drawings were one of his few escapes. They were a way for him to let out his hostility and confusion in a creative way. He found peace within him. And there were only two things that gave him peace anymore. The second was playing basketball.

Up and down the court he ran, heavy breathing, strong sweaty palms tensed, blue beady eyes fixed upon the ball. Each part of his body in sync with the next. His arms held slightly out at his sides in defense or readiness for the ball that might slip from the opponent's hands. His legs slightly bent and shoulder-width apart in anticipation of his next move. All of him showed the signs of a great athlete. He was quick and agile, knowing the opponent's next move before it occurred. Everything befitting, except for the flopping, red Converse tennis shoes that he wore on his feet.

Getting married and having three daughters was not even a possibility for Dad at this point; nor was working twelve-hour night shifts to support a family. All he thought about now was the game. And the only thing he worked for was those shoes.

The shoes were two sizes too big and each night before the game they were filled with toilet paper, newspaper clippings of previous games, math homework . . . whatever he could find. They were the only thing that slowed him down; showing any kind of fault in his game, as he ran across the court like Ronald McDonald with those huge, red shoes smacking the floor with every step. The noise embarrassed him, but he never let it show.

He ran up and down the court like a champ. Shoulders back, head held high, pride beaming from every sweating pore on his body. He had worked six days a week for five tiresome months just to get those shoes. They were the first new thing he had ever really owned, everything else had been handed down

through the three older brothers before him. They were new, the soles still unbent and squeaking when he walked, and they had a smell like the first day of school when everything's still unused—textbooks and notebook paper, sharpened pencils and lockers that haven't been opened for three months. It didn't matter if they didn't fit, because he had bought them. They were solely his, with no one to share them with or pass them down to.

He found freedom in those shoes. They gave him power. The power to forget. As he played he didn't have to think about working at the factory or his dad's death. He didn't have to remember that the game was only a game, and it couldn't last forever. For those brief four quarters, the game was his only reality.

More than twenty-five years later the shoes were now worn-out and the boy that had once donned them was worn-out too. Dad was still working in the same paint factory, still waiting for the next year to roll around when he'd get out. Waiting to fulfill his dreams, or at least get a chance at them. But now he had a family to support, and even if he did get out he had no place to go. Once again he found himself escaping to the auditorium, but this time it was for me. He attended every practice and game, home or away. And on our days off he'd meet me on the outside courts to challenge my skills in a game with Old Dad.

Dad sat alone in the folding, wooden seats of the echoing auditorium. The blue, beady eyes were wrinkled around the edges like a shirt that needed to be pressed and they squinted, straining to watch the players run up and down a court he'd once played on.

He watched me run back and forth, mimicking the moves that he had taught me. I know he must have been smiling as I slightly scuffed the floor with every step of my new black Nike tennis shoes, just like he had done in his red Converse. He must have been proud to watch me play—me being the only one of his daughters to share his love for the sport—and to see me in my new shoes. He had been saving up for weeks to get them for me, and had been so excited when he finally got all one hundred and thirty dollars. Just to watch me open the box and discover the new shoes delicately wrapped in tissue paper, with their familiar smell, must have brought back memories for him.

In the locker room before the game, as I was lacing up my new shoes for the first time, I thought about all the work Dad must have put in to be able to afford them. I thought about how he had to sleep during the day, because he worked all night. And even if it meant missing sleep, he never missed a practice or a game. I knew I had to play my best that day to show Dad what his gift meant to me. I wanted him to be proud of me.

With three seconds left on the clock and the score tied, I flung the final shot from my long, slender, awkward arm. With the ball arching into the air as if never to come back down again, the buzzer sounded. And then complete silence until the swish of the ball falling through the net could be heard. We had won the game! Curls bobbing from my short, high-seated ponytail and my black high-tops scuffing and squeaking across the freshly waxed floor, I ran to

the wooden seat where Dad sat and wrapped my arms around him.

Together we cried for the victory, for all the memories that the game had given us, but most importantly for the new tennis shoes that I wore on my feet. They were my symbol of my father's love for me. They represented twelve-hour shifts spent from midnight to noon each night in the paint factory. My shoes now told the story of my father's life, standing on concrete with aching knees and back repeating the same remedial task hour after hour, night after night. They spoke to me the words my father wanted to say, but didn't know how. That he would give me everything I needed and would never let me know what it was like to go without, to want so badly but to always have to settle for something less than what I deserved.

Interrupting our moment, another nearby parent remarked, "Wow, what a shot!" Dad just pulled me to him, hugging me hard against his chest and beamed, "That's my girl!"

So that night I didn't show Dad the blisters on my feet. I couldn't let him think that I didn't love the shoes, even though he had bought them a half-size too big. Sure, they slipped with every step, even when I wore two pairs of socks. But to me it didn't really matter if the shoes fit or not. What mattered was that Dad had done this incredibly selfless thing for me, and in that act I knew that he loved me . . . even if he didn't know what shoe size I wore.

## Maybe God's a Loafer

*by Mike Boblitt*

Mom says God has come to her in dreams.

I say Snoopy has had my child in dreams.

She says I don't understand Faith.

I say "believers" try to use Faith as scientific evidence of the existence of God, therein  
convoluting the meaning of Faith.

I sell loaves of bread at a bread shop.

The walls are covered with small posters containing such witticisms as "We're just  
loafing."

A businessman with a "damn, I'm important" facial expression paces from one side of  
the counter to the other, pondering which type of fresh baked bread best suits a  
man of his status:

Intellect—whole wheat

Maturity—ten grain

Self-comfort— premium white

A childlike playfulness admirable by his peers— cinnamon swirl

He ponders over to a bench and sits down—crosses his legs tightly—doesn't notice his  
seat is already occupied by a fallen poster.

Finally, an exasperated sigh—our bread just won't do. He stands at attention and  
marches out of the store.

Clinging to his ass is one of our signs—"It's nice to be kneaded."

As he returns to his SUV, I point his advertisement out to my co-workers.

We are damn happy.

God comes to me in bread stores.

**Politics***by Jamie Bell*

Television screams  
Media protests your freewill  
Who are you to choose  
What you think  
Try to regulate your mind  
Free yourself  
By your own design  
Speeding through life  
Stopped only by statistical warning signs

Making memories every step of the way  
What will you remember the most  
When someone asks you  
What were you doing  
Don't even know what to say  
I'm just here and there  
Around when I need to be  
Can't find it in myself  
To just leave this place

Now you want only what you know you can get  
Too realistic for your own good  
Noble but crude  
Everyone says you could be the president

## The Law of Karma

by Stacy L. Brannan

I think  
perhaps  
the last time we went around  
*I stabbed you*,  
pierced through the olive skin  
I worship now,  
disconnecting  
the snug and compact cells  
of your chest  
or liver.  
I imagine that you bled there,  
gaspd and seized there,  
and I scolded your ability  
to leave  
scarlet tributaries  
on my perfect plush carpet.

Only when you were  
nearly gone  
and penetrating me with  
the watery gaze  
of love and forgiveness  
did I hear the  
roaring expanse  
of a life without you and  
discovered a need  
to heal—  
to stitch together  
your brokenness,  
to donate blood  
that we, together,  
might flow clean.

# 11 North High

*by Vincent Xexaviar*

Consciousness slithers out  
 Through a keyhole in my mind  
 Dangerously dangling above dreamland,  
 A quiet repose of my spirit  
 Where he may drink my mind's nectar  
 Growing drunk on my insanity and imperfections

The glowing cloud of slumber  
 Muffles my aimless thoughts  
 Trapping me in a lucid walk of languorous transition  
 The cool orchid's perfume winds around my neck  
 Choking away the sun,  
 The moon,  
 And the street lamp  
 That glares with incoherent syllables  
 Dancing through the cricket's orchestra  
 Whispering to wake

To glance through the eye  
 Of that winged villain,  
 His tongue lies as sharp  
 As his shrill beak  
 Breaking the boundless luster  
 Of the moon's aura  
 Chasing my shadow and dream  
 Into hiding

But you, of the  
 Ash tainted feather  
 You are no bird of flame

You wish not to rise  
 But only to erect those  
 Who now lie dormant

How dare you arouse my mind  
 From the comfort of solitude's soliloquy  
 Searching for all to worship you  
 And lay tribute  
 To the fiery orb  
 Which transcends evil to my heart  
 Shattering all that  
 Was once good  
 And be left  
 To greet again  
 The solace of night

## Civic Duty

*First Place, Short Story Contest*

*by Jordan Lowe*

People tell you, when you're staring death in the face, your life flashes before your eyes. That ain't it at all. It's just regrets. Those last couple loose ends you wished you'd gotten around to. Only, it's misinterpreted as "life," since that's what most people's life is: a series of letdowns, lost moments, and disappointments covered up by a fake happiness towards what you settled for in place of what you wanted. How would I know? Easy. I'm about to die.

My life was probably not much different from yours. If not for a few twists and turns, we might have been friends. That is, I never had too many friends myself, but I'm sure you always did. Yeah, buddy, how I used to imagine: the both of us in fancy business suits out for a power lunch at some expensive restaurant, discussing the morning meeting and griping about those bozos in other departments. Or, maybe we're both colleagues at one of those private schools. I could come into the teacher's lounge and make some witty crack about the class I just came from and you would laugh and ask me if I had a chance to read that book of poetry you lent me. Hell. I'm not even that particular. What if we were two bricklayers? We'd work all week out in the sun, then head out to the bar on Friday night to drink a pitcher, eat some wings, and watch a baseball game. That sure would've been nice. Trouble is, we ain't friends. Never were. You were born in the hospital across town. You grew up on this street instead of that. You got that scholarship I didn't. You dated the girl that turned me down. You managed to keep your job in the company that laid me off. You and I have never really met. But I know you. And whether or not you want to admit it, you know me too. But it's okay that you turned your head when we crossed paths. It didn't hurt my feelings. I just wish that . . . well . . . once, you'd think of me. I did it for you, you know. After a point, there wasn't really anything in it for me. I thought if I did just one little thing, maybe it would make some kind of difference. Even if you never looked me in the eye afterwards, I would at least have just a tinge of the pride you must feel every day. To contribute. That's all I really wanted.

But enough of that. I ain't the type to talk at length about myself. I guess it's just . . . well, you know. I want to get this out. So, after we parted ways at that fork in the road, so to speak, my life was never much to write home about. My old man knew this fella that got me on at a garage. That day in June when he told me about the job he had lined up was the last time we spoke. Didn't even come to my graduation. I guess it was because Ma was going to be there with her new man. It's probably best he didn't show up, after all. I can't say I liked that slick greaseball any, but sure enough, Dad wouldn't have been too cordial. Especially if his wheels were greased with a little Jack Daniels. So, it was that kind of "here's your diploma, and there's your suitcase" deal. But, like I said, at least I had a job. I kind of liked it too, if you believe that. It didn't take me long to learn the ropes, and I got to meet lots of people. Trouble is, they were never too keen on meeting me. Cause, to come talk to me meant there was

something wrong with your car. And that sort of thing don't give people any kind of sunny disposition. But I tried to be just as pleasant as I could be, no matter how mad and rude the customer got. I'll bet I even worked on your car. Which one was it again? The Lincoln with the dented front fender? The Ford F-150 that just wanted its windows tinted? Or was it that BMW that needed alignment work? It's tough to keep them all straight with so many. I didn't even have a car. But the bus line is pretty near my apartment. A quick three blocks and I'm right there at the stop. It was really only bad in the winter. That morning wind has a way of shoving its way past your coat and just snuggling up against your insides. Damn if some of those shivers aren't enough to make your neck ache. But I never really even wanted to be behind the wheel in such weather. I watched you as you drove past me on the side of the road. You were always leaning forward to see out of your fogged-up windshield, trying not to spill the coffee in your mug, and you never tended to look too happy. But it isn't hard to figure out why. The way business went up in the winter was pretty impressive. Wrecks upon wrecks upon wrecks. In my line, you got to see some real bad ones. It was all pretty somber. That is, until you got some guy in there telling you your business. You could tell him and tell him that the car was a loss, but he never wanted to believe. Always accused us mechanics of being crooks . . . I tell you, if we was crooks, we'd have already bilked enough out of you to drive an expensive car like the one you just wrapped around the guardrail, pal. So as you can see, it never got boring. There's really only one thing I didn't like. I feel stupid even mentioning it. It's just some trivial thing. I hate how it made my hands look. See, stupid. But day in and day out under the hood, working with all those oils and lubes, and your hands get stained black. It doesn't take long, either. Sure, you wash them off really well, five or six times a day, even with that special Lava soap, but it don't ever get all of it. It gets stuck up under your fingernails, and in those creases in your knuckles. Even after a couple of days off, the shadows are still there. Did you ever notice? If you didn't see anything else, I know you thought about how my hands looked. I know I should stop being self-conscious about it, but I can't. Every time I handed the cashier at the fast food joint my money, I could just hear her thinking how gross I must be, a person who doesn't even clean up before eating lunch. That's not it, darlin'. Believe me, I scrubbed. And if we'd ever had the occasion to shake hands, I'm sure it'd be first on your mind. But I can't really apologize. It was my job. You brought me your car to get its oil changed. My hands got black. Yours only stained if you ventured to pick up the newspaper in the waiting room. That's just nature. In fact, even now, as I look down at my trembling, clammy hands, I can still see the faint discoloration beneath the new color. That sickening syrupy red that's come along with my more recent occupation. Funny. I'd almost stopped thinking about them. What was it, almost two years ago now that I lost that first job? And it took me this long to find new . . . gainful employment. Why can't I ever work somewhere where you stay nice and clean? Like I said, the stains aren't easy to get rid of.

But don't worry about me. It's a little too late for that anyway. These last couple years have just flown by. I mean, I liked my job and all, but I could get

along without it just fine. With the little money I had saved up, unemployment, and the insurance from Dad's policy after he passed on, I could get by. Sure, I had to cut back a little. I didn't eat out so much, and I stopped going to the movies. In fact, I pretty much went generic. You know, generic food, generic fashion, generic medicine . . . But that's all right. Wasn't much of a heavy eater or a pill popper anyway. The thing I missed most was my cable. When I was working, I didn't watch much TV. But, when you're home all day, it gets so you ain't got nothing else to do. You can only take so much staring out the window. Hell, having cable would've probably kept me out of this whole mess to begin with. If I'd have been watching the old 'idiot box' instead of staring down the street and letting my mind wonder, then maybe none of this would have happened.

That seems to be a real sedative. Nothing will put you to sleep faster than late-night cable. But movies always get my blood pumping funny and my mind darting from thought to thought, and I ended up not sleeping so well. See, I still had my VCR. And on Tuesdays, the video store has this special deal where you can get two movies for only ninety-nine cents. Two. Of course, you can only pick from the old ones, but that's just fine with me. The old ones are the best ones anyway. These new movies coming out today with their teenage soap operas and computer hocus pocus . . . that's all for the birds. Give me a Scorsese picture any day. Or something with John Wayne. Or Steve McQueen. In fact, the only movies I didn't have to rent were *The Searchers* and *Bullitt*. I had this old cassette that someone had taped off the television. It still had the commercials in places, and was kind of wavy, but I didn't mind. I damn near wore that tape out. Have you seen either of those? Probably not. They're not quite so popular nowadays. But, aside from those two, I had to rent everything else. Man, I looked forward to Tuesdays. Getting out of the house for an hour or so and wandering the video store. I would scrutinize every box on the racks. But somehow, nothing appealed much to me. Maybe I could find one interesting one. I'd get *Apocalypse Now*, *The Dirty Dozen*, *Jaws*, *Dr. Strangelove*, or *Chinatown*. You know, something good. But I was always stuck, trying to find that second pick. So, every week, I'd go back up to the counter and ask for *Taxi Driver* again. Now, I know what you're thinking, and it ain't like that. Have you seen it? Well, even if you haven't, it's got this kind of connotation as being one of those movies that makes you do crazy stuff, like that character that shot at Reagan to impress Jodie Foster. Now, he was just plain nuts to begin with. The movie had nothing to do with all that. It's just a quality picture about a . . . well, a solitary kind of guy that ain't quite got his bearings in the world. What's that line? Oh, yeah, he calls himself "God's lonely man." I'm not quite sure what that means, but it's a great line. So me and Travis spent a lot of time together. Oh, Travis is Robert DeNiro's name in the movie. Travis Bickle. And you know how it is when people spend too much time together, right? You start talking the same way, or finishing each other's sentences. You feel what the other person feels. And . . . and it was kind of . . . well . . . See, Travis's life was just hell. And it got to the point where it made me kind of depressed to watch him. He just sat around in his apartment day after day with no goals, no hope and no

future. His neighborhood was falling apart around him. And I saw myself in the middle of it all. From my apartment alone I could see all manner of scum. There were junkies and drunks, crooks and pushers, hookers and pimps, without leaving my chair. You just had to look out the front window and there they were, on display to the world, those sick, degenerate street trash. It's a kind of scab on the city. A smoldering pile of human waste, in the worst sense. But . . . it's like they were ghosts or something, moving around the city unseen in the daytime. They only rattled their chains at night. And that's why no one seemed to notice them. So I made it my business to notice them. To study them. To catalog them. To stop them. I didn't rent another movie. I didn't go out at all. This was a full time job, and I didn't clock out when the whistle blew.

It was easy to ignore them, before, when I had a busy day like you. It was never our problem, right? We had customers to service and tasks to accomplish. Then we could go home feeling as if we'd done our duty. We snuggled up in our beds with the doors locked tight, not concerned about what was just outside the walls of our personal fortress. I mean, don't you still? How well did you sleep last night? The night before? Do you know what I saw two nights ago? I stood right there in my apartment and saw a homeless man die in the street. These two thugs were tearing ass up the street in their Momma's new car, while this poor drunkard stumbled from the curb. I wanted to yell. I wanted to pound on the glass. I wanted to drop the hammer of God on those spoiled bastards. But I didn't. I couldn't. I . . . wasn't ready. But it sure as hell helped to get me ready. They hit him square on, flipping him up over the side of the car. Then they just took off. They squealed their tires and let a man bleed to death. But that's not even the worst of it. Not by far. The worst of it is the people who saw it happen. The witnesses. After ten seconds, they all just turned back around to continue on with their sordid business. I was helpless, behind glass, still just watching my dirty aquarium. But he . . . he was one of them. And they just turned their backs on him. They just gave him up, like society gave up on them.

And at that moment, I knew I'd give anything to be back at that garage, up to my elbows in V-6 engine. I wasn't sure I could handle this new work. At least then I was somebody. See, I used to think that you and your kind looking down on me was the worst kind of hell a body could be in. But that ain't anywhere near the truth. I was on the fringes of your world, but at least I was there within sight. These people are invisible. They wear their sin like camouflage, and you can't see them until you're right up in it. And by then, there ain't no getting out. These dirty people with their dirty agendas . . . now I couldn't help but see. I shine compared to them. Sure, I don't go to church but on Easter. I drink a bit and I smoke too much. But I pay my taxes and keep the noise down. I sweep my walk and hold the door for old ladies. And if you couldn't stand me, then how do you stand them? My hands were dirty. And you treated me like a nobody. Well, their souls are blacker then my mitts could ever be and nobody gives a damn. Nobody gives a damn about anything anymore but themselves. Nobody . . . That's your daughter out there! She's strung out, tapped out, and worn out. And she can't be more than seventeen years old. You've let your daughters . . . because you were caught up. You had to work late. Now, I've never had kids.

I've only even dated a couple of women. It didn't amount to much, them being alcoholics or crazies or too high maintenance. But you . . . you have children. Lovely children. And you've allowed them to find the ugliest part of the world. And to die there.

So, really, who's the biggest sinner? The dregs on the street? At least they're honest about who they are. Those of you in the ivory tower who allow it all to happen? Surely you're all pleading ignorance. Or is it me? The one caught in the middle, always jealous of the good life, enough to blind me to the bad. What have I done? Why am I the only one that is being punished? I'm the only one who lifted a finger, dirty as it was . . . I'm the only one who tried to bring on some change . . . I'm the only one . . .

The thirty-aught-six felt heavy in my hands. Heavier than it did the day I bought it. Heavier than it did any of those times at the range. And certainly heavier than it did in the woods when I used to hunt as a younger man. I had pawned most of my old junk. But I always held on to this. It had been ages since I'd fired a gun, but the stock nestled into the crook of my shoulder like it had never left. My fingers found their resting places, and though it was cold, my trigger finger curled up into its nook without so much as a shiver. I dropped the sights onto the first person I saw on the street. It was dark, but his outline was clear enough. A squeeze of the trigger and it could all begin. A tenth of a second of courage and I could finally accomplish something all the mayors and senators and lawyers and cops and teachers and talk-show hosts only blabbed about. I never had much use for talk before. But now I had something to say. Something that meant something. And I found my voice. But I wasn't going to shout from the rooftops. No. No one listens to the jerks with the loudspeakers, shouting Hellfire. You must be artful. You got to recite poetry in a whisper. You must work face to face. And so I unlatched my door. I barely noticed the month's worth of mail I had to step over. Had it been so long? No time to worry. I renewed my determination and for the first time, felt dignity flush out my cheeks and straighten my back.

Letting the door slam behind me, I took the steps two at a time until I burst out into the street. I took in the scene, smelling the hazy air. It smelled like smoke and rotting meat and spilled liquor. I could see well enough, the streetlights drawing sharp lines between brightness and shadow. But I had to squint anyway. After dark in a zoo with no cages. But now I had made it a hunting trip, and I didn't slow my steps until I was face to face with the alpha male, half a block away from my front door. I got a few curious stares and a few drug-addled giggles. But that's all I wanted. No resistance, just curiosity. They were looking at me. Right then, I was a man from Mars. He cursed. I smiled. He puffed out his chest and waved his hands around. I raised my gun. Only when he saw I was serious, when he realized I wasn't one of these wasted, last-ditch types trying a bluff, did he register fear. Even behind his gaudy, gold-rimmed glasses, I could see his eyes go wide. He knew who was in charge. And I'm pretty sure he saw the fires of the hell he was headed to. What life flashed before his eyes, I wonder? What regrets did he have? Can animals feel disappointment? I tried to think of something witty or profound to say, like they do in the movies.

But I couldn't. So I didn't worry about it. I savored that last instant of fear. Now he knew. The scum finally knew. And as the muscle in my finger tightened, I saw a flash of color reflected in his glasses. Flame? It was red, sure enough, then blinding white. But why the headache? It was a shooting pain at the base of my skull, and then it was a shock running up each knee to my thighs. Damn. A blow to the head. I'd fallen to the street. I tried to turn and face my new attacker, but all I saw were hands. Thin, pale hands framed by loose red sleeves. The kind of top that went out of style in the seventies, worn by a frail blonde. She had one of her spiked heels off, gripping it like a hammer and bludgeoning me repeatedly. Her nail polish didn't match that blouse at all. Whack. Whack. Whack. But why? That was your daughter. The one I was trying to rescue. Didn't you ever teach her any sense? She had already turned on you, her family. And now she's turned against her savior. She was murdering an angel cause she was more scared of a devil. Or was she just accustomed to it? Can you build up a tolerance to Hell? And for the first time, the worthlessness of it all crept into my mind. What was I doing? This wasn't a movie where I could walk in tall, shoot from the sidearm on my hip, and walk out with the girl. The girl didn't want a sunset. She was happy in the dark. It was right around then I heard an explosion. Small. Quick. Concentrated. But right in my ear. So loud it rattled my ribcage. Then I choked on a horrible mixture of smoke and warm liquid. The bastard had a twelve-gauge in his coat. And I had a hole in my gut. It was all over. I had been fired for the second time. No one could repair this place. Not with all the tools in the world. And there I was, leaking . . . staining the filthy street even more.

And the regrets began. Was my life a waste? Certainly. I realized the better question had to be, was my death a waste? God, I hope not. Maybe . . . maybe you'll hear about this on the radio over breakfast tomorrow and you'll think . . . you'll ask yourself . . . you'll just feel bad and wonder what's wrong with the world. Then, when your kids run down the stairs with big smiles on their faces to join you, you'll remember that you have a little piece of that world right there across from you. And you'll cherish them just a little more. Or maybe I'll just be another obituary that you skim over to get to the stock report and crossword puzzle. Maybe you don't have time to watch the news. I'd hate for you to be late for work on account of me. I know how important it is . . . Or maybe . . . maybe I'll make it. Yeah. I've seen people shot up worse than this survive. All I've got to do is get to a hospital. Come on. There's one less than twenty blocks away. But I'm on my hands and knees. If I could just . . . get . . . patched up . . . maybe I can still make a difference. Maybe I can still . . . damn. Here I am crawling up the street, holding my guts in with the left hand and holding my tears back with the right. And nobody's turning around. All I see are their backs. Help me. God, help me. Nobody will look at me. I know I'm hideous, but turn around. Dear God, nobody's turning around . . .

**6:27 a.m.**

*by Michelle Casto*

Three minutes  
till day begins,  
I trace muted shadows  
across your face.  
Unaware, you sleep.

In silence, I admire  
my body folded in yours,  
seamless,  
an abstract display of  
bare limbs and breath.

For three minutes  
my only fear is  
you waking,  
reclaiming yourself.

For three minutes  
I still believe you love me.

## Can You Solve the Puzzle?

*by Jennifer LaConte*

The Wheel spins.  
Big money, big money!  
A superior snigger snakes across his face.  
He is Sajak.

The female contestants hug him  
When they win a trip to Cancun.  
So why won't Vanna give him the time of day  
When the red light winks off?

Pat, a failed comedian,  
Finds his love and consolation  
On wedges of cardboard.  
A solitary figure  
selling  
vowels.

# Exhale

*First Place, Burkhart Religious Poetry Contest  
by Rebecca Rossiter*

Sometimes, days resembling  
fuzzy, wet blankets  
cage me.

But Today's musty silver,  
its herbal tea invitation  
brings stubbornness  
that's being tuned

\*

Hear it?  
that bit of Beethoven,  
the bite of Bach  
tugging at my  
poppy-colored  
heartstrings?

\*

And The Piano Tuner  
Himself taps his fingers  
somewhere up in Paradise  
to the rhythm of His  
Child  
Pressing On

## The Choke

*by Becky O'Neil*

I hand the paper to you, my fingers holding it more carefully than money. You take it from me as if it isn't precious; I hold my breath until I see your face drop. You can only have read the first line, but, "Please tell me this poem is not about me," you say, and your seriousness stops my exhale. I sit on my hands and rock forward and back, feeling the plastic of the diner bench painning every knuckle. I clamp my teeth together and won't look at you. Instead, I look at the cherry at the bottom of my glass. Poor cherry, with all those ice cubes piled on top of it. And in my head I say, Of course it's about you. You were the one who said my herbal soap smelled atrocious, then used it. This is how mint must taste to skin, you said, holding your washcloth and glowing. You were the one who surprised me with breakfast in bed; it was days before I discovered all the burnt toast in the yard. You were the one who showed me that distant trees move like seaweed: slow, silent underwater feelers. We should go swimming—er, walking—more often, you said, and I breathed the air like it was saltwater and my lungs were coral. But now you are giving me that look from across the table, so I say, "No, it's not," very lightly, but not before swallowing something in my throat. A cherry pit, I think.

## On Giving Up Caffeine

*Second Place, Personal Essay Contest*

*by Ellen Beversluis*

So, I am addicted to caffeine. Not in the way that you're thinking: I don't just drink a lot of it and I crave it at weird times, or get jittery without it; there is just no without it. I am; therefore, it is.

There was a time, however, when I developed the farcical idea that I could exist happily without caffeine. It all began when I started noticing that I wasn't sleeping at night. I would lie in bed for hours staring at the tree outside my window. I cursed the street lamp shining in, cursed the breeze that invaded the room, then cursed the stuffiness when the window was closed. Never once did I admit to myself that I was as wired as a stick of dynamite. At three in the morning I would lie awake, counting coffee-colored sheep and praying for morning. Sleep would finally come. Dreams consisted of swimming in Mountain Dew streams and floating on fizzy clouds—picture Willy Wonka's Caffeine Factory—until I fell headfirst into the loud DiiiiiiiiiiING of my alarm clock.

One morning, after having slept a total of two hours and ten minutes, I said to my roommate, Poppy (name changed to protect the addicted), "This has got to stop!" She, being equally addicted, agreed. Thus began our plan for withdrawal: we would halt our caffeine intake altogether. We would get a full night's rest! In a burst of determination, I poured out the contents of the coffeepot, and we left for our classes.

An hour into my first class, I began to think this might not have been such a good idea after all. I was developing a migraine, and my head wouldn't stay planted upon my shoulders. I felt my body slump over the desk, arms flying out and dangling from each side of the desktop, cheek smooshed against the hard surface. The boy sitting to my left poked me, asking, "Are you okay?" "Mmpf" was all I could muster. "No damn it, I want a COKE!!!" my body roared.

Class ended. I pried myself from the desk and stepped out into . . . the sunlight. Never before had the sun glared down so vehemently. It could have picked any other day to grace me with the power of its glorious light! I shielded my face with my hands, glaring and growling at everyone who passed. My lip curled, my teeth bared, my fists clenched. People were swerving to avoid confrontation with this girl turned beast. Staggering across campus, I reminded myself of the ultimate goal: to exist happily without caffeine. A deep groan resonated from the core of my deprived body.

I entered the Roost where Poppy was waiting for me. Her body was hunched over, mouth wide opened, eyes glazed. We ordered our food and proceeded to the pop machine. "YAY!" my heart cried; "I can finally have a . . . Sprite." A chill coursed through me. Was I doomed to become a Sprite-drinker? Would my lips never again wrap around the sweet-tasting red and brown bottle of a Coke? Reluctantly, but nevertheless determined, I retrieved my Sprite and sat down, an empty feeling washing over me. I was lonely without the feel, the smell, the taste of my beloved Coke—the sweetness of the bubbly liquid on my lips, the

*CRaCkLE* and *PoP* it makes introducing itself to my tongue.

The day passed ever . . . so . . . slowly. In one of my classes I heard about a pill that could rid the body of toxins and help one overcome an addiction such as mine. My professor spoke of an herb that could be used to replace the desire for caffeine. I decided to take control! Rushing out to the store, I bought the organic substance that was about to change my life. I came home and popped one into my mouth, and one into the eager mouth of my roommate. We sat. We waited. Nothing happened. I don't know what I was expecting exactly—perhaps a halt to my headache, or at the very least, an instantaneous distaste for Coke products? But nothing happened.

That night I slept like a log, but to no avail. I awoke the next day, well-rested but entirely miserable. My life was in havoc. I wanted the feel of a coffee cup against my lonely palms. I wanted the instantaneous relief that a sip of coffee could bring. I wanted to stop shaking and be whole again.

That afternoon I sat on my bed, legs stretched over the side, back straight. My eyes focused in on the murky waters of the Coke bottle seductively wooing me from my desk, and I contemplated. The foundation upon which my life was based had plummeted from its glorious heights. No experience was complete without a (insert caffeine product of choice here) to bring life and energy to my listless body. Without caffeine I was nothing but a machine, going through the daily functions of life. I lifted the bottle and raised it above my head in triumph, shouting "With caffeine I am whole, I am alive, I am . . ." I took the forbidden gulp, "I am weak."

**Dismembered***by Melissa Tipton*

Only the  
one dead plant  
and the haz-

ily re-  
membered dream  
where I once

was someone.  
only the  
One dead plant.

## Pleasant Dreams

*by Vincent Xexaviar*

We roll and we tumble  
 Rising and falling again,  
 A harmonious laughter engulfs me,  
 A symphonic pleasure realm  
 As you release a primordial scream  
 Signifying to all  
*The ceremony is about to begin*

Rise and awake  
 Gasping for heavy air  
 As you forget about night  
 And day  
 And eternity  
 Your sticky, sweet nectar,  
 A by product of love,  
 Is oozing from your being  
 Tears of lust  
 Fall as you rise  
 Trembling with excitement  
 You call again  
 A rapturous flow  
 Like that of the river  
 Echoing a relentless pleasure

You clamber up spider spun webs to the clouds  
 To swim through my soft fingers  
 And be warmed by my effulgent splendor  
 Only to glide down now  
 Slowly  
 Traversing the collapse  
 To stay on top  
 Merely another juncture

You spiral earthward  
 A golden leaf into the  
 Fields of ecstasy  
 As you stare into oblivion  
 Mind numb  
 Body exploding and quivering  
 Ready to ascend once again  
 Toward the moon

A pale face martyr  
He tried to give you what I have  
But his rays are gone now  
And he sits cold  
Powerless and impotent  
Unable to understand  
Or fulfill your needs

As you descend this time  
I must pause  
And withdraw  
But I shall return,  
I promise  
Just shut your eyes now  
And sleep  
Sleep

Later  
When you wake  
I will shower you  
With my loving words  
Once again

Goodnight dear maiden

## Visit With My Brother

*by Michelle Casto*

Battered knights and pawns  
decorate the chipped board  
separating my brother and I.  
My young, vulnerable hand  
guides the white queen into position,  
and I call check hesitantly,  
with a small smile.

He laughs lightly and settles  
into the olive recliner,  
slowly sipping his Folgers.  
He asks about school  
and I tell him about  
joining chess club.

He tells tales of  
days in middle school—  
chess tournaments and  
team trophies.  
I want to tell him  
I remember,  
I was there.  
He tells me about the  
state championship,  
his loss to a nerd from the hills,  
and I laugh, remembering.

He asks if dad made me join,  
and I pause, say yes.  
I don't tell him I joined  
so he would notice me.

## What I Would Say at Your Funeral

*Third Place, Poetry Contest*

*by Matt Glaviano*

I forgot to feed the dog this morning  
because you always did that.

I couldn't figure out  
what she wanted when  
her insistent muzzle tapped  
against my knee.

Then I saw  
her empty bowl, and  
understood  
you were gone.

I am afraid the dog will starve.

I am lost without you.

## A Mid-Afternoon Drive

*by Mike Boblitt*

The setting sun spews bronze through the cracked curtain  
giving a surreal glow to the complimentary fruit.  
The golf bag leans in the corner—  
the driver's shadow like a cobra ready to strike the vanilla lampshade.

Twenty years on the PGA tour,  
Twenty years of picturesque golf courses in exotic getaways,  
Twenty years of nothing to do in the afternoon, evening, night.

An idea.

Tanned hands dial a number from the last guest's forgotten adult magazine—  
1-900-MAN-LOVE.

30 minutes later, a man is at the door—

Fabio hair, white silk shirt, black leather pants, and a jagged scar on his left  
cheek.

Golfer says, "Clothes off and up against the wall, please."

The sunlight bends around the man's chiseled ass.

He submissively places his hands against the wall  
and turns to give his patron a "you naughty boy" grin.

Golfer says, "Face forward."

Golfer grips his driver, drops a ball to the plush carpet.

The first shot ricochets off the right cheek, shatters the vanilla lamp.

The next misses entirely, dents the pale dry wall.

The third . . . a hole-in-one.

## Secret

*by Susan Zedella*

He could take my body  
and break it in his fingers  
as a stem snaps under pressure without bending  
I am vulnerable and bare  
in his strong, anxious grip  
unfolding like fragile petals before him  
delicate and new  
a blossom in need of sunshine  
I am eager for warmth  
turning my face towards the light  
But we exist in shadows  
This private obsession  
lives not in the glare of day  
We wait to conceal our admiration  
beneath a blanket of pale moonlight  
In darkness bits of truth escape  
and circle our heads in skewed orbits  
like bees in a frantic quest for pollen  
Our secret is stifling  
stunting my growth  
and draining my color  
I wilt in weariness  
A droplet descends from his body  
and splashes onto my arm  
surprising and cool  
My finger smoothes the surface of its landing  
only to find it has already been  
greedily absorbed into my skin  
A tiny drop of him which is now in me  
Yet it does not nourish  
It simply leaves me  
thirsting for more

## Catsup and Relish, No Onions

*Second Place, Short Story Contest*

*by Rebecca Rossiter*

Hot dogs are absolutely fascinating. At least, in my opinion they are. So much goes into them—a daunting combination of body parts and spices, really—and Oscar Meyer's finest is created for our taste buds. Hot dogs also intrigue me since people still buy them after hearing all the 20/20 horror stories, after scrutinizing the fine-print package labels; they seem to crave both the taste and the "American-ness" of those juicy little bodies. Heck, even the vegetarians eat tofu wieners nowadays. Found simmering in baseball stadiums across the country, in fairgrounds and grilling out on backyard patios (not to mention on every other street corner in New York City) hot dogs, like so many other simple things taken for granted, are a necessity to American culture.

It was because of this new-found philosophy on the average frankfurter that I found myself comfortably taking over one of the many wrought iron benches in Central Park, one that lounged directly across from one of the city's most famous hot dog stands.

Eddie Simon, affectionately nicknamed "Frank" by his regular customers, was known throughout New York for his special sauce and his belting Pavarotti-esque voice. Eddie could sing any Broadway tune and was downright good at it. Rumor had it he'd been offered a part in an up-and-coming musical but had turned it down when he found out he'd have to sell his cart, special sauce and all.

"I've got rhythm, I've got music! And hot dogs, folks! I've got hot dogs!" Eddie's tenor voice rang out clear and true across the lawn, and a few people stopped reading or chatting to glance up at him. An Asian couple, obviously tourists, stopped to snap a quick picture. Gershwin and Eddie made a perfect pair, I decided, and sat back to do what I always did in the park most days after school; I took out my vanilla pad of paper and began to sketch. Not just anything, mind you. I drew people: men in expensive suits, bums, nuns, and housewives—they all fascinated me. A person's face could hide so much, yet reveal a Niagara's worth of emotions. As I sketched strangers, I created imaginary lives and personalities for them. The hot dog stand was a perfect place to stake out, because customers would have to pause for a few seconds, giving me time to add a few swift strokes of detail. Some would even stop to chat or sing along with Eddie.

As I sharpened my colored pencils one by one, the sky was a periwinkle blue, and the clouds resembled wispy, white tire tracks fading into the east. I felt myself exhaling slowly, as if I'd been holding my breath for a long time without knowing it. I had really come to the park for a bit of peace, something I stumbled across quite easily most days among the sweetness of the trees and grass, the absence of cement and looming skyscrapers. There were times when I wholeheartedly loved New York, fell into the lustful rhythm of a typical day amid the ant farm called Manhattan. I'd find beauty everywhere: in flowers reaching through sidewalk cracks or in the rainbows reflected in the spewing

water of fountains. But other days, when all I wanted was the world to stand still with me, the city was a dentist's chair I couldn't seem to escape. A commotion that never sleeps can sometimes put a dent in any person's sanity. Sometimes, you feel you have nowhere to run, surrounded by the constant drive that keeps a city's heart pumping. Perhaps that's why I was sitting and watching a hot dog stand in Central Park that afternoon—to escape from having nowhere to go.

I had grown up in the outskirts of Brooklyn, a tough little tomboy named Jayne who learned the rules of the street before she learned her spelling or geometry. My mother had left us when I was only a toddler—no one really knows exactly why—but still, sometimes I think she'll come walking through the front door, looking just as beautiful and bewildered as I remember her. And then I'll laugh, not a happy Shirley Temple laugh, but a cruel, cynical one, because then she'll see that she's missed out on her little girl being a little girl. I'll say, "Hi, Mama. I'm fifteen now. You've missed over half of my birthday cakes, over half my Christmas mornings. I know what sex is, Mama. I've French-kissed a boy, and I'm a bleeding woman now. And you weren't the one to tell me these things. You didn't show me squat."

Eddie's singing breaks through my spiraling daydreams, and I try to shake off the ever-present thoughts of my absent mother. My father was always telling me I was way too old for my age, that I acted and talked more like an old woman than a kid. I knew I had grown up too fast, but how I looked at it, I didn't have much of a choice. Drawing was a way I could create the present world as I wanted it to be, colorful and filled with smiling faces. I was only drawing a person's surface, though, I knew, not what was really hidden way down deep in the inner caves I assumed everyone had.

I yawn and stretch my arms up—higher, higher, higher—then busily start to sketch a little Chinese man in a checkered red jacket buying a coney.

"Buck fifty," Eddie croons with his fat lips stretched into a business grin. He trickles the sauce on the hot dog and showers onions on top delicately, like he's decorating a cake with candy sprinkles.

An ice-cream truck rumbles by, followed by a squawking flock of laughing children, and I catch my reflection in its shiny windows: ratty hair pulled into two misshapen pigtails, wide nose, large, coffee-colored eyes. My father was black, my mother white, and because of this, I found myself desperately reaching for a concrete identity from a very early age. Since he worked during the day, my older brother Mikey and I hardly saw our father, a construction worker who told wild bedtime stories and smoked clove cigarettes like it was a religion.

Mikey, stubborn and mischievous, toppled into the wrong crowd as the wave of adolescence dragged him under, handed his life over to the heavy blanket that smothers any drug dealer. He'd had the bright idea when I was seven to use me to transport his goods; after all, no one would ever suspect a scrawny little kid, let alone a girl. Because I loved him, because I didn't quite understand, I did it. For nine months I was the key factor in bringing in my brother's astronomical salary. Mikey would buy me presents to keep me quiet, the best paints and pencils for my art collection. Then one day, my father came home from

work early, hugged his baby girl and found cocaine in my overalls. He beat my brother till he could barely stand.

So Mikey ran. Mikey ran and never came back. I was beginning to think that anyone I'd ever love would do the same.

"You never draw me, kiddo." Eddie was suddenly sitting down next to me, wiping the sweat beads from his wide brow with a Statue of Liberty hanky. It startled me, this encounter with the hot dog man. I didn't know quite what to say.

"You never draw me," he repeated. "Them pictures of yours sure are something, though. Bet you could sell them to the Met." I smiled, delighted yet cautious.

"When have you ever seen my pictures?" I demanded, realizing that my cheeks were turning strawberry.

"Oh, I see a lot of what goes on around here. And then there was that one time, when that storm hit and—"

"You helped me pick up the ones that'd blown away," I finished his sentence, remembering that day with the wind whipping at my face and Eddie and I scrambling to grab the last picture from the grass before the rain came.

"That's right," he said. "I see a lot of what goes on around here." His breath was minty, not hot and horrible like I'd expected it to be.

"Tell you what," he continued, pointing to his cart and standing. "I'll give you a wiener on the house if you make me a picture."

"Of what?" I blurted out.

"Me, of course," he chuckled and patted his Santa Claus belly. "You're a good kid. You come here everyday and never give me no trouble." He started back to his cart and then turned around, wagging his finger in my direction. "Make it a good one." And I thought to myself for a second that I wished I was his daughter. What a team we'd be! I'd help him sell his hot dogs, and I could draw people's portraits for five bucks apiece. We'd be living on Fifth Avenue by Easter.

I wasted no time in choosing my best pencils and placing them carefully by my side. With my tongue covering my upper lip in deep concentration, I speedily concocted what would turn out to be one of my favorite drawings. I couldn't believe I'd never thought to draw Eddie before; he was perfect. With his floppy ears and egg-shaped body, he resembled a funny fairy tale character. But he was beautiful, this hot dog man, beautiful for taking the time to talk to me, for noticing me at all.

In fifteen short minutes, the drawing of Eddie in all his glory was completed, and I ran over to hand it to him. He finished giving a customer change, and then turned his full attention to me.

"Ah," he smiled at the picture of him and his cart, framed by music notes and dancing condiments. "Picasso, you'd better watch out. It's a masterpiece for sure."

And for a moment, I believed that it was. For a moment, my heart swelled and I realized that I could be anything I wanted to be. I could be an artist, a real artist someday, and people would look at my work and wonder about the person

behind the colors and shapes and the conquered canvases. I'd show them all—my brother, my mother, my father—I'd show them that I wasn't going to abandon myself

Eddie took a steaming frankfurter from its rotating Ferris wheel, tucked it neatly into a toasted bun, and asked, "What do ya want on it, little missy?"

"Catsup and relish, no onions," I answered with no hesitation, hungrily eyeing the hot dog with my name on it.

"You can tell a lot about a person by what they order on their dog," Eddie said wisely, squirting on a perfect squiggly line of bright red catsup and spooning on sweet relish to top it off. "You, for instance, you're special." He grinned down at me, his eyes twinkling, and I knew he was going to break into song at any moment. I took the warm hot dog from him with fingertips stained with color, and enjoyed my first bite. Eddie laughed, throwing back his head, white ear hair and all, and started in on Rodgers and Hammerstein's "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top."

And as he sang to me, Jayne, the blooming artist from Brooklyn, I did feel special. Heck, I even felt important. And for once, I felt the city breeze blowing in something wonderful.

# As We Watch The Spirits Dance

*by Vincent Xexaviar*

Gazing deep  
 Into the cobalt  
 Celestial abyss  
 Chasms of mist  
 Transforming a canvas  
 For imagination

Whispering serpents of air  
 Slither amongst these entities  
 Cold, yet sharp  
 Like the eye  
 Of the necromancer

They dance with calculated balance  
 Churning young lovers' desire  
 Allowing the apparition  
 Of Eros  
 To gyrate before them

As the serpents grow  
 And envelop the eve  
 They quilt themselves  
 With shades of black  
 Bedding themselves  
 For twilight slumber  
 Forcing young lovers  
 Into hiding and to creep  
 Amidst the shadows

As the serpents lap the vapor  
 Their tongues dance with desire  
 Allowing springs to gush  
 Bursts of droplets erupt from their pores  
 They gasp and twist fate's desire  
 Rolling through the lowland  
 Trading regret for passion and passion for regret

As we watch the spirits dance

Their moans and pants  
 Rumble through the basin  
 The violent blinks of the enchanter  
 Break the witching hour  
 Strikes and scratches  
 Shaking leaves from trees  
 Making lesser animals flee  
 Forcing them to embrace  
 And flow slowly away

As the climax subsides  
 The blanket becomes a shroud  
 Holy and broken  
 Sifting moonlight and stardust  
 The explosion of one thousand diamonds

The mist drifts and serpents pass  
 Alas, the chaos of calamity has subsided  
 And the old wizard has laid down his wand

The breaking of the magic  
 Creates tender echoes to fade  
 And the sweet silence  
 Awakens the young lovers  
 Allowing them to extinguish  
 Their night's eye  
 Causing them to roll over  
 And fall fast asleep

## Wings

*by Angela Grandstaff*

Last night, in the undulating haze of sleep  
I dreamt you were a bird.

Perched proudly on the windowsill  
you stretched your wings and smiled—  
a strange bird smile, with your eyes.

I reached out to touch you and you flew away,  
the air carried your weight—  
over the deep sea of depression,  
beyond the highest mountain of disorder.

When I woke up I prayed,  
all my hopes for you were  
harbored by my devotions.  
One day you will find the wings  
that carried you away in my dream.

**model***by Becky O'Neil*

you lie unseeing  
a pale shape  
pooling darkness within your  
first contours:  
spine, pelvis, limbs  
my awkward black lines  
building your invisible  
poised bones

my thumbs smudge  
the charcoal shadows between  
your lips;  
your eyelashes are  
small flicks of my wrist  
along your inkpool eyes

i wake you slowly  
so you will be used to  
the light, and  
my cheeks grow pink  
as i strain to hear  
the wet red blood  
whispering beneath your  
paper skin.

**crossing paths with a Normal Girl***by Kimberly M. Lowe*

When I walk,  
I don't walk like you.

No bubble butt bobbing in the air;  
no 'pert and perky' perfect breasts thrust  
up, up and away;  
no nose tipped savoring  
the scent of the sky;  
no lashes fluttering gaily  
at just the right moment;  
no teased hair being tossed  
to snag willing passersby;  
no hands placed and angled  
for maximum exposure;  
no painted feet shuffling  
so daintily along;  
no lips that fully press,  
pout, and pucker;  
no hips swaying and swirling  
like reeds attracting  
all those fish in the sea.

My mom never taught  
your tricks to me.

## Daffodil

*by Shannon Fishel*

Her crowned head with  
golden lips of tissue paper  
embracing a furry tongue,  
oracles in nectar grains  
whisper secrets to buzzing slaves,  
bladed arms stretch upward  
from the altar of earth  
in a life of worship  
to a burning goddess,

she is my daughter,  
a seed rooted in my soul,  
I fed her, I loved her to life.

## Crossings

*by Tom Steckert*

I walked along a river bank and found  
I could not cross; the current was too swift,  
the river strewn with rocks and logs adrift;  
nor could I pass, nor could I wade around.

I sat and pondered, while the river raged—  
To wait for help? Cry out, would I be heard?  
Or wish in vain to cross it like a bird?—  
and what, to my long journey, this presaged.

"A bird?" I thought, then knew what I must do—  
retrace my steps until I found a ford  
or bridge to cross the water as it roared;  
decision made, back down the path I flew.

A choice I've made quite often since that day:  
concede, retreat and find another way.

## Upon the Arrival of My 22<sup>nd</sup> Year

by Stacy L. Brannan

The man I have come to love  
sleeps in the bed  
two rooms over,  
hugging the pillow  
he says is a poor substitute

for me.

I sit, enjoying the late-evening stillness of my new apartment—

the gentle humming of the first space  
I can claim my own,

my pen, tilted,  
pressed to paper like  
the staking of national colors  
into foreign soil.

This is air virginal to poesy,  
a moment historical, awaiting  
documentation.

There is a freedom to the blank air,  
the blank page—

this is the first footstep of the journey.

## Battling the Cover Girl Army

By Claire Cahoon

I am a sarcastic girl, admittedly. I like dark humor. I like wit. I don't like talking about makeup or girls who do. I don't even like wearing pantyhose. Yet there I was, contestant number fifteen at the regional competition for Ohio's Junior Miss.

I see my error now. Desperate for scholarship money for my upcoming freshman year of college, I am drawn in by the shiny, full-color brochure for the contest. Its bold, perky print assures me, "This is not a beauty contest." Ohio's Junior Miss is a competition for outstanding, intellectual, career-minded, young women. No, really, we swear.

So I take the first step. I enter. Besides the enticing brochure, I have a high-school boyfriend encouraging me to enter, mostly because of his own amusement at my competing to be anything called a Junior Miss. My mistake doesn't hit me right away. In fact, I am feeling pretty confident as I ride with my parents down from Cleveland to Mount Vernon High School in central Ohio. This would be good. This would almost be fun.

This would make me vomit. I arrive with my garment bag and change of shoes. That's right. I'm not yet tipped off by the brochure's stipulation of one "nice outfit" for interviews and a "workout outfit" for (gulp) the "fitness portion." No, I am not yet afraid. The brochure has so reassuringly chirped that "this is not a beauty contest." So I register. They hand me a number.

"What's this for?" I ask.

"The poise portion," the evil woman returns with a tight smile.

"The what? But I thought . . ."

"And here is a list of questions for you to prepare for that portion as well," she says.

Hold on. Number on my back? This is not a good sign. Poise? The now less-than-credible brochure had informed me that the competition consisted of a personal interview with the judges and a talent section, where you could sing or dance or whatever. I am prepared to recite a monologue. That seemed less demeaning than prancing around in a sequin leotard, tapping to "The Good Ship Lollipop." But they have changed the rules. I will be prancing anyway, except in heels with a number on my back. This is a beauty contest. The brochure has betrayed me.

"Mom, I don't want to do this," I say. I have to stop this insanity.

"What? What are you talking about? Are you nervous?" she asks.

"No, no. This is a beauty contest. I have a number! I have to walk around to music! I want to leave," I say.

"Claire, honey, we drove two hours to Mount Vernon for this. You are going to make the best of it. You'll be fine. Good luck."

With that, the evil, tight-lipped woman whisks all the parents away so they can torture us privately. I look around for the first time at the other girls. They are all wearing business suits, the kind with the cute little skirts. They have their hair teased to the gymnasium rafters.

"I am going to kill myself," I think. "I am going to slit my wrists."

We are quickly split into groups, like the cattle we have become. My group is the first to learn the "choreography" for the strutting around with a number on my back section, a.k.a. "poise." This "choreography" mainly involves us all taking dainty little steps in unison, making a revolving pretzel shape so that each girl can be ogled equally. As I shuffle along to Garth Brooks, I am suddenly reminded of a Holocaust death march. I begin to wonder whether if I throw a faint they'll let me leave? What if I trip and twist an ankle in these ridiculous shoes? I bet I can forfeit.

No such luck, but the prancing session mercifully ends and I am led away to await my interview. A chance to talk to the other girls. Goody. I'm inwardly hoping that some of the others feel as cheated as I do. Surely they all read the shiny brochure, snowing them to the possibility of being involved in a beauty contest. I sit with my group, anxious for compatriots.

"Did anyone else get the brochure? This sure is a lot like a beauty contest, huh?" I say. Have you ever been to a farm and seen the blank stares of cows? Bingo.

After a relatively awkward silence, one girl with stiff-sprayed brown hair and a teal green suit brightens.

"Was anyone else at the Miss Teen Ohio regionals?" she asks. Suddenly this girl has enlisted an army, a squealing, giggling Cover Girl army.

"I went to the northwest regionals!" one new soldier says.

"Oh?" the first girl smiles. "I made the semi-finals." More squeals. I am hopelessly outnumbered.

I am finally called for an interview. I sit down in my very non-business suit, sale-rack dress and cross my legs awkwardly. Honestly, I don't remember any of the questions they asked me, but I do remember my mind taking an embarrassing turn for the worst as I start to answer them as a beauty contestant. I remember saying something about how awful drugs are and something about making the world a better place. And, I'm embarrassed to admit this, I give them some tears. Yes, I actually fake crying. It's like the judges have a mental hold on me, making me chuck all my earlier resolutions to be myself, cynicism and all, to fly in the face of this ridiculous contest. When I leave the room they are all beaming at me. I feel sick to my stomach.

I suffer through the "physical fitness" practice by astral projection. With each jumping jack I do next to Cindy in the pink warm up suit I imagine myself in Spain, on the French Riviera, at Alcatraz. Anywhere is better than here. I try to ignore my plain, white T-shirt and old shorts. I especially ignore the thought of going through this ridiculous routine for the actual competition, in front of people, in front of my parents.

We break again. I am back chatting with the Maybelline brigade. I can actually feel myself getting stupider, but I do pick up a lot of valuable information about mascara and what blush shades give the appearance of high cheekbones. I start to wonder if any of these girls has read a book before. I wonder if they have at least read something that doesn't have a full-color picture of N'Sync on the opposite page and makeup tips as its feature article.

As I go with these girls to change for the talent portion, the first part of the program, the ridiculousness of the entire situation is closing in on me. I'm afraid

I won't make it through the program without laughing. I'm worried I'll bean someone in the head with my heel when they ask me what I would do to make the world a better place.

My parents return. They can see the wild look of complete desperation on my face. I think they are intentionally ignoring it. I can envision myself describing this experience to a shrink thirty years from now.

"They made me put a number on my back and strut in a pretzel formation!" I'll shriek.

The competition begins. Ooooh. Lights dim, the girls shuffle backstage in their gold lamé tuxedo shirts and fluffy pink boas. There is an inordinate amount of tap dancing in the talent portion. There is also a cruel amount of some evil substance known as "lyric dance." Please, not another girl dancing as a flower opening to the sun. I just can't take another one.

My turn comes up. For the first time all day I am relaxed and in my element. My monologue is dramatic. It has something worthwhile to say. It is poignant and beautiful. It counteracts tap dancing. At least, I hope it does. But this little oasis of Zen will not save me from the inevitable. I go to change for fitness.

The fitness portion involves some group aerobics, mostly jumping jacks and other elementary school exercises. Lucky for us, it also boasts a little moment in the artificial sun for each girl. We each get a tiny spot to do crunches and jumping jacks at the front, while the other girls step in time in the background to "Shake Your Groove Thing." Could they make this more painful? I can see my parents in the audience through the spotlight as I do my "personal" crunches for the rapt judges.

"You will pay for my therapy," I mentally beam at my folks. They smile encouragingly, pretending not to be able to read my mind. Apparently, they were previously unaware of my ability to jump rope to music. I am such a multifaceted, well-rounded girl.

I continue to radiate multi-talent as I strut around the stage to old Garth, smiling a smile so rigid my mouth hurts and my bottom lip starts to shake. I'm so close to finishing. I'll be going home soon. I am planning to berate my parents the entire way.

The last half of poise mercilessly arrives. We wait in the wings in a line, each girl rehearsing under her breath what she'll say.

"I'd make the whole world cupcakes."

"I'd paint the White House yellow. It's much cheerier."

"I'd find the person who wrote the Junior Miss brochure and . . ." (I admit that comment is mine.)

As angry and humiliated as I feel by this point, when I walk across that little stage and stand by the microphone for my question the judges beam their mental rays on me again. I become a full-fledged Girl Scout. I actually utilize my horrific experience in my answer by saying something about all the "great girls" I've met today and how I feel "really close to them."

I am without honor.

I don't remember leaving that day. I don't remember the drive home, but I know I held off on berating my parents. This was obviously the result of post-traumatic stress syndrome. All of that is a blur. However, I vividly remember the

envelope I received a few weeks later. The same perky typeface on the return address.

I am a semi-finalist. I am one step closer to being Ohio's Junior Miss. They love me. They want me. Yet, somewhere between reading the acceptance letter and screaming in horror I decide to seek other avenues of college funding. Ohio's Junior Miss would have to settle for a tapping debutante or a lyric dancing beauty queen. I will go back to cynicism and sarcastic humor, a little bit wiser, yet a little bit weaker than when I left. As much as I hate to admit it, that ridiculous competition had made me face some dark angels. Perhaps, I mused, buried under my sarcastic exterior was a girl who actually wanted to fit in, a girl who wanted to be liked. Maybe that girl really wanted to be just like everyone else.

Thank God, I killed her and buried her in my basement.

## Creation of Me

*by Stacy Campbell*

Brushing fingertips  
Graceful strokes of an artist.  
Your hands form me—  
Like clay I mold  
To each curve of your palm.

You trace the shape of my body  
Cupping, arching, smoothing  
Allowing no air or space between us.  
Both you and I  
Becoming one in your art.

Delighting at the presence  
Of your touch;  
I gently fall into your fingertips  
Which bud my fingertips  
Springing with new life.

You have made me  
I am your Galatea—  
Sculpted by your hands.  
Intertwined in the tiniest piece of you  
I become whole.

## Buddha Cameos

*by Clint Zehner*

I Frenched her a cherry  
                   a smile, "I love maraschinos."  
 Then smoking we scraped  
 rusty screen with our tongues  
 and gazed at my asphalt backyard.

The ambient lamplight  
 buzzed in my skull like the thought  
                   I'm alone  
 and she knows "there's a guy for [me]"  
                   that parties will linger  
                   and who cares I'm pissed at mediocrity?

(I told my dear friend of satori one lunch  
                   and she quite excited,  
 "I'm feeling religious—  
 oh, look, they're making slushies!")

So I went on the porch  
                   wearing bathrobe and boots  
 and gulped from a red wine bottle.  
 was stung by the prajna that humans are  
 tragic species of vegetable:

"My pants are so loose—  
                   Hallelujah!  
 This weight loss thing is working . . .  
 how 'bout Steak & Shake?"

So I took my roommate there and told  
 him that people are onions  
 ("We're so shallow," he said  
                   and I, "everyone lies who says  
                   they're not")  
 you peel and peel  
 and pretty soon nothing.  
                   At last the waitress brought our check  
                   we stiffed her on the tip.

# Depends on how you look at it

*by Allison Barrett*

Here's the earth from a moon-point perspective:

regal, majestic.  
 A gleaming cold palace,  
 it saunters through space,  
     suspended  
 among twinkling stars.  
     Twirling slowly,  
     inevitably  
 along its predestined path.  
     Here's awe,  
 and I can't catch my breath.

Crash back down,  
     zoom  
 to up-close person perspective,  
 where earth is beautiful in a fragmented way.

Small things,  
     like butterfly wings,  
     add up to larger things,  
     like a landscape so gorgeous  
 that again, you forget to breathe.  
 All tangled up in parts combining,  
     trying to remember  
     the whole  
     they are a part of.

It's very hole-y here,  
 and that includes backward beauty,  
 the homeless man's missing tooth  
     you noticed when he smiled.  
 Beautiful BECAUSE he smiled.  
 He knew that we are always  
     adding up to everything,  
     in millions of possible  
     and impossible ways, like

there's a song playing now  
that I want to turn inside out with.

Violins and even whole pianos  
tumbling forth,  
as together we lean deep,  
then deeper into the ether,  
exploding glitter dust  
into the velvet night.

Lap the darkness from the streets.

I wish I could meet  
Dean Moriarty,  
who feels this stuff too,  
only...

it seems he's fictional.  
(but I don't know if I buy that;  
cuz haven't we all been him  
from time to time?)

I hope we meet (all of us)

One Day,  
tripping giddy  
through the alley way,  
full of wonder...

I try to maintain all of This,  
but It spills out of me,  
away,  
trickling down the storm drains,  
absorbing back into the earth,  
back to where it came from.

I cool down.  
I was so close.

Calm and collected,  
Lean back to moon-point perspective.  
Begin again.

## Holding

*by Becky O'Neil*

That night she left the window  
open, her stomach a clenched fist,  
as the rain pulled down the sky  
and pressed black leaves into  
cracked cement;

when she slept, she woke into  
a dusky forest, branches waving as if  
submerged, as if the wind was  
water, blind twig fingers tapping at  
lightning scars;

her hands, small quick birds, did just  
what the story said: filled the wolf with  
stones, and sewed him back up,  
his insides swollen against  
the stitching.

Oh, but she knew too well the feeling,  
throat scratched with granite, belly  
weighted and ponderous, no grip to hold  
the light floating bones of old woman,  
little girl.

She knew they were not ghosts, but  
shadows he carried in his lungs, for she,  
too, woke exhaling them into the dark,  
once more collecting water in  
empty palms.

