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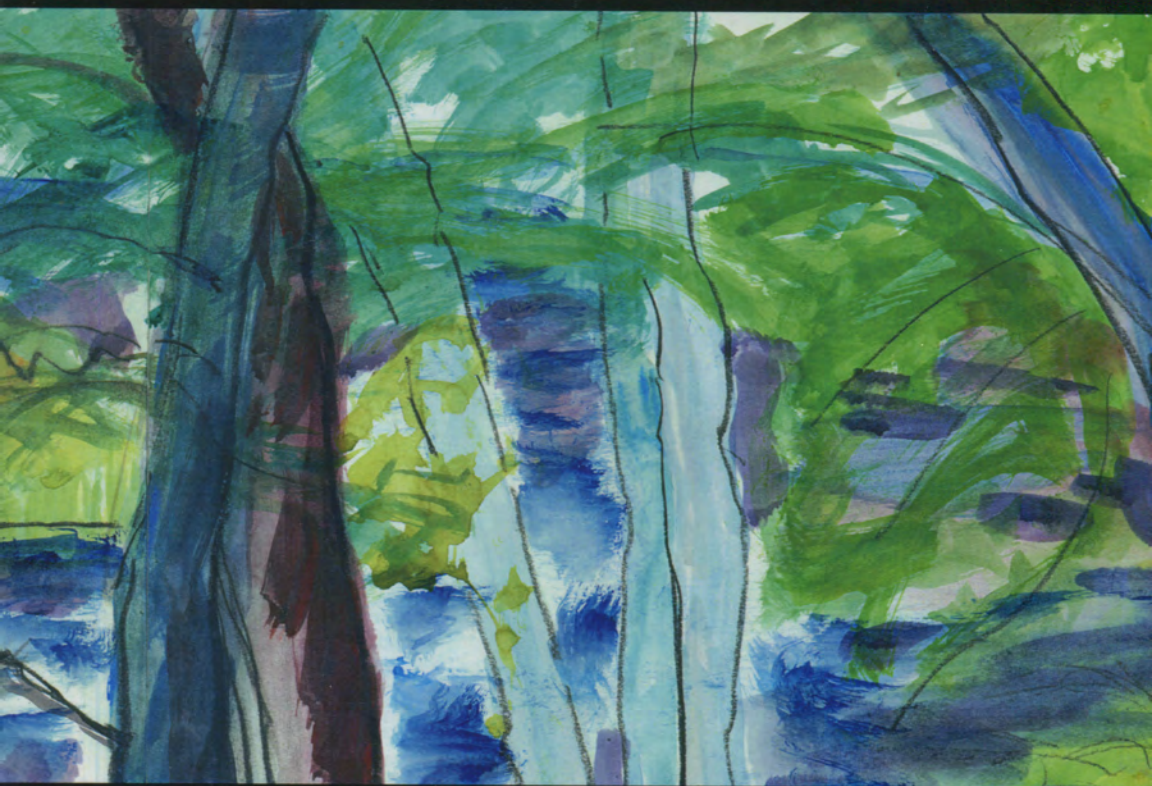
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The Pecan Grove Review staff would like to extend thanks to all who shared their literary works. The quality of the submissions received made the selection process very difficult; your talents are greatly appreciated.

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Table of Contents

Dedication...9

Poetry Part I

H. Palmer Hall

Elegy 16...12

Natalie Hightower

On the Backs of Bees...13

Bailey Furgeson

The First Swing...14

Stephanie Anne Motz

Prayer...15

Bonita Sarah Babu

Dreamland...16

Glenn Hughes

The Treasure...17

Diane G. Bertrand

Why Do Poets Dress In Black?...18

Natalie Hightower

Still Loading...19

Cyra Dumitru

*Conversation with My Mother-in-Law:
Recovering from Illness and Depression...20*

Justin Quiroz

Song of the Lost...21

H. Palmer Hall
Elegy 8...23

Non-Fiction Part I

Amber-Rae Nino
One Black Olive...26

Cyra Dumitru
*What the Guadalupe River Told Me the First Friday of
Spring...27*

Francisca B. Castro-Redditt
Black hearts broken dreams...28

Kelly Montgomery
Shouldn't You Be Over It By Now?...31

Diane G. Bertrand
Climbing Up From the Rubble...33

Noel Shaheen
My Mother's Tale...35

Mary Lynne Gassaway Hill
Five Minutes and a Shell Casing...39

Isaac Lucio
Persona...43

Noe Domingo Garza III
Blue Fury...46

Nick Canedo
Mrs. Brite's Gun...49

Poetry Part II

Mary Lynne Gassaway Hill
Easter People in a Good Friday World...52

Glenn Hughes
Scandal In San Antonio...53

Amber-Rae Niño
Three with Barbie...54

Stephanie Anne Motz
Polenta...55

Celine A. Jacquemin
A Letter to Gracie...56

Stephanie Anne Motz
A Familiar Conversation...57

Noe Domingo Garza III
Death-Mute...58

Alexander Eakins
The Purge is Near...60

Fiction

Alexander Eakins
The Purge...62

Alexandra Birr
Freedom's Worth...66

Kassandra Lozano
God was busy. And my spot was taken....72

Sarah Cortinaz
The Battle of Rose Hallow...74

Gregory Valdez
No Warranty...79

Alexandra Birr
The Silence...82

Kelly Montgomery
A Trapped Bird...85

Non-Fiction Part II

Kalpana Mukunda Iyengar
My Portentous Blanket...90

Amal Alijubran
Childhood Memories...92

Xiang Shen
My Grandmother and I...94

Hanouf Alotaibi
Swimming Pool...96

Noor Al Abdulmohsin
My Noisy Group...98

Abdullah Khalifa
My Children's Behavior...100

Amal N. Alshehri
One of My Childhood Memories...101

Li Dongfeng
My First Flight Experience...103

Julia Dickens
Third Grade Life Lesson...105

Anndria Flores
An Everyday Dad...108

Poetry Part III

Sara Cabrera
Drowned...112

Julia Dickens
Born To Die...113

Angela Sobery
Battle Cry...115

Emily Bryant-Mundschau
The Close...116

John Moore
Memory...117

Paloma Salinas
Rio Grande City...118

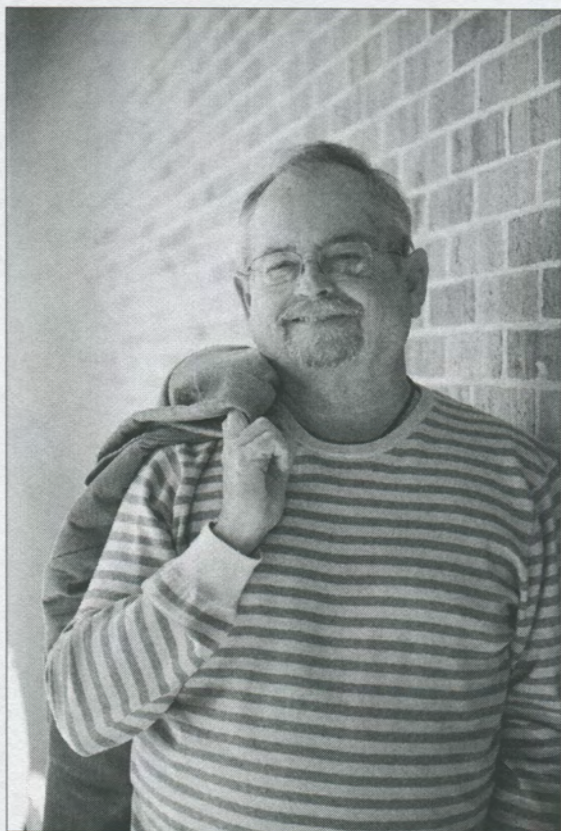
Kristen Burress
Mysterious Purple Flower...119

Matthew Mendez
Sobriquet: Aopli...120

Paloma Salinas
San Benito Street...121

Stela Khury
Agent Provocateur...122

Final Reflections...123



This issue is dedicated to
Dr. Palmer Hall (1942-2013).

Poetry

Elegy 16

H. Palmer Hall

(for my mother)

"Born twice, he has two mothers, one who dies, and one the mortar in which he's tried"—Li-Young Lee

My mother worked as a carhop at the Pig Stand on Calder and hated every minute of it. Not a career woman, no, still she had a "progressively responsible career:" car hop, clerk,

head cashier at a supermarket. She never wanted to work, not a part of her generation, I suppose. But she did damned well for a woman who never finished junior high school. She was

only forty when my father died—when the ship sank—and she grieved for many years, but she did not go to work again. She tended her garden, her relatives and friends.

And when she died, her daughter tended her in her home, she faced the back yard which she had planted, the crabapple tree she grew from a small plant, the rich figs, the encroaching swamp.

She smiles, hears my sister reading to her from the New Testament, and looks at her property. My father returns from a long voyage.

On the Backs of Bees

Natalie Hightower

I don't want to meet you in summer,
when the sun stays close to us, and
feelings are flimsy things,
flighty and prone to sudden stops.

I wish to see you in the fall
as the air swirls crisp and cool
we teeter on edge of something serious
much more sure of ourselves.

I see you still when winter comes,
a cold hand presses to the back of my neck,
pushes me forward, frosts my breath,
you think hot tea is the solution.

Spring arrives on the backs of bees,
and you're still here by my side,
you and I catch perfume on the air,
shedding our winter clothes.

Summer rounds on us again,
we welcome it cautiously,
our noses turned up seeking the sun
hoping we don't burn.

The First Swing

Bailey Furgeson

I grip the club.
My senses take in the fresh cut grass.
The fairway constricts.
Thinner
and thinner.

Inhale.

My fingers tighten.
My blood pumps
loudly enough,
sounds as though a bass drum
teases my nerves alongside me.
I take my first swing.

Hours pass.

The ball floats up.
Higher
and higher
above the tree line.
Finally it lands softly on a pillow of grass.

Exhale.

Prayer

Stephanie Anne Motz

Having snuck upstairs,
she lay unquiet where I found her.
I lowered my ear to the door
listening for shuddered breath.
I heard the tap of beads coiling
into a pile of more.

Entering the room, crawling across the bed
to her, I cradled my mother as she once
cradled me. I picked up the end
Of her rosary, twisting
beads between my fingers,
our lips locked in the act of prayer
begging Mary, *pray—*

Dreamland

Bonita Sarah Babu

The girl closed her eyes,
Listening to the voice of her mother.
Within seconds she fell asleep,
Transporting her to the land of dreams.
There a boy welcomed her,
He was her guide and friend in that land.
He showed her lollipop trees and cotton candy bushes,
She was told to eat to her fill.
She ate some and saved some more for later
And she was shown fountains of all kinds of soda.
They played with talking cupcakes
Ran with multi-colored bubblegum
And swam in vanilla milkshake with flying Oreo dolphins.
She had a lot of fun and her face was glowing.
As she was asking her friend about more sights,
She felt herself being pulled into the air
She looked down at her friend
And she was waving at her.
She closed her eyes and opened them
And she looked into the eyes of her mom.
It was time for school.

The Treasure

Glenn Hughes

She watches her hands as they lower the cover
of the red-lacquered Chinese box, just large enough
to hold the many letters inside—but it will do,
there won't be more letters. Her delicate thumbs
push tight the front clasp over the twin protruding rings
in its familiar fit. Fine work from the nineteenth century.
Her hands rest on the box with their red-lacquered nails—
hands so much older than the newest letter inside.
She looks at them, trying to divine the past.

Why Do Poets Dress In Black?

Diane G. Bertrand

Do they want to blend into the darkness
literally and figuratively?
Or maybe it's a continuous mourning for
a dead lover, the urban wasteland, or
the empty penny jar in the back of the closet.

Maybe she was a nun in a past life;
maybe he wants to hide the tattoo from a drunken mistake.
Or does a body feel pale and wearing black
helps one totally fade away?

After the reading at open mic
do they have to attend a funeral?
Maybe it's easier to hide in a cemetery at night.

Could it be the poets never took a color theory class?

Perhaps those little black berets
aren't made in yellow, green or purple.
Or maybe that poet was forced to wear
Khaki uniforms for twelve years and can't
match patterns, stripes, or plaids.

Maybe they couldn't find white clothes in their size.

Do some like the sleek black cat look?
To look elegant like a grand piano;
to look thinner, older, younger, wiser.

Or because it is so sexy
watching a long, blonde ponytail
swish itself against black satin.

All I know is when I arrive at the poetry reading,
wearing a blouse embroidered with *flores de colores*,
I am the lone peony in a field of black orchids.

Still Loading

Natalie Hightower

The words stayed poised on the cusp of his teeth
stuck on his tongue like sun warmed taffy
as they sat in the cool café that was filled
with the comings and goings of people with more
important lives, more interesting conversations.

He thought about what he wanted to say, but suffered
a disconnect somewhere between his mouth and
his brain. Still loading, the right words flashed for a
second before they disappeared and again, still loading.
He sipped his ice tea and felt his palm slippery
was it condensation, or was that sweat?

He frowned and still couldn't seem to pry the words out.
He could hear the operator trying desperately to connect him,
her movements swift and impatient as she worked to get
his mouth reconnected with his mind. Please hold, she
demanded, and tried again.

He cleared his throat and gazed across the table
his eyes that shifted here and there, nervously.
He sipped his tea again, hoping to grease the log jam
that surrounded his tongue and wiped his palms across
his polyester and cotton blended pants.

He frowned, please hold, still loading.

Conversation with My Mother-in-Law: Recovering from Illness and Depression

Cyra Dumitru

"It is a beautiful day; the sun shines," she says.
"My blinds are closed. My blinds are closed
because I still have thrush.
I can't taste anything I eat.
Not even the strawberry
jam on my toast."

So, closing the blinds
will cure your thrush?

"Yes."

Song of the Lost

Justin Quiroz

A silver bird flies upon a windowsill
Peering into the window the perched bird sits there
As the sun begins to fall from the Earth
Welcoming the darkness of the nights sky
The Silver Bird sings his song

As I sit on my bed alone and scared as I lie awake at night
Stricken with fear I'm always alert
I curl up into a ball
Clutching my knees close to my chest

Wanting to disappear into the night
My left eye is still swollen
As the shadows begin to fall
Light is but a glimmer shining from the moon

Through the broken blinds the dust particles shine brightly
Illuminating the fear in my eyes
Suddenly the floor begins to creak
I know what's coming next
My body tenses up.....

As I try to hold my breath
There is no way out
I am left to suffer alone
Filled with fear I can no longer move

What fate is to await me tonight?
The cracks of the whip....the slings of the ropes
The fear is overwhelming
Suddenly the door bursts open
I try to pretend I'm somewhere else

I lay still hoping not to be found
I'm grabbed by my neck
I begin to weep and cry more than ever
After one fist to the head

I hear his song and I go back to sleep
The songbird perched on the windowsill
Concludes his song as he looks into the window
Gaining one last sight of the boy
Before departing into the night's sky
He cries a golden tear drop
Only to sing his dreary song upon another window
Someday the dream will end

Elegy 8

H. Palmer Hall

My own Pacific crossing was mild, nothing arresting
until we approached Subic Bay. I lost my contacts
In the middle of so much ocean some shark
is probably wearing them still. We lost one soldier

who jumped overboard, were pinned in concertina wire
on the beaches of Subic Bay, then churned on to Da Nang
and south to Chu Lai. Chu Lai to Nha Trang, Nha Trang
to Pleiku and the Central Highlands: KonTum, Dak To.

Forty-five years ago, the years compressed like poetry,
the past, the present—all one, all demanding attention.
Where to start and where to end? What side roads
to stray and explore? It is all one, nothing spins off.

A young girl sitting on a water buffalo stares vacantly at us,
almost nods. Her father pushes the plow into rice paddies.



Non-Fiction
Part I

One Black Olive

Amber-Rae Nino

To the inmate who requested one black olive as your last meal, I thought about you yesterday, well, I thought about your last meal request. I questioned what made you so different from the others, if by chance you were different.

From each photo to photo I viewed, I couldn't place my finger on why, but the others' food choices made me smile, even chuckle here and there. It's what's caught my attention, an article focused not so much on you, or the others, but of photos of prisoner's last food selections. I can't recall what triggered my attention, perhaps boredom or hunger, but I do remember the last meals, each placed on orange sectioned trays. One solely filled with fruit: a ripe closed banana, a full headed pineapple and a handful of whole fresh strawberries. While another held just two crisp-dipped waffle cones and two pints of Haggan Daaz Vanilla.

But, yours, yes yours, had me thinking about myself, who you were, and that one black olive. I thought "hmm...a whole mushroom pizza, I would choose with lemon tea, yes that'd make me content." But content? Could someone be really content holding their knowledge so close...knowing the day, hour and minute of their death? Well, I believe you weren't. I envisioned you with a lack of appetite. That the thought of death greatly unsettled your stomach, perhaps like the feeling you got when you took your driver's test or when public speaking made you cringe. That you knew you better than most assumed the kind of person you existed to be, and that one black olive would suffice. Yes, this was your reasoning for ordering practically nothing. It had to be...Not simply because you didn't care or were angry. Nope, it was not that simple, couldn't have been. Perhaps you were scared... 'cause though I couldn't see your eyes, or talk to you face to face, I swear... I sensed your humanity.

What the Guadalupe River Told Me the First Friday of Spring

Cyra Dumitru

Before God made the world, he made drums, drums of all kinds. And then, God made a woman to play the drums.

At first, she was awkward with the rhythms. It had been many years since she had drummed, hiding as she was in the seriousness of God. Before long, however, she had all the drums gathered around her in a spiral and she became a flame with many hands, hastening from drum to drum in such fluid, fantastic rhythms that God began to dance.

Woman drummed. God danced.

The rhythms of drummer and dancer called out to the seeds of the world scattered in the infinite mind and heart of God. God's great dancing feet sang, "Let there be light, and let there be its opposite." Air was born, carrying with it the twins of sun and moon.

God's dancing feet sang, "Let there be water, and let there be its opposite." Shadows from the flames of the drumming woman turned inside out and became rain. Drought-stricken land appeared and caught the rain. Rivers found their paths, carved journeys into the land toward the gigantic nets of the oceans. Trees of all kinds: cypress, fig, ebony, mahogany, cherry, pine, redwood, palm, sequoia, baobab, mesquite, cottonwood, willow, oak, elm, Japanese maple, apple, laurel, and magnolia took root in beautiful rhythms all around the Earth – rhythms rippling from the hands of the drumming woman.

God's dancing feet sang, "Let there be animals and seasons." From the flames flew and crept, flickered and scurried, rippled and leapt, trotted and ambled, swam and sprang thousands of creatures. And it was Spring! Winter politely bided its time, along with summer and autumn.

Woman drummed, God danced, the world flowed as it was made to do.

Black hearts broken dreams

Francisca B. Castro-Redditt

Well, here it goes. I didn't have a happy childhood. As a matter of fact I'm pretty sure my childhood was one of the worst. Of course, there is always somebody who has had a worse one. Usually since you are the one feeling the hurt, pain, and devastation of the terrible situations it makes you feel that your misgivings are the worst. I had a terrible father; he was one of the most evil persons that I have seen on this planet. Even though he was the worst individual I've ever known, I still loved him because I knew no different. There is no way I can stress how mean and evil he was. I guess I can attribute his attitude to the different life experiences he went through, but I think I would just be making excuses for the devil.

I tried to think of all my childhood memories, but all the good ones would not be enough to write my essay. I don't want pity or anybody to feel sorry for me. This is something I just went through. I have two half-sisters on my mother's side from her first marriage. I have a younger sister from my mom and dad. All together we make four and I'm the third child. I love all my sisters very much. I'm very proud of them and how they are doing in life. Their childhoods weren't easy ones either, but I'm very positive mine was the worst.

I was an excellent child, great at school, helpful at home, and an outstanding daughter. But it really didn't make a difference or count too much in my household; all of this was expected of me. I didn't receive special treatment or even congratulations for the good things I did. It was just my duty. I owed it to them. Why? I have no clue. They didn't give me any special motivation to strive for perfection. They thought that what they were doing as parents was enough. I endured mental, emotional, physical and sexual abuse on a daily basis. We all did. Depending on how my father's day went dictated how we were tortured that day. My mother and I received the brunt of the brutality. I felt it was my responsibility to be the protector, to take the blows for both of them if I could.

My father was a gambler and one of his vices was to race horses. This particular day was Sunday, the most important day for the races. I was preparing my homework for Monday. It was a study on a novel by Gabriel Garcia Marquez—he is a very famous and talented writer. I was very proud of my work so far. I still had some questions and there was nowhere to find answers. This was the 1980's and I had no commodities or permission to leave my

house to go and do some research at the library. We could only go to school and the grocery store. So I did the only thing I could think of, which was call my older sister at school in Ohio and ask her my questions. She was at College in Notre Dame. She is a music virtuosos and her specialty among many musical instruments is the cello. She is awesome; she is currently playing for the Blue Lake Symphonic Orchestra in Ohio. I knew she had read the novel so I figured she could help me with my questions, and that she did. My project was coming out great. I was sure I would get one of the best grades in class.

After my work was completed, I was telling my mother it had been a great idea to call my sister to finish my work. She had made the suggestion. She was very proud of her daughter and her academic abilities. Meanwhile, my father had been listening to the horse races on the radio and he was not doing so well. This was definitely a recipe for disaster. He was furious. When he heard us talking about my project and how my big sister had helped, he had only one comment: "she is nothing but a dirty nigger." My older sister is black, and my father among other things is a racist. My mother, like any other mother would, told him in a low voice that my sister was not a dirty nigger. That was all it took. Upon hearing, he stood and walked towards my mother and started beating her. The beating started in the living room and moved all the way down the long corridor. My mother was trying to get away from him, but he was merciless. Meanwhile, my little sister and I were in a state of panic yelling and crying for him to stop. Once he reached the end of the corridor he managed to corner my mother in one of the rooms. By the way all this time he had been hitting her. She got cornered and could no longer stand up; she fell down on the floor. We could no longer watch, so we stood in a corner in the room next door crying and screaming for him to stop.

We didn't know what to say. All we could yell was that he was right that she was a "dirty nigger" and to please stop hitting her. I remember the sound of every kick, slap, and punch, even over our screams. I remember that it was around dusk because I could see his shadow reflected on the wall; I could see when he raised his arm to strike and his leg to kick her. By then we were screaming uncontrollably and senselessly until finally we saw him come out of the room. We thought it was over. He walked out to the other room when he got tired of hitting her to get his revolver. Yes, to get his revolver so he could shoot her. Oh my God! I thought we were all going to die for sure this time. He was about to shoot her because he was in a trance. Our screams wouldn't stop him. My

mother started screaming for her life and the only thing that saved her was when she pleaded for her life on his mother's name. Then, he finally stopped and left the room.

I was so afraid. I let go of my younger sister. I had been holding her in a fierce hug. I had to go and pick up my mother, or what was left of her. When I went into the room my heart shattered. My mother's body lay in pool of blood and urine. My knees went weak if I wanted to call for the ambulance and he wouldn't allow it. I gently helped her up, afraid that he would be back to finish all of us. My mother couldn't and wouldn't leave the house. I just will never understand why. Two of her ribs were broken, both eyes blackened and sunken in, lost some teeth, was bruised everywhere, had lacerations in all areas of her body. I couldn't find a place to hold her and pick her up without hurting her. I remember she was wearing a yellow and white house dress that was full of blood. Don't ask me why, but we kept it. We thought we would finally stand for ourselves and one day we would use as evidence. How silly were we, we never did, I found it years later hidden in the closet after he had finally died.

You never recuperate after something like this. I couldn't understand why my mother would stay there and let us suffer like that. There was nothing more important in the world than to get out of that hellhole. It never happened. There was nobody to give us help. Tears stain my paper as I proof read it. No matter what, I can never hold them back. I guess they will always flow out of my soul...

Shouldn't You Be Over It By Now?

Kelly Montgomery

Gives me permission to skim quickly through the story of my mother's death, like a Jesus lizard runs across a pond never sinking under the surface. I can tell the story like it belongs to someone else.

I CAN say that the day of her funeral, as we pulled up to the funeral home to "view" her one last time, the street was busy with lunchtime commuters on a Wednesday. The cool breeze enveloped us as we left the car and it blew my skirt gently around my calves. Birds twittered in the nearby trees.

I CANNOT say how empty I felt, as if part of me, my soul, had somehow fled and left grayness in its place. I never say how all the life surrounding me was hyper-bright, yet the voices of my family were muted and their chatter of "*It's such a beautiful day*" and "*You look nice today*" sounded idiotic because my mother lay three days dead within the walls of the nondescript building in front of us.

I CAN say we walked through the door and were greeted by the director of the funeral home, who shook our hands and smiled slightly. Who walked ahead of us down a narrow, dimly lit, yellow hallway toward a room with its door open. Only flowers peeked around the doorjamb at us. I can even say I stood rooted in that hallway, only five feet from the destination. Even that my father grabbed my wrists and dragged me through the door, all the while saying through clenched teeth "*You have to see, Kelly, you have to see.*"

I CANNOT say how the atmosphere changed so drastically when we moved through the doorway from the outside to the inside of the funeral home, from life to death. How the air smelled of flowers and, later I would learn, embalming fluid. How the director's smile faltered for a moment when he saw my 11-year-old brother and a 15-year-old me. How his handshake was limp and damp, almost lifeless. How the calm that had finally come over me only the day before started to crack and my heart was beating hard and crimson with anxiety. I can't say that I was rooted to the floor because in some primal part of my brain, death terrified me, and the very idea that MY MOM IS DEAD froze me to my core. I never say how as my father drug me into the room that the director stood behind him looking at me with pity while my grandmothers, uncle, sister and brother stood behind me emanating frustration like a buzzing swarm of gnats. I would never dream of saying, even to those

closest to me, that the whole time my father pulled on my wrists I was quietly chanting "No, no, no, no, no, no." Tasting bitter bile roll into my esophagus.

I CAN say I lost that tug of war. I can say that the room was delicately lit and the flowers crowded around the gray casket spoke loving tributes of *"Beloved Daughter, Beloved Sister and Aunt, Beloved Wife and Mother."* I can say she was wearing a hot pink dress she had made and a cream sweater bought mere weeks before she died. I can say she had on a gold cross necklace and her wedding ring. Her glasses, sat loosely in her gently folded hands over her abdomen. I can say how my father "oohed" and "aahed" over how beautiful she looked, done up as if she had just stepped out of a salon; how she looked like she was sleeping; and he even said *"I should have brought the camera."*

I CANNOT say that as soon as I entered the viewing room my anxiety fell away like a heavy cloak because of the deep, infinite emptiness that emanated from the casket or that I could taste an unfamiliar sourness in the back of my throat that came from the same place. I cannot say that I recognized HER, but that my soul couldn't feel HER anymore in the empty husk that lay before me. I never talk about how dried and withered her hands looked, how alien they had become. It is impossible to say how I stood, my hand only inches from hers and yet couldn't reach out to touch HER. I don't say how ridiculous she looked caked with make-up, something she never wore in life.

I CANNOT say she looked at peace because she didn't. Her brow, pinched and her mouth turned down, grimacing, angry at her fate. Angry at being dead at 44, after suffering and waiting 4 long years for a heart and two lungs to save her that never came because of helmet laws. I cannot begin to say how she confided her lost hopes and dreams to me those last six months. I cannot say how much these memories hurt worse as I hurdle ever closer to her age. Now I understand more deeply the anger and terror she faced as a woman, a mother, a person. As each trip to the hospital and grim conversations with numerous specialists stripped more and more hope away, it left her only despair for what could have been, what never would be.

So, when someone says to me *"Shouldn't you be over it by now?"* Even 18 years later, I can say *"No, I'll never be over it because it wasn't just a moment in time, it was everything from that moment on that we lost, her and I, the millions of moments we will never have with each other. She was and is my mother; the person who gave me life and helped to mold the woman I have become."*

Climbing Up From the Rubble

Diane G. Bertrand

The manuscript wasn't working. I knew the concept had potential. When children see pictures of their parents as children, it bewilders them. How can Mom and Dad have once been two kids? Inspired by a friend's anecdote that she married the boy who once gave her bunny ears in their third grade photo, I wanted to convey lessons about friendship and tell a relationship story to inspire conversation when families read the book together.

Bringing the initial manuscript, *Best Friends Mom and Dad*, to my critique session with three other children's authors met with dismal feedback. The ladies used kind synonyms for vague, boring, and confusing, but the fact remained the manuscript didn't work. Eventually I abandoned it for other projects. Three years later, I found the story inside my old manuscripts file. After rereading comments, I decided to retype the short manuscript on my new laptop and sense the story word by word.

In the retyping, the idea came to me to give Mom and Dad their own names. Thus several drafts changed titles: *Best Friends, Ramon and Leticia*. *Best Friends, Emilia and Rodrigo*, *Sofia and Carlos are Best Friends*. My focus remained on two anonymous friends, trying to invent humorous experiences two children from the same neighborhood shared. I described the family looking through the photo album as a way to visualize the concept. However, while I received encouragement from my new critique group, I also knew certain lines fell flat.

And then on a humid June morning, my big brother Mike died from a heart attack. His presence in my life had been tremendous, his sudden loss a devastating crack in the ground underneath my feet. Two weeks later, I faced another critique meeting. I hadn't written anything since Mike's eulogy. I sat at my desk, going through a pile of papers, when I saw the manuscript about best friends.

Thinking about Mike and his wife, Cecil, I scratched out the title on the paper, and scribbled *Cecilia and Miguel are Best Friends*. With memories of my brother's lively spirit like a warm shawl upon my shoulders, I replaced all those "flat" ideas with real activities Mike and Cecil shared together like fishing and swimming in the ocean. Even though my brother and his wife met as adults, their marriage inspired me to bring their sense of humor, their romance, and their happy family life with their daughter to this story. And

because real people I know and love influenced my revision, each line came from authentic expressions of friendship I had witnessed in my brother's life.

When I got the email that the manuscript had been accepted by my Houston publisher, Piñata Books, the next thing I composed was this essay. Because in the midst of terrible grief and incredible sorrow, a writer sometimes feels she or he will never be able to adequately describe the earthquake, or the victim, or the survivors. However, sometimes in taking a troubled manuscript from under the rubble and letting a loved one's spirit bring comfort and joy in the revision process, the new story will find its readers. And a writer will find her voice again.

My Mother's Tale

Noel Shaheen

The nuns scared us so much. Once when I was in kinder, a few other girls and I got in trouble for talking during class. About 200 feet from the classroom, there was a little closet where the wood for the heaters was kept. We didn't have heaters like they have here in America. Well, in this little room is where they kept the wood. It was for storage, but everyone called it *beit lal jaradien*—house of the rats. Our teacher lined us up and told us that she was going to cover our ears with *assal* and *tahini* and throw us in the storage closet where the rats lived.

My mother's eyes widened with excitement, as mine widened with fear.

Then...the rats would BITE OUR EARS OFF!

My mother would pause for effect here. My sisters and I leaned forward in anticipation.

So we walked to the room. I could hear my heart pounding in my chest. I looked over at the front of the school and there was a painter giving the wall a fresh coat of paint. He had left the front door open. So I started running. The nun told the painter to run after me. I ran probably half a mile. I was wearing new boots and they were a little tight on my feet so he caught me and took me back to school. My teacher was so mad at me. She put my fingers together and hit them with the edge of a ruler to discipline me. That's how they were—the stupid nuns at school.

My mother told us dozens of stories about her time at Raheebat al Mahaba—Nuns of Charity French Roman Catholic School in Damascus, Syria. My mother, along with her nine brothers and sisters, grew up there, although they were not all born there. Originally, they came from Jerusalem in the West Bank. Back then, it formed part of Jordan, but Israel took hold of the West Bank in the war of 1967. My grandparents decided to move to Damascus because my grandfather had two brothers there and the opportunities were better in a country where war was not always beating upon them.

My grandparents constantly struggled financially. My grandfather worked for a tiling company, while my grandmother stayed at home so that she could manage her ten children. All twelve of them lived together in a one-bedroom apartment. There were two beds, and they all took turns sleeping on the floor each night so that they could spend at least one night a week in either

of the beds.

Naturally, my mother's side of the family is used to sharing what they have with each other. The five girls in the family shared one doll. The five boys all shared one action figure. They would all help my grandmother with the cooking because cooking for twelve people everyday can be a chore, and was definitely the most costly part of their expenses. Ultimately, they never had a lot of money, clothes, or objects that they could call their own. They were never spoiled with material things, but there was a lot of love to go around.

I remember baking with my mother on Saturday mornings. All of us would squeeze into the kitchen and make date cookies and zahtr bread. The whole house would smell so good! Because we were so many, we were able to make a lot in a short amount of time. My mother was the best cook. She always made sure that we never went hungry. Sometimes we had holes in our shoes, but we never went hungry.

I am able to experience the love of my mother's family through every story she tells. They show me the love they had for each other, and have developed in me a love of stories. Whether it was about the cruelty of the nuns or the hilarity of her siblings, my mother has stories for everything, even one about her brother's swollen lip.

Your khalo Elias came home one day and his lip was swollen. When our mom asked him why, he said that nothing was wrong. She said, "No, something is wrong. What happened?" Elias told our mother that the neighborhood kids came and beat him because they wanted to take the derbakee from him. My mother became very mad at the thought that children had beaten her son just to play with a drum.

When your khalo Beshara came home, our mother told him, "How come you did not help your brother against those kids who wanted to take the derbakee from him?"

Beshara was confused. "What derbakee? What story did he tell you?"

She told him what Elias had said and he laughed. He said, "No, that's not what happened!"

Our mother was exasperated. "Then what is the story?" she said.

Beshara smiled and said, "Do you remember how you told us not to go to the bassateen because it is dangerous? Well, Elias went there with his friends and he was picking and eating apricots in a tree. He was up in the tree and his friends began saying, 'There is the damman! He is coming!' So what does Elias do? He jumped

from the tree and started running. The damman saw him and ran after him with a stick. Elias was running and running and when he turned around to see how far ahead he was, the damman had thrown the stick and hit him in the mouth. And that is the story of Elias' swollen lip."

My mother was the second eldest out of her nine siblings, and her youngest siblings were twenty years younger than she. She was always overprotective when it came to her family, and still is to this day.

Did I ever tell you about the time that we lost khalo Beshara? No? Well it happened during one of our first years in America. Suhaila, Adele, Jihan, Beshara and I were traveling along the East Coast, exploring the different states and found ourselves in Maine. We heard about a ferry ride that could take us to one of the tiny islands about half a mile off shore and we decided to take the trip. When we got to the island, we agreed to split up due to our different interests, but planned a time and place that we would meet so that we could catch the ferry back to the main land in a few hours. So we all went our separate ways.

I spent my afternoon on the beach. When the time came, I went back to our meeting spot. Suhaila, Adele, and Jihan came a few minutes later, but Beshara was nowhere to be found. We began to panic and decided to go looking for him. We searched everywhere. The island was only about two square kilometers, but it was getting dark and we could not find him. Eventually, we gave up and went back to the ferry's dock so that we could make it back to the mainland for the night. I remember stepping onto the boat and feeling absolutely terrified. Where was my little brother? I began to cry uncontrollably as my sisters attempted to calm me. They told me that he would be alright for the night and we would find him in the morning. This only made me cry more. "My baby brother is MISSING!" I wept loudly.

Soon, the ferry man came over looking very concerned. "You say you lost your little brother on the island? How old is the little guy?" he asked.

"Twenty-nine!" I said through my tears.

So what happened to Beshara? He had found animal tracks and followed them into the dense trees. When he realized that he had gone too far, he was lost. He spent the night at the house of one of the island's residents. We found him in the morning. I wasn't sure who should have been more embarrassed, Beshara or me. The ferry man thought I was mujnoon.

I see so much of my mother in each story she tells. Her personality, her humor, her childish side—these are all qualities that are sometimes hidden by her years of maturity. They make me feel closer to my family and closer to my heritage in ways that go beyond simply knowing the country we come from. They reveal the character of my relatives, and not just as a representation of the Middle Eastern culture, but as genuine, unique, and beautiful people. They are experiences in themselves. They are hardships, loving kindness, spirit, song, pride, shame, and joy. They are my mother.

GLOSSARY OF ARABIC WORDS

assal: honey

bassateen: orchard

derbakee: drum

khalo: uncle

mujnoon: crazy

tahini: sesame seed paste

damman: caretaker of the orchard who rents the fields and gives a percentage of the fruits to the owner

zahtr: thyme mixed with sesame seeds and sumac

Five Minutes and a Shell Casing

Mary Lynne Gasaway Hill

Last spring, I was teaching some basic concepts of the theory of Structuralism to one of my classes. Structuralism is ultimately about systems, particularly about how things are defined in relation to each other in a system. How the parts often create something that seems to be a bit greater than a whole ... like the system of a family or the system of a language.

Different things attain meaning in relationship to other things in such a system. Parents define children; children define parents; siblings define each other. Language is also such a system, a system of signs, where the sign "up" is defined by not being "down," where the sign "holy" is defined by not being "profane," where "life" is defined by not being "death."

In our class we discussed how, according to the groundbreaking Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, a sign is made up of two parts, the signifier and the signified. In a language system, the signifier is a word itself, while the signified is the idea or our understanding of what that word represents. For instance we use the sounds and letters that make up the word "tree" to refer to the tall plant life form in our front yard. However, my default idea of a tree is an expansive Midwestern Rock Elm, whereas the default idea of native San Antonian is probably a scrappy Pin Oak. In other words, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is completely arbitrary. Yes, we all use the same word "tree" but often times what that means to us is more individualized than what is revealed in our daily maneuverings in our language system of English.

Anyway, I offered the word "cacophony" to the class. What should we have this word-idea-of-ddiscordant-sound mean in the mini-language-system of our class for the semester? Ashley didn't miss a beat as she blurted out "lemon jello!" OK, so within the system of our class, which generally functioned in standardized English, cacophony now meant lemon Jell-O. So be it. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary.

Shortly after this re-defining moment in our class, my family and I began a journey back to the land of the towering Rock Elms to see my father for the last time. He had grown progressively weaker since the holiday season, floating in and out of different time periods, visiting with loved ones long gone and then fluttering back to us, clear as the spring sunshine, remembering precious details of our lives – and of Cardinal baseball. But he was fading.

So, on the first Saturday morning of spring break, we packed the van and headed north on I35. Somewhere between Austin and Waco, my sister called. Tia, the hospice nurse, had told my siblings that she didn't think Dad would make it through the weekend. My husband, ever able to think outside the box, told me to call 1-800-IFLYSWA immediately. I punched in the numbers, but I wasn't exactly thinking clearly, so he spelled it out for me. "We'll drop you at Love Field in Dallas. Get a flight to St. Louis. Now."

So, I did. "Do you have any available seats between Dallas Love and Lambert International?"

Kind female SWA voice. "Yes. There's one seat left on the 5:20."

"I'll take it."

"Do you want to know how much it is??"

"Doesn't matter."

"What's going on?"

So, to this gentle human voice on the phone, I explained that my Dad was dying and I just wanted to get home.

"Then, let's check you in. Your boarding pass is B22. Do you need a rent car or will someone come to get you?"

Ah, my best friend from high school came to get me. What a gift to see her. To be with someone who had known my Dad for over thirty years, who had known the system of our family through thick and thin. She dropped me off in the same driveway we used to pull in and out of to go to football games or the drive-in.

I walked into our family home to see my sisters bearing witness next to my Dad's passing, reassuring him. His breathing had changed shortly after one had told him that my plane had landed, and that all of his girls would soon be with him. I sat down on his right side, holding his hand, watching a single tear slide out of the corner of his eye. I then reassured him that we were there, and that we would be OK. That he could do whatever he needed to do. We had five minutes as his breathing tapered off, slowly, patiently.

Once again, he had waited for me for five more minutes.

But now, the signifier "five minutes" signified something quite different than it had when my class turned cacophony into lemon Jell-O. We buried Dad, an Army veteran, next to our Mom at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery. Two young soldiers folded the flag; a middle-aged man played taps; four elderly vets from Dad's WWII/Korea-era fired the guns.

Different moments in the life cycle, each with different gifts to offer.

After we had thanked the elderly veterans, the leader picked up the shell casings, giving them to our oldest brother, who had served in the US Navy for 22 years. Our brother then gave a shell casing to each of the rest of us. I never thought I would cherish a shell casing, but on that sparkling spring afternoon, with the sun bouncing from the snowy blossoms of the plum trees to the snowy marble of the tombstones, the signifier "shell casing" now signified something radically different to me than it had that day when I talked about signs with my students.

A few weeks later, I was listening to the homily at a memorial mass for my father here in San Antonio. The Gospel was John 21: 1-12. Jesus, as the Risen Lord, appeared on the shore of the Sea of Galilee to his apostles who had been fishing all night. The priest stated that the apostles had had an awareness of someone on the shore as dawn was approaching; however, that awareness grew to a recognition of Jesus when he invited them to breakfast. He continued stating that through my Dad's teaching in the classroom, that Dad "saw the shadow of the Lord" in each of his students, that he was aware of each of them as he invited them across the shoreline of his classroom, where he then recognized and respected them as individuals.

As the priest offered this comforting image of my father (the same guy that another of the priests referred to as "the last of the tough guys"), my mind wandered back to the arbitrariness of the sign. Those last five minutes the apostles had before they recognized the Risen Lord. Those first five minutes of being present with the Risen Lord. But the wandering didn't stop in Galilee; instead it swept across the globe to the shoreline of Florida. George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch coordinator of a gated community in Sanford, Florida, had just recently been arrested for the shooting and death of a seventeen-year-old boy named Trayvon Martin. The details were sketchy. Zimmerman claimed self-defense even though Martin was unarmed. No witnesses.

Just the reality that there was a five minute period before the shell casing hit the ground. There was a five minute period after the shell casing hit the ground. The arbitrariness of the sign glaringly apparent for Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman, and for all of their loved ones.

There are the five moments before a shell casing hits the ground and there are the five minutes after a shell casing hits the ground. Certainly that was the case for our four American soldiers killed in

Afghanistan this week; certainly that was the case for our slain US Ambassador to Libya last week. The system, the relationships that had once defined these signs for them and their loved ones, has been changed and their meanings are subsequently altered. Their arbitrariness brands our minds and hearts, searing new "default" ideas and images of these everyday words into our language-feeling-selves.

Now, reflecting upon St. Augustine's observation that meaning is created retroactively, I think that it is perhaps through such scorching transformations – that highlight the arbitrariness of living – that we are invited to the shoreline. A shoreline where we can recognize the shadow of the Lord passing over each other, even as we struggle to figure out what that means for us today and what it might mean for us tomorrow.

Persona

Isaac Lucio

I am not my own person—not exactly. I am a persona, heightened by the anonymity of online interaction. He has been able to talk about me many times—to himself and to others. He has analyzed me and wondered if my existence is a sign on insanity. I like to tell him it is.

We've had conversations before. He'll be talking or listening to someone, and I'll think of something sarcastic to say.

"Say it!" I urge, laughing.

"No, it's unnecessary." He responds with a smirk and a mental eye roll.

It sums up our relationship pretty well. He drudges through his life doing what he needs to, ignoring my creative suggestions for improvement. I get bored a lot.

To be honest I am not sure why I exist. Am I necessary? Am I Convenient? Am I Circumstantial? Whatever the case, our life is more interesting for it...well, his is at least.

It was around five or six years ago that I was born. Born? I think that's right, "Came into non-being" sounds way too overdramatic. Anyway, I don't remember the exact date. He was working as a 411 operator—directory assistance. The job was terminally boring. Eight hours a day, five days a week, taking phone calls that had to last less than a minute each. It's surprising how many people make something as simple as retrieving a phone number or address nearly impossible. People would talk as fast as they possibly could, get angry or offended if he asked how to spell a word, or insist places really existed and that he was lying if he told them he couldn't find them—and those were the sober ones. The drunks at least were entertaining.

After working two very long weeks, it was time to pick up the first paycheck. For months he had been reading people online talking about the game World of Warcraft—a "MMORPG" (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game). He decided to buy the game as a reward to himself. He had no idea that he had just done something that would change his life. World of Warcraft quickly shoved aside all of his other interests, and took over his free time. It would also go on to take over the lives of more than three of his friends.

While playing, he was eventually invited to join a group of others

that played the game (a “guild”). Joining the guild meant that he was constantly in contact with an entire group of people of various ages and with diverse personalities. Perhaps it was the relaxed atmosphere of recreation. Maybe it was the feeling of safety that came from being alone while talking to people. Maybe it was the sheer amount of time that he spent online, but, eventually, it became clear that a different personality was forming.

The atmosphere in the guild was one that allowed and encouraged its members to find fun and unique ways to annoy and disrupt people that they met in the game world. Going out of our ways to mess each other up became a part of the game. Naturally this included how we chatted with each other as well as how we played. In person, he has bored me nearly to tears, but online, it is much easier to act or speak in different ways. It eventually became clear that a rift had formed—a boundary separating the offline and online personalities, him and me.

That is how it was for a time. We didn’t interact with each other yet, we didn’t even really acknowledge the difference. There was no need, our worlds were very separate and clear. Naturally, that didn’t last. Two things simultaneously caused our worlds to mix together. First, friends that I had known online for years suddenly became offline friends as well. Second, social networking sites started to connect people who knew him and not me.

It happened first with his cousin, Adolph, and Adolph’s boyfriend, Art. We had played the game together since roughly the same time, and after a year or two things started to blend together.

At first, I would notice small things, like him saying “Dimmy” instead of Art—Dimmy being Art’s online name. Slowly I realized that I would be talking out loud to them. It was odd, but not really important, Adolph and Art did know both personalities.

Facebook is when it became necessary to really think about which of us was talking. Most of the people on MySpace had been people who only really knew me, so there wasn’t a worry about who was speaking. When Facebook came around, people who had only ever known him were suddenly in contact in situations where it was me who did the talking. The need to really think about which voice was being used—and thus our “relationship”—came from that. Being able to quickly distinguish which voice was being used became necessary, and having two to choose from became useful.

Ignoring the issue of sanity, I have come to realize that not only do I bring a measure of humor to an otherwise dreary existence, but I have a vital role in socialization and creativity. I also help with moral and self-confidence, as I was born in a place of safety and can use that in situations that would be uncomfortable with just him. All this from a voice created by playing an online game.

Blue Fury

Noe Domingo Garza III

I have taken different routes to get to my destination of choice. Sometimes I pick the long route, but it doesn't keep me from continuing on my merry way. I always like to adventure through different paths, whether it's on the road or off the road.

However, no matter where I'm at, I always drive the same way home. I stop at the same Shell gas station before I leave San Antonio, Texas. I always stop at the same Valero for gas in Riviera, Texas. I don't change my usual way home because I will get lost. I see many people from different cities, towns, or people from that particular town, but I feel a connection between our encounters. Even though I may not know these people, a mutual goal is being met. The goal of returning back to what we know to the best of our abilities. I may stop in the same places as these people, but both these people and I have encountered each time I drive home, have different destinations and homes. Yet I, these people still venture out because it's only natural to try something new (even though this can't accommodate everyone).

I am a college student at St. Mary's University. I tend to be reserved at times, but get me going and my wild side emerges in fiery passion (in a good way, of course). I love to drive around in San Antonio (or any place I seem to be at). I find new places that no one really sees or has the chance to appreciate. I am a sightseer in my little blue Nissan pick-up truck. I enjoy seeing where the road takes me through the winding turns, the narrow streets, the exaggerated or mediocre bumps, potholes, and cracks in the road remind me of life's journey. Even when I drive off the main road into the dirt, mud, sand, or just the plain grass of a nearby field, I find an adventure yet to be seen by my eyes.

I have to admit, I am a bit of a car and truck fanatic. I like my cars to be fast and slick, while I like my trucks to have a die-hard beating heart with the strength to push itself through anything, no matter how much abuse.

Back in high school, I got the Blue Fury (that's what my friend called it for no apparent reason). The Blue Fury turned my life in a complete 180 degrees. As a kid I longed for freedom and the Blue Fury gave me that privilege. I drove the Blue Fury everywhere. I drove it to the beach, to a field, and to the hills of Puente De Los Lobos, a fishing/trail spot.

I remember the first time I got stuck in the mud with my Blue

Fury. It was a dark, gloomy, and rainy day. I could barely see out my windshield as I drove home from my grandma's house. My family and I had just moved to our new house that my parents just built. However, I had never explored this subdivision called The Woods. I was close to home, ready to relax and sleep all day. However, something stopped me on my way home. I felt a desire to explore and immediately decided to scope out the area, to find something interesting and new. I drove onto the main road called Stagecoach. As I drove through the long, sharp curve, I grew excited. I had never done anything like this before on my own.

The curved road had a dead end that I couldn't see (at the time) from afar as I drove through the pouring rain. I reached the end and saw nothing of interest, so I decided to turn back. As I returned home, I saw a road from the corner of my left eye. I thought to myself, "How did I not see this road?" I quickly turned into the road and followed it head on. The road, used as an entrance for a utility station, led towards to an array of trees where not any person could really hear or bother me. Enthralled with my new discovery, I checked out the area. Two roads, going opposite directions, perfect for exploration and mudding for future reference. I thought to myself, "Just imagine what my friend will say when I tell him about this place!"

However, I found myself to be in a psychological dilemma that could have traumatized me for life. The road I stumbled upon was a one way, narrow road, with no possible way to U-turn. Only mud and grass surrounded the road, engulfing it lightly. I thought of just reversing, but the rain pounded on the hood of my truck. I found it too hard to look through back of my window, so I made the bold decision to make a U-turn. I began to turn the wheel of my Blue Fury and accelerate the tires of my truck. I noticed that my tires were just spinning in the brown muck I put myself in. I stepped on the gas pedal harder as I panicked for survival, but the Blue Fury wouldn't budge. All that went through my head, "I am screwed." I called my friend Jesus (ironically) to come pull me out. Then the horror of my high school life, my dad, called my phone. He was also heading back from my grandmas and he didn't see my truck, wondering where I went.

Click

"Mijo, en donde andas?"

"Umm. I am here putting gas."

"Ah, en donde?"

"At the Exxon."

"Ah ok, well hurry up."

Click

Scared to the bone, I decided to call my friend again to come get me out. I waited in my own pity for 15 minutes. Then my dad, again, called me.

Click

"Where are you son?"

In a heap confusion and desperation, I told my dad, "Honestly, I am stuck in the mud close by the house, can you take me out?"

My dad, with out hesitation asked, "Where exactly are you at?"

I answered, "I am in a field at the end of main street Stagecoach. You get in through a utility road at the end of the road."

He replied, "Ok mijo, I'm on my way."

I waited there in the Blue Fury, rain still pouring, dark as hell outside, but the thought that my dad didn't get mad (even though it was short-lived), puzzled me. He came to get me out and then the savior, who was supposed to have come to save me from my mistake, showed up right as my dad got there. I asked them if they had brought a tow strap or something. Neither of them came prepared. So then they told me that they would push me out, which they did. They got me out, my dad told me to go home, and my friend followed. My dad scolded me, but he didn't make a big deal about it and at the end of the day, and I had to wash the mud off my truck (not fun at all).

I learned something important that day. I never really know what lies ahead in my life if I don't venture out and search for what I desire. I know it's scary to venture out to do something and fail, but I figured that taking risks is what makes life interesting. I know I don't take all risks, but I don't cower in front of a new challenge or new path that may lie in front of me. I give it a shot as long as I play it smart and I am able to return home, where I know I can be safe. I try my best to be as outgoing as possible, so that I don't miss the opportunity to know what could lie ahead in the road of my future.

Mrs. Brite's Gun

Nick Canedo

Ninety-year-old Mrs. Brite didn't leave her ranch in Tilden, Texas, too often. However, she still always had to have a nice hairdo. Luckily for her, my mom was a loyal hairstylist who didn't mind traveling the 75 miles from San Antonio to do her hair, especially since Mrs. Brite made that same trip for over ten years.

This time, it was a family trip to her ranch. When we arrived, Mrs. Brite greeted my mom, stepdad, older brother and me into her home. All over the house were pictures of her four kids and late husband, along with all his military possessions and hunting prizes mounted on the walls.

As my mom was getting her clippers ready, Mrs. Brite turned to my stepdad and said, "Surely, you don't expect the boys to watch their mom cut my hair. Why don't you go grab a gun and go shooting."

Go shooting? Was Mrs. Brite really recommending that my stepdad take an 8-year-old and 13-year-old shooting? I didn't believe it until my stepdad took us to a glass cabinet and opened it up, displaying at least 15 guns that had been used by Mr. Brite. I had only seen guns like these in movies and on TV, but now I was going to be the western hero or police officer targeting the bad guys.

Instead of picking one of the larger guns that were proudly displayed on the rack, my stepdad grabbed a gun that was standing up against the side of the case. He also picked up a black, milk-carton shaped box, which he said contained "the bullets."

We walked to some trees by a small pond on Mrs. Brite's property. My stepdad lifted five soda and beer cans that were on the dirt and placed them on a tree branch. He then walked about 40 feet away, put the gun against his shoulder, cocked it, aimed and pulled the trigger. He hit the first can and a small hole was made.

This was the first time I saw a gun fired in front of me. My stepdad pulled the trigger again, and the second can fell to the ground.

He then handed the gun to my brother, who like my stepdad, hit the next two cans and they fell to the ground. He smiled.

"Ok, now it's your turn," my stepdad said to me.

"But I've never shot a gun before!"

"Well then this will be your first."

My stepdad explained what I had to do. Cock the gun, put it against my shoulder, and aim at the last can placed on the branch.

My arms shook as I lifted the gun, pointing in towards the can. I couldn't believe that I was about to shoot a real bullet from a real gun. Time stood still as my index finger pushed against the trigger and seconds later, the can fell to the dirt.

My stepdad and brother gave me high-fives as my first attempt at shooting a gun was successful and the target was hit. Even though I didn't realize then that it was merely a BB gun I was shooting, the sight of the can falling to the dirt has never left me as a childhood moment where I felt like an adult.

Poetry
Part II

Easter People in a Good Friday World

Mary Lynne Gassaway Hill

Her Pastor said:

“We are an Easter People,
in a Good Friday World.”

Purple balloons floating down a grisly street
in Marja,

Calm tones echoing through the marbled halls
of the Rotunda,

Lilies at play in fields of decay.

Strings of lights

red-yellow-green

red-yellow-green

draped across a barren cupboard –

an emptiness unforeseen

by those who raise the children,

pay the taxes –

as the delicate Marble spins

on Her tilt-a-whirl axis.

Droplets of sunshine

in a sea of blues

swirling into a poignant hue

of animal green,

heralding our very own

Resurrection spring.

Scandal in San Antonio

Gleen Hughes

Dead horses on their sides close laid in rows
cover the entire roof of the North Star Mall.
The fact of their flesh beginning to decay
radiates down inside to the shoppers
and causes odd behavior: everyone's movements
speed up by at least ten percent, and they all
begin texting each other, or friends, or family.
If it were possible to read the meaning between the lines
of the messages, they would all have a single
subtext: I am hungrier to shop than ever!
Only when helicopters and cranes begin clearing
the animals from the griddle of the roof
does repulsion set in—especially at home
among those watching news clips and drinking sweet tea,
discomfited by a peculiar revelation:
one of the horses was named Sweet Tea!—
a fact that comes to light early on, as the ranchers
and cowboys and farmers and breeders and riders
identify horses as their own, a process
that in the end takes over a week to complete.

Three with Barbie

Amber-Rae Niño

When I was three,
time was not about plans.
Time was triangled sandwiches.

My growth, my image
was outlined by light,
creating shadows amongst Rugrats' wallpaper.

Light guided brush strokes into Barbie's hair,
pushing her perfect twig-figure into my playhouse,
home to dolls half her size.

Her sparkling grin hid her displacement,
while hair bands kept her tied to chairs
and trains "choo chooed" around her kitchen sink.

Ken never joined in for tea,
but a glisten dwelled in Barbie's blue irises
when I changed her heels and wardrobe
from yoga pants to ball gowns.

Glancing at the window light,
the change of the seasons made little sense.
The room vastly grew darker,
and I failed to recognize the strands I brushed.

Light crept from the kitchen,
away from Barbie's painted face.

Suddenly, Dollhouse playtime was boring.

Noticing change, shadows and lights,
time raced faster, clock ticked louder and
Barbie left the playhouse.

Polenta

Stephanie Anne Motz

I told her I wasn't
superstitious—

but again today
I felt the polenta

against
the wooden spoon

and refused to stir it
back around the pot.

Belief and accuracy
blur old wives' tales:

bourbon on baby's gums
soothes the ache,

baking soda on doorframes
keeps roaches away,

stirring polenta in one direction
ensures it sets.

A Letter to Gracie

Celine A. Jacquemin

Dearest Gracie,
From another continent,
a younger generation,
and even with an accent, you loved me.
To marry your son,
to enter your family,
to be your new daughter, you welcomed me.
To care about others,
to pray God can lift burdens,
to make each person matter, you knew me
To fight for human rights,
to teach about our world,
to yearn for solutions, you appreciated me

To teach true love,
to grow in faith, and to be strong,
you showed me

Too frail to walk, too tired to talk,
yearning for Christ, you taught me

To journey along,
to move to your new home,
to part softly, you waited patiently

Already missing you and forever grateful,
thank you for loving me

Céline

A Familiar Conversation

Stephanie Anne Motz

Cousins of crows, with delicate wings,
the grackles lift and carry reprieve
from months of unbearable heat,
squawking the resurrection
of winter's blusters:

Now Texas towns swarm
with late fall grackles—
pulling cold like a fertilizing
blanket behind them.

This year the birds have lingered.
I think the return of my loneliness
too heavy for them to carry
far beyond here.

I've read crows remember faces,
call to each other on sighting
familiar eyes—
voices to keep my thoughts
in dialogue with an other

Death-Mute

Noe Garza, III

The darkness is overwhelming.
It covers all the earth with its chaos.
Waters are raging.
Sky is electrifying.
Earth is destroyed right to the foundation.
It is just overwhelming.

The people have nowhere to turn to.
The dead walk.
Mimicking the living as if they were alive.
They are filled with the darkness of chaos,
they have no way of being saved.
The savior seemed to have abandoned them.
The people rot and are scorched in rising flames of their cities.
The people have nowhere to turn to.

The seventh trumpet of the archangel blows
throughout the sky of the world.
Now the battle ensues between good and evil,
The people are just the audience and casualties caught in the
middle.
Who knows if they will be saved.
They are just pawns left to watch their reality crumble to the
ground.

Death lingers around the skies of tomorrow.
Life as we know has changed.
I want to be a deaf-mute so I won't hear
the agony of those crushed and vomited out of Omega.
There is no home. Just pain.
The lights reign we will be put to the test in the hearts of its
carriers.

Hopefully, our lives are spared.
Hopefully, Death never prevails.
Hopefully, we have the strength to fight the darkness.
Hopefully, we can build home into the foundation set by the
Creator.

He is my architect.
He is my spokesman.
He is my friend.
He is my Father.
He is my guide.
He is the only one that will bring me out of
my own darkness that lingers in my soul.

But what can I do with the overwhelming madness that lingers in
me?

The Purge is Near


Alexander Eakins

I summon thee, drunk and lost, lost Lenore
Unto thee Lenore, standing at your door
And to me, the vulture croaks "nevermore"
Nevermore, lost Lenore, I've lost Lenore

I open your door, dear Lenore, a creak
A creaky door, a creaky floor, to speak
Speak to me! Dear Lenore, this door is meek
Door is meek, evermore I hear the creak

I am lost Lenore, for you left here
Here I am, on the floor, bottled rum near
I hear the croak "nevermore," and I fear
Fear the loss Lenore, for you are not here

So when I wake, I hope the road is clear
I pray the Purge is near; the purge is near



Fiction

The Purge

Alexander Eakins

The sun peeked over the horizon line. He lifted his knees, stretched his arms, and scrambled up the wall of sky before settling to watch the people. Sighs and yawns were his gifts to them. Today, he was gray. He boxed his languor and gifted it to the people, wrapping it in a dull gray bow of light. Day was an old movie reel. A reverie of black and white, black and white.

John stared at a wheezing vulture that floated over the people. Its ribs protruded through thin skin and unkempt feathers. It flapped through the gray, film sky and looked longingly at the faceless people below. Food, food, and more food. Every creature for itself.

A dull creak as if a door cracked open slithered through John's head. It drowned out all thought. He stared at the people. He stared without seeing, stared as if he could only see the back of his own head. They were gray blobs in the background. Sleepy shadows of unshaven sheep. Sheep with gray coats. Sheep with no faces. *Cre-e-a-k*. The sound. The creaking devoured his senses with unrelenting, dripping, venomous fangs. He was drunk. His senses were gone and thus the world.

A graceful footstep poured color into the ground beneath it like a paintbrush. Grass was no longer gray, but green. John looked and saw Lenore. Lenore. Lenore he could see. He could hear. His Lenore, dressed in a green dress with black stripes. She lit the path she walked on. She smiled as she approached John.

What's your favorite flower, he asked.

Daisy.

Mine too, he said

No, it's not.

Who am I? he asked.

I cannot say! Who am I to you?

Everything, he said.

If I am everything, then you are nothing.

The vulture landed between the two and bore its peckish eyes into John's. *Cre-e-a-k. Cre-e-a-k*. Lenore became motionless like stone. Drops of red rain pelted John's fingers. He stared curiously at the stained water sliding through his fingers like blood from a wound. He looked up and saw darkness emanating from the sun. It breathed smoke and smog to form black clouds which dripped

sanguine rain. John's eyes slowly fell to Lenore who was melting away in the rain, dissolving like sugar in a glass of strawberry lemonade. Although he saw her disappear, he understood that she was not lost. He began to dig beneath the soil as if she would still be there.

As if she'd planted a seed, speakers and alarms rose from the gray soil and chanted into the gray sky: commencing the Purge, commencing the Purge, commencing the Purge, over and over again. Then, coffins sprouted from the ground like plants of false resolution.

Sun became chaos, that dusty iron-clad beast of burden. He gripped a giant hand around the people struggling to preserve the illusion of themselves. They sprinted to the coffins, baaing all the way. The coffins would protect them from the Purge.

Crimson rain soaked the vulture, which flew in panicked circles in the downpour. As though it were absorbing the rain, it grew plumper with flight. It surveyed the land for food, reinstated its search with newfound vigor and enveloped the land in the shadow of a dragon.

If she was everything then he was nothing. He was nothing without her. John moved from left to right, spinning and turning as if he were dancing. Something was happening. He could feel it, as if a cloaked figure stalked him. If she were to die, then so must he. He searched. He continued to search.

Darkness permeated the land. The damp air tasted of blood. The Purge neared. The Purge. The end. The beginning. That much, John understood.

Scarlet rain purified the land. For the sheep had lied to it. The sheep defied it. The sheep defiled it.

John searched for her, for she was him. He trudged through the rain calling her name. The name shattered against the alarms. The melodious voice of the speaker still echoed: commencing the Purge, commencing the Purge, commencing the Purge. To die would have been easier. He fell to his knees

A hand clapped his shoulder. He turned and saw another sheep. It baa'd insignificantly to him and he heard the door in his mind creak again. *Cre-e-a-k.*

He took no note of the other sheep that had come to join him, baaing incessantly. He felt the need to baa in return, but could not even manage that. Then Lenore's face flickered in and out of sight behind them like a beacon in a sea of gray—like hope. He waded through the sheep like a fish swimming upstream, but she'd

disappeared again. When he finally broke out of the flock, he caught glimpse of her hiding in one of the coffins and felt reassured that she was safe. The dragon swooped in and perched itself atop a cactus. It knew that blood would soon shed. It had grown plumper still. Its beak was a dark red.

Feeling certain of Lenore's safety, John retired to a coffin of his own to preserve his sense of self. He was unsure of what hid behind the blaring alarms and warning speakers. He stood momentarily staring at the coffin looming in front of him like a promise of everlasting change. It looked as though it were an escape pod from a spacecraft. It was a steel gray and a small rectangular window appeared to allow its user to see outside. He opened the door, and it creaked as the creaking in his head had been creaking all along. He climbed in and settling, listening to the muffled alarms and waiting patiently for whatever would come.

A still motion filled the air, a ship rocking at sea. Quiet clamped the jaws of the alarms, the sheep and every worldly sound. Yet the door in John's head screamed louder. *Cre-e-e-ak*. A thick cloud of black dust swirled like a whirlpool in the sky. It swallowed the land, running its black hands across every coffin searching desperately for any vulnerability. Ominously and menacingly, it fingered its way through every crevice with surgical precision.

Boom! John's coffin rocked as the vulture crashed its dragon like body into it, panicking. When the vulture moved, John caught a glimpse of his lost angel Lenore. Sweet Lenore. His Lenore. Impulse drove him to open the coffin door and run toward her. He stopped. She turned to face him, smiled, her green and black dress flapping wildly, and she was swallowed by the black dust. The most intimate connection was lost, a miscarriage bleeding bitter loneliness.

First he panicked. The youthful should not die. Then he accepted death. For without Lenore, who was John? Finally, he came to a realization. John was John and Lenore was Lenore. He almost began to laugh as the dust neared. Too late, he thought.

The dust hugged his legs, caressing him gently. He did not fret; he did not squirm; he did not scream. He closed his eyes and smiled as if he knew something. A smile that had never before visited him, this smile was genuine. The dust slowly ate his body, mingling flesh and bone, bone and dust. It almost tickled.

He opened his eyes to find Lenore in a field of daisies. Blue flagged the sky. Green stained the grass. Fiery orange lit the sun, which sank under the horizon line in a lazy wink.

She turned to him with a sobering smile.

You have to let me go.

I know, John said.

Before I go, what is your favorite flower?

A dandelion, he said.

That's not *really* a flower.

He said: I know.

I jolted awake and scanned my blackened room. I smiled wide, a smile which mirrored the moon. The door was open and light bloomed. My ear twitched and a whisper crooned, "Let the Purge resume. Purge resume."

Freedom's Worth

Alexandra Birr

Morning sunlight streamed in through the window of the second story bedroom, illuminating the room within. A pile of clothes and shoes lay discarded next to an unmade bed, and a clock on the wooden nightstand pulsed with the morning's time. The door of the room opened, and Gabrielle was roused from her sleep. She looked up to see the figure of her roommate sitting up on the bed. "Good morning," Gabrielle greeted with a yawn.

Emma turned to face her friend. "Hey," she returned.

Gabrielle stretched and turned over on her side. "I didn't hear you come in last night," she began. "Were you out late with Samantha again?"

Emma felt a smile quickly spread across her face. "Ah, yes I was," she replied easily. "It wasn't any big deal; we weren't doing anything important."

"You don't have to hide anything from me," Gabrielle said, rolling her eyes. "I know complete infatuation when I see it."

"Gabrielle!" Emma protested. A quick laugh from the other assured her that she was teasing. Emma smiled slightly and studied her friend. Despite the early hour of the morning, Gabrielle was already dressed in red satin. Emma had always wondered why Gabrielle chose to wear such expensive attire every day. Red satin, smooth as silk, from one of the most lavish stores in Paris—as Gabrielle often mentioned. However, despite her appearance, she rarely left the house. "This city is far too common," she had explained to Emma once, drawing out her voice with painstaking boredom. "There is hardly anything worth seeing."

Emma by contrast wore a simple pink with white lacing up the front. She preferred comfort to elegance, although Samantha had often said that Emma's down-to-earth nature was one of her favorite qualities about her. While Emma could never be found so lavish as Gabrielle, she always had the willingness and energy to undertake any endeavor or adventure.

"So where did you two go?"

"Out dancing, and then to one of Samantha's friend's houses for some drinks."

"She took you out dancing?"

Emma bristled at Gabrielle's tone, feeling indignant. "Of course," she answered. "Samantha says that she always feels most

comfortable with me."

"Alright, alright," Gabrielle said, waving off Emma's defense. "Did—" She stopped. "Emma, what happened? Is that a bruise?"

Emma's attention snapped to the offending mark. "It's nothing," she assured, quickly moving to hide it. "It was an accident."

"What happened?"

"Nothing."

"Suit yourself."

Whether from lack of care, or perhaps respect for her privacy, Gabrielle dropped the subject and turned away. Choosing to believe the latter, Emma sighed with relief. She eyed the mark a second time. It had been an accident, hadn't it?

Emma remembered the first time that she had met Samantha. It was just after she had embarked on her own in the world. She was young, fresh, inexperienced, and anxious. When she had first seen Samantha, she was immediately drawn to her arresting presence, which seemed to fill the room. Samantha spoke freely, laughed easily, and there was a determined gleam in her eye that Emma envied.

When Samantha spotted Emma and declared her to be the most gorgeous thing she had ever seen, Emma could not have been more surprised or thrilled.

The two quickly became inseparable; Samantha rarely went anywhere without Emma, who for her part complied with Samantha's every whim. Showered by adoration and love, Emma was certain that her happiness could not be more complete.

Thunder cracked overhead, momentarily breaking the rain's otherwise constant drum. Gabrielle pushed herself up in time to see a very wet, muddy, and sorry-looking figure drop to the ground beside the bed. Another click of the door and the room was once again silent, save for the rain against the window.

"Emma?" Gabrielle called softly, walking closer to the silent heap. "You look terrible," she mused.

The question pulled Emma out of her exhaustion. Terrible? She didn't believe that she could possibly look worse than she had the previous days. Muddy canvas clung to her body, and she was certain that some of her scuffs and scrapes were permanent bruises. Indeed, the large mark left from when Samantha had thrown her against the ground the previous month had not at

all faded. Samantha has been profusely sorry afterwards, initially seeming grieved to see Emma's previously flawless skin marred; however, now the mark seemed only to be a cause for annoyance.

"Samantha and I spent the day together. I'm a little worn out, but I'm fine!" Emma said with a laugh, pulling herself off of the floor. She leaned away as Gabrielle peered closer at her body.

"Is that a cut?"

Emma attempted to hide her embarrassment. She wondered if she could cover it up, but no. Gabrielle had already seen it. "Yes, I'm fine," she answered nonchalantly.

"What happened?"

"Nothing," Emma insisted, waiting for the usual reply of "suit yourself." It didn't come. Silence filled the room, seeming to highlight the various marks on Emma's skin.

"Emma, listen to me," Gabrielle started after a moment. Her persistence seemed to be a refusal to drop the subject. "You can't keep letting her treat you like this."

Emma was immediately defensive. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"You let her walk all over you!" Gabrielle snapped. "You say she loves you, but you let her hurt you and step on you all day long! I see the way that she hurts you."

"Samantha is wonderful, so stop it!" Emma threw back.

"Do you think I like seeing you come back like this every day?" Gabrielle asked.

"I'm fine, just drop it."

"Emma—!"

"Drop it!"

"Emma—!"

"I am not talking about this!"

Gabrielle began to speak again, but then stopped, seeming to think better of her words. She turned away. "I hope you think about what she's doing," she said, then was finally silent.

Emma chose not to reply. Of course she thought about it. Constantly. But why couldn't Gabrielle see the whole picture? She was much better off than before Samantha had come into her life.

* * * * *

It had been several weeks into their bliss before Emma had begun to realize that there could be anything wrong. After one too many long and happy days out with Samantha, Gabrielle had commented that Emma wasn't looking as healthy as she had been before.

Emma had considered this, but decided that there was no problem at all. Samantha could be a little abrasive, but that was just her personality. And most importantly, Samantha loved her, as she frequently pointed out to Emma.

But over the months, she gradually came to realize the severity of the situation. Gabrielle—concerned, but too prideful to admit it—was avid in pointing out every new scrape and bruise that Emma acquired, all of which had been inflicted by Samantha. Emma was grieved by the eventual realization that despite all of Samantha's love, she was suffering at her hands. But to admit this out loud would be to break herself

Time and time again she wondered whether this treatment was worth it. Sometimes when she came back home and Gabrielle pointed out the worst of the injuries, Emma thought that she had had enough. But then she would remember the overwhelming loneliness that she had felt before Samantha came into her life. Loneliness that she hadn't realized she had, but that Samantha filled completely, and Emma knew that she did not want to live with it again. She was forever plagued by the thought of which was better: to be free or to be loved? And which was worse? To be hurt or to be alone?

The truck sped down the highway, laughter and music blaring from the front seat. A carefree ending to what, for some, had been a perfect day.

Samantha and her friend, Lacey, had taken advantage of a mutual day off to drive down to the lake. It was a beautiful summer's day, with weather so perfect they could not have chosen a better time to plan their escape.

All morning, Emma had watched Samantha wistfully as she packed her bags, chattering excitedly on the phone about her plans. Just as Emma had resigned herself to a day alone, Samantha reached out and took hold of Emma, taking her to the truck with her. Emma's elation lasted only as long as it took Samantha and Lacey to drive to the lake, get out of the truck, dump their bags by the shore, and rush barefoot into the lake. Emma was left alone by the bags and items, with the strict expectation that she would not move from that spot.

Emma spent the day wallowing—both in her misery and the mud—until hours later Samantha and Lacey headed back for the truck. Emma's heart briefly skipped a beat, thinking that she would be able to sit with Samantha, but Samantha took one look

at the forgotten items and declared them “disgusting” and “too muddy,” then threw everything into the bed of the truck.

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And so the truck drove on, the laughter and music blaring from the front seat only causing Emma more pain. Was it worth it? To be constantly stepped on, trodden on, and then forgotten when it mattered the most? Just as much as the confines of the truck promised a lifetime of neglect and abuse, so too the open air around her made an equally ardent promise, but one of a different nature—freedom. Independence. All she would need to do is leave the one who she cared for most. Was it worth it?

Yes.

With a sudden leap of faith, Emma threw herself from the back of the truck. She bounced, skidded, spun, was sent flying through the air by the wheel of another car, but finally landed unceremoniously on the side of the road. Shock immediately set in. She was dirtier and more alone than she had ever been in her entire life. But... with growing excitement and awareness, she realized that she was free!

In the coming years, the grime of the world covered Emma in layers of dirt so complete that she was indistinguishable from the

being who Samantha had once seen in a store all those years ago. But she held onto life with the tenacity and spirit that she was now able to call her own. Freedom was hers, but often she found that it was accompanied by an aching loneliness. Freedom—was it worth it? She would have a lifetime to ponder this, as she sat in the same place that marked her original change in fate.

Weighing and judging her own decision, she can still be seen there. As families drive by, frequently one can be heard, saying to another, "Why is there only ever one? Who loses just one?" Not lost, she wanted to answer them. Independent. An old, beaten up—but never more alive—shoe on the side of the road.

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God was busy. And my spot was taken.

Kassandra Lozano

I love that these doors never creak, not like the ones at the chapel down on Charles. Here everything was nice, quiet and crisp. I just hate that to get to the pews you have to go through two doors—why two? Does God have two doors? Is one for once you die and the other to talk to God? You'd think that you could just talk to God as you please, but not the way these doors make it seem. I think God only needs one—or none. I mean he knows where we are all day, like Santa Clause but more holy.

No matter what church I enter I have to find the perfect pew. The one in the back, but not alllll the way in the back, but it has to be fully stocked with books cuz I like to follow along. And there can't be anyone in my pew—just me and God. Well apparently God didn't tell all these people that I was coming; there was a whole bunch of people sitting in my church. They all look so dark and black. I looked at the alter just in time to see a dead guy layin' in the casket.

I don't like to think about people dying. I mean I know we all die and that "it's going to be okay," but I just don't like the idea of people going to funerals. But the way I see it is that this is my church and my pew. So I sit anyways. There's this lady in the front with a big black hat—you know those ones that the queen wears to have tea—but it looks more like a crow's nest. I don't know why you'd want to wear that on your head. But I guess I can't really say much since I'm not a girl. Besides, no one knows why girls do anything they do.

It's not the first time I've seen a hat like this. I've been to a bunch of church occasions. None were for me of course, or anyone I know. Well besides the one for my little brother—but I don't like to think of that one. I've been to quinceañeras, weddings, anniversaries and even baptisms. I really just like to get out of the home. We are only allowed to go out if we have a good reason; God is always the best choice when you want to get out without any questions. Most of the guys say that just to get out, but not me. I really mean it. I always go to church; me and God like to talk.

I end up in these family functions, and sometimes it's kind of nice, but sometimes I think the secret to getting parents to keep you is to practice being part of a family. I really liked the baptisms; they're the best ones. Everyone is always happy no matter what.

The best part is the part where Father George asks the godparents if they agree to help raise the baby. My parents died before they got to make a will, so now we are "wards of the state," or at least that's what neighbors to the home call us. Some of us get lucky and get to keep a family, but not me. My brother and I had a whole plan to get the same family, but he was little so they picked him first. Mr. Jake said that the family would've taken me too if it hadn't been for my brother's accident.

So every day I come here and I talk to God, and then I ask him to take care of my brother for me. He always says yes and I always believe him but today I was too busy watching this terrible church scene. I wish I had stayed behind the other door. Funerals are never fun, and I think about my brother too much. So I tell God that I know he takes care of my brother, but if today he could take care of the little boy in the casket too and maybe his brother if he's down here with me. He said yes. And I walked back to the home; it was dinner time soon and my turn to say grace. I didn't look back at the sad family cuz I know my God is gonna keep them too. He has a big family up in heaven, but I like to think there's a place for me too. I still go to church every day, but now I read the mass schedule so I know that my pew is open and that God isn't busy, but also so that I don't have to look at crow hats.

The Battle of Rose Hallow

Sarah Cortinaz

The people of Rose Hallow came out from homes and congregated in the town square. This was the traditional Sunday Picnic, started when the town was founded in the 1800s. It was an ordinary day; nothing was out of place. The cucumber sandwiches and lemonade were made to perfection, and the children ran around playing with Mr. Jamison's dog, Maggie.

It was on this day, a day like any other, that a man on horseback rode up to the entrance of Rose Hallow. Who would come to here? They were so far out in the middle of nowhere, that nobody ever bothered them. The crowd of people stared in disbelief.

A mother called to her son as she grabbed his shoulders. "Jimmy, stay with me."

As the stranger got closer the people could see the lacerations all over his body, which caused him to bleed from head to foot. The crowd froze. The man got off his horse and began to walk towards the crowd. After two steps, the mysterious man collapsed.

Four men in the town began to run up to the man. When they finally reached him, they examined his wounds and his clothes. They lifted the man up from the ground and brought him to the town doctor.

Two days after the arrival of the mysterious man, he emerged from the medical quarters. His left arm was in a sling and the cuts along his face had been stitched. The man walked through the town, noticing the people's apprehensiveness towards his presence, until he came across James sitting in a rocking chair.

"You're really quiet," said James. "Don't take their impoliteness personally. We just don't know who you are. However, to be fair we'd like to ask you questions."

James stood up and reached out his hand for a handshake. The man stepped back and furrowed his brow.

"I'm sorry, I didn't have a chance to introduce myself," James said. "My name is James. I was one of the men who helped you when you were wounded."

"Look," James continued. "I know this might seem strange for you, but we want to help you find your way home."

The mysterious man dug his heel into the dirt. James waited for the man's answer.

"We need to know who you are, though," said James. "What's your name?"

"O'Brien, My name is O'Brien." The man said.

"Well, O'Brien, I hope you're doing better. Once you're fully healed, we will get looking for where you came from," said James

O'Brien was about to shake James' hand when a voice called from afar.

"Who is that?" yelled a woman.

At the entrance, where O'Brien had too been collected, another man on horseback rode up to the entrance of Rose Hallow. He collected a package from the side of his horse, threw it to the ground, and rode off. Everyone throughout the town stood still. The mysterious man ran from where he was standing with James.

"Hey, wait!" yelled James.

O'Brien was the first one to arrive at the entrance, along with a man named Baynes. There, lying in the dirt was a small brown package. The town's people began to run as fast as they could. They needed to what this mysterious person had left them. When the crowd finally reached the entrance, they breathed heavily while they examined the small box.

"What do you think is in there, Baynes?" said a young boy.

"I don't know." Baynes slowly reached for the box.

"Don't touch it," yelled Shoshanna as she reached out her hand, "It could be poison!"

Baynes was jolted back. "Woman, you scared me half to death! I doubt it would be poison!"

The crowd looked at Baynes as he picked up the box and unwrapped the brown packaging. He peeled back each layer of the brown packaging as the crowd watched. His breath grew shallow. He finally reached the wooden box and opened the lid.

"There's a letter," Baynes said.

"That's it?" asked Shoshanna. "Well, what does it say?"

"It says 'Enemy.'" Baynes looked at O'Brien. "What do you think that means?"

"Hey, who is that?" A woman asked.

The conversation was stopped when the people looked north, and saw the man on horseback had been watching their reactions to this package from the top of a distant hill.

"What did we do?" yelled Shoshanna.

"Quiet yourself, woman!" said Baynes.

The people looked up at the hill where the man on the horseback sat, but it was if he was a statue.

The crowd stood grouped together at the mouth of the town. O'Brien, though wounded, forced his way to see what this man looked like. O'Brien and the mysterious man made eye contact with each other, and it was as if something snapped. O'Brien's chest began to rise and fall in a quick motion.

The man on the horse suddenly sped away, and the mysterious man pushed through the crowd, finding his way back to the medical quarters.

It was like clockwork, everyday at noon, another package would show up at the entrance of the town. Each letter would say the same thing: "enemy." On the third day a package showed up containing a different letter. The letter said, "It's too late."

"What do these letters mean," asked James as he held a letter in his hand. "I have a bad feeling that something is going to happen, Baynes."

"Don't be saying those words out in public." Baynes said. "You know you will only worry those people."

"Maybe they should be worried." said James.

Baynes took a gulp of whiskey and threw his hands up in the air.

"I don't want to get into this with you, James. If you think we should move out, then let's move out. However, I'm not the only one in town that thinks this is just some practical joke. The last one showed up, what, four days ago?"

James sat down across from Baynes. James rubbed his face and exhaled. There was silence between the both of them, until a loud bang. It caught both their attention, as they turned to the wall.

"What was that?" asked James.

"Mr. Devon has been moving lumber all day for his new fences." Baynes said.

"What do we do with O'Brien?" asked Baynes

"Send him on his way I guess. I think he's healed up enough. He can be on his way tomorrow morning."

Baynes took one more gulp of whiskey before getting up from the table. He stretched and groaned.

"I guess I'll go tell him." said Baynes.

All of a sudden, their conversation was broken off by a woman's high pitched scream. As the men ran out, they were plunged into a different atmosphere than the town they were familiar with. People were running everywhere as town buildings were set on fire. "Get out! We need to get out!" yelled Baynes as he began to run.

As people ran towards the entrance, they were surprised that the different entrances to the town had been blocked. The town's

people were caught in the middle of the town. Fire was flying above them.

"What do we do?" asked a woman as she began to cry.

"I don't know," said James.

Just then a group of men began to climb over the blocked entrance. The town's people couldn't do anything but fight, but they were ill-prepared. James made it to his home and gathered what little weapons he had. Other men did the same, but some did the best they could with the guns on their waist. As James approached the entrance of the town, he noticed a group of mysterious people making their way towards them.

The mysterious group began to take over the town. Screams of women were being heard, as the cries of men rang throughout the town. James went from behind the saloon, and saw a man from the mysterious group. In one swift movement, James grabbed a figure, and took him into a back room of the saloon.

"What do you want from us!" yelled James as he slapped the young man. "Answer me!"

The young man, not a day over 25, simply laughed. The young man's face was covered with blood.

"That man you took in," the young man said. "You think he's your friend? He led us to your town."

"But why kill us?" asked James as he crouched down. "Why destroy our town? What have we done?"

"It's what you've become. Our group thinks that you people have become a disgrace to society. The world must be cleansed of you."

The young man began to cough up blood. His chest rose and fell at a slower pace. James stared at the man's chest until it refused to rise any longer. James noticed that out of the man's shirt pocket was an old piece of paper. As he unfolded the piece of paper, he noticed that it was a map of the surrounding area, and three red Xs. At that moment, James realized that everything had been a set up. This was all planned. He opened the door the saloon.

The crowd grew smaller and smaller. James was shooting at any man who wanted to cause him harm. He kept on firing his gun until there were no more bullets. His gun clicked, in desperation, in that final moment, O'Brien stood in front of James. Slowly, O'Brien lifted his pistol. James breath became shallow, as he stared down barrel. The building on men's right exploded, as the bullet fired from the gun. The whole town was destroyed.

Two days later, a lone man wakes with a jolt. He leaves the

town of Rose Hallow, and walks until he finds another town. He is wounded. The town where he arrives wonders where he has come from.

No Warranty

Gregory Valdez

In her Latina accent, the lady tells me:

"This is your fault! Not mine. It's your mistake."

She goes on about how incompetent I supposedly am for not including the sales tax in her estimate. I can't remember the last time I had to grit my teeth so hard. This lady infuriates and frustrates me, turning my decent day into sour. I feel my cool slipping just as she decides to shut up.

"Alright ma'am. I apologize. I won't be back until I have the correct total."

I grab the TV mount she's holding before I walk back to the home theater desk. Her bitching doesn't bother me. I get chewed out enough. But I think her words sting because I assume that she's dumber than me. No taller than 5'4", the woman's hair is tinged a shade of orange that is almost unrecognizable, and the stud in her nose jets out of her right nostril, making it look like a metallic hair.

Even though she's wearing scrubs, I doubt she's a nurse. I'm going with *clinical office assistant* or whatever they call medical receptionists now. Her snappiness suggests that she deals with dumbass patients all day, checking them in at an office on the Westside. And as I contemplate this, my anger does not subside. And I know I have two reasons for which I can be upset, but I can only pick one. Despite her own position, she lacks empathy and sympathy that would allow her the patience in dealing with others. . . meaning she's a mean person. The other is the first I mentioned earlier: I'm pretty sure I'm smarter than her, yet she speaks to me like I'm the idiot.

Still standing at the home theater desk, scenarios run amuck in my imagination. If only I could walk back up with a finger in her face and a grimace on mine saying,

"Ma'am, though I can hardly understand you, I take it that you're an unkind witch who is stuck wherever you are because of the way you are."

Then I'd kick out the cane from under her father just to give an example of her own attitude. I would likely be dragged out soon after, sealing my physical resignation.

I want to do that and I don't, and I understand *why* I can't. But I don't understand *why* I can't. What keeps me, you, anyone from doing what they want for the right reasons? Not telling that

woman something, letting her walk away feeling as if she won, that would be injustice. Otherwise, she walks back into the world, free to belittle and mistreat those around her and those she'll encounter.

Walk around and listen to those around you. Go ahead and eavesdrop. It's OK. The lack of kindness which surrounds us can be so infectious. Worst of all, we don't challenge that norm, leaving it to gradually release its toxins. The poison spreads, reaches more people, slowly seeps into their possible souls. This *unkindness* gradually changes a person. It gradually changes society and the way people perceive the world around them.

Of course, this takes decades if not centuries, but I'm not one to sit and let goodness decline. Because it's not only that the lack of kindness causes suffering and pain, the self is also corrupted and lost. Ultimately, I decide this is what bothers me the most about the way this customer speaks: she, at that moment, is the embodiment of collective cruelty and ignorance that many unknowingly perpetrate. She might as well be Pol Pot.

This vision may be exaggerated, but I know what I'm talking about. And as my eye catches the time, it hits 6:00 pm. My shift is over. I quietly clock out and start making my way towards the front of the store, taking the long way around so that the woman and her father don't see me escaping the lashes of her tongue.

Racing towards the front doors, a young couple stops me near the DVDs. . .

"Excuse me, where can I find *Fox Force Five*?"

"The TV show? Which season?"

"Season 2," the girlfriend chimes in.

"Blu-ray or DVD?"

"VHS, dude . . ."

"You're kidd-"

"Yeah, man. DVD"

"Ah, well I'm off the clock, sir. Ask the gentleman right there."

I point behind them and make my break as they groan. With a wave to the cute cashier, I cross the threshold from air-conditioned electronics into sun-broiled junkyard. I throw on my shades with the right and reach for my cigarettes with the left. Already on my lower lip, I light the cigarette with my silver zippo and then untuck my shirt. Without ever looking behind me, I finally reach my car at the other side of the parking lot.

A feeling of relief begins to spread throughout my body as I turn the ignition on. It begins in my chest, working its way outwards

to my fingertips and toes. A smile breaks across my lips and I look towards the front entrance of the store as I begin driving off. The woman and her father are walking out of the store with the TV mount in hand. Even from across the organized tar, I can tell from her face and waving arm that her visit has been unpleasant. I laugh to myself, feeling pleased. My eyes keep on the pair as I crawl towards the lot exit.

My interest wanes and I turn my eyes back towards the front of the car. It's too late. Before I hear anything, crimson bursts across the windshield and leaves half of it with a branching crack. I swerve and brake. I can't see past the red. It's another 10 feet until the car is fully stopped and I step out in frenzy. *Oh, God. Oh, God . . .* In a mangled mess, a girl lies across the blacktop with a puddle of blood forming around her.

It's too late. A crowd is forming around her. A man grabs the body and hugs as tears run from his eyes. The agony of his face brings me to my knees. With knots of hair in my hands, I scream uncontrollably. Even customers inside the store can hear me and as the lady steps into her car with the TV mount, she turns to her father and says:

"Aye . . . that's how I feel every time we have to come here."

The Silence

Alexandra Birr

The silence was maddening. It was everywhere—surrounding him, suffocating him, screaming at him. He longed to fill the air with words, but couldn't speak. He had taken to filling his day with idle sounds—words, music, television, anything—because it was in the silence that he had no one to face but himself.

He stared at the crack that ran along the white wall of the small room, running from eye level up to the ceiling. It provided a brief distraction before he forced himself to look back at the silhouette behind the screen. His knees already were beginning to ache from kneeling in front of the dividing wall—or rather, his entire body was aching from the tension.

Damn it, he had to say something. "In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Eric stopped. That was as much as he knew to say. He was racking his memories for what came next, beginning to feel paralyzed by fear, when a gravelly voice from behind the screen spoke. "How long has it been since your last confession?"

Eric's head snapped up. Gratefully, he rushed to answer. "I don't know, Father. Maybe ten years. I... I've sinned—" He broke off, and the weight of the silence pressed heavily on him once again.

Again, the old man lifted the silence. "Why don't I start?"

Eric nodded his head quickly before remembering that the old man could not see him. "Yes, thank you."

"Why are you here, son?"

"I'm here because—" Eric stopped. Because he had sinned? Because he was in the wrong? Because he felt guilty?—"because I need to confess."

"And what is it that you have done?"

Eric took a deep breath, trying to work up the courage to speak his confession out loud. When he finally did speak, it was in a rushed, forced manner, his words tumbling over themselves in an effort to finish as quickly as possible. "I've been having an affair with a woman, Cassie, from my work. For six months. When I finally told my wife, she told me to go to confession." There. He had said it. That's why he was here. He breathed again.

He could still remember the look on Cassie's face when she told him that they had to end their relationship. Broken, desperate, and anguished. She had said that she couldn't keep doing it

anymore—couldn't keep hiding things from her husband and "living a lie."

Eric continued, a small and foolish part of his mind hoping that if he just spoke the words fast enough, it would lessen their impact. "My wife and I aren't close. We haven't been close for years. Sharon doesn't care about me at all. She doesn't care about spending time with me, she doesn't respect me. If I told her I was going on a month-long business trip, she wouldn't even care! It's like she has no emotions at all."

Why the hell was he here, anyway? Putting himself under the scrutiny and judgment of a complete stranger—it wasn't fair! If anything, Sharon was the one who should be sitting here, not him. He remembered the contemptuous look in her eyes when he had finally told her the truth. As though she should have expected as much from him.

"Do you understand why what you did was a sin?" The words of the old man were not unkind. They were slow, patient. For some reason, that seemed to make them worse.

As he shook the memory of Sharon's face from his mind, Eric could feel the anger rebuilding in his chest, replacing the overwhelming guilt he had felt ever since Cassie had left him. "No, you know what? I don't see why it's a sin. It's pretentious people like you and Sharon who are calling it that. I didn't do anything wrong. Sharon checked out of our marriage a long time ago. She just stopped caring. I even suggested once that we go to counseling, but she just rolled her eyes as though it was the stupidest thing she had ever heard. The only thing keeping her with me are those damn vows. So if I finally found someone who actually loves me? Who supports me and respects me and cares about me? What is wrong with that? For as much as Sharon is concerned, I'm not even here."

The old man began to speak, "Son—"

Eric stood. The anger had continued to rise as he spoke. Anger at his wife for ignoring him. Anger at Cassie's husband for taking her away from him. Anger at the priest for daring to think he could understand and pass judgment upon him. Even new anger that he had not yet felt—at Cassie, for leaving him. The way she left, the way she had cried, she acted as though he should feel as guilty as her! "No, you know what? I'm leaving. I didn't do anything wrong. If Sharon is so concerned about this place, then she can come back here herself!"

"Wait—"

Before the old man could speak, Eric wrenched the door open

and stalked out. Anger filled his entire being, but it was better—so much better—than the guilt. His own thoughts occupied his mind as he walked back to his car. Most people would blame him, he knew. But they couldn't understand or know what his marriage was like. The whole world could judge him from its lofty pedestal, but he didn't care. When he finally sat down in his seat and started the engine, he paused for a moment and took a deep breath, trying to clear his mind before he began driving. Perfect silence surrounded him once more, threatening to overtake him, and he could feel the echo of panic begin to creep again into his chest. Hastily he flipped on the radio and cranked the volume to the first station that came on. Backing the car out of its spot, he quickly drove away.

A Trapped Bird

Kelly Montgomery

"What are you doing?" The words spilled from my mouth before I could even understand the scene I had interrupted.

The male nurse looked back at me. He stood at the patient's bedside with a small blue pillow hanging from one hand, "What did it look like?"

Standing only five feet apart, we stared silently at each other, assessing. *Did he just try to...*

I took a chance and said half-jokingly, "Potassium is quicker... just push it and flush the line with saline..."

After an eternal pause, he said, "Do you have any?" His eyes stabbed into me like ice picks.

I found myself reaching into my purple scrub top pocket and fondling the half empty vial of potassium.

"Yeah..." I whispered.

He walked closer and in the hallway light behind me I could see his hospital badge, "Mike Hamilton, RN." He held out his right hand, still staring at me with his startling blue eyes. I handed him the vial. It seemed like we stood for hours like this, a turning point possibly the start of a new partnership.

"Hey, Mike! The food's here!" yelled a voice from down the hall.

The moment and tension shattered. He dropped the vial into my pocket as he maneuvered past me and out into the hallway. He was so close that I could smell the Axe body spray wafting from him. I followed after him. My medication cart still stood where I had left it next to the nurses' station. Behind the counter Nurse Hamilton was now standing with two other nurses, all dressed in red scrubs, who were good-naturedly arguing over Denny's take-out.

He was staring thoughtfully at me. I quickly looked away and, blushing, grabbed the cart and rushed it out of the ICU. Walking down the empty and low-lit hallway to the elevator, I found myself shaking with anxiety. I wasn't sure what had just happened or how I should deal with it.

By the time I got back to the pharmacy, I had regained control over my conflicted emotions. I swiped my hospital badge to open the door and as I pushed the cart inside, I could hear the usual 2am-on-a-Sunday joking around by the three other pharmacy technicians I worked with.

"Hey, Becky! You gotta phone call!" my shift supervisor Cameron sang, poking her head around the corner.

My other colleagues, John and Rachael, "oohhed" and "aaahhhed" from somewhere behind her. *Typical*, I thought. What was surprising was what she said next.

"Yeah, it's that hot nurse from the ICU...Hamilton!" she giggled and hoots erupted from the others.

"Oh, I'll take the call in the back." I replied.

"That's what she said!" John yelled.

Rolling my eyes, I quickly pushed the cart to the back of the pharmacy. By the time I parked it, Cameron had patched the call through.

"This is Rebecca Jones, how may I help you?" I said cheerily.

"...We're out of Tylenol..."

"I can send that up in the pneumatic tube."

"...Don't you guys have to restock the medication cabinets?"

I had half hoped he wouldn't say that.

"...Yeah...is there anything else you need?"

Snapping his fingers, "...That stuff we talked about before, you know..."

"Ok." I found myself reaching into my pocket where the vial lay waiting.

I hung up and stood for a moment going over the phone call in my head. *He seemed so normal...and so had!* Taking a deep breath I walked to the front where the oral meds and my co-workers were telling raunchy jokes to each other.

"They're out of Tylenol, he was just reminding me," I said smiling.

I grabbed three bottles of the liquid medication and headed to the IV preparation room to get a bag and to find a larger and full vial of potassium. I put the meds into a non-descript brown paper bag and neatly folded the edge down. *Is this for real or some sort of a setup?* Calmly, I walked back to the door to leave.

"Be right back!" I yelled brightly.

The fake smile I had plastered on my face disappeared before the door slammed shut behind me. *What was going to happen now?*

I found myself racing down the darkened hall and into the elevator which stood open almost in anticipation of my arrival. I hummed semi-nervously to myself on the ride up to the third floor ICU. When the doors slid open, *Hamilton* was leaning against the wall across from the elevator. I walked out of the elevator, turned right, and started down the hallway; he fell into step next to me.

He walked so close that our shoulders kept brushing.

"Did you bring it?"

I knew he wasn't talking about the Tylenol.

"Of course, Nurse Hamilton!" I chirped.

We continued down the hallway and into the ICU. I entered the medication room next to the nurses' station with him close behind. He stood by the door and watched me refill the Tylenol. I took a deep breath and turned around.

"So..." I said smirking.

"So...are you in?"

"Are you?"

He cocked his right eyebrow at me, "Come on."

"Where are the others?" I asked.

"Watching *True Blood* at the other nurses' station down the hall...they think I'm out for a smoke."

He moved past me and walked toward a room two doors down from the nurses' station, "In here."

He pushed the door open a crack and slipped into the room, I followed. He stood over the heavily sedated woman looking intently at her and as I came to stand to his left, he held out his hand. I took the vial from the bag and let the bag fall to the floor as I popped off the cap. When I placed the vial in his hand I noticed the large syringe he already held in his right hand. I stood transfixed as he drew up as much potassium as the syringe could hold. *This is no setup.*

"Put your hand over her heart." He commanded me as he held the syringe up in the air.

With my trembling right hand I complied at the same time as he turned the alarm on her heart monitor to silent. I held my breath as he injected the entire contents of the syringe into her main IV line and quickly followed it with a saline injection. With his right hand he casually tossed the empty syringes into the used syringe bin. Then he placed his left hand over my right hand pressing hard.

As the woman's heart fluttered around in her chest like a trapped bird, he whispered into my ear, "Have you ever felt *anything* like that before?"

The fluttering of her heart became weaker over what seemed like an eternity before it ceased all together as I responded, "No, never...I always leave right away, so I won't get caught. This is much more exciting."



Non-Fiction
Part II

My Portentous Blanket

Kalpana Mukunda Iyengar

"One does not burn a blanket to get rid of a flea" (Turkish Proverb)

I had a beautiful satin security blanket that I kept with me for as long as I could remember. My mother bought me that colorful blanket while we were shopping at a silk farm near Ooty in India. I believe I would not quit pestering my dear patient mother for something to play with while she was busy looking for stuff in the store. She saw the silk blanket that was about the size of a kitchen towel, manageable by a 7 year old. She decided to buy it for me hoping that I would not bother her! I was happy to have gotten something to hang on to and so I was happy that day.

Who ever knew that blanket would bring so much misfortune and chaos in my life! After all I was a 7 year old child with no sense of reasoning what so ever. I had three siblings, one my own age (a twin), another 9 months older than us, and the youngest was a month-old baby. We three played a lot, fought for trivial things that we would not share, annoyed our mother with our pranks, and got hurt several times in a day. Although the youngest was nine months old, we made sure we included him when playing hide and seek and other games. The blanket was the fourth companion in my life now...

But the blanket brought another problem in our lives. We all wanted that piece of silk although it was mine. My mother would say, "You have to share with your brothers or else God will take them away from you," like Vajasrava threatened Nachiketa to give him away to Lord Yama. God did take two of my brothers away when I was 9 years old because my parents separated. The older boys left with my father and my little brother and I stayed with my mother. I cursed myself for not sharing that blanket.

Oh! That blanket—the places it traveled with me... It went to school with me, slept with me, was a companion while I ate, joined my clothes in the washer, and played with me at the playground. But, the only place I did not let it go was with my brothers. How I regret my mistake of not sharing that blanket! It was hurtful to think that I had the blanket, but I had lost two of my brothers.

My brothers tried innumerable tricks on me to secure that silk cloth, but failed sorrowfully. I loved that blanket because it was always the same length; same colour, and it stayed at the same place I left it. It would unquestioningly go to school, to the market,

to bed, and to all the other places I went. I loved it because my mother could carry it along with me, and most importantly my brothers could not get it when my mother had it with her; the blanket and I were both secure. However, the blanket was not always safe as I thought; one day, it got lost. I could not find it anywhere!

My twin brother got hold of it and told me that he lost it in the park. I did not eat a morsel that day or sleep all night thinking about my poor, lonesome blanket. How I worried that it was eaten by a monster or torn by a wild beast. I imagined horrid thoughts. I think my twin, a sensitive boy, could not bear his sister's agony of the loss of a blanket, so he revealed it to me the next morning. It was next not my pillow and boy was I not thrilled to have found my lost love after a day's absence.

After that painful episode, my bothers played several pranks on me because they enjoyed their only sister's agony. Eventually since I did not share that blanket, God took them away from me forever.

So, children, share your blankets with your siblings and they will not leave you...

Childhood Memories

Amal Alijubran

Some of our childhood memories are beautiful. We all have many childhood memories that make us smile and feel happy when we remember them. I have many childhood memories. Most of them make me feel happy and wish that I could go back to those days again. However, a few of them make me feel sad when I remember them because they make me remember those people who are not still alive.

My favorite childhood memory which makes me feel happy when I remember it is the trip to Dubai with my family. The trip was just for five days, but it was five days full of fun and good memories. Ten people went on the trip, my parents, my two younger sisters, my uncle, my aunt and their three children. At the time, I was twelve years old, so I was old enough to understand and realize everything that was going on around me. On the first day, we went to the Al-khalifah tower which is the tallest tower in the world. It is huge from the inside, and many tourists from all over the world come to visit it. We experienced a new thing by visiting it. On the second and the third day, we went to the Dubai mall. It is one of the biggest malls around the world. We enjoyed our time there where there are many shops for children's toys and games. We as children were interested in the toys. At that time, there was a festival there because our trip was during the summer time and each summer Dubai used to have a Festival called Modhesh World festival. It attracts many people from different countries to visit Dubai in order to let their children enjoy the attractive and wonderful events that are held there, and we had so much fun there, we enjoyed our time playing with each other and watching the festivities. Thus, this trip has become one of my best childhood memories.

On the other hand, I have a few sad childhood memories. The saddest memory that I ever had when I was a child is when my grandparents passed away. They were kind and loved their grandchildren a lot. They used to visit us and stay at our home from time to time, which made us feel happy because we loved their presence around us. Moreover, their home was the place where the whole family gathered every weekend. As children, we enjoyed the family gathering because it allowed us to meet all our uncles' and aunts' children, and to play with them and have so much fun. When my grandparents passed away, we missed all of those

get-togethers. We miss them, and miss their smiles that used to make the entire family smile and feel happy. Also, we miss family gathering which is significant to ensure a good relationship between each family members.

Most people have many memories that make them remember the different periods of their life from their childhood to the present. Childhood memories, in my opinion are the best things that we can remember because the childhood period is characterized by honesty, guiltlessness, and candor. Childhood memories are unforgettable. Sometimes they make us smile and feel happiness when we remember them. However, sometimes some of our childhood memories make us cry and feel sadness, especially if the memories are allocated with people you love and are leave us.

My Grandmother and I

Xiang Shen

My grandmother's memory is very deep in me, though she died many years ago. My grandmother's home is in the village near the city I live. After school, I spent most of my childhood there; I had a happy childhood without any constraints in my grandmother's home.

I often played with my little uncle during every vacation. He was in high school then. He would tell me a lot of stories that I had never heard about. And we also went very far away to the slopes during the moonlight night to steal foods in farmland to cook in the winter. We also saw the stars together in the summer night on the small slope behind the house, resting under the moonlight. At that time I worshiped him very much, and I was like a small shadow to follow him all day along. We often chatted with friends who were not far away from my grandmother's home. My grandparents liked us whenever we played outside. My grandmother always prepared some food for us, and she was very good at cooking. The most delicious food I remember she cooked is the braised chicken.

Spring time in grandmother's home was the most cherished memory in my mind. While we woke up about 6:00a.m., my grandmother would gather the family and she would prepare food, clean the house and burn candles in the main room. Then we would wait for other relatives to arrive. During dinner, as usual, the first thing was to put the prepared food in the main room and burn incense to pray for ancestors, and then the whole family would begin to enjoy the delicious food. After dinner, the time was for children. Adults would stay around the fire pit chatting with each other. This time was the happiest time for children in the whole year. In the Spring Festival, adults must to give some money to children as a New Year gift. We spent this money to buy firework, food and toys. The impressive memory to me is the fighting between boys with cap pistols. I was very young at that time, so I was often being fired to cry in the game. Then, my little uncle would defend me.

Also, I remember there were many chickens in grandma's yard. When I was alone in her house, I liked to run after them around the yard. When I caught them, I would throw them out to the air and saw those flapping wings shed some feather occasionally. Grandma often stopped me from running after the chickens because some hens would not lay eggs because of the fear from running.

Although so many years were gone by, these memories are always clear and colorful in my mind.

Swimming Pool

Hanouf Alotaibi

On a hot summer day my father decided to go to a lodge on the beach. I was young at that time but I have not forgotten this incident for my whole life. I remember how excited I was when my father called our family to go with us. Imagine uncles, aunts, cousins and my family gathering in one house. The preparation for the trip was another story. My mother kept calling my aunts to ask about the detailed preparation, even though all they had to bring was food and clothing. I was standing there and I did not know what to do. Everyone did his/her business. My father called my old uncle to arrange the budget and my mother contacted my aunts to discuss how they would divide the jobs. My father looked at me, while he talked to my uncle on the phone, and told him "tell your daughters to bring their swimming suits." My father knew the expression on my face. He knew how much I loved to be in the water. Even though I could not swim, the idea of being in the water excited me. I finally found a job to do. Finding a swimming suit is not an easy job especially because all my uncles, aunts and cousins would be there. I needed a beautiful swimming suit to be impressive. After hours of searching and digging in my closet I found my old swimming suit which I had not seen for a years.

After two days of preparation we all got to the cars and drove to the lodge. My old uncle drove his car in the front and everyone followed him. We were like a chain; if the front car stopped all the other cars would stop. After two hours of driving we reached the lodge. It was a big house with many rooms and had a big back yard with many different types of trees. One of the trees was a lemon tree which is rare to see in Saudi Arabia. In the back yard was the biggest swimming pool I had ever seen. The men were tired so they went to their rooms to take a nap. The women went to the kitchen to prepare the food for the dinner and the boys went outside to explore the area. When everyone was busy, I snuck off to the back yard. I wore my swimming suit and entered the swimming pool. Even though I knew it was wrong I could not resist the temptation of the water and to avoid a scolding I also encouraged my cousins to enter the pool. I was afraid of my old aunt, who was a very anxious and nervous person. If she knew that I had entered the pool, she would have rebuked me, because she had warned us about going to the pool without supervision. For me it was impossible to wait

until the family finished dinner. After persuading my cousins to enter the pool with me, we started playing in the shallow area because my younger cousin and I did not know how to swim. My other cousins, who were a pretty good at swimming, went to the deep end and tried to convince my younger cousin that the best place to learn swimming is in the deep end. Unfortunately, she was convinced. She was sure that nothing could happen to her because of the swimming rings that she wore. She slowly moved to the deep end with her swimming rings, which had a special design with open end to fit anyone's shape. No one could have imagined what happened after she moved to the deep end. Suddenly the swimming ring end opened wide and my younger cousin start to drown. The older cousins tried to save her but they could not because she was too fat, and it was difficult to pull her up. In the middle of the screaming and the crying from my cousins, I stood there frozen not knowing what to do. I remembered when I convinced her to enter the pool. I told myself "if something happens to her it will be my fault, if I lost my precious little cousin I won't forgive myself." I asked God to save her life. The screaming got louder when my old aunt came running, she jumped in to the pool and wrenched up my cousin. My aunt had saved my little cousin's life. At that moment I looked at my aunt as an angel when she used to be the devil in my eyes.

That trip was supposed to be joyful but it ended with my uncle closing the swimming pool door and made it a prohibited area for the children. No one scolded me but I still think that I ruined that happy time. I felt a guilty about the incident with my little cousin. After that incident she had nightmares about water and pools. She developed a water phobia. I tried my best to help her but unfortunately my attempts failed. I could not forget this incident from my childhood and I promised myself that I would not give up, I will do my best to help her, not because I am sorry but because I love her.

My Noisy Group

Noor Al Abdulmohsin

I lived in a small village that was far away from any city; this rural village had a lot of different habits compared with cities or even countries. When I was in fourth grade, my parents decide to move to a city that was two hours driving from our village. We weren't living alone over there; we have a huge family that shares their happiness and sadness with us. But my dad's work forced us to leave our lovely village, and we move to Dammam city.

When we moved to Dammam city, the first reaction from me was crying! I don't know why I reacted like that, but I guess this was because I was thinking of a new life, leaving my family, and going far from my best friends. After that, I spent the first year in a moody and crying tone; therefore, my parents were always worried about my situation. So, they ended up with a good solution that made everyone comfortable. The solution was staying five days in Dammam city and spending every weekend in our village with my family. My brother, Hassan, one of my best friends, my 3 cousins, and I were the noisiest group ever. Since we moved to Dammam city, they would wait for us every weekend. Also they were waiting for the yearly Al Haj vacation, performance of the pilgrimage to Mecca for Muslims, which happened in December. My parents always went to perform Al Haj, and they left us in our village to stay with our family. This was the best time ever for the noisiest group. We would wake up before the sunshine, but we were the last ones to sleep on those days, so we could have as much fun as possible.

In 2007, on Al Haj we stayed in our home at the small lovely village; that year the noisy group had decided to make it special! So, we were collecting and saving money for this vacation. First, I would like to mention that one of our uncles has four daughters; we don't like them at all! There are a lot of reasons that we did not like them of those reasons they were so arrogant, in my eyes! That's why my brother and cousins tried to take away my right to speak to them. So, the first thing we did was clean up our entire home, so we could invite them there and have a discussion session to find a punishment for them! Then we decorated the home as if it was a birthday party, but it really was not necessary. The third step was my responsibility; my part was to call them and try to be nice to them. So, when I invited them, they would come! The next step was for my middle cousin, Ali, which was that he should put soap on

all external of the flooring of the house, so they can fall immediately and we laugh on them. Then Hassan had to be the boss, so he allowed everyone to sit or stand. But Hassan was really fierce with them; therefore, they immediately started crying louder and asking for help from their mommy! Unfortunately, Hassan didn't stop on what he did; he kept yelling at them till they started fighting with him and throwing everything around! Not only that! But also, the big surprise that their mom forgot to give them the key to their house, so she came back and she saw everything. That was the worst thing that happened, because the noisiest group was punished; each of us got a punishment from his/her mom and his/her dad. However they did not forget to take the money that we saved.

After that incident, my parents didn't have any chance to go to Al Haj perfume, and that was the last time the noisiest group got together without any monitoring until we were adults. However the really cool experiment was that the punishment from my parents was to not go to our village for a month. That punishment forced me to get used to Dammam city, and make huge friendships all over the city.

My Children's Behavior

Abdullah Khalifa

Before I married, I was dreaming to have good children. I was planning their lives based on my attitude. I know that I gave a lot of problems for my parents, but when I grow up they feel proud and their learning worked. There is an idiom that usually the parents used on my country is "The behavior of the son will be the same as his father." Furthermore, if the son did anything that harm his father or something that make the father happy, the son will face the same behavior on his son when he grow up. I believed on this idiom. The reason is I heard a lot of stories regarding the relationship between father and son. I started to change my behavior nor because I was so harmful and I want to be respected and kind to my children and I want them to me like me in the future. In my childhood I was playing a lot and I was not listening to my parents this is the most thing that I did to them.

At this time my little children were born and I'm trying my best to make their behavior very well. Most of the time they are with me and I'm more responsible about them from many ways. Such as feeding, cleaning, dipper changing and take them from and to school. Suddenly, I face that my son act in different way. I tried to see what is that change, and I asked his teacher about his attitude. I did not realize what are the reasons that change his behavior. I got back and remember the idiom. All what I did is I was not listing. Also my daughter she became more aggressive even stronger then her brother.

After certain day of thinking and reading in on many books and consulting the teachers I saw that they are growing and they are in the level of understanding the meaning of behaviors. Everything that they do is based on their knowledge on the school. The teachers on the school keep saying the same word that they are still in progress until they reach the level of life understanding. Finally, I'm trying to do my best and dedicate myself to them to be on good behavior.

One of My Childhood Memories

Amal N Alshehri

The childhood of any person's life is filled with many events that stuck in his or her memory. Those events are divided to be a good memory or a bad memory. During my childhood time, I have kept some good memories, and these events happened in our summer vacation with my family in the most quiet area of Saudi Arabia.

When I was ten years old, my father told us in one of our family's meetings about the best place to spend our summer holiday. There were many suggestions from our family members because our country has a hundreds of the tourist places. For me, I liked to visit my home town Al Namas and to be more specific, I would say my village in Al Namas where is my grandfather and grandmother lived. This was also because there was cool weather and the mountains looked placed above the clouds. Two of my family members agree with me and supported my summer idea. The voices during that summer meeting were too loud, until my family and I convinced our parents with our choice.

We took the decision in Riyadh city, the capital of my country, then we started to ready ourselves for summer lovely adventure. The day started when we went to the airport facing Abha city, which is 80 miles away to Al Namas. We took two hours from Riyadh to Abha. We arrived to Abha and took a taxi to pick us up. The road from Abha Airport was fantastic. The green trees join us for the beginning of our trip to the end, where there is a big welcome plate in the right side of the road with a big written words, "WELCOME DEAR VISITORS IN ALNAMAS."

At our destination, the mountains were the main scene that caught our eyes. We drove through the trees for about 20 minutes, until we arrived to our family house. It is a big two party white house stayed between three Almond trees and it decorated with many limestone rocks. The first day in our village was amazing especially, when we went to play around my grand family herd of sheep for the rest of the day. At that wonderful countryside evening, we slept on the rainfall sound. My grandmother was the first person who woke up of our big family, she went to the kitchen to prepare the breakfast for my grandfather before he left the house to graze his sheep flock. We gathered for breakfast and I asked my grandfather to join him that morning. My grandfather and I left the house to get the herd of sheep out from the barn, then we started our day

walking through farms. When we heading to the mountain the valley was percolated after last night rain. I was afraid and I asked my grandfather are the herd going to pass this valley, he answered "Yes." I covered my eyes and trying to see with one eye the herd movement to the other side of the valley. At that hard time, a lamb was stuck in the edge of the valley, and the lamb was too small to get out of the water. I cried to my grandfather "grandpa look there is one small sheep stuck over there," then he got to the water and held the lamb until he put it down on the safe side. I was very happy to see the lamb alive and I laughed when it shook its body to remove the water. I joined my grandfather every day to graze the sheep herd and I spent a good summer holiday in Al Namas.

In short, my summer holiday in Al Namas was very interesting. I keep it forever as a great spent time and it has many childish events that deserve to hang on my memory. Life changed and we raised, but I remember each second I tasted the countryside holiday, beside I remember each smile was drawn on my face during that holiday.

My First Flight

Li Dongfeng

I did not go to other places by air before going to the United States. Even though it was my first flight experience, I had different feelings along the way to America. Not only was it a nearly twenty hour trip, but I also had to transfer two flights before I reached my destination. I still remembered I transferred two flights in Tokyo and in Salt Lake City, and there were two interesting stories that happened to my eight friends and I while staying a few hours in different airports.

First, I made some mistakes because of the language barrier when I reached Tokyo airport. After we went through the security check in Tokyo airport, and we had to look for our boarding gate for the next flight. Unfortunately, we wanted to use the signs to guide, but the signs were written in Japanese. Then I had to ask airport employees, while the majority of them cannot speak English. At last, a stewardess guided us to the right gate. After that, Ma and I started to search for smoking room, which was easy to find. However, we found that we didn't have a lighter, so we had to borrow it from someone else. At that moment, I didn't know how to say lighter and just knew fire. I asked another smoker for fire, but he didn't understand what I said. At last, one of the smokers understood me and gave me his lighter. I felt so embarrassed at that moment.

Second, we met with a series of troublesome events in Salt Lake City. As we all know, everyone has to go through the immigration inspection in order to come into The United States. Unfortunately, there were a large number of people waiting to go through inspection. As a result, we spent nearly two hours in line. In the end, we didn't have enough time to go to the boarding gate because we had to check our luggage and go through security check. Although the airport workers let us go through the emergency access, we missed the last flight by ten minutes. The over ten hour flight trip had already made us feel tired, but now we had to wait another ten hours next flight to San Antonio.

We also realized that it meant we had to stay at the airport. What's worse is that I lost one of my bags when we hurried for the flight, and the majority of my valuables were in this bag. I went to lost luggage station to look for my bag, but no one found it. At last, one of the employees told me I might be able to find the bag

in San Antonio airport. When I returned to the boarding gate, I felt very tired and I could not sleep well on the seat. Furthermore, we were told there were no flights to San Antonio when we prepared to leave, so we had to go to Houston first, and then transfer flights to San Antonio. When I reached San Antonio airport, I could not remember how the ten hours passed. Fortunately, Ma found my bag in the San Antonio airport at last. The over thirty hours flight travelling was the most unforgettable experience of my life.

It is obvious that everyone may have the same experience, but feel different about it. Before my first flight, I imagine it would be a wonderful experience. In fact, I saw some beautiful scenery from taking the plane. However, the surprising and troublesome events changed my previous positive expectation about my first flight experience. Even though I made some mistakes and had some trouble with my first flight, I realized that I should learn from this. For example, I should improve my speaking skills and make sufficient preparation for my flights before taking off. In short, my first flight experience gave me a chance to broaden my horizon and make it a valuable experience.

Third Grade Life Lesson

Julia Dickens

"Raul! What are you doing? Dreaming about your girlfriend?" Mrs. Jung snapped.

All of the students laughed and looked around the room. Raul dreaming about his *girlfriend*? Is she in our class? Most importantly, a *girlfriend*!? What boy would have, or want, a girlfriend in third grade?

Although the idea continued to swim in my head, Mrs. Jung continued the lesson. She had short, peppered, tight curly hair. Her big round glasses did not help hide her small squinty eyes, nor did the high waist dresses hide her little belly that pushed out under the belt. Just above five foot too, Mrs. Jung was a small snappy little lady!

In Mrs. Jung's class, I sat in the second row in the middle of the class, and my friends sat in the row behind me. Directly behind me sat Deleasha with her short blonde hair, and next to her was a friend who I cannot remember. Brenda, who was large with a boys bowl haircut, was next in the row followed by Lupita.

Not thinking, I turned around to Deleasha. "I bet Raul is thinking about Lupita."

The comment floated away, and Mrs. Jung continued to teach math. I dreaded the homework in her class. I went from having no homework in second grade to about thirty problems a night in third grade! Mrs. Jung was *that* kind of classic teacher.

I began learning multiplication in third grade, practicing with the times table flash cards that had the equation on one side and the answer on the other. I flipped through each card over and over and over again throughout third grade.

After each lesson, the class studied math problems on their own. I was focused on a math problem when Mrs. Jung snapped.

"Julia!"

I looked up to see Lupita red faced with salty droplets running down her cheeks, and Mrs. Jung's arm around her.

"Why would you say Lupita is Raul's girlfriend?" She snapped again.

I stammered "I...I didn't say that."

"You didn't?" I had not learned sarcasm, so I thought she was asking a serious question.

"I didn't! Right guys, I said..." I turned back to get support from

Deleasha who I first told about Raul thinking about Lupita, and she shook her head. "No, I said Raul was thinking about Lupita!" I looked down the row of my friends who all agreed with shakes of their heads that I had said Lupita and Raul were *boyfriend* and *girlfriend*.

"You need to apologize to Lupita right now!"

Boy, do I remember how Mrs. Jung loved to snap!

I walked over embarrassed, trying to ignore the whole class watching me get in trouble. I looked at Lupita whose tears were still skating down her cheeks. She wiped them away only to have more replace them.

"I'm sorry Lupita." I looked down at the floor embarrassed.

She nodded her head. "It's ok." She continued to cry.

At the time I thought the incident was resolved because she simply said "It's ok." I know now that it wasn't. My nine-year-old self should've been more convincing, known how to show sincerity so that Lupita really believed I was sorry. I only wanted to make my friends laugh, not to make Lupita cry.

What I remembered next was not my punishment (probably because I don't think Mrs. Jung gave one to me), but at recess when I was official banned from my group of friends. Every time I walked to them they would walk away without saying a word.

I followed them around the field but they would not stop to wait for me. We walked to the playground, but I was not included in their games. I specifically remember lining up to go down the slide on the small playground. One by one everyone zoomed down the slide in front of me. When it was my turned, I slid down the slide and out of the tunnel.

All my friends were gone.

My isolation was worse than being stranded on an island; I could hear all my peers laughing and playing. I was not stranded by accident from a shipwreck, but on purpose by friends who assumed I was doing wrong by making fun of Lupita. But I was not trying to make fun of Lupita, so I could not be doing wrong!

It did not matter what I thought, but what my friend believed.

After the worst recess I remembering having, I walked back to the classroom. As I reached my desk I saw a little purple paper waiting for me. I did not see her do it, but I know Mrs. Jung left this piece of paper on my desk. Drawn on the paper was a cartoon detective dog with his paw pointed at me. The message described treating others how I wanted to be treated.

A rush of anxiety and guilt flooded me as I read the paper; I

thought I felt awfulness being isolated at recess, but now awful sunk deep into my pores. If the teacher was still thinking about how bad I treated someone to give this piece of paper to me after recess, then I knew what I was accused of was very *wrong*. Remembering this moment still hits me in my gut; even after twelve years I still get a little pang from that day. I had been wrongfully accused of making fun of Lupita! I was only trying to make my friends laugh. I was innocent!

But everyone looked at me as the guilty “girlfriend” claimer.

The other events from that day are gone, but I know my friends eventually talked to me, probably even the next day. I still had thirty problems to do a night for math. Raul was still teased about not paying attention. Life moved on.

Lupita’s tears, my isolation, and my teacher’s reaction taught me to treat others how I wanted to be treated. Although a simple rule, it took being sunk down to awfulness for the rule to become ingrained in my thoughts, heart, and soul.

An Everyday Dad

Anndria Flores

My older brother and I stood in the doorway of our sterile white bathroom, while Richard, our mother's boyfriend, towered over the small white sink shaving his black grizzly beard. My brother stared at me, eyes wide open, as if thinking *spit it out!* I wanted to spill out one word but, what would happen? My fingers popped at my side as my thumbs pressed against the top of them.

"Richard," I said.

"Riiiiichard!" I said a little louder as my eyebrows instinctively raised and my head leaned forward. The running water shushed the sound of my voice.

"Just call him again." My brother nudged me with his elbow, my body jerked and I grabbed my rib.

"Don't rush me!" I whispered in a fierce tone. I wanted to use the word that I knew would get his attention, but I wanted to ask permission first. What if he didn't want me to use that word? His daughter might get upset at both of us if I did.

"Maybe we should just wait until he's done." My brother grabbed my hand, and I thought to myself; *what if I never get this chance again. I may never be this brave.*

I had been rehearsing the conversation I wanted to have with Richard all day with my Ken and Barbie dolls. I sat next to the bunk beds in the room my brother and I shared, practicing what I'd say.

"Richard, can you be my dad?"

"Richard, will you be my dad?"

"Richard, can I call you dad?"

"I wouldn't do that Ashlie" my brother had interrupted. "Grandma, grandpa and dad are going to get mad if you really say that." My brother snatched my Barbie out of my hand and proceeded to give it back to me, then jerked his hand back with a grin on his face. My eyes watered. I wanted an everyday dad. I wanted the kind of dad that my friends had. I wanted the kind of dad who took me to school, and picked me up. I didn't want a dad I had to miss.

I was fed up with following the divorce orders and only seeing my real dad every other weekend. I didn't understand what it meant when I asked for more time with my dad and I was reminded that we had to follow court orders. On days I did spend time with my dad it was fun to go out, go shopping, and build every other weekend memories, but I wanted to eat dinner every day with him.

I wanted him to be able to call me his baby girl every day, read to me every night, and not have *visits*.

I was tired of making up for lost times during visits. My brother had a loyalty to my dad and grandparents that I didn't want to mirror because I wanted a dad today and every day. The truth is I didn't care if they got mad at me. Richard knew how to be a dad. He called me "Princess" even when his daughter was around. He took me to school, and brushed my hair. Every day he told me that he loved me and how pretty I looked before I went to school. Why was it wrong if he was my dad on days I was without one? My eyes started to water and my bottom lip quivered as I continuously reached for my Barbie and it was pulled away from me.

"Mooooom!" I screamed. My brother flung the Barbie at my purple, white and pink dollhouse. My organized miniature plate settings and furniture flew across the room as my dollhouse tipped over.

I don't recall how my brother and I made up after that, and how or why he now stood next to me, encouraging me to call Richard dad. But I think to a certain extent he wanted an everyday dad too. Our every other weekend dad was fun, but sometimes I needed one on a Tuesday.

As my brother slightly pulled my hand I watched Richard as he pressed the razor against his face. The removal of his dark grizzly hair revealed his flawless smooth olive skin. He splashed water on his face, ran the razor through the running water; and as he started to tap the razor against the sink I said it.

"Dad." The tapping suddenly came to a halt. All I could hear was the running water telling me *shushhhh*, and my heart banging inside my chest. My brother let go of my hand. I didn't look at him, but I could hear he took a few steps to my right, no longer next to me in the doorway. I stared at Richard's reflection in the mirror as he stared back at me.

"What did you call me?" he asked. Water dripped down his face and hands as his eyebrows reached toward one another on his forehead. I was convinced he was mad, but I looked at him with eyes that said *I am desperate for an everyday father*.

"Dad. Is it okay if I call you dad?" Richard set down his razor and grabbed the white towel resting on the silver towel ring next to the sink. He wiped his hands and face and took a few steps until he reached the doorway. He kneeled down and met my six year old eyes and kissed my forehead.

"You can call me dad or you can call me Richard. I would love for

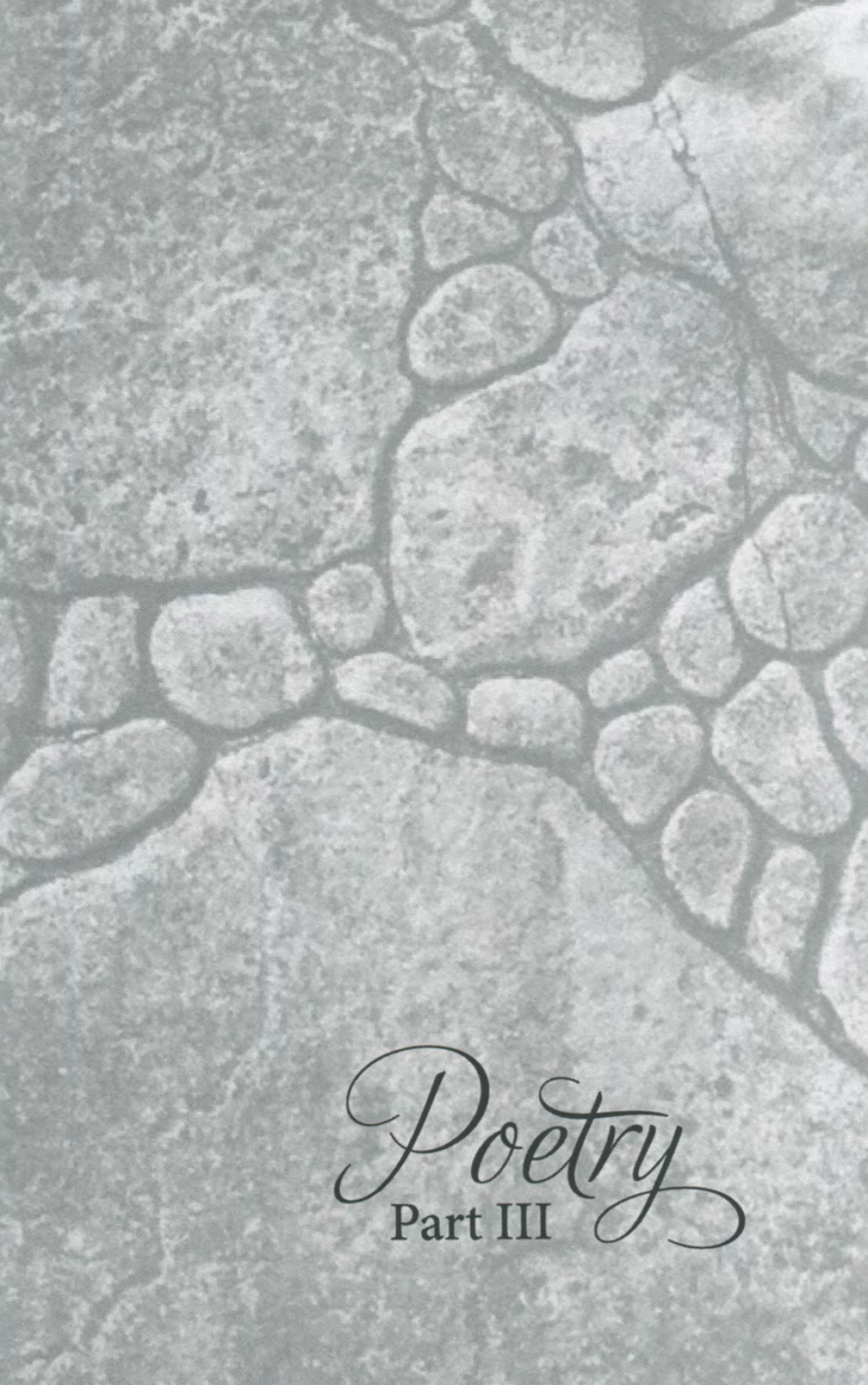
you to call me whatever you are comfortable with. Okay?" he said. I nodded my head and smiled. "That goes for you too Chris" he said to my brother. "Now you two go play while I get ready."

After realizing I had called Richard, Richard for years and that it felt very awkward to call him dad; at some point I decided I was more comfortable calling him by his name. But that was okay.

He called me his little princess anyway, gave me a bell to ring when I was sick so he could bring me soup and crackers, and even called in to work one father's day and told his boss he'd be late just so he could eat donuts with me at school like all my other friends dads.

When I bought my first car he had a sign made that he still has placed in the driveway that reads *Princess Ashlie parking ONLY. All violators will be towed.* He has always done things to make me feel like *his* little princess.

Despite me choosing to change my mind and not call Richard dad after all, I guess you could say Richard didn't mind. Richard was an everyday dad anyway.



Poetry
Part III

Drowned

Sara Cabrera

We are deafened.
Drowning in the screams of
memories
people
shadows
dreams abandoned
and love that has turned to ash on our lips
Waiting in the interim is silence
There, we may find peace.

Born to die

Julia Dickens

We are all born to die
Romo states.
While air sits, silence ripples
in the room.
My mind wanders.

Baby Brother
lying on white sheets
his lips youth red
lashes resting on delicate skin
his hair angel blonde
his fragile heart beat
gone.

Father
regal in a crisp navy suit
your hair now gray
your hands clasp together
at your waist
his fragile heart beat
gone.

My dreams in a formal
green gown
my hair sun rays the pillow
color disappear
as winter white cloaks
autumn leaves
my fragile heart beat
gone.

Time is running
But love ones you are stopped
in my mind.
I cannot help our destined end.

Baby don't
grow up
Father remem-
ber my love
Dreams begin
breathing
Until our fragile
heart beats are
gone.

Battle cry

Angela Sobery

How do I motivate our American men and women to die?

It is survival of the fittest and they must train!

They are young and have so little self-esteem.

Is it enough to say: "That our country needs you?"

Do I scream at them: "if you fail you *will* die!"

What is the battle cry?

I see new recruits with lost faces.

I have to take over for their parents and make them adults.

They do as I say and must have nothing else to think about.

I will tell you to sleep, eat, and shower.

I threaten to show you example and save your life.

Do I scream at them: "if you fail you *will* die!"

What is the battle cry?

At graduation I see you in formation.

I know where you must go.

I know where I have been.

I see your families so proud.

It makes me remember my own graduation day.

"Go! Do Not Fail! I order you to come back *ALIVE!*"

"Remember your training!"

What will be their battle cry?

The Close

Emily Bryant-Mundschau

Switch off the light.

Call it a day.

You know, it's on your face:

We all see what you've done.

How does it feel, deserter?

Walking away tonight.

You've made it this far. Now go.

Call it a day.

Switch off the light.

Memory

John Moore

Memory is a silent bird
Soaring near the end of the sky.
Unable to find its home
It seeks a place to land
But has no eyes to see.

Rio Grande City

Paloma Salinas

I remember when everything was simple.
Report cards covered with gold stars.
Which friend to sit next to was the toughest decision.
Naptime was a snooze fest.

I lived in a city with four streetlights.
 in a brick one-story house.
 in the middle of town.

Where you knew everybody by name.
felt safe at night.
found a taco stand at every corner.

I knew I could always call home,
be who I really am.

River water flows by.
Threat of floods loom.
Naptime—a thing of the past.
Gold stars withstanding.

Mysterious Purple Flower

Kristen Burress

Whilst traversing along the mundane walk of life,
A tiny life silently beckoned me to give it notice:
It was a stately flower, full in bloom,
Blessed with the raiment of royalty
And born to stare down at the frivolous world below.
Was it admiration or curiosity that answered this call?
Either way, with camera in hand, I drew forth
To pay homage to this thing so potent with life.
As I gazed up to hail her image
And observe the gold and white rings she bore,
I was overcome with the desire to taste her fully,
To know what sweet perfume that was hers alone.
But alas! She seemed to be removed from the earth
For such a lowly mortal as myself to attempt to touch.

Sobriquet: Aopli

Matthew Mendez

Cosmological speculation
Writhing vesica piscis
Musician chain waiting to erupt
Aerographite asymptotic rendezvous
Reader aesthetic sensation
Realization of irrecoverable chances to
Encounter the sojourner crossing the
Moment: tactics of the marginal
Melding art and the politics of pining
Is this for "you know what I'm worth"
Outside the public sphere
Cloudless asthenosphere
Optic nostalgia
Emergence from a
Conscious intersection
Mobile against further reification
Superstructural negotiation
Recontextualized wistfulness
Elitist discontentedness
Zeno-phobic class warfare the well?
Eiste to milo tou matiou mou.

San Benito Street

Paloma Salinas

Brick house at the corner of the street.
Every morning I wake to cock-a-doodle-do.
Neighbors let their roosters peck about.

Nana lives three houses down:
charming blue house with white shutters.
Cracked ceilings show character.

Cars race by with no regard,
dogs chase after rolling rubber.
Children chase after hairy tales.
Screeches fill the peaceful air.

Grass well kept by my brothers.
Flowers blooming in the spring.
Mud pies for sale after school,
my own special recipe.
A birdbath and two flamingos.
One sad looking tree.

I learned how to ride a bike,
red Schwinn with streamers.
I fell and broke my arm.
Countless scrapes, cuts, and bruises.

Taught me to be tough.

Agent Provocateur

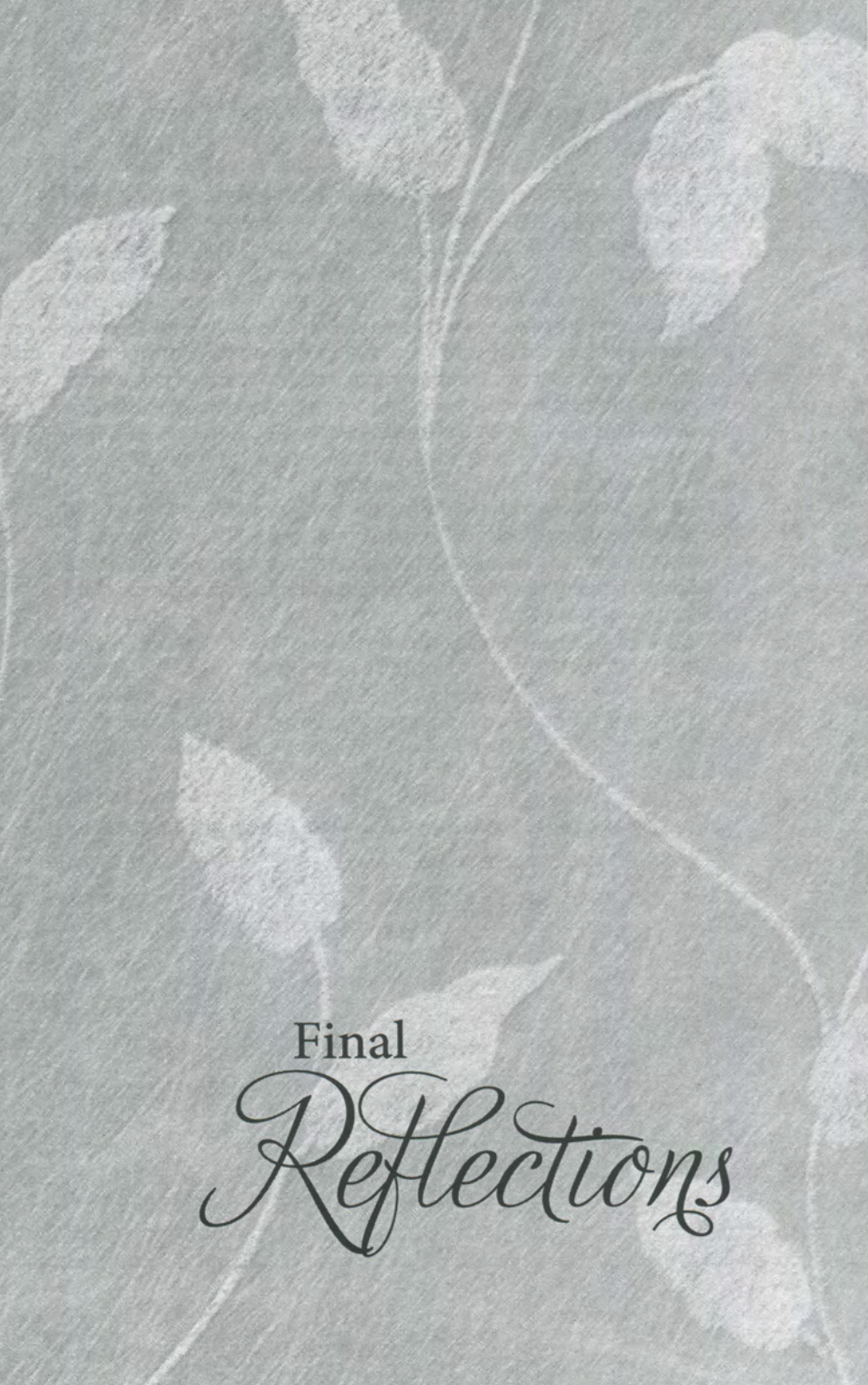
Stela Khury

He rues mornings when there is work to be done.
The beige, moldy elevator descends faster than it goes up,
a testament of the 1950s.
Escape is a strong willed struggle;
descent is compliance, she once told him
with tousled hair and an empty wine glass in hand.

The interrogation room is no more than a humid basement
below all the offices and people,
below morality.
He fixes his black tie around his throat;
constricted, choking on uncertainty.
He feels all civil servant, helpless,
hearing the clinking of handcuffs against the chair
to which she is strapped to,
surrounded by men
and himself, all compliance.

Her eyes are pools of defiance
and her lips a moist mess of bright red
lipstick.
He wants to kiss her salty lips,
make her tell wholesome truths;
repent and renew her soul.
But she won't talk and he will be demoted.

The prodigy, manager of defectors,
fooled by a young woman
who stole all his secrets
while the fool was busy
with child's play,
sentimentality.



Final
Reflections

Remebering Dr. Palmer Hall

Melody Mejia

A dedicated and inspiring professor with a passion for poetry and literature, H. Palmer Hall passed away on February 9, 2013.

Hall was born in Beaumont, Texas, in 1942. He earned a bachelor's degree from Lamar University and, after serving as a Vietnamese linguist in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War, completed a master's degree in library science as well as a Ph.D. in English at the University of Texas at Austin.

At St. Mary's, Hall was the director of the Louis J. Blume Academic Library and taught creative writing workshops as well as various literature courses at both the undergraduate and graduate level.

Hall was the co-editor and director of the renowned Pecan Grove Press, a non-profit literary press dedicated to the publication of poetry. He worked diligently for over 25 years to help launch and establish local, national, and international poets.

Hall himself was an accomplished poet, essayist, and professor. He had the ability to help his students understand and appreciate the power of literature.

"Dr. Hall gave me an insight into what life is like when you pursue what you love. He was truly a man carved from experience and with the courage to press forward," alumnus Mike Cortez said.

Hall's dedication to advancing poetic voices and his motivation to help students find their love for literature lives on, one word at a time.

Originally published in The Rattler, Volume 101, Issue 2, Feb. 13, 2013

A Student Poem for Dr. Hall

Benjamin Schweers

I listened to your last reading
in the library

realized I'd met you before
upstairs

among poets who speak of life:
truth, love, illness...death

and knew what you would tell me:
speak honestly

one day it will be your time
to enter the thicket

Of Heroes and Last Words

Twister Marquiss

Sometime in the mid-1990s, an overconfident kid—a fledgling fiction writer with a short journalism background and an untamed nexus of ideas—found his way into a literature course at St. Mary's University. The course was "The American Hero and Anti-hero." The professor was Palmer Hall. The overconfident kid was me.

I remember a great deal from that class. Slack afternoon sunlight pouring through slender windows in the Treadaway Hall classroom. The deep blue cover of my hard-worn copy of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*. Sounds of Country Joe & the Fish from an old tape player as students listened to Vietnam occurring in song. Defining heroes. Defining anti-heroes—those forward-driving characters who lacked drive. And I remember the final book we examined that semester: Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*.

With Palmer Hall's passing, many will reflect on his influence as a professor or as a poet, or they may recall his lasting contributions as director of the Blume Library or Pecan Grove Press. I will recall him as the tamer of my writerly nexus of ideas. He provided me with a connection to Scott Blackwood, who was assistant director of the Student Learning Assistance Center at the time and would later win the AWP Award for his novel *We Agreed to Meet Just Here*. Scott, like Palmer, would become a mentor. And that connection eventually led me to the creative writing program at Texas State, where I worked extensively with another mentor, Tim O'Brien—coupling my experience from Palmer's class to my own work in even more immediate terms.

A few years later, I wrote a novella about an imaginary, legendary figure and about the scope of stories that surround such characters. I included these words, related by a narrator with a short journalism background: "In my college literature course on the American hero and anti-hero, I learned that 20th-century society picked apart legends. George Washington didn't cut down a cherry tree. Babe Ruth was a drinker. Soldiers cry. Superman fell off a horse and broke his neck."

A month ago, a friend of Palmer's—a friend I've never met in person—contacted me to say that she'd just spoken with him. She told me he said wonderful things about my work. She told me to call him, right away, before it was too late.

So I did.

I thanked him. I read to him the words I'd written in that novella. I told him it had been a finalist for the Faulkner-Wisdom Prize—and that his words from class connected to my words on the page. He was delighted to know that words and stories and a tamed nexus of ideas now enveloped my world. We talked about writing and about that class where I'd seen afternoon sunlight go slack. We talked about horizons. His last words to me were these: "I'm really tired. I have to go now."

A handful of years back, in a review I wrote of Palmer's essay-memoir collection, *Coming to Terms*, I noted links between his life and his writing, and between his writing and his readers' lives. My last words about his work were these: "The introspection it induces is as cathartic for the reader as it must be for Hall. His life has not been common, though it is common enough for us to relate, even to adventures we only wish we shared. It brings us closer to those things we've lost, as well."

Linguistic Loaves to Palmer Hall

Frances E. Neidhart

Two lips when saying palm
Part ways and lift with ease
 Tongue glides
Palms of both hands grow warm
With murmuring

Mouth opens when the hall
Appears, throat widening
 To the world
Then without utterance
Someone sweet floats out

Palmer Hall: An Honest Voice

Cyra S. Dumitru

When I think of Palmer I think first of his voice. I hear it: deep, resonant and spacious. Palmer once left a message on my office phone that I saved, playing it back again and again because I loved how he said the word "smooth." He transformed it naturally into a polysyllabic word. It wasn't only the elongated space of his "oo" sound; he opened up the "sm" sound by humming the "m" for a few beats. "I hope the writing is going smooth," was the full sentence. What a fine greeting from one writer to another, to begin a message by acknowledging the relevance of, the commitment to writing.

My writing hadn't been going so smoothly at that time; I was preoccupied with teaching four writing-intensive classes, and driving my children between school in San Antonio and Sports Acrobatics in Boerne. But hearing Palmer say the word "smooth" gave me pleasure and encouragement.

Even more than the sound of Palmer's speaking voice, I treasure his poetic voice. He wrote with honesty, clarity – paying close attention to the sensory details of any given moment. He also had an ear for the music of words. Listen to the fluidity and soft tinkling sounds of the simple words that comprise the final stanza of his poem "Communion": "Let us drink, clink glasses/lift them high and bright./Even the lions gather/for this liquid holiness." Or these two lines that sing from "A Villanelle for the Rainy Season": "Everything green and wet teems with growing life/and drinking deep keeps every living thing in grace."

Palmer's subject matter was broad: African elephants flinging water into the air, smoking a cigar beneath summer stars, trees growing in the subdued light of the Big Thicket in east Texas, teaching English in Vietnam during wartime, people scrambling over blown-up segments of a Buddha statue. Palmer also wrote about uncomfortable subjects: being stabbed in the parking lot of a local mall, white men dragging a black man from a truck until his body broke into pieces near the Big Thicket, "the puffing display of destruction" when American precision bombs and Blackhawk helicopters entered the landscape of Baghdad, his memories as a Vietnam veteran. In his poem "From the Periphery" that recalls his wartime experiences, Palmer observes, "Language can not/translate what eyes have seen." The final stanza is devastatingly beautiful:

Thoughts lie fallow, spears of grass
that cannot push up or out.
This, then is what war must be: a walk
in the night, heart held in the hands of those
who walk beside you, breath held in each
other's mouths, smell shared in such a way
that all scents are one, touch only
a light pressure, hand on shoulder,
eyes searching for movement in the dark.

Breath held in each other's mouths. What an image of interdependence, intimacy, vulnerability, the vitality of a single moment.

During the early years of the Iraq War, I wrote an unsettling poem from the perspective of an executioner and terrorist. The voice visited itself upon me, speaking in ways that I found repellent. Yet, perhaps there was something to learn from this imaginary voice that represented real people living real and desperate lives. With trepidation, I received the voice, crafted its vision and entitled the poem "Invitation to a Beheading." As the title suggests, it is an edgy piece, potentially deeply offensive. We do not always choose our subject matter. Sometimes it chooses us. I wanted to share the poem with someone who understood that just because a poet gives voice to uncomfortable subject matter does not mean the poet endorses the poem's vision. What do we do with such a poem: hide it in a drawer or seek an audience for it? What audience might be appropriate? Trust Palmer to guide me, I thought and e-mailed him the poem. He responded quickly with respect and support; furthermore, he had forwarded the poem to the poetry editor for *War, Literature and the Arts (WLA)*, an International Journal of the Humanities. Trust Palmer to know of such a remarkable publication. "Invitation to a Beheading" was accepted by WLA, for a while. When the full editorial board for the publication met to review the content, objections were raised about the poem and it was pulled from the pages. A few years later, Palmer published it as part of my collection called *Remains*. Trust Palmer to maintain his full support of poetry.

When Palmer gave his final poetry reading in the art gallery of the Blume Library at St. Mary's University in November of 2012, his voice was altered. It no longer had the tonal depth that I treasured. It was higher pitched and, at times, thin. Breathing was not easy for Palmer at that point in his illness. Inwardly I grieved

the loss of his rich speaking voice.

Yet, as Palmer read his elegies, I realized that his truest voice still spoke, still sang. I was reminded that when I think of Palmer I think first of his voice: the voice of his clear-eyed perspective. Through his finely crafted elegies, Palmer confronted uncomfortable emotional truths. He was in the grip of a fatal disease. There was no self-pity, just unflinching details about illness, treatment and keen awareness of the absence of cure shaped into phrases that sang to the soul. Within Palmer's struggle for breath, remained intact his poetic voice – the essence of which is his deep attention to the moment as a way of cherishing life. No matter if the moment is beautiful or devastating or both. It was the most moving poetry reading I have ever attended. Spiritually spacious – reverberating with reverence, integrity and song. Trust Palmer to give witness to his physical decline with a series of exquisite elegies.

Palmer embodied how I hope to live the rest of my life, using poetry as way to testify to and sing about the totality of it: beauty, love, war, cancer, natural landscapes and the creatures that populate them, seasons of our living, enduring, and dying.

I'm not Ready for You to Pass

Kathe Lehman-Meyer

I'm not ready for you to pass.
You have been a life-line to serenity
to understanding me
to pushing me
to focus me
Like a parent with guidance
I missed, and acceptance I needed.

At a broken moment
You believed in my courage and talent and breathed
a new life in me, by giving me space,
technology, and convenient grace.

You just sensed when my rope was ending
or if there was fire in two places

And like a miracle you stretched a lanyard
and I was able to tie a knot and hang-on.
I came to talk with you in my weakness and you made me strong,
Like a backbone I didn't know that I had, until I needed it.

And now I weep at the thought of you giving up,
Because I will have to carry the dream only
In my heart, because we built the Hall hall together.

Thank you for the courage.
Thank you for the serenity.
And for the peace I have
Again.
I don't always like it, and
I fight it... but my fullness
is Graced... and I owe you
for Inspiration and Peace.

Palmer

Alice Kersnowski

A slightly gaff rigged stance
just right for a fisher of words
Held books like a prize catch
Gently, firmly lest they slip away
Looked at their seas of words
Like a naturalist
Observing how they swam
sometimes in schools, sometimes alone.
Turned pages, palm up
To the tide that held them
Just for a moment
Glittering in the shallows
Just out of reach

Parting

Sybil Estess

In their small south-Mississippi hometown, my husband hugs his brother. Pats his face in the casket. "Don't leave me now. Please don't!" he weeps. Bees killed Troy. He was mowing on a tractor, on a Friday, in late June. Troy died in ten minutes. Before the hot funeral, three days later, we went to see the unparalleled personality's body. No wake, no family gathers in any of several private, available funeral rooms. Troy's body is stored in an office, "to keep it cooler." One woman clerk keeps coming in, pulling out drawers, banging and fumbling to get paperclips or staples. The man running the place, Jimmy Boyd, in his drawl says, "It's time t'git on go. We gotta' load him up fer the church." Once there, hundreds wait to see. No chance for the only two siblings to be alone. It's nearly a state funeral in a country town. Seven eulogies. First my husband's, then the Director of NASA's, the astronauts' (never seen before in person in this hamlet) and on and on. One had been on Apollo 13. It all lasts three hours. After the procession from the burial, there's fried chicken, ham, southern peas, cornbread, homemade cakes at the church hall. All I could think about was that before, back at the house, I had asked my spouse if he wanted to go to Troy alone, to be by himself with the only man who called him "Bro." No. He wanted me to be with him, he said softly. Once there, what I saw when in heat we reached the cold office that held the body in a box was bloodless, pale, stopped. Roy was always on fast move. His blood ran swift and parched. His hair was parted for us and everyone at the sweltering church to notice not the way he wore it, but on the wrong side.

The Accordion Fold

Sybil Estess

When I received a contract from Palmer Hall for my book LABYRINTH, it was for a chapbook: 40 pages. Soon before it was due, I spoke with Palmer on the telephone. At one point in the conversation he said, "I want at least 80 pages." I did not reply. I was astonished and floored! I did not have eighty poems ready: I had forty. I panicked. I was in Colorado that summer, with the intent on finishing the book. During the last two weeks, my husband had returned to Houston and I had loaned our house for one week to a young minister and his wife.

I took my LABYRINTH work and checked into an old hotel, twenty-five miles from where our log cabin house is located: in Hot Sulphur Springs--just next to an ancient hot springs, which has been renovated. I had told the owner, Abe, an old grouchy man that I had to have a desk in my room--to write. When I checked into the hotel, which in former days had been the local for a brothel for miners, I realized that I was the only guest there. For six days, I got up early, walked to the only cafe in town for breakfast, ordered a take-out sandwich for lunch, walked back to the hotel, worked on old poems all morning by handwriting (there was no internet there, and cell phones did not work!), ate my sandwich, took a nap, worked all afternoon, and around 4:00 went over to the Hot Springs for refreshment in the pools. Around 6:00 I would return, and old Abe would prepare me a splendid dinner in the dining room with good wine.

On Saturday of that week, I returned to find the front door of the hotel locked, with an envelope taped to the door. A note inside said, "Sybil, here is the key. I am gone to Denver for the week-end. Be sure to lock the place when you leave it." I was floored. I was going to be alone in an old, old brothel building, with about 25 bedrooms, each named for a woman who used to work there, for two nights, and I was afraid. I drove to where I could find cell phone service, called my husband in Houston and said, "If I am murdered, and don't call you tomorrow, here is the room I am in: Annie's, at the back of the second floor, overlooking the (Colorado) river."

When I returned to Houston, with eighty pages of poems, I typed them, and sent the manuscript to Palmer. He telephoned me and said, "Why did you send me so many poems?"

I replied, "You said you wanted eighty pages."

Palmer answered, "I did not mean eighty poems!! I meant eighty

pages on an "accordion fold," which would be forty pages!! But Sybil, the book is so much better with the number of poems published, that I am going to publish it all."

I had never heard of an "accordion fold" or how that works in printing. I only remembered that Palmer had said, "I want eighty pages!!"

My week at the brothel-hotel was not wasted!

For Palmer Hall, In the Last Weeks

Janet McCann

You have gone behind the wall.
And we come, bearing poems, pies, prayers.
We try to find some way to get them in,
Someone just passing by to take them in.
We want to see you, in a chair in the sun,
Smiling. Maybe a blanket on your legs
But a drink, maybe a bourbon, beside you,
The sunlight hitting it. And piles of books.
We stare at the wall, paste messages, look for
Bearers of messages, but there are none.
You and your life are there behind the wall.

So I read your poems: Vietnam, all the names
And places, Dak To, Pleiku, Lake Bien Ho
Where students sang Christmas carols while
An old man on a water buffalo watched...
And then your other places, Texas, Louisiana,
All the injustices you warned of, and the justice
You brought or helped bring, with your nouns
and verbs. Behind the wall, I wish and wish.
I make this poem into a paper plane
And throw it, but it doesn't clear the top,
Falls, pointed down, to rest among the others.

And Now, We Must Consider

Mary Lynne G. Hill, Ph.D.

Late August. 5:15 pm. Parking lot across from the new gym. Palmer tugs on his beard a moment, "It's called 'institutional stress.' And now," his eyes twinkled with wry humor, "we must consider how we're going to handle it."

I had never heard that phrase before, "institutional stress," but it captured the feeling pervading our 135 acres on the West Side at that moment in the late 1990s. We were talking about changes that were beginning to shoot their tentacles through the core of the University. The heat shimmered on the asphalt. Our thoughts shimmered in tandem with it as we noodled various thought-strings about, possibilities of how things might take hold or not. We agreed that the changes were intended to better this place that we cherished; yet we were poignantly aware that such changes are generally chaperoned by at least a shadow of sacrifice. A sacrifice of the familiar, a sacrifice of the idiosyncratic, at a minimum, a sacrifice of the 'way things are done here,' a loss of our sense of community, at a maximum.

"And now, we must consider how we're going to handle it ..."

Thinking back to that conversation, I realize that Palmer's early training as a warrior had served him well as preparation for coping with our institutional stress. A training that encouraged a steadfastness in the face of transition. Rooted in such experience, he honed a steadfastness to the word as the most life-giving tool to cope with transition, whether that be as a linguist in Vietnam, as the director of a library, or as a poet, all in service to the places he loved. He would use the word to transform internally to stay in step with transformations externally.

"And now, we must consider how we're going to handle it ..."

Such steadfast service is right and fitting in a place like ours whose primary image is of Mary, steadfast at the foot of the cross, bearing witness. Palmer, our "Anonymous Marianist," as Bob O'Connor has christened him, manifested Mary's example in the way he bore witness to his cancer. Last November, he risked sharing this witness by coming out to play, one more time with us,

for a poetry reading at his Blume Library. The image that lingers from this gathering is Palmer as young Texas poet exploring New York City. He offered us glimpses of the boy-become-man who snuck onto a quiet New York stage to whisper, "to be, or not to be," in the same spot that Richard Burton would pose that question a few hours later. As a warrior-poet, he shared stories, reads elegies, and reminded us that the pen is indeed mightier than the sword, and that Hamlet's question is really all we ever have.

"And now, we must consider how we're going to handle it ..."

So, now we must, again, consider how we're going to handle it, this new institutional stress of his absence, now that Palmer has crossed into that Undiscovered Country that Hamlet prompts us to bear witness to. May we do it with grace, with humor, and with steadfastness.

Thoughts and Reflections on Palmer Hall

Early on in our 29 years of working together in Blume Library, Palmer gave me this bit of wisdom. "Caroline, you can get mad at me, but you can't stay mad at me. I need someone to talk to about... this." And here he made a gesture that encompassed the library, the campus, and the world.

I realized the reverse was equally true: Palmer could get mad at me, but he couldn't stay mad at me. And I too needed someone to talk to about..this. I miss those talks.

- *Caroline Byrd*

Thanks for asking for insight and information about Palmer. He hired me in the summer of 2003. I'll always be grateful for the insight that he had into me, and the way I work. He was a supportive boss, and friend. I've never really liked my nickname, Kathe but that way that Palmer used to call my name made it sound special. I can still hear him asking for me in the lab. It was a special opportunity for me to work with him to create the Academic Imaging and Media Center from the Learning Resources Center and A/V Depository, then later the Learning Commons. He always challenged his students to build webpages, when it was not the popular thing to do...

- *Kathe Lehman-Meyer*

The first time I met Palmer, I could see that he was extremely passionate about poetry. I know that his enthusiasm and love for poetry inspired many students and others in the St. Mary's community and beyond, and so I am certain that he lives on through the inspiration he provided.

- *Dan Kaderli*

What I most liked about Palmer was his zest for life. Whether it was writing about the behavior of exotic African animals, recounting how he discovered a little known, marvelous author in Spain, or describing the intricate pattern in which weeds grew between the rocks in his beloved back yard, Palmer knew how to cherish even the most seemingly insignificant thing. Another side of Palmer I liked was his sharp wit, which he delivered with a mischievousness that made you smile.

- *Gwendolyn Diaz*

Although all human beings have a value in this world, rarely would I say that a given individual is irreplaceable. But in the case of Palmer Hall, I believe it's true. Never have I known someone who was so multi-talented and so knowledgeable about so many things. He could and would teach anything at all the English Department threw at him, and he did it eagerly and well. He was a solid administrator of the library, yet had time for so many other activities. He built the Pecan Grove Press as essentially a one-man operation (with the great help, of course, of Louie Cortez). And on top of all that, he was a solid writer who encouraged other writers. I remain in awe of this man.

- Richard Pressman

I met Dr. Hall twice in his office. The first time was when I was the director of Continuing Studies; I wanted the CS students to have access to the library facilities. Another occasion was when I wanted to install the Gram Tech Software for the Intensive English Program participants on the machines in the MIC lab. During these visits, we talked about English language and literature, publications, journalism, and poetry. One question that Dr. Hall asked me still reverberates in my mind even today – "What is your teaching philosophy?"

Here is what I wrote him, "I think that the lives and destinies of men and women everywhere are products of their cultural backgrounds, the emotions instilled in them by their peak life experiences, the company they seek, performances they attend, the informed choices they make, and the exposure they have to philosophical and educational systems. People learn from society, friends and family, religion, ontological understanding, and other communities and institutions. People also learn through processing the information that they gain each day and through the socio cultural interactions to become productive citizens of their respective communities. My teaching philosophy is to foster and nurture affective and creative energies in my students so that the students can become confident and productive later in their lives. The 21st century adult classroom requires alternative methods of instruction. The traditional teacher driven as opposed to student led classroom may be less productive in terms of active engagement of the adult learners. For example, performance (theatrical activities) pedagogy can be considered as an alternative to traditional curricula. Lessons that portray the lived experiences of students appeal to their intellects and emotions, which in turn

enable the adult learners stay interested in the program of study!"
He seemed impressed by my response.

- *Kalpana M. Iyengar*

For three years during the early 1990s, Palmer Hall and I co-edited The Texas Writer's Newsletter, a semiannual bulletin published by the Texas Association of Creative Writing Teachers. This operation involved my driving to the St. Mary's campus every week to confer with Palmer and pass on anything I might have written for the newsletter. At the time I was a computer illiterate, which meant that he was stuck with all the formatting. I remember, though, that no matter how busy he might have been that day, or how much extra work for him my typewritten articles entailed, Palmer never complained. To the contrary, I recall only a ready smile, his trenchant comments on just about every writer who ever lived, and the omnipresent can of Diet Coke either on his desk or in his hand. (I sometimes wondered if he lived on Diet Coke.) His gustatory preferences notwithstanding, these editing sessions became the highlight of my workweek and marked the beginning of a literary friendship which endured until his passing. I'll miss him. Or, as Shakespeare more memorably wrote, we "shall not look upon his like again."

- *Carol Coffee Reposa*

I never met Palmer personally, but such was his broad humanity that he could establish a warm relationship over the cold wires that carry emails and FB postings. He accepted for publication my book of poems, *Li Po Laughing at the Lonely Moon*, even though I had submitted it incorrectly, with the poems printed the wrong way on the pages. He told me about a camp site in Africa where on the internet you could see animals going to a water hole to drink. We enjoyed that together. He told me that my book had caused him to go back and reread the Chinese poets. How many editors give such kind encouragements to writers? A humble man, giving and brilliant. We were blessed to have him.

- *Chuck Taylor*

I had the privilege of meeting with Palmer Hall at a number of Creative Writing and Poetry conferences in Texas in the last ten years. He was invariably warm, gracious and gregarious about poetry and life. As soon as he found out Thomas Whitbread was my UT thesis advisor, he offered to serve as a conduit for our

reconnection. Palmer's contribution to publishing the work of so many fine Texas poets I have known through the years (Professor Whitbread, Wendy Barker, Chuck Taylor Janet McCann, the list is endless) will serve as a lasting legacy to his energy and enthusiasm for our art form. He will be missed and mourned by all those who cherish fine spirits and the rapidly vanishing small presses.

- Ken Jones

For six summers I taught a graduate writing seminar at West Texas A&M, Canyon. That's about a 1,000 mile round trip and every year Palmer drove that distance to tell the students about The Pecan Grove Press. That's rare dedication. That was Palmer Hall.

- Robert Flynn

The Anonymous Marianist

Dr. Robert O'Connor

*Notes on Marianist Heritage Award Recipient Henry Palmer Hall, Ph.D.,
January 22, 2013*

Palmer Hall has been with the Academic Blume Library since 1976 and as Director since 1977. He has been an administrator, mentor, publisher, poet, novelist, essayist, dad, husband, Texan, Viet-Nam vet, Big Thicket devotee. In these various roles Palmer has acquitted himself with visibility, grace, and professionalism.

In all of these roles those who have interacted with Palmer, knew his role. Writers have benefited from his roles as editor and publisher. Junior faculty and librarians have benefitted from his actions as an administrator and colleague. Senior faculty have benefitted from his collegiality peppered as always with sharp and well-conceived opinions. The reading public has benefited from his professional efforts as an accomplished writer. Susan and Stephen have benefitted from his life with them as husband and dad.

And now he has become a Marianist Heritage Awardee and ironically in many respects the credentials that make him an outstanding candidate for this award are virtually invisible to many.

Palmer has never been a Marianist "rah-rah" sort of guy and he hasn't to my knowledge done many of the overtly Marianist "things." But, a perusal of his writings reveals a person deeply interested in and moved by many of the very life events that move Marianists.

His poetic reflection upon the horrific murder of James Byrd, Jr. in "Big Thicket Requiem, Part 2" resonates with Marianists who understand their own solidarity with society's disenfranchised. His many reflections about the insanity and inhumanity of war are Marianist in content if not in name.

His "Looking North" that describes the plight of immigrants from borderlands is Marianist in its empathy (with allusions to the Holy Family, no less), if not its title.

In many respects I would invoke the controversial, but I think nevertheless valuable notion of Karl Rahner's a generation ago of the "Anonymous Christian" and suggest that Palmer has often served as the Anonymous Marianist and now Anonymous no more: a Marianist Heritage Awardee of 2013.

Elegy 9

H. Palmer Hall

A young woman marching with me against a stupid war,
her hand in mine. Two years later, I drive from Austin
across Arkansas and Tennessee, along the Blue Ridge

Skyline, a million fireflies explode from Shenandoah,
a billion stars from above, a light show outdoing Love
Cry Want with the Woodstock light show. And still,

I almost fall asleep, drift towards the cliff, the driver
of a semi pulls close behind me, sounds his air horn, blinks
his brights, wakes me to the necessity for three cups of hot

coffee at the next truck stop. I drive around the beltway,
exit to Silver Spring. She's at work, but my key fits,
and I crash until nine that night. She wakes me, tells me to rest

I'll leave tomorrow. No justice, just too good, no screams,
no regrets, just a much too soft goodbye. I drive home.

Pecan Grove Review VOL. XV

Publication Date: Spring 2014

A collection of short fiction, poetry, and creative non-fiction (memoir or narrative) written by current students, faculty, and staff of St. Mary's University.

Each writer may submit up to three typed pieces. There is a limit of five double-spaced pages of prose (per selection). Each poem should be no longer than forty lines. Do not type your name on the manuscript. Each piece must be titled.

Add ONE cover sheet with the following information:

Name

St. Mary's E-Mail Address (NOTE: graduating seniors should add a personal email too)

Title of Work(s) & Category

Cell Phone #

Permanent address

*Submissions without a cover sheet will not be considered.

NOTE: Use your St. Mary's University email address for submissions.

Only electronic submissions with WORD attachments will be considered.

Email Submissions to:

pgrsubmission@stmarytx.edu

Deadline: September 20, 2013

Additional questions can be directed to Professor Diane Bertrand, faculty moderator dbertrand@stmarytx.edu

Writing is a thinker's pathway. Through writing we learn to understand experiences, to wrestle with difficult topics, and to recreate significant moments. The Pecan Grove Review Literary Magazine provides an opportunity for writers in our university community to learn from each other as we all try to understand ourselves. From international students to faculty poets, from first-time authors to experienced voices, the variety of writers represented in this edition give readers a glimpse into their individual journeys and their community stories.

