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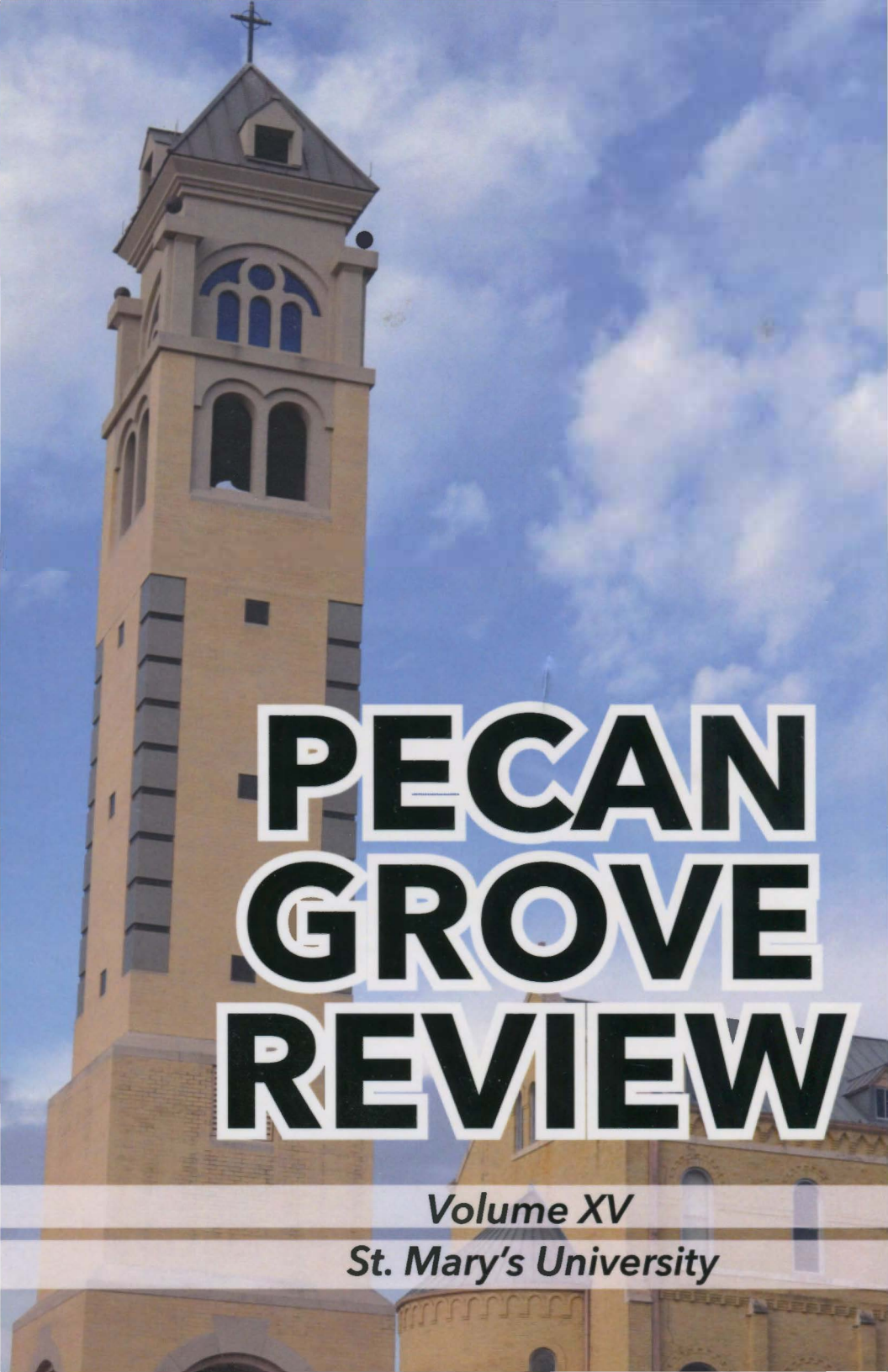
Pecan Grove Review Volume 15

St. Mary's University



PECAN GROVE REVIEW

Volume XV

St. Mary's University

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St. Mary's University
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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.

The magazine editors sincerely appreciate Louie Cortez's assistance in the publication of this magazine.

Pecan Grove Review

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Pecan Grove Review

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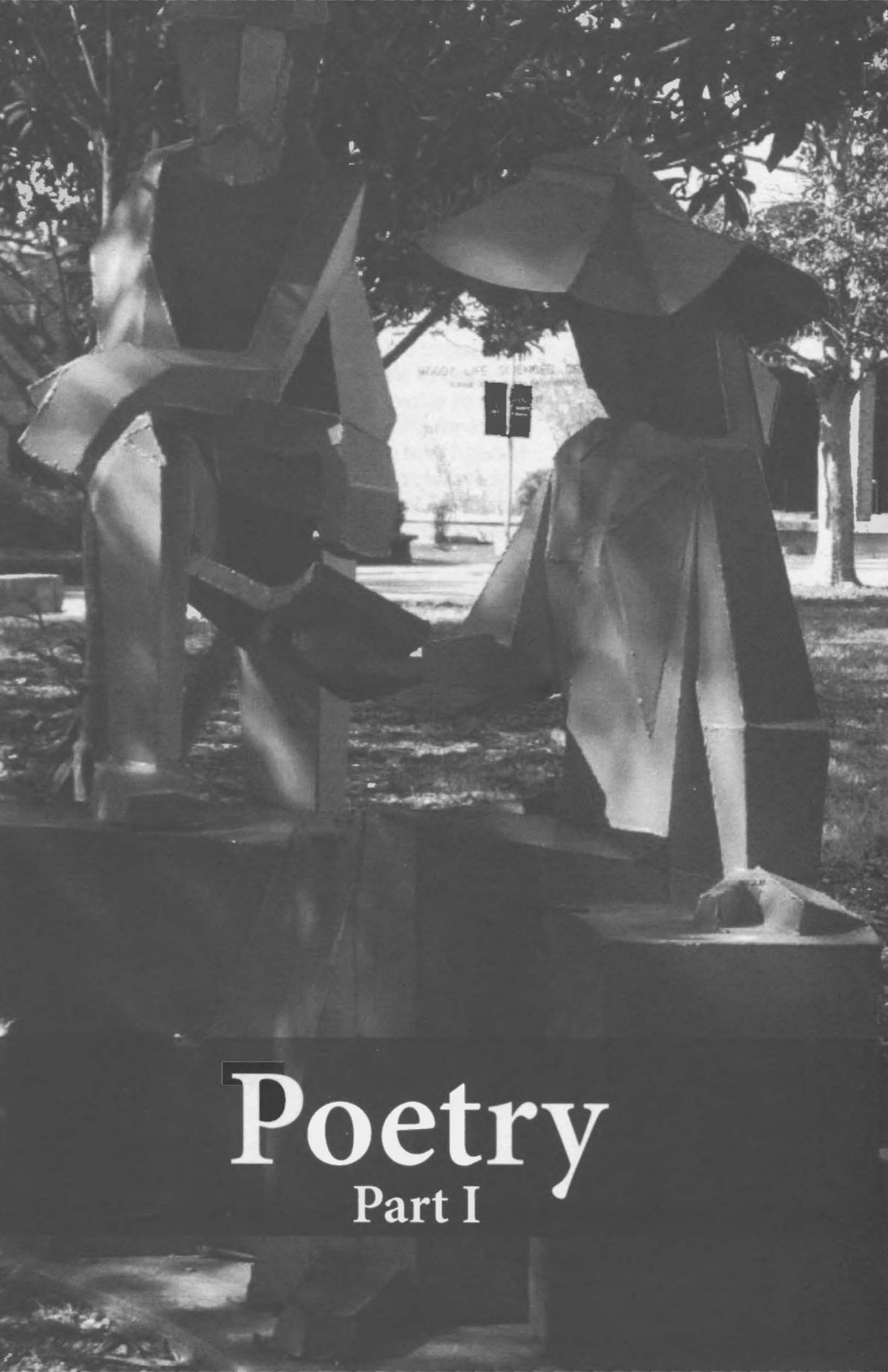


Poetry
Part I

Pecan Grove

Mairi Vannella

Among the rocks at Pecan Grove
Lie a piece of history long past.
The moss decorating the now
Dilapidated and sad
Figures of long ago.
In the shadow of the night,
They are able to speak to
Me, are able to regain a
Long lost voice so sad
And desperate for an ear
To listen, to take heed of
Tales and lessons for whomever
May arrive, be it Fate's desire
Or by the free will of the stranger.
Eternally they bemoan behind
Thick walls of silence,
Among the rocks at Pecan Grove.

Rain Embraced Me

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

(For Palmer Hall)

All words
stopped
inside the poetry workshop
when raindrops pattered the roof.

All heads turned to the windows
for the end to wilting gardens,
choking humidity, and thirsting spirits.

Someone opened the door
and water tapped its way inside,
spotting the dusty tiles.

We wrote, read, breathed
the moist hand of metaphor
the fragrance of imagery
the click of onomatopoeia.
and similes in a love poem
written by a dying man.

And when news came that you had died,
rain embraced me,
ending the long drought of your illness,
promising resurrection to a tuft of brown grass.

The Girl from Anacahuita Trees

Mariajose Romero

I am from the old green swing my grandfather
gave me when I was three,
from "El Manana" newspaper and Hershey bars.
I am from the small two-story orange house
with a tiny patio and a dog that barks.
I am from the anacahuita trees and the rose bushes that smell so sweet.
I am from intimate Sunday family reunions, watching movies all day.
I'm from kindness, from my three caring brothers: Pau, Ale, and Jose.

I am from the smell of cinnamon and hot chocolate during Christmas Eve,
everyone anxious to open their gifts.
From "I'm gonna tell mom" and "Please be still."
I am from "El Padre, del Hijo, y del Espirtu Santo,"
"Dios te Salve Maria cubrenos con tu manto."

I'm from Mexico and USA.
From the courage and hope of my grandfathers to seek a better future,
And from the one and only perfect example of unconditional love from
God and my parents.
I am from photos hanging on a white wall in my grandmother's house,
next to the picture of "La Virgen de Guadalupe" in whom we put our trust.

Sui Generis (One of a Kind)

Jennifer Nunez

I am from a Catholic family
who prays to the Virgen Maria
and who believes in the fables of la Llorona.
Remembrances of supernatural encounters
become stories shared
around the old kitchen table.
I am from tamales and atole,
from Elia and Jose.
I am from the volatile clan
and the thrifty tribe
from "always do the right thing."
I come from undying loyalty wrought
from shared blood,
laughter, and tears.
I am from coffee mugs,
holding the dark aromatic ambrosia
that has turned into my daily alarm;
without it there's no way I'll wake up.
I am from the flower garden
Bursting with daffodils, periwinkle, and tulips
growing and glowing during spring
within the sun's embrace.
But my flowers wither away in the cold,
blustery winters that snuff
out the life that was so abundant.
The ephemeral garden life
reflects the mercurial nature
of my curious self.
I am from embroidered memories
shared, kept, and stored
in drawers, boxes, and closets
confined in mementos,
in baby clothes and photo albums.
Relics that tell the story of six souls
all linked together until the end.

Bianca

Bianca Denise Martinez

I am the female college student who
comes from a middle class family.
When I die, the world will think
this is all of me,
Unless I tell them I volunteered
at Haven for Hope and met
a little girl named Erica,
who wore a sundress with beads in her
braids and who followed me, questioned
me, and assisted me.
I should tell them that I was confused
why she was following me, some
average college girl,
and that I had never met anyone with
total innocence and trust in others.
Unless I tell them, they will never know
I am a girl who gifted a piece of costume
jewelry with strong personal meaning to
a little girl I came to care deeply about.
The words "When will I see you again?"
are recalled which brings a yearning to
the missing piece of my heart that I
freely gave to a little girl who I will
never see again.

A poem for the boy who named his Red Truck Rogelia

Alondra Garcia

His Rogelia yearns in agony through the night as we sleep.
An earful rumbling of the red truck,
as if she hopes to be driven,
but, Rogelia knows she has to wait until morning to ease the pain.

The red truck was driven daily by a boy.
He would take her to school
and as he came inside the campus
his friends would say, "Ahi viene la Rogelia!"

As the boy drove by, showing off his truck to his friends,
the truck would resound with praises of joy.
As he parked Rogelia, he would tell her,
"That's my girl."

At night hear the red truck
longing to be touched by the boy's hand.
Other hands drive her now but she struggles to start
because she knows the boy will never guide her again.

"Rogelia," she hears at night, but where does the voice come from?
All she knows is that the boy rests with The Father
and when she rumbles she always roars his name – Rai.

El Rio Grande and the Dream

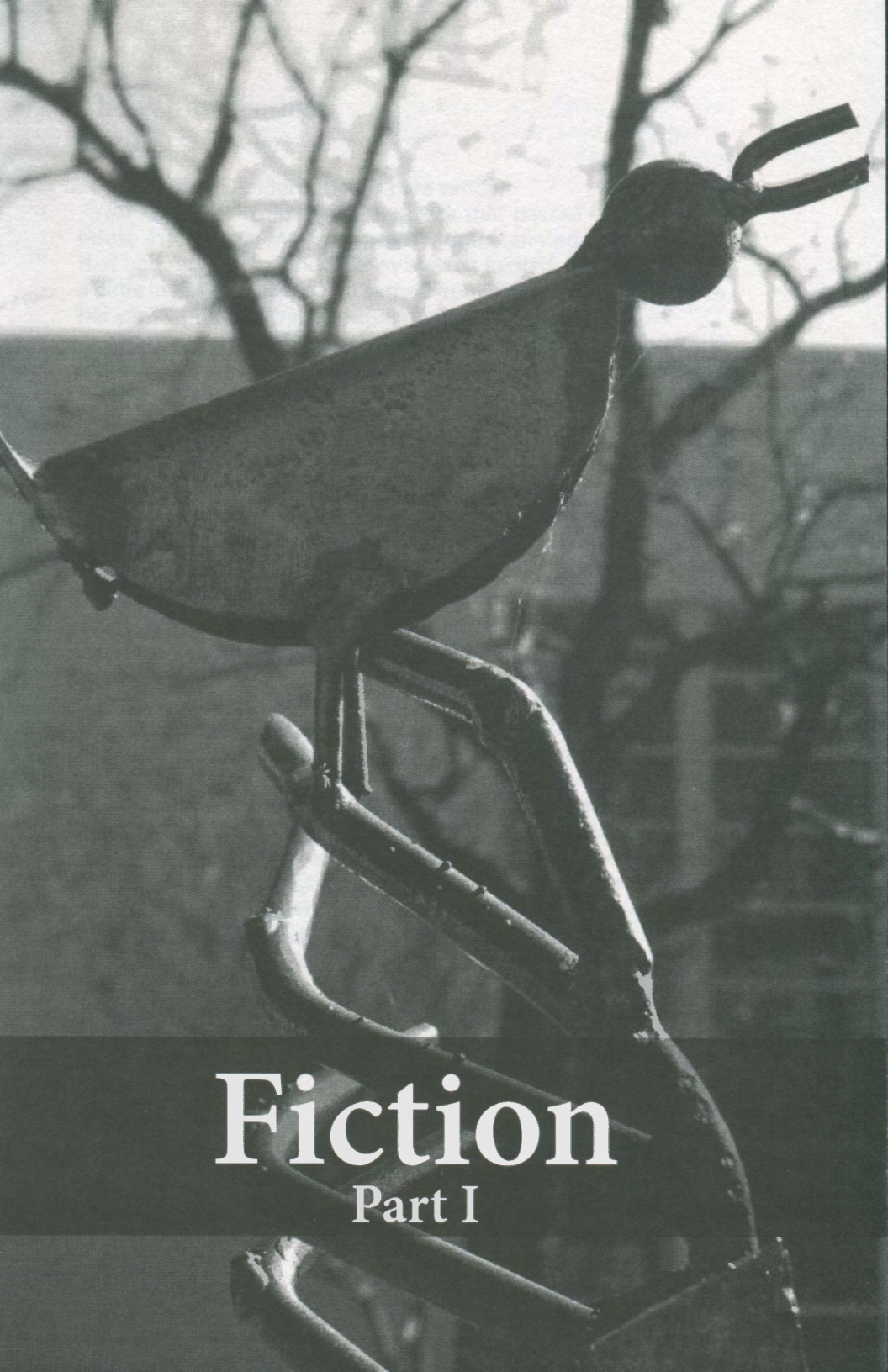
Mariajose Romero

He steps along the river looking ahead and back
at the same time. He tries to take a step but,
something's pushing him back.

From this side of the river, the radio plays a Latin cumbia.
Across from it, the radio plays in English.
El Rio Grande flows quietly and peacefully,
like it's welcoming him to take a step in.

He doubts himself, "what could be best?"
Feeling like this is all there could be but, at least being home or
taking the risk of entering into the mouth of the lion and stepping into a land
where he's not welcome, but at least holds the hope of a better future.

El Rio Grande must be bilingual, maybe he should stay in the middle
not taking a step ahead nor back. If he can't have the best of both worlds
than
maybe just remaining neutral sounds like a better plan.



Fiction

Part I

The White Feathers

Sipriano Gonzalez

"Pollos para vender… pollos para vender!"

Ali knew that call; it was the truck that passed by her corner house in Reynosa, Mexico, once a month carrying baby chickens that had recently hatched. Today she felt excited, because she had a dime in her pocket she had earned from helping Ms. Dolores with her yard work; that was enough to buy two baby chicks.

The year was 1971, and she was a seven year old girl with the innocence and excitement of a child buying something earned with their own money. She ran out her house, slamming the screen door behind her. Luckily she lived in the corner of the neighborhood, so she could stop the truck rather than chase it down like all the other neighborhood kids.

Slowly the truck came closer and closer as it shook and rattled through the dirt road, hitting every bump and pot-hole on the way.

She motioned the man driving the truck, and he came to a stop. He unloaded the crate of chicks.

"Puedo comprar un pollito?" Ali asked the man, with her sweet, round, seven-year-old eyes. Her hair was long, black, smooth and ran down her spine to the back of her elbows.

All she had wanted was to love the chicks like she saw the mother hens do in her farm. She wanted to sleep with them and cuddle with them all the time.

"Mija, grab which ever you want," said the man smiling as he looked at her excitement.

Ali scanned for the two chicks she would be taking home to love, nurture, and raise on her own. She looked around the basket of chicks. There were hundreds of them chirping and squirming around, but like a mother hen looking for her babies, she was going to be picky on which one she was going to love.

"This one and this one."

Ali pointed and picked up the chicks before the man could get a chance to do so. She was certain which ones she wanted; she didn't want the man to be mistaken and grab the wrong one for her. The little girl gave the man a dime and hurried back to her house, cuddling the chicks as if they were still as fragile as the eggs they hatched from.

Her mother saw her run into the house and hide in her room.

"Que tienes? What did you buy?" Her mother demanded as she

slowly peeked into her room.

"I bought two pollitos. Look, this one is Poncho and this one is Chone."

Ali raised each chick individually as she gave them their names. The chicks, not used to the sudden transition, just sat in her little hand as Ali presented them with glee to her mother.

"Ay, mija, just don't squish them."

"I won't! I'm going to love them forever!"

That night, Ali prepared the bed and laid the chicks under her chin in the warmth of her neck and chest; they settled as if they knew her intentions. She imagined herself being a mother chicken lifting her wings to make room for her babies to nest and sleep through the night. Ali already loved Poncho and Chone unconditionally. As though the two chicks were refused a peaceful night since they hatched, she cradled them under her chin and went to sleep immediately.

The next morning Ali woke up at 6 am to find that Poncho and Chone were already awake and exploring her bedroom. There was a weird stench in her room; it perforated her nostrils as she slowly got out of bed. That smell was very familiar to her. As her feet touched the floor, she felt something in her toes. She looked down and saw she had stepped in bird poop. It dawned on her as she wiped her feet that the smell was exactly like the stench coming from the chicken coop. She looked at herself and her bed and found bird poop everywhere. She knew she had to clean it before her mom saw it or else it would be the last time she would be able to have the chicks in her room.

Every morning Ali would wake up, clean her room, make the bed, walk to the kitchen to moisten some bread in water, and feed the chicks a hearty breakfast. Then she would go out back to her farm where the chicken coops were, feed the chickens, and check for any eggs the hens may have lain.

Oftentimes the chickens would find a way out of the coop and go to the woods behind Ali's house and lay their eggs there. So Ali would always walk through the woods looking for the chickens, scanning the floors for chicken eggs.

After returning home, she would spend the day walking around the neighborhood, always with Poncho and Chone following close behind her. She loved that they saw her as a mother figure and would always spoil them more than any other of the animals her family owned.

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Poncho and Chone soon grew up to be huge roosters. Ali had treated them so well, and always made sure to feed them, never letting them skip a meal. Both roosters were about a foot and a half feet tall, fat and round, with very long white feathers. The red crest above both their heads were very big, and it would lie to one side as though they preferred to look that way.

By now Ali and the roosters had established a routine. Every morning the roosters would crow and wake up Ali for school. They would follow Ali like two body guards making sure the package got where it needed to go safely. Poncho and Chone were two very smart roosters and would walk back home together after dropping Ali off for school and each afternoon they would wait for her outside the school building and walk home with her once again.

When they reached home from school one day, Ali ran inside and turned on the old black and white television. She wanted to watch her favorite novela. The episode day before left off with a very exciting cliff-hanger that she just had to follow up on.

As she was engaging in her show, she suddenly heard Poncho and Chone scurrying through her front yard. She heard a man yelp. She looked outside to see what was going on, only to find that the roosters were refusing to let one of her father's friends inside the house. She smiled as she walked outside; she knew they were both very territorial and would never let any strangers in the house. Like two guard dogs, the roosters made sure that their mother was always safe.

"Hola mija, is your father home?"

"No, sorry, he is at work," Ali said grinning as the man struggled to swat away the roosters. He had been trying to open the gate, but immediately stopped in his tracks as he saw the two roosters running to attack him.

"Poncho! Chone! Go inside!"

The roosters obediently listened, immediately calmed down, and walked away, following Ali to the back yard. The man probably knew he would not last long if he crossed the fence to wait for his friend, so he turned around and hoped to see him another time.

That night, Ali felt tired and didn't feed the chickens or do her rounds like she had always done. She heard her brothers playing in the back yard and assumed they would tend to her duties for once.

When she awoke the next morning, she heard only one croak from the rooster; she thought it was odd. Ali walked into her bathroom, picked up the tub, and filled it for her morning shower. As she walked outside to the well she noticed Chone quickly walk

up to her and follow her. He looked flustered and a bit scared. Poncho did not follow behind as he had in the past. In fact, Ali couldn't find Poncho anywhere.

"Poncho! Poncho!" She cried out, but heard no response.

Ali got worried, and as she arrived at the well she noticed that the lid was open. It should have been closed like always, but someone had forgotten to close it the night before. She looked inside. Her eyes widened, her hands trembled, and she dropped to her knees, sobbing at the sight that lay before her. Poncho had fallen into the well and drowned. Ali started screaming at the top of her lungs, not knowing what to say or how to feel and understanding only the pain of losing someone so close to her heart. The tears rushed down her cheeks uncontrollably; her father rushed out of the house thinking the worst.

"What's wrong? What happened? Are you ok? Que te paso?" He stammered at Ali, grabbing her by her shoulders and picking her up to check that his daughter had not been harmed.

"Poncho... is... dead!" Ali could barely say the words, she was sobbing too much.

Her father looked inside at the dead rooster floating in the water; he lifted it and laid it out in the dirt. Ali picked Poncho up and hugged him, not caring of anything else; Chone just stood there beside her as if he knew the pain just as well and comprehended the fact that his brother and friend were dead.

Her father was gracious enough to dig a hole and bury Poncho for Ali. The entire time she stood there in the heat of the day, Chone, not far from Ali, pecked at the ground. As they laid Poncho in the hole, Ali placed three wild white roses from her mother's garden with Poncho, her favorite flowers. She said goodbye and walked through the woods with Chone as her father filled in the burial plot.

Ali slept with Chone that night, hugging him and remembering all the good nights the three of them had; remembering the mornings when she would have to wake up earlier than everyone else to wash her sheets, clean her room, and open the window to get rid of the smell. Chone, as big and strong as he was, lay down and cuddled with her on her chest, trying his best to fit under her chin as he had done when he was a baby chick.

****

It had been three months since Poncho had died. The hot summer was saying its last goodbye. The fall was setting in. Chone was still strong as ever, and Ali had learned to live without Poncho.

Ali was walking to school that day, with Chone close behind, when a stray dog started barking at them and viciously ran towards them. Ali jumped, startled at the menacing dog that was coming at her. Chone, without moment's notice, jumped between them and started pecking and scratching the dog, spreading his wings and feathers as big as he could get. The dog saw Chone grow in size and was caught off guard by the ferocity of the rooster. Chone pecked and scratched the whimpering dog until it ran away with his tail between his legs, and then returned to Ali with a strut in his walk, as if he knew he did his job in protecting his mother. Ali feared for Chone, but also knew it wasn't the first time he had been in a fight with a dog. After going to school she saw Chone turn around and walk back to the house.

School was dull and boring that day. Ali breezed through the day like any other. When classes were done she walked out of the school to the chill of the day, it had progressively cooled further and she needed her jacket for the walk home. She looked around for Chone but he was nowhere to be found. "I guess he didn't feel like walking today," she thought to herself and started the cold walk home alone.

When Ali reached her house she saw that Chone was not waiting for her at the gate. She immediately began to worry and ran to the back yard to check the chicken coop. Chone was not there. Ali ran to the well to check that the same atrocity hadn't happened to Chone, like it had Poncho, but the lid was closed and there was no rooster inside. She saw one of her brothers and approached him.

"Have you seen Chone?"

"Uhhh… no…. uhhh… maybe he is in the woods."

"No, he's not there, I just checked, plus he wouldn't go there, not without me."

"Uhmm… I don't know what to say." Her brother had a sketchy look to his face, as if he knew exactly where Chone was but was keeping a secret.

Ali walked inside and asked her mom if she knew where Chone was. Her mother was in the kitchen preparing supper, and cutting vegetables for the soup. She was a fairly big woman, short but very strong, her hair was curly and up to her neck; she had a knife in her hand as she cut up the carrots, stopping only to fix her bifocals. There was a big pot of boiling water behind her mother; Ali could hear the thick broth bubbling. The sweet aroma filled the room and warmed her insides as she smelled the rice mixed with the

vegetables her mom was dicing and placing in the pot.

"Mom have you seen Chone? He didn't walk me home from school today and he wasn't outside."

"Yea, I'm making him for dinner," her mother said without any sign of regret or guilt towards her rooster or Ali's feelings.

"You what?!" Ali shrieked at the top of her lungs. She couldn't believe that her own mother would do that to her. "Why would you do that?" She stammered back as she felt the drops of tears getting heavier beneath her eye lids. Her eyebrows had shot up and her eyes, big and round, popped out her face as if they were trying to escape. Her hands cupped her cheeks as her arms began getting heavier. Ali's chest was pumping hard as she struggled to breathe, and her heart had sunk as she felt it pumping in her stomach.

"Ay, that rooster was already big and plump and didn't even lay eggs. Why do you want a chicken that doesn't lay eggs or do anything else? That's what they're for, para comer, so you can eat them"

"But mom, he was my friend and he was mine! I bought him and raised him, how could you do that to me?" Ali wailed at the top of her lungs. It was the first time she raised her voice at her mother with every intention to make her feel reluctant of what she had done to Chone.

"Hurry up and set up the table. It's a really cold day outside and your dad wasn't feeling well so the chicken soup will be good for him."

"NO! I can't believe you're going to eat him!" Ali could see the pot behind her mother boiling and bubbling as she screamed in agony. She knew her friend was in there. In her mind Chone was crying out for her help; in her mind Chone was still alive and her mother was the evil butcher that kept them apart, committing atrocious deeds of torture that killed Chone.

Ali stormed out of the kitchen, still shocked at the news and went to her room. She was crying as her tears trickled down her face and created a puddle on her pillow; she could smell the broth cooking in the kitchen, the aroma of the chicken and the vegetables boiling together, and hear her mother chopping away. She wanted to puke at the thought of eating someone she loved so much.

While everyone gathered for dinner and served themselves a hefty bowl, Ali simply sat in her room remembering her old friend and the great times they always had together. She could hear her father sucking on the chicken bones, to get all the marrow out. She could hear the spoons chattering as they hit the plates and the

slurp of the soup as her family feasted on Chone. Ali rolled over on her bed and found a white feather at the edge of her pillow. She picked it up and placed it under her chin as tears raced down her cheek.

* * * *

Three days had passed since Ali's family had eaten her longtime friend. She woke up early that Saturday morning, went outside to feed the chickens, and then decided to go for a walk in the woods. As she walked through the brisk of the morning, she heard the chirping clatter of baby chicks; Ali turned towards the sound and saw a hen walking through the bushes with seven chicks following close behind. Ali smiled as she saw the eighth chick scurry behind everyone else, trying its best to keep up: the runt of the group. She got as close as she could to the hen and her young ones and swept the baby runt to keep for her own. The mother hen saw this and flew at Ali, pecking and scratching her.

Ali ran as fast as she could back home with the chick in her arms, ready to start a new friendship.

Tupperware

Benjamin Schweers

The soap built-up on his hands, big soapy clouds that dripped smaller clouds into the sink, then slowly dissipated in the water. He grabbed the last dirty plate and dunked it in the dish water. The cloudy water swirled. He scrubbed the plate, and then dunked into the other sink, into the clean, crisp water. And that's when he noticed the dirty Tupperware. He wasn't going to clean it, and he knew it.

Three days before, Marcy had taken some meatloaf to work for lunch. When she brought the container home after work, she plopped it on the counter and went straight to the bedroom. Tim, sitting on the couch, watching TV, looked over at the container and knew that she wouldn't come back to clean it.

And there he stood at the sink, three days later, doing dishes, the Tupperware as dirty as when she brought it home.

I'm not cleaning that, he said to himself. The water drained from the sink, Tim put the plate on the dish rack, and glanced over at the Tupperware again. Little black mold spores already peppered the sides of the plastic. He tried to imagine how rancid the inside smelled.

I'd clean if it had been rinsed out, he thought. But not now. They'd had this conversation many times before.

Tim squeezed the sponge, and all the soapy clouds fell into the empty sink.

* * * *

Tim rolled his suitcase up to the front door, where he righted it then grabbed his keys off the table.

"Ok. Have a good trip," Marcy replied from the couch.

"Yeah, well you know how these sales things are," he said, with his back turned to her.

"Don't be that way. You'll have fun. Enjoy the break," she told him.

"I'll be back in a week," Tim said.

He faced her, stood next to the door with his hand wrapped around the knob, slowly turning. She looked up from a magazine, their eyes met. They stared at each other for a few seconds.

"Alright," he said, and he walked out the door.

Later the next evening he sat on the bed in a hotel room. He picked up his phone every couple minutes, as if he was going to

text her something, but then realized he didn't have anything to say. Instead, he would look at the photos Marcy had sent him while he was away: pictures of the dog sleeping in odd positions and in odd places; a freshly vacuumed floor; the pillows arranged neatly on the couch; pictures of the food she made for dinner.

She even sent a picture of something she never did: The dishes. All the plates and glasses were neatly stacked on the drying rack, the silverware sat in the little silverware holder, but there was no Tupperware.

Tim put his phone back on the nightstand, turned out the lights, and stared at the TV, the glow of the screen the only light in the room.

* * * *

A week later he pulled briskly into the driveway, grinning to himself. They had talked during his drive home from the airport. She had missed him. She let him know that. This was more than his return home, they said, it was their return to normalcy.

He got out of the truck and hurried to the door. He took a breath when he slid the key into the lock, and he exhaled when he turned the knob and swung the door open. Silence.

"Hey," he said when he found Marcy.

"Hey," she said back. Their eyes met. They stared at each other for a few seconds.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Ugh. This stupid thing won't work," she replied, not looking away from the computer screen.

He turned and walked to the guest bedroom. He threw his suitcase on the bed but didn't unpack anything. Tim changed clothes then went to the fridge. After grabbing a beer he stood up straight, pushed the door to the fridge closed, and then saw it: the Tupperware on the counter, in the exact spot where he'd last seen it. The lid was still securely fastened. He could only guess at how bad it must have smelled and how disgusting it must be inside.

* * * *

Days later Tim sat at the kitchen table, arguing with Marcy. They didn't look at one another, but their voices filled the room. When Marcy had enough she flipped off the lights and walked away.

"What the hell?" Tim yelled.

"Fine! I'll turn the lights back on for you," she screamed.

"No! I'll eat with the lights off," he yelled sarcastically.

He swung around in his chair, took the glass in his hand, and smashed it against the light switch behind him. The room went

dark. Shards flew across the kitchen, scattered onto every surface, under every table, chair, and cabinet.

They stood in the dark, breathing. Tim flipped the lights back on. Marcy stood at the doorway and stared at him. No words. Then she turned and walked back away. He scanned the room, walked carefully to the trashcan.

He picked the pieces up off the floor and threw them in the trashcan. He collected bits off the counter and scooped them into a dust pan. And quickly the mess was erased. Only a lone sliver of glass remained. Stuck in the wall, next to the light switch, it was lodged in the drywall. When Tim noticed it, he went to remove it but turned and left it in place.

With the rest of the mess cleaned, he cinched up the trash bag, knotting it three times instead of two. He held the bag out in front of him as he walked it to the backdoor. He stepped onto the back porch and the floodlight came on, illuminating the trashcan at the far end of the yard. He reached the garbage can, lifted the lid but stopped short of swinging the bag up into the trash. Tim stared down into the almost empty can, and, with the help of the dim porch light, he faintly recognized the top of the Tupperware.

Twenty-Nine

Dominique Vargas

It was her twenty-ninth birthday. Her first twenty-ninth birthday, but she knew it would not be the last. After twenty-nine, a single woman has to start lying about her age. Next year she would be twenty-nine again, and the year after too; on and on until her hair grayed and people were either too polite or too embarrassed to ask her age.

She slept in until midmorning and began her day as she had planned. First she took the stiff over-night rollers out of her hair and dressed in a long sundress, layered with a heavy sweater. Then she walked six blocks down to the sea wall. It was February on the Gulf Coast. Salt water mixed with blowing rain in a hazy cold rinse cycle. Waves crashed against the hundred-year-old-wall and sprayed her with foamy water and chunks of wet sand.

When she got home she was shivering. Her lips and bare fingers were whitish blue. She combed the sand out of her hair and started baking. Yellow double-layered cake with chocolate icing. While she was melting the semi-sweet chocolate squares, her mother called.

"Happy birthday dear. Now it really is time that you get serious about your life. Listen, please think about moving back home. You know, Alma's boy, George is still single and he always asks about you. You two would look, well you would look just fine together. Now, think about it. Don't eat any sweets today. Your face will break out. We'll see you this weekend, George is going to come to dinner, so bring something nice to wear. Hope you liked your gift. Grandma and Dad send their love."

Her mother spoke uninterrupted like she was talking to an answering machine. She hung up the phone and looked at the gift her mother sent. It was a tea set. She did not have room for it in the cupboard, so it sat out on the table. It did not match anything she owned. The powder blue pot, six cups, saucers, cream pitcher, and sugar bowl all had yellow daffodils painted on them. Daffodils meant unrequited love.

She stirred sugar into the melted chocolate and thought about her mother's call. George was her first boyfriend. And an idiot. Now whenever she visited home he drove to her parents' house and sat next to her on the porch drinking beer out of aluminum cans. He was always glazed with sweat, even in the winter. He smelled like yeast and wet carpet.

She never wanted to move home again. Everything was brown. Brown rocks, brown dirt, brown grasss, brown cedar trees choking out every other plant in reach of their parasitic roots. The gulf was her escape. It made her feel like she could walk into the waves and disappear.

She opened the oven and poked a fork into the center of each six-inch cake. The prongs came out clean. She left the cakes on the counter to cool and put the icing in the refrigerator.

In her bedroom she sat at her vanity, looking into her own eyes until her face was blurry. She felt older than twenty-nine. Crow's feet were beginning to spread out from the corners of her eyes. Other lines spread out from her mouth and brows.

Her lips were thinner than they used to be. She dabbed some rose-colored lipstick on and tried to hold her face very still. If she clenched her jaw and tilted her head toward the ceiling she thought she looked a little younger. Either way, she resolved to use more cold cream at night.

Next she closed the curtains for her birthday ritual. There were two boxes in the top of her closet. The box on the right held mementos: letters and cards from friends she had in college, pressed flowers from their weddings, ribbons, pictures—anything that reminded her of something, or someone. The box on the left held scraps of paper with her writing on them. These were failures. A year's worth of everything left unsaid, a rejection letter from graduate school, names of lovers she would never have.

Each year she burned the failures and started over. This year was different. She emptied both boxes into a large brown envelope and addressed it to her mother in red ink. She was not sure how much it would cost to send it, so she put six forget-me-not stamps in the top right corner. Forget-me-nots mean true love. She took the package to the kitchen and finished icing her cake. She also made tea in the new pot with the daffodils. The table was set for six. Each setting had a cup of tea and a slice of cake.

She left the house again and walked back toward the water. On her way she dropped the package in the rusted blue mailbox on the corner. High tide pushed tangled seaweed and a faded maroon bandana against her ankles. On the horizon, oil platforms seemed to bob against the clouds. She clenched her jaw and tilted her head up. It was still raining.

Trap the Mouse

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

I stood there in front of the third graders, waiting for the next question. I had only agreed to talk at Career Day as a favor to a sorority sister.

"What will I talk about?" I had asked her a few weeks ago.

"Talk about writing stories. It's what you want to do someday, right?"

So I stood there for ten minutes, making a lame career day speech about going to college, my choice to be an English major, joining a sorority, and meeting their teacher. Smile, smile, wink, wink.

I showed them one of my writing journals, my cheerful composition book with butterflies and flowers on the cover, a writing journal I had decorated when I was twelve.

I told them I wrote a funny essay about getting lost at Sea World and got an A from my professor. I showed them an illustrated poem I gave to my boyfriend, and I read the first page of a fiction story about a goose and a mouse.

A freckled-face boy waved once and blurted out, "Why haven't you written any scary stories?"

"I don't like to feel scared," I said, as a raw fear of monstrous proportion clutched my gut without warning.

A terrifying ache held me prisoner, pinned me down against my will.

* * * *

When I was six and my brother was nine, he took great sport in his own game of "Trap the Mouse".

He would reach across our parents' bed, grab me by one foot, and yank me closer. At the same time, he would grab the chenille bedspread and throw it over my head.

At first I wasn't scared because it wasn't dark—something I really hated most of all—I could still make out the light bulbs and the ceiling fan. I could still hear the cartoons on the TV and feel the initial coolness of the bedspread, splaying my fingers against the bumpy designs.

And as I pressed my hands against the faded blue bedcover, I could feel the familiar softness of cozy mornings when I'd awoke in my parents' bed after unsettling dreams. My mom was rarely in

the bed when I awoke, but I could snuggle into the warm rut and imagine Mommy still there.

I tried to cuddle the memory to me, but the air always seemed too thin.

My fingers were forced into fists as the bedspread buckled down over my face, my head, and my shoulders. My stomach, my legs, my feet, my toes—all ironed down on the bed by the weight of my brother's arms, legs, hands, and feet, pressing me flat, pinned under the trap of the bedspread.

Like always, I yelled, "Stop! No!" but my cries were muffled by my brother's laughter. And then the blanket seemed to be sucked inside my open mouth. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't see, I couldn't live.

I shrieked louder; his laughter surrounded me in waves. His cruel glee filled my ears, squeezing tears from my eyeballs, pulling out every hair from my head, until I was tortured, broken, begging for help, crying my mommy's name.

So many times I surrendered to fears of dying. Under a blanket that smelled like Kool-aid and pee-pee, I would suffocate. I'd shrivel up. I'd be scraped off the bedcover like old bubble gum my little brothers forgot to spit out before sleeping.

I dissolved into wetness; horrors seeped from the inside out.

Suddenly he would release me and roll off the bed. Gone. His laughter echoed in the hallway as he ran for the kitchen door.

Like a chenille blue bird's wing, I'd raise the bedspread off my head. Sniffling and sobbing, I crawled off the bed. Forget Purple Power Girl, my favorite hero; she abandoned me to save some other victim. Nobody ever rescued me or helped me escape. Nobody.

I always sobbed out the front door, all the way to the porch steps. I couldn't tell my mother. If my brother got in trouble, he always got revenge.

So I'd sit outside, snuffling the horrors back inside me. I'd always swear: no more TV in our parent's bedroom. Then I'd forget, until the next time "Trap the Mouse" played again on the blue chenille screen.

* * * *

Many years later tiny fists battered for release. I swore to suffocate the fearful flutters into dust.

"No," I said slowly, glancing at the curious face of my sorority sister. I turned back to stare at the boy who had asked the question. "No, I never write scary stories. I wouldn't even know how to begin to write one."

The Blue Marble

Jessica Valles

My waitressing shift just ended so I sat at the ice bar of The Blue Marble, my place of work and my family's favorite restaurant. As I finished my second drink, I looked out at the grand dining area where my family was scattered socializing. It was a relatively calm night for the usually busy establishment. I looked out at the tables and chairs and imagined how I'd rearrange them for my brother's wedding. I was so caught up in imagining the decorations and set up that I could've sworn my drink turned into champagne. Or maybe I had one too many drinks after a week of long shifts and little sleep.

Now I saw my brother, Corbin, leaned up against the glass panels that made up the restaurant's walls. Cara was to his right and oddly enough they were standing at the entrance to the patio where the altar would be in a few months when they were to be wed. With their hands clasped together, they looked like the only two people in the world who knew where to stand and what to do with their free hand.

I pictured them in full wedding attire; my brother in a sleek black tuxedo and Cara in a lacey off-white dress that looked like it'd been put together by fairies. I imagined them standing there with the bountiful flowers my mother and I picked out in the background. I finished my drink as my eyes began to tear.

Smoke was irritating my eyes and I heard my mother scream at me, "Susan, get your father!"

I shook my head to clear the daydream and saw a group of people trying to put out a fire by one of the glass panels draped in gold fabric.. Osphera, my mother, was one of the pseudo firefighters-cigarette still in hand. Without question I knew that she had too much to drink. She had probably tried making a business deal and, while chain-smoking, with her hand gestures. I made another drink.

That same window now framed by fire has always been my dad's favorite for family photos. I could imagine him on the wedding day making us all squeeze together to pose for a picture. The girls would be in the emerald green chiffon bridesmaid gowns and the boys in matching tuxedos. I envisioned us together grinning for a few seconds too long. We cleaned up nicely and had warm smiles. I

could see my dad, Sunny, setting up the camera on the tripod and running towards us to stand next to my mom.

In reality, he was running, but towards the scene of the fire. "Osphera! Get out of the way, you've done enough!" I heard him yell.

As he got closer to my apologetic mother I found myself holding my breath. I was unable to hear what he screamed at my mom before he pounded on the glass window with his fists. My instincts were to go over and help, but I couldn't walk without stumbling over.

I continued to sit at the bar and watch the fiery scene in front of me. I kept imagining the photo of all of us posing happily amongst the flowers. Then a loud crack broke me out of my daydreaming. At first I didn't know where it was coming from, but it was booming and I thought Earth itself cracked in half.

The glass restaurant was heating up from the fire. The glass panel where my parents were standing shattered. This caused a domino effect of breaking glass on the other panels making up the ceiling of the restaurant. The look on Sunny's face was utter disappointment as he realized the damage done to the venue of his son's wedding. He didn't mean to cause such destruction, but it burst out of him like an uncontrollable ray. He was staring off into the distance and I swear it seemed like he too could see the vision I was seeing.

I imagined waiters and waitresses walking out of the kitchen holding plates of crab cakes and strawberry cakes-Cara's favorites. I could also see Corbin and Cara who had aprons on over their tux and dress to help serve their wedding guests.

"Somebody call for help!" my brother cried. In reality they weren't holding plates of food, they were holding towels to help aid those who were injured by the broken glass. I put my head down on the bar. I felt like I was going to pass out.

Next thing I knew I was imagining dancing with my grandfather who was telling me to lead because he had too much to drink. I had to get him home and my heels were hurting my feet. I could've sworn they were bleeding.

They were.

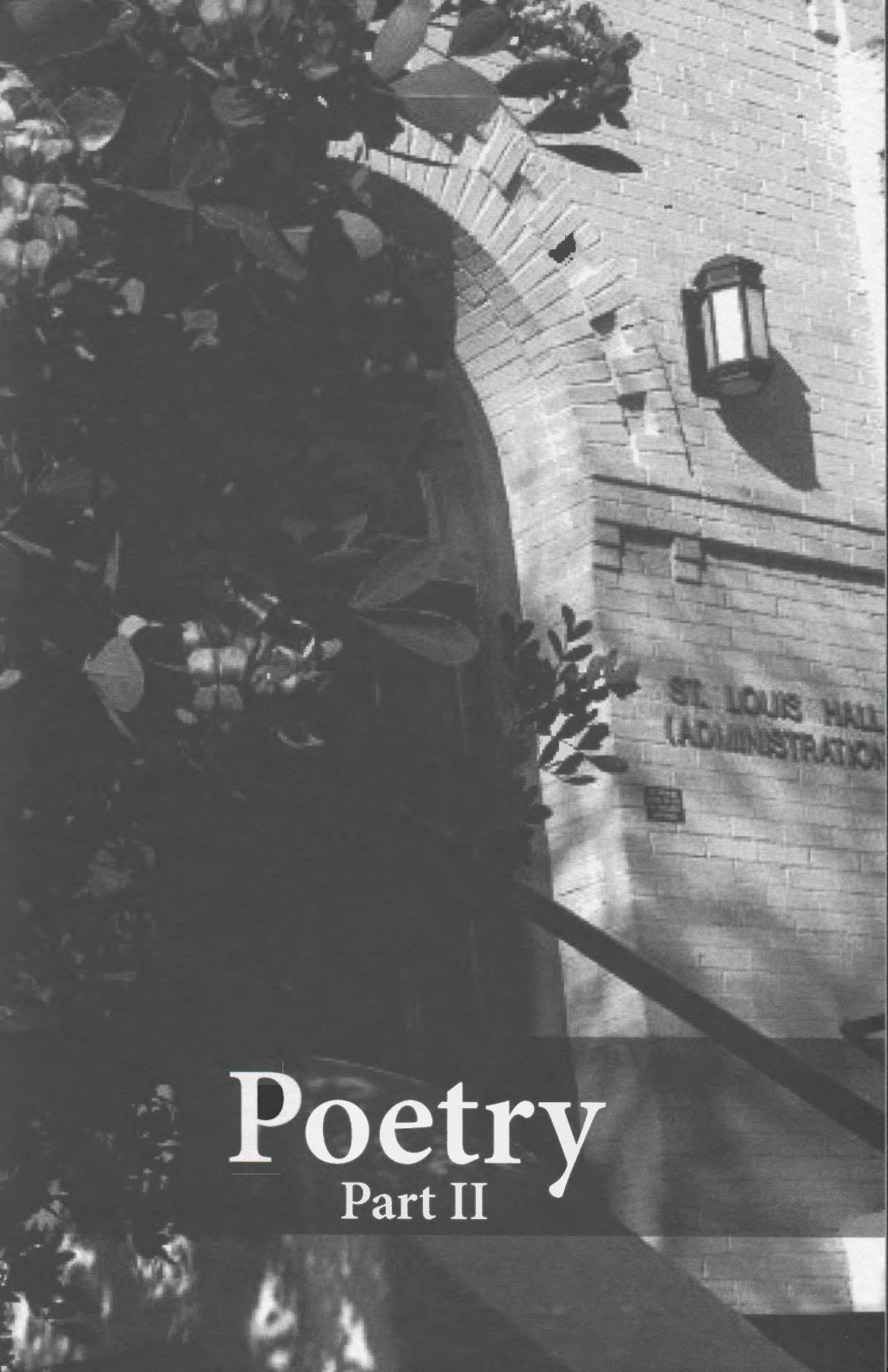
I had actually lost my shoes helping get my passed out grandfather out of the heat from the fire. I took him out to the patio where it was safe and instead of asking wedding guests to call him a cab, I asked strangers to call an ambulance.

I turned back towards the now glowing restaurant, not because of all the extra wedding lighting but because of the fire.

I could still imagine all my friends and family dancing on the glossy marble floor, but it was just covered in water.

I looked for the source and saw The Blue Marble's iconic ice bar was melting due to the heat. The owner was standing beside me. He wept.

My parents came out onto the patio with my brother and his fiancé. Emergency vehicles started to arrive. My mother lit another cigarette and turned her back to the ashes of The Blue Marble, "Corbin, Cara, what do you think of that place for the wedding?" We all looked at the red building across the street and started walking towards it.



Poetry
Part II

Let Daylight Come

Kassandra Lozano

Let daylight come
With streaks of pinks,
Yellow lines and wispy whites.
With morning air's first breath,
Take in the moment,
Find your peace.

Let your mind not wander
Into the dark.
Breathe in, breathe out.
Let your body
Run through rays of light.
Let each step sing among the trees

A move so simple
It comes after walking.
Find in it new strength.
Be in it calm and renewing.
Run through rays of light.
Breathe and breathe
As daylight comes.

People Pleaser

Stacy Fowler

A frog's life would suit me fine
They hop around from time to time
They're always moving - no dust on their boots
Can't stay still long enough to grow any roots

Or perhaps a chameleon is what I should be
Always changing my looks and trying to please
You don't like this color? I've got several more
Do you think I look better with three stripes or four?

I know! I know! I'll become a mouse!
I'll slip around silent all over the house
You won't even know that I'm still around
You'll look high and low but I won't be found

But, after I stretch and pull and tie myself in a knot,
Trying to show you I'm something I'm not
When, at last, I realize the way I should be
Maybe, just maybe, I'll finally be me

Flower Feast

Sara Cabrera

When I met you,
flowers started growing
in the darkest parts of my mind.

I wanted a flower,
you planted a garden.

But you forgot
you forgot to
give it sunlight
water it
nurture it
you forgot,
and all the flowers w
i
l
t
e
d

Now my mind is dark;
you no longer give me flowers.
So I go to the floral shop
buy a bouquet of pastel lilies and lilacs
take them home and
eat them.

I eat flowers
because you are what you eat
and I want to be beautiful.

Do you love me now?

Wildflowers

Lauren Olivia Faz

I am Raymond, the aged, quiet man
living in a cul-de-sac of weathered houses.
When my time is up, they will assume that a
simple house with a lawn mower out front is all of me.
They will not know that I married my middle
school sweetheart in a field of wildflowers overlooking the city.
They will not know that after fifty-five years of marriage,
I was the last smile she saw before she slipped into her final slumber.

I should tell them I am a veteran of war that my
country should have never entered. That I played the violin
for a traveling band and that while I have seen the skylines
of the great cities, none of them ever felt like home the way
a field of wildflowers overlooking a small city does.

I should tell them that along my travels I marched
alongside Cesar Chavez on the road to equality.
Unless I tell them, they will never know that I am a child
of this earth's joys and her sorrows. Each line on my well-worn
face is a testament to each moment of a hard life lived well.

Cracks

Alexander Eakins

They slide 'cross the room on skates of shadow

Slamming into walls like black bumper cars

Some blaze a black trail, straight and narrow

Others zig-zag like empty, driverless cars

I wonder what lies waiting in their paths

What fingers dare climb from their crevices

I wonder why I sometimes hear ugly laughs

Crying from the depths of their premises

I wonder if the cracks hide in all rooms

If storms or calms conspire beneath them

I wonder if they carry banes or boons

If they aim to spit air, fire, ice or phlegm

Still I always hear their hard creak and slide

Dark and deep at the bottom of mind's eye

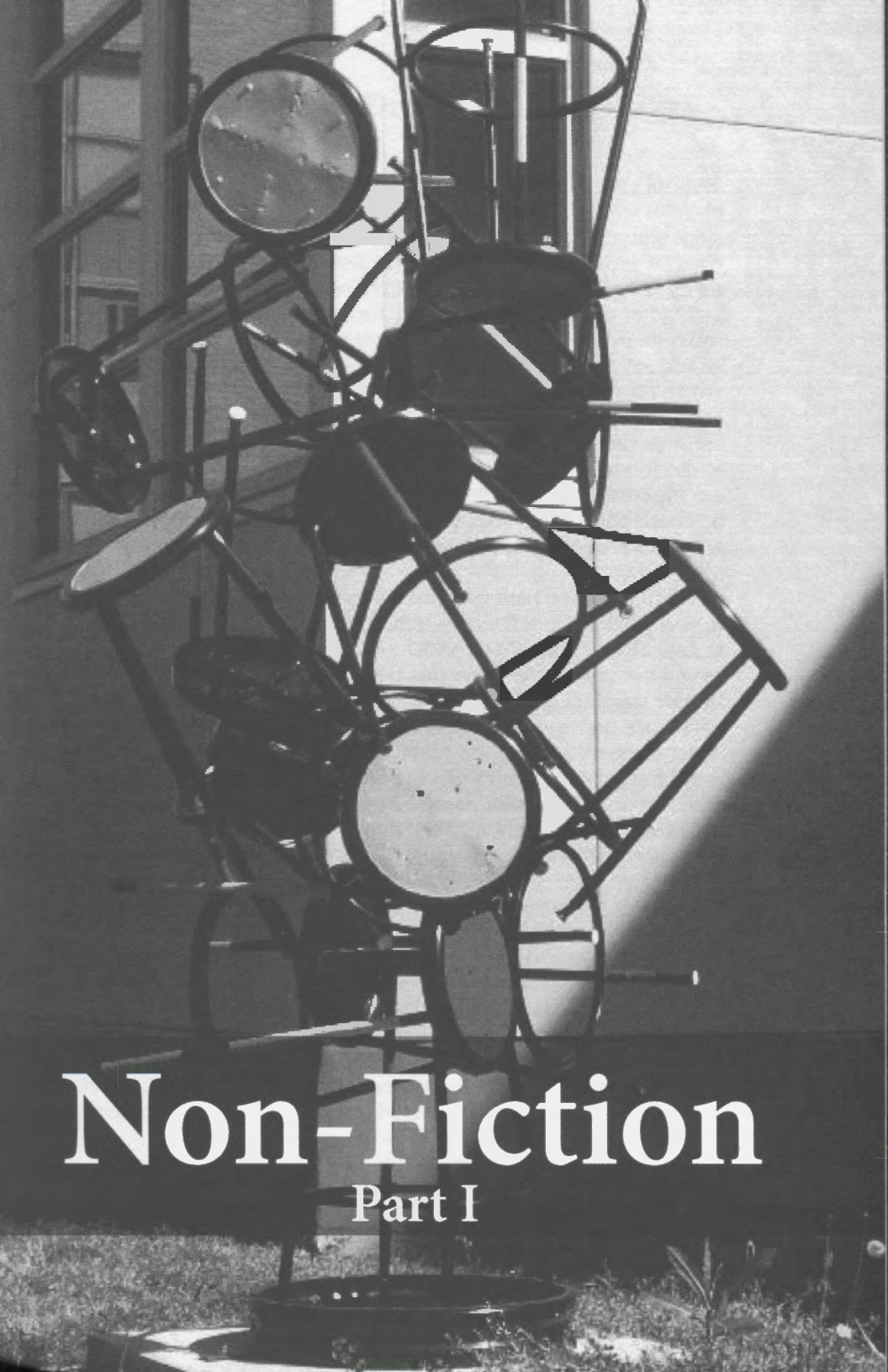
The Unacknowledged Relative

Cyra Dumitru

has taken up residence
in the rental car parking lot
of a regional airport,
cleaning windshields and headlights
in exchange for bottles of water
and small boxes of raisins.
When it rains, she sleeps
inside the Expedition.

I have a gold-leaf card to hand to her,
formal invitation to come live with us.
Time to come in from the wind
and heat, isolation and sleet.

Whatever her former transgression,
whatever she did to shame herself,
embarrass us, should now be admitted
as one more necessary story
around our common table.
No more, no less.



Non-Fiction

Part I

Fulfilling My Wildest Dreams

Céline A. Jacquemin

From the time I was 5 years old, I was told THIS is not for girls. It is too expensive. We cannot afford the lessons plus the uniform every year. At 17 when I went to Japan, I ogled all the purple Ninja women and thought, oh well, too late now. But now after 30 years of longing, I am finally pursuing my wildest dream. I signed up for Jujitsu and had my first lessons. I love it. Ok, it is going to be hard —big understatement—yet I really enjoy it. And yes, give me a few months (more like many years) before I can be a serious contender on the mat! But I will get there and I am having so much fun on the way.

Kyoshi Lee always says that the hardest belt to earn is the white one. Having taken 30 years to get there, I certainly cannot refute his argument! Instead, I will explain what eventually brought me to his dojo and what expectations and aspirations I had then and how those have been transformed over the past the past 8 months in training.

I am really not sure in what order to list the combination of five reasons that made me realize that the only thing still in my way of any martial arts training was: me. Quite an obstacle I might add, at 170 lbs, 5 foot 7, I am one driven and determined fiery red-haired gal. So until I could refocus my energy on following my wildest dream, I certainly thought it would never be more than a fantasy.

I had come a long way from home at the time, France where I was born and raised. After living in California for 16 years to earn my PhD in Political Science and International Relations, I had been fortunate to find my dream job at St Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas where I moved in August 2004. My first year there was bitter sweet. I so much loved my teaching and my students but I was running myself ragged following a grueling schedule of seven workday weeks and long 14 hour days. For some days, I really had no choice, a new faculty at a new school, meant so much to learn and so much to do. But often I was so determined to be the best Professor, Mentor, Advisor, Teacher, and at times even the best Mother I could ever be that I attended tons of student events to encourage them and support their efforts. This meant my life was 99% St Mary's and while this was incredibly enjoyable and fulfilling, it had become draining on my health and energy. I knew by March

that I needed to take better care of myself and seriously started to do so.

Every day I drove by the Talamantez Karate Academy on my way to school. I thought I should check it out. I had always dreamt of learning martial arts. But I never stopped in. Yet, as a single woman, leaving in a large city I knew I needed to be proactive to protect myself. After an unfortunate event one evening when I was not sure how I managed to thwart the attack, I certainly was left feeling vulnerable, disgusted, and mad. Within a few days, my best friend also had an encounter with her own attacker who tried to break into her house while she was there. She was even more frightened when she came face to face with him again a few days later in the parking lot of her house but the police refused to do anything. I felt sick, not only could I not do anything to help her but I was also terrified by the idea of someone trying to break into my own apartment. You probably think that is it. This time, Céline figured out she needs to pick up a martial art. Nothing is that easy or straight forward, especially not when you are about to follow your wildest dream! And a wild dream it was because I knew I had little to no body coordination. I kindly think of myself as made up of three left feet, one and a half right hands, and many butter fingers.

The decision to train came in a dream a few days later. Well, what else would you expect? I was being restrained by a bear hug from behind. Ok, first I stomped his foot. Well, was it the shoe? Or did I not stomp hard enough? It did not seem to work. Ok, now for the back elbow strike to his chest. Not again, this guy did not even budge. I am going to twist my body around and punch his groin… useless… I was not fearful during this half conscious dream but puzzled that what I thought I may know about self-defense just did not seem to work. I sat up in bed: of course if I had been learning a martial art since I was five, I would have known how to do this the right way! NOW I was determined train in a martial art. So I called a friend who would know which martial arts are holistic ones. For I knew I was not looking for some cardio kick boxing or gentle Tai Chi. I still longed for the discipline and focus of my Japanese Ninja Women! He recommended either Chinese Shaolin or Traditional Japanese Jujitsu.

Armed with this information, I surfed the internet. I meticulously took notes, printed things out, and researched further everything with which I was not familiar. What was this Kenpo stuff anyway? Aikido sounded good? I did find out Judo came from Jujitsu but

I really needed Japanese Jujitsu, not the Brazilian kind. None of that grappling on the floor with sweaty guys for me, please. There, I found it! Ok, there is the Kojukan Jujitsu Academy, minutes from my apartment or the Shaolin place off of West Avenue, only 20 minutes away or so. I called both. That afternoon, I went to the Kojukan Jujitsu Academy. So, on Wednesday June 1st, 2005, I walked in and met Kyoshi Lee. I knew within minutes that not only Jujitsu was for me, but also that Kyoshi could actually teach me.

So, I did the only thing I could do: I signed up. I knew if I walked out of there without a firm commitment I might never muster the courage to come in again. The only sport I ever practiced, was swimming. I was good at it but never a fast swimmer. However, I had never really been able to learn coordinated movement at least not easily so all my doubts and fears were overwhelming me again. As I left, I thought I had just accomplished my most courageous act, but far from reality.

I told Kyoshi Lee that I would come for my first class on Friday June 3nd at 1PM. I had scheduled that at noon I would change into my Gi and mosey on to the dojo. But this time no doubts anymore, only crippling and paralyzing fears! My level of adrenaline was through the roof as if I was under attack. Well yes, my mind was doing its best to remind me of those left feet and butter fingers I had. I am not even sure how I made it into the uniform without splattering on the ground. I certainly came close. Ok… I can do this. If my mind can make me so insecure, I can just channel this adrenaline for joy and excitement about my first Jujitsu class instead. After all, I am a professional student! Learning is what I do best –ok I am pretty good at teaching too but this is not my field- so today, I only need to worry about me as a student. I have been a student for 32 years; I am pretty darn good at learning. Yes, I can! This is probably when I became Thomas the little engine! Wow, this was overwhelming. Ok it is 12:30 I have to get into the car and drive there. Sick to my stomach, I know it was more than butterflies! I checked for the fourth time that I did have everything in my bag. Ready, go. I climbed into the car after retrieving a bottle of water from the trunk. Let's take a sip, ah. Feel better? Nope. Let's drive. Parked in front of the dojo, it took 3 more separate and intentional sips before I could get out the car.

When I walked into the dojo, I met Shihan Greg for the first time. He seemed so nice. Thank God, he immediately proceeded to teach me how to tie on my obi. I do not think he realized how frightened

I was. Then, Kyoshi Lee came out of the office and class started. It took a few minutes before I could silence the fears in my head and focus. But Kyoshi Lee could indeed teach me and he is by far one of the most amazing professors I ever had. And trust me when I say I have been blessed with remarkable, dedicated, and brilliant teachers and mentors most of whom are simply eclipsed by Kyoshi Lee's combination of skills, dedication, astuteness, compassion, and care for his students.

Following instructions in class was usually ok even when it always took a little more time for me. But Kyoshi was so patient and always helpful that I could usually hang in there. Some of my big brothers and big sisters were also very supportive and I started feeling so comfortable even when needing extra help. It had only been a couple of weeks I was training when I had a really bad day. I almost broke out in tears in the middle of the dojo. I just could not get it! I was frustrated and discouraged. While on a good day, I do not know my right from my left hand, I have learned to quickly make up for that. However, on bad days, I seriously do not know my feet from my hands and sequencing movement just trips my brain. I felt I was trying to learn Jujitsu while drowning in a stormy ocean while the rest of the students were safely training on the sunny shore. I had to tell Kyoshi. I went to his office after class and explained to him that I have a mild form of spatial dyslexia that can sometimes make everything I do feel like walking across a desert without water. I know I have to make it through to the other side somehow and I am wary of the tricks my brain plays on me for I may get stuck in a mirage, drinking sand! Keeping my focus is the hardest on those days and so learning is also much more difficult. Kyoshi was incredibly kind and explained to me that he had dealt with many different learning and physical disabilities before and that I should not worry. He made it always so easy to trust him. I always laugh when Kyoshi reminds me to breathe as I learn a new technique. How many of you forget to breathe altogether when you train? Well often, I did!

As for expectations and aspirations, the narrative above should have made it clear that I never had the time to think about them before my first visit to the dojo. I wanted a holistic ancient martial art because I did not just want to learn to roundhouse kick or break boards. I wanted to learn a discipline of the mind, body, heart, and soul that would help me build the confidence and skills to defend myself and others. My aspiration was simple, I would commit to

working hard to learn –I did not know this would be the hardest subject I ever learned, even if certainly worth it. I did not aspire to earn my belts in a certain amount of time, nor to be the best ever martial artist –even if sometimes I yearn to be. I was going to do this for me. I would prove to myself that I could do something this hard, yet so fulfilling.

My expectations and aspirations have changed over the past eight months of training. I never expected to find a new family and get so many new brothers–and a few sisters at the dojo. But I do love the camaraderie and care we show for each other. I love that Kyoshi Lee is always there for any of us to talk about our lives or simply answer questions about Jujitsu. Many people I have met through the dojo have shared great insights and friendships with me. Thanks to Kyoshi's gentle nudge in the right direction, I not only have tremendous respect for Sensei Carlos but I also enjoy training with him now. Sensei Joe is by far the most gentle and quite an inspiration to me. I continue to look forward to learning from him when he comes back. Many of my big brothers and sisters show remarkable patience in the way they help me learn each in their own way. I will only name a few of them but I am thankful for all of them: Craig, Jay, Ovi, Tai, Mike, James, Brandon, and Laura.

My expectations of what I can learn have grown as I discover all the many aspects of Zujitsu from learning to use and defend against weapons to maybe one day actually being able to detect, disrupt, and dictate my own rhythm. My aspirations continue to include a wild dream: maybe someday I can earn a black belt. Ok there I said it, but that is still a wild dream! For now, I only aspire to be the best student I can be to make Kyoshi Lee, Soke Zulu, Kyoshi Zosia, and all my other Senseis proud of me. I know the best me will never be a great martial artist, but after all that is not what Zujitsu is about. I need to learn to defend myself with honor and restraint, not perform at competitions or in movies! Trust me when I say that my toughest lesson was not learning my first Kata (which took a month) but the toughest was to come to terms with the fact that my best is not as good as that of many others. I eat large slices of humble pie every time I enter the dojo. But I think that is a very healthy diet for a very good, safe, and happy life. I feel blessed everyday and thank God for bringing Jujitsu and so many amazing people into my life.

My First Job Interview

Zhang Shuxia

I am not a traditional freshman, for I have already had an Associate Degree from China. I went to a Nursing Community College in September 2006 and graduated in July 2009. Then I worked in a clinic for about two years, before I came to study here last year. Working in the clinic was an unforgettable experience for me, but the experience of finding the job itself was just as eventful as the actual job.

During the last year of my college, while most of my friends were focusing on studying the Chinese Nursing Certificate Exam, I prepared myself for TOFEL test instead, aiming to further my study in the U.S. I applied for UTSA at the end of 2008 and received its admission in March 2009. Looking forward to coming to UTSA for the fall semester of 2009, I did not take the Chinese Nursing Exam in the incoming May. But things did not work out the way I had expected; I did not get a student visa in August. After frustration and disappointment, I decided to find a job to have a fresh start of my life.

At the end of August, I moved out of my parents' house and rented an apartment. Then I spent several days going through all of the nursing jobs from the nursing recruitment websites. After reading the job descriptions and all the requirements, I felt that clinic work was the best choice for me because of its flexible schedule. I made a list of the available clinic job interviews, and there were around twenty of them.

Next, I went to all of the interviews I had written down. None of the employers gave me an instant offer; and they all said the same thing, that they might contact me later. With the hope to be hired by at least one of them, I stayed in my apartment to wait for their response. But I became anxious after waiting for a couple of days without getting any responses. I came to understand "contact me later" was just an implicit way to say "no". And the truth is that health centers including clinics, would like to hire someone with a nursing certificate, because without a certificate, the doctor or head nurse becomes responsible for the actions of the non-registered nurse.

After accepting the fact that all of the interviews were not positive, I fell into frustration and disappointment again. For the following days, with nothing to do, I hopelessly walked around the city every afternoon. But one day, on my way back to my

apartment, I noticed a nursing employment opportunity posted outside of a clinic. I walked in not expecting to get the job. Like most supervisors who interviewed me before, she first asked me about my educational background, which was followed by work experience and nursing certificate information. Based on previous interviews, I was prepared to leave right after I answered "no experience" and "no certificate". But surprisingly, she continued and asked the reason why I did not take the nursing exam. I told her that I missed the exam, for I was preparing to study abroad. She had a quick nod and then asked about my grades from college. I was surprised, because no one had asked about my grades before. After I told her my average grade was eighty, she smiled and said I must have studied hard in college. I suddenly felt a relief at this moment. And then she stopped the conversation to look at my resume. About two minutes later she raised her head, and said that she would like to give me a chance. Even though I already felt positive as the interview went on, I was still shocked that I had been hired.

The experience of getting this job is extremely valuable for me, because it gives me the courage to face difficulties. Succeeding in finding the job makes me realize that to achieve any goal one must persist, which encouraged me to face my challenge in studying in US. With the belief, I tried again and this time I got the admission and came to St. Mary to further my study.

My Journey To Makah

Abullah Alshamrani

It was one of my dream trips, to go for Hajj to Makah. Finally this day came and the dream will be real. We started, my brothers and I, preparing ourselves for this trip a month before the trip, getting our paper work done and all we might need there, such as; blankets, billows, and our traditional Arabic coffee.

We woke up early on that day to pray Alfajer, then we drove to Makah. That is away from my city, Riyadh by 700km. We arrived at the "Miqat", a place we have to change our clothes and wear "Eharam", special clothes for Hajj. Also, we decided to do the Hajj by saying " labik allhom hajj".

After that, we continued with the trip to Makah, and when we reached there we entered the holy mosque. I did my "Tawaf", which is walking seven times around the "Ka'abah", I was really happy and I did very fast. There were a lot of hajjies around me, and what was amazing there was that each one of them was praying in different language. After we finished, we went to our place where we stayed.

On the ninth day of the twelfth month in the Islamic calendar I went to "Arafah", to spend that day in this place to the sunset. It was unforgettable day, people were busy praying and asking God for forgiveness, I saw many people were crying, raising their hands up to the sky. At the noontime there was a prayer that all hajjes had to pray together. What I were not happy to see there, some family came with a young children on their first year, they were suffering from the heat and from cars carbons. I remember the long lines of people several cars waiting for the sunset, it was really the longest buses lines I saw on my life. Then, after the sunset, we all of people and cars start moving in a great scenes to another place to spend the night.

When we reached our place in "Muzdalifah", it was like a huge camping city without any tents, with the sky above us. Our mission was to collect forty-nine small stones to be used later in the Hajj. It was a great night and I was waiting for the Alfajr prayer. I could not sleep that night. I went to my sleeping bag, and I was hugging my stone as if it was a diamond.

The next day, which we call "EID", we have to go to throw seven stones on the devil, as we promised by God that the devil well be there, and he will feel each stone in a place we call "Jamarat". There was a funny scene when I saw some people throwing their shoes to

the wall after they throw their stones. Also on this day I did "Tawaf"; I shaved my hair. After that, I went to "Mena" that we call "city of tent."

There were around three million Muslims for three days. I heard about it and how crowed is it, but when I saw it, it was like a shock for me, how could all these people live here together for three days? During the daytime it was sunny and very hot, and there were many of water sprayers all around, in a smart try to cool the weather for hajjes. At night it was a little breeze weather, and we gathered and sat together to talk and cook our dinner. Each day from these three days, we have to go and throw seven stones in three different places. That was our mission on these days.

On the last day, I went to throw my last stones and to do my departure "Tawaf". When I came back to pack my stuff, I saw everyone around me packing their stuff with many expressions. Some of them were happy because they did the hajj, and the others were very sad to leave Makah. I packed my stuff, and I believe after I saw everyone wearing the same white clothes with no differences between them.

Does not matter if they were rich or poor, king or public, and Arabs or non-Arabs.

How to be a Successful International Student in the U.S.

Omar Alamri

There are a lot of students from the entire world going to the U.S. to study in universities. Many students around the world prefer to study in the universities in the U.S. However, a lot of students follow the wrong steps to be a student in the U.S. universities. Usually students try to do that by themselves. They way not succeed. I had the same experience and I found myself lost. However, I learned from my friend the best steps to be an international student. Because of that, I will try to help the international students around the world who have the same problem. In this essay, I will write about the best steps to follow to be a successful international student in American university.

First of all, you must have (TOEFL) Test of English as a Foreign Language or (IELTS) International English Language Testing System results. For example, a score of at least a 550 in TOFEL or a 5.5 in IELTS is necessary to study of the university. Secondly, you need to think what the best major for you is. After you choose your major, you should search on the internet what is the best university that offers your major. You must then apply to the university you want. It is advisable apply for more than three universities because usually it's just one or two universities that will accept you. After they accept you, they will send to you an I20 form and all the information about when you will start classes. Then, you need to check your expiration date on your passport because they will not accept you want review your passport expired passport date. Next, you need to make an appointment at the U.S. embassy in your country, and you must pay for your SEVIS online and print a copy for the receipt. After that, you need to go to a bank and bring a bank statement of at last six months prior to the date of beginning. While you are at the bank, you must pay for your student F1, Visa, and take the receipt with you. Next, you must go to your appointment at the embassy early and bring all the paperwork with you. For example, your passport, receipt for your Visa, receipt for SAVIS, and the bank statement. After that, they will ask you about your passport, and the source financial guarantee, and you need to show them all the receipts and tell them which university you will attend. Next, they will take your passport and your I20 form to finish all the information about your Visa. Later, after they finish processing your work paper, they will send to your home the passport and your I20

form, and inside your passport you will find your student F1 Visa.

The next step for you to make reservation on the flight to the U.S. before you start in your classes university. Next, you need to take your important things in your backpack, for example, your I20, and passport. You will need to show the immigration officer after your plane lands in the U.S. They will check your information and I20, take a picture of you, and stamp your passport. After you finish with immigration, you need to take your luggage. After you take your luggage, you can go to the hotel and rest. Finally, you need to go to your university when the semester starts and get your identification. Now you are studying of an international student in the U.S.

In conclusion, students around the world dream to study in American universities. Moreover, they study a lot to get higher scores to continue their dreams. For that reason, students, after they graduating from high school, try to get all the most important information to travel to the U.S by themselves, thinking they know the steps to be a successful international student. After that they take the wrong path, because nobody tells them the best way or gives them the directions. Students need to follow the best way. In addition, they need to take the best steps to be international students. My friend helped me, and I am a successful international student in the U.S. If others follow these steps, they will also be successful international students like me.

English is the Key

Faisal Hayyash

I spent most of my life speaking just one language which is Arabic. It's the first language back home in Saudi Arabia and mostly the only one for a while. My father used to speak English very well, but I didn't think of learning it or even trying, until it became a mandatory class for me and that was when I started to learn English.

Going back to the old days when I was in the elementary school, I used to take English classes every year. That was a mandatory class, so I dealt with it just to pass by doing my homework and attending class. I couldn't accept the language at all. One day I contacted a newscaster, who had gotten used to presenting news in foreign languages, to ask him about the news. He surprised me with his response "why don't you try this?! ". The eagerness to follow my favorite team's news carried me to think about his words. Therefore, I brought the tools I needed to translate, which were my laptop and my electronic dictionary. Initially, it was complex for me; translating to Arabic was the huge part to get the output and it took me long time to do that. On the other hand, the effect has become apparent, just by looking to the text I could feel how useful was what I did. Gradually, everything became more exciting. he news I found, the great work I presented and the encouraging feedback I have gotten. Clearly, I noticed the improvement on dealing with other languages even for my English class; it had become one of my favorite classes at that time.

After a while I quit typing because I got to the high school level where most of the teenagers build their career and design the beginning of their way. In fact, I spent three years in my school uncertain about what was the next step or what I wanted to be in the future. The high school days were gone, it was the time where you follow your dream and look forward to reach it. All at once, I thought about leaving the country to explore a new life in a way that could help me find what I wanted to study. Therefore, the bell did ring! I looked back to those days when I used to do what I like. I kept my experience in the translating field on my mind; I remembered translating, sports and news. So I decide that the US was the best place that I could travel to.

Nowadays, I have enrolled at a University in the US and dealing with the English language is the key for me now. English is not

something that I do not accept anymore because it plays a big role in my life in order to be successful. My experience in the translating field helped me to decide what could fit for me and that was the moment when I felt translating English was a big step forward.

When I decided to study aboard two years ago, I had the desire to change my life and try new things, but I didn't think of the differences I might have or the difficulties I might face in my new life. I used to live with my family in a small house in my country Saudi Arabia, while nowadays I live alone in the United State. In fact, Studying aboard have changed many things in my life which is helped me to explore and learn more than I used to in my country. Therefore, my life now is different from what it was in Saudi Arabia in several ways, responsibilities, experiences and my relation to people.

The first difference I have noticed since I came to the US was the responsibility, when I was in Saudi Arabia I didn't used to be responsible for my needs, because I lived with my parents and they used to take care of the entire family needs. While nowadays, I found myself responsible for everything in my life. For example when I was in my country, my mother used to cook for me and I used to have three valuable meals every day, on the other hand, nowadays, I cook for myself or I order the food from restaurants. In additions, when I was in my country, I didn't used to pay for pills, because my father used to take care of them. Impact of that, when I first came to the US, I had to learn how to pay for pills and I had some difficulties trying to be responsible for my pills when I first came to the US.

Living in the United States, gave me big chance to explore different experiences in my life. In fact, one of the new experiences was the different weather. When I was in my country I used to live in Riyadh city, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. The air temperature in Riyadh is really high and you can't stay out for long time in the day. On the other hand, when I came to the United States, I lived in Chicago, where the air temperature is much lower than it is in Riyadh. In Chicago, people love to stay out in the day because of its nice weather. In addition, I saw the snow for my first time in my life when I was in Chicago.

The most importance difference between my life in Saudi Arabia and my life in the United States is my relation to people. When I

was in Saudi Arabia, all of my friends were either, from my family members or my classmates. I didn't use to have many different aspects of friends, which reduced my opinions to others people. On the other hand, I have had a lot of different kinds of friends since I moved to the United States. I have met many people from several countries such as Brazil. In fact, living in the US gave me the chance to meet new people and learn from their culture, which would be more difficult for me in Saudi Arabia. For example, I have had two Japanese friends in Chicago, they were couple, and they invited me to try the Japanese food in their apartment with some of our friends.

In conclusion, my life has changed in many ways since I came to the United States. Nowadays, I have more experiences on dealing with different people, whom don't speak my language or share my culture. Also, I believe that I have become more responsible since I moved to the US, because it was my first experience to travel and live without my family. Impact of that, my life has changed since I moved to US in several ways, responsibilities, experiences and my relation to people.

Mazen

Abdulaziz Alamoudi

I still remember that day! The day when my best friend Mazen passed away. I remember the sound of the crash, and the blood on his face. The accident happened after we finished eating dinner in a restaurant. Our friend was driving up to 100 miles per hour, when a car showed up in front of us. My friend could not control his car, and he crashed into cars. The car hit the parked cars. I flew out of the car, but my friend Mazen's head hit the car window, shattering the class, and the airbag saved another friend's life. Mazen did not die right away; he was in a hospital for a few days. I visited him. My brother did not let me go and see him. When my brother saw him, his face was shocked. I asked him if he was okay. My brother said he was fine. They just did an operation, so he would survive. The next day my Mom came to me and told me that he passed away. I could not believe it. Disbelief turned into sadness and anger because I could not see him when I was leaving. However, the disbelief disappeared when I saw him at the mosque. Mazen was covered with a shroud, and I just kissed his head. After we finished praying for his soul, we went to the cemetery to bury him. I did not cry more than twice, not because I was not sad, but because I could not imagine how my life would go on without him. In Islam we have three days of consolation. I went to the first day of the consolation, and I stayed for few hours because his family forced me to leave and study for the finals.

I kept going until afternoon and left in the evening for the rest of the days. Mazen's mother could not see me because she did not want to remember him. I visited his family from time and time, but Mazen's mother did not meet me. I had a difficult time finding friends after mazen's death because nobody had the friendship features like Mazen. I was like his brother; we were friend since elementary school. He had my house key because we were in the same neighborhood. We used to play soccer at school after we finished our classes until the evening. We went to the same middle school. In middle school both of us got a car, and we used to drive around a lot.

In high school we went to different schools. Even though we went to a different high school, but every weekend we hung out. I still want to hang out with him, but every time I hold my phone to call him, I realize he is not here anymore. I wish if he were here to

listen to his jokes, and laughter. Mazen's advises, help, secrets with no worries, takes all patiently, and defends bravely. He did what brothers do to each other. Even though it has been three years, but I still pray for him, and I hope he has gone to another life better than here.

I still hate losing someone or even say goodbye to people. I do not like to say goodbye because I think saying goodbye means I will not see someone again. I prefer to say see you.

The Day I Saved My Sister's Life

Fabiana Pineda

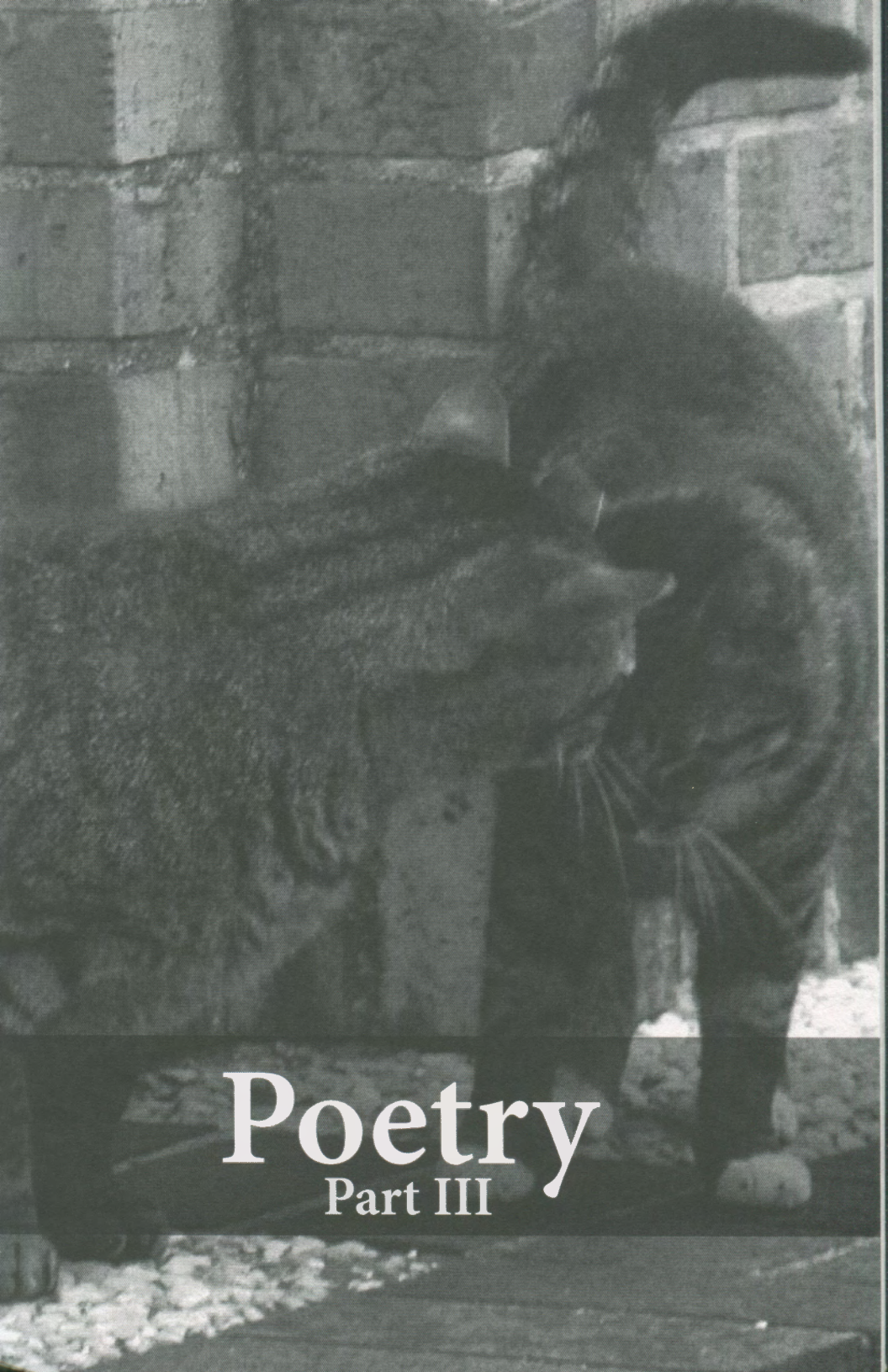
I have always been told by my parents to take care of those who I love and I never thought it was going to become so literal that hot Spring Break day when I saved my baby sister's life. Ever since my sister Luciana was born we created a special bond and I promised my parents that I was going to take care of her as much as I could. I was 15-years-old when Luciana was born, so one could say that the age difference influences our relationship in a tremendous way; I am always protecting her and I have almost a motherly affection towards her. My family has always been very united and we always look out for each other. We do almost everything together this time was not an exception. As Spring Break was approaching we decided to go out of the city, somewhere inside Honduras and a place where we could have fun. We finally decided to go to Copan Ruinas, one of the most beautiful and touristic places in all of Honduras. We were all excited and we thought it was going to be our best trip so far. Who would've known that it was going to be a life-changing trip in which we were all going to learn a big lesson.

That day all of my family was gathered up around the hotel's pool. We were having a great time. It was a very hot day but the cold drinks and laughter made the atmosphere lighter than it really was. I remember my sisters being in the small pool which, at one point, was connected to the bigger pool. I was keeping an eye on them as best as I could since my dad was on his phone and my grandmother went ahead to grab more food from the restaurant. Although my mom was in the same pool area, she wasn't able to see my sisters from the Jacuzzi, so she left my dad in charge of taking care of the girls. I knew my dad wasn't going to take good care of them since he gets distracted easily, so I decided to take the responsibility myself.

As I was keeping an eye on my sisters I got distracted when the waiter came to get our orders. I was reading the menu when I decided to see my sisters one more time to make sure they were fine. I first saw Ana Victoria, my eight-year- old sister, and she seemed to be having a lot of fun. When it was time to check on Luciana, I wasn't able to see her. All I could see floating in the middle of the pool was the rubber ring she was wearing right before I started talking to the waiter. At that moment I got up immediately from my chair and ran towards the bigger pool. Right there, next to the

transition between the bigger pool and the smaller pool, I saw my baby sister struggling for her life. I didn't even think about it twice. I jumped into the pool, with my clothes on, and pulled her out of the water as fast as I could. Thankfully she didn't drink any water, but she was in shock. I noticed she couldn't cry due to the horrific experience she had been put into.

We were all amazed at what just happened, but in the moment all we could do was thank God for being there with us the whole time. According to my father, I came to my sister's rescue just in the right moment and at the right time. After a while, everything just seemed to come back to normal. Luciana was completely fine and playing with Ana Victoria whereas my parents were relaxing, while being more aware of the girls' safety. That was the very first time I truly felt proud of myself because I didn't just get an A in a class or win a prize in a contest, I had just saved my sister from death. That moment was and will always be the most rewarding thing I had ever done in my life.



Poetry
Part III

Family

Karlie Ortega

warm eyes to loving smiles
big appetites to birthday cakes

plump pumpkins picked fresh from the pumpkin patch
hand turkeys drawn on parchment paper
jokes about the lefty

smell of real pine needles and vanilla candles
ham on Christmas Eve
omelets on Christmas morning

mouthwatering aroma of Daddy's chili in the winter
barbeques, rain or shine
rain or shine

Grandpa's lectures about life
the white dove watching over Grandma's casket
tears my mother shed at her parents' wedding
nine hours to both El Paso and Tulsa

memories that will never be forgotten
laughter and sorrow
life and death
family

December 21, 2012

Karlie Ortega

The night the world would end,
we lay together
holding hands under the blankets
cuddled on the air mattress
rolling to the middle

The house is quite,
the wobbling fan overhead
humorously threatens on its unstable axis
it whirls as we whisper

We can't sleep.
I ask him,
Are you afraid?
He says,
No.
Why not?
He says,
Because of you.

Maybe I'm afraid,
just a little
so I close my eyes and listen
the fan,
his heavy breathing
a soft lullaby beckons me to sleep

In the morning,
I wake up beside him
The bed is deflated
And the world did not end.

Thrill Ride

Bianca Soto

My body thrusts back into the cold
metal of the seat, hair flying back,
eyes bulging wide open

my fists clenching onto the metal bars
pressing me down, preventing me from falling,
my screams and words jammed in the
middle of my throat with no way out

of my tightly sealed mouth because I
don't have the slightest time to think
or yell, but just feel the row of carts falling
down,
down,
down
like an everlasting drop that has gotten
the other people screaming and throwing
their hands in the air except for me,

I have become too physically occupied
in making sure my guts don't spill out of my mouth;
my shoes don't fall off my feet; my seat harness
doesn't magically unlatch;

my heart doesn't beat out of my chest;
my eyes don't fly out of my sockets
and that I don't pee out the large Coke ICEE
I drank right before, because then that would be embarrassing

and I would have to explain
to my friends that maybe riding this
rollercoaster wasn't a good idea after all!

From There to Here

Lauren Olivia Faz

Blue water danced
with the sandy shore,
wind flowing and picking up
the occasional piece of litter.

During the summer,
the full moon reflected on the water
as we sat with gooey s'mores
in front warm flames.

Flannel blankets did little
against the sand yet, sheltered us
from the North Carolina wind.

Now, I look upon a different moon.
Instead of reflecting in the ocean,
this moon can be seen reflected upon
the cars parked outside New York City lofts.

There are no longer warm fires outside
on the beach, nor crashing waves upon
the shore but there are still flannel blankets
and s'mores to be had on small New York City roofs.

Camargo Street

Benjamin Schweers

Walk home, wind chimes
Heat radiates from the road
An acorn I kick bounces, clicks
Over cracked sidewalks
Then settles in a yard

Trees shade beautiful, wrinkled houses
Iron bars cover many windows still
Wood warps, paint cracks
On houses watching the city
As the skyline grows

Heat falls on the grass
On the agave plants
On the cats, asleep
On rusty air conditioners
That blow hot air into the street

On his tricycle, the old man
Rides towards me
From the corner store
Where he once asked me to "bless him"
With money I didn't have

And the big white house—
Pillars supported with bricks
Hold up a sagging roof

Stunned Bunting, Second Chance

Cyra Dumitru

With the wind at his colorful back and
our high window before him: wham!
He hit the glass so hard it knocked him
flat on his back, his vivid blue head
to one side with its stunned bead eye,
his delicate feet twitching, and
his red-orange belly brilliant

in the hot breath of the noon sun.
I turned him over gently, shaded him.
Marveled at how bright blue became
bright green, then gave way to reddish wings.
How his calamity brought an unknown beauty
to my day of tasks.

For a long time he was unready to ride the air again,
the gusting wind, his wings, what awaits unseen.
For hours he stood, panting in his paintedness,
looking out between the rungs of the balcony
as if trying to grasp what this world is, where
his place within the landscape.

How like each of us he was. How like
himself again when finally he flew away.

In the Parking Lot of Holy Rosary

Colin Brogan

Yesterday, I watched
a priest together with a biker
anoint a Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

The Biker, rugged and rough,
wearing his jacket with patches
matted hair and worn jeans

closed his eyes and
sprinkled holy water onto the black bike,
leaning with a sigh against its kickstand.

The Father observed peacefully with a nod,
understanding the bond between rider and mount.

After, the sign of the cross was made
and good byes were said. The Biker
blared tejano music as he left,
perhaps because he knew

that he could ride on safely.

Searching for Words to Say

Kassandra Lozano

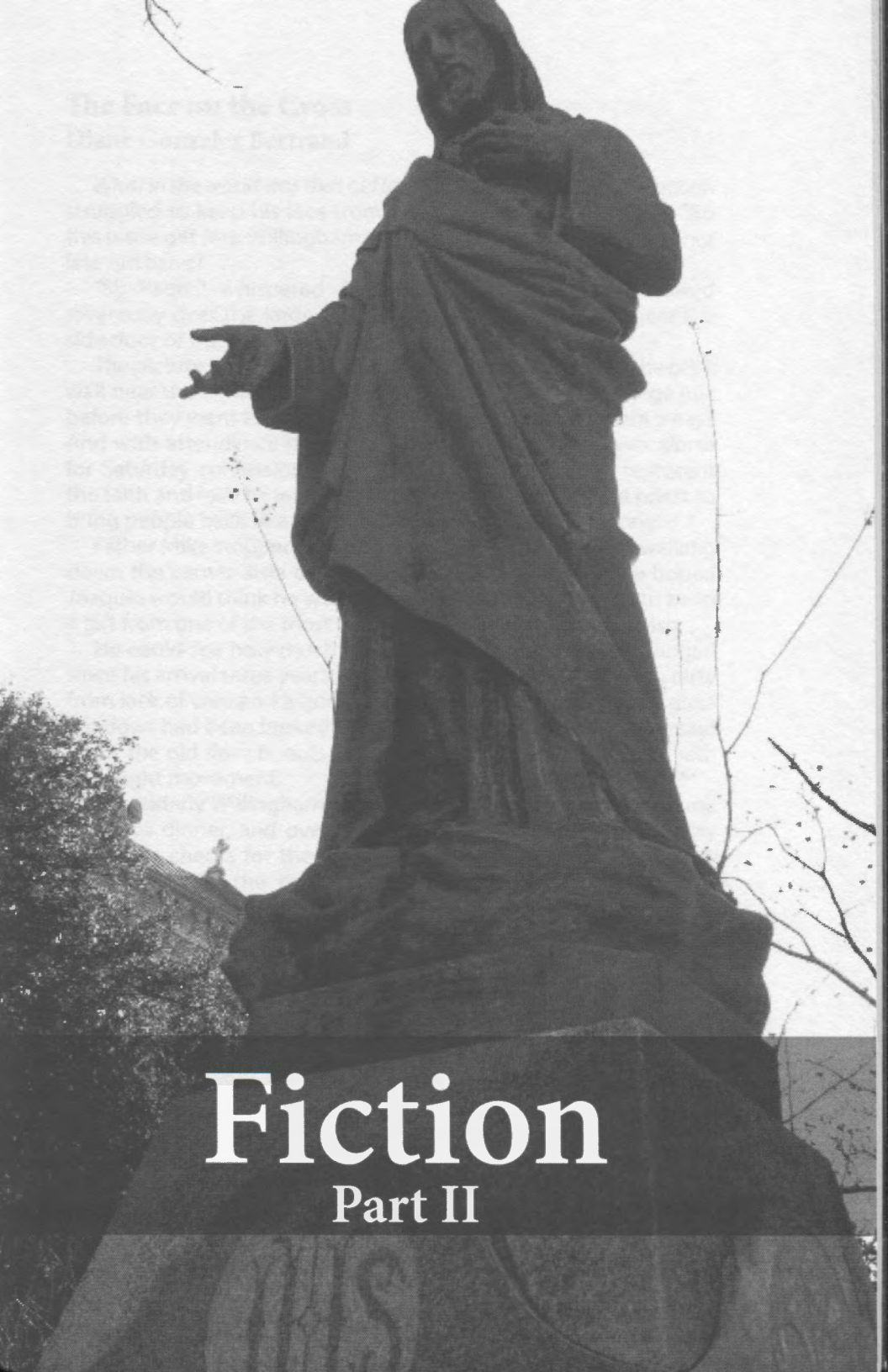
Wooden cross:

You lie upon my chest
Bound by thread.
Carved by simple strokes;
A fish at the heart
A border line.
Plain and simple
Two designs.

You lie upon my chest
Ever since he put you around my neck.
Discrete, a detail, often overlooked
Almost nonexistent…
Yet, all eyes watch your brother
As he sits upon my father's chest.

Now, if only I could think of you
Without a guilty heart
Knowing what you stand for,
still acting how I do.
Sometimes when I see you,
I'm at a loss for words to say.

Whenever you are lost
I know I want to search for you,
Because I lost you once-
Well rather misplaced.
I think I took you off to swim,
It felt more like suffocating.
When I realized you were gone
I suddenly had so much to say.
I went to find you,
To put you back where you belong;
Lying near my heart.
And told you all I had to say.



Fiction

Part II

The Face on the Cross

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

What in the world was that old lady thinking? Father Mike Branson struggled to keep his face from revealing his honest feelings. "So this is the gift Mrs. Willingham sent to the church in memory of her late husband?"

"Si, Padre," whispered Joaquin, the custodian. He bowed reverently over the large painting he had just set down near the side door of the church.

The picture was big enough to fill in the empty space on the brick wall near the confessional, but if parishioners saw that image just before they went to confess their sins, would it scare them away? And with attendance down for Mass in general (and even worse for Saturday confessions) hanging this painting didn't represent the faith and love he wanted to impart. He had become a priest to bring people back to a faithful Catholicism, not a fearful one.

Father Mike stepped away from the picture and started walking down the center aisle of the church. Glancing around, he hoped Joaquin would think he was trying to find the perfect spot to hang a gift from one of the most generous benefactors in the parish.

He could see how much the inside of the church had changed since his arrival three years ago. Back then the walls had been dirty from lack of care and a good coat of paint. The front stained glass windows had been broken and boarded over. The first time he said Mass, the old floor boards at the altar creaked under his feet with any slight movement.

The elderly Willinghams were the first to invite the new young priest to dinner, and over the following months, sent incredibly generous checks for the new building fund he had immediately established. By the time Mr. Willingham's funeral occurred six weeks ago, the scrubbed church walls had been repainted a pearl white. All the windows gleamed. At the cemetery Mrs. Willingham had told Father Mike the services were very beautiful; she would send a large memorial gift to the church in her husband's memory by summer's end.

Father Mike had already started planning the new landscape outside the church with the money he expected to receive as a memorial donation. So when Joaquin called his cell phone and said Mrs. Willingham's gift had just arrived at the rectory, he told the janitor to walk over to the church right away. He wanted to see

the amount on the check, then kneel in God's house to pray for the man's soul and to recite prayers of thankfulness.

He had just walked out of the sacristy as the side door opened wide. When Father Mike had seen his custodian coming in with the large picture, he chewed his lip and frowned. But he still tried to find something positive in this opportunity to decorate one of many empty walls of this old church.

Then he saw the image, and had to wonder. Why did Mrs. Willingham buy this?

The abstract art was streaked in black and white, except for the crucified body on the cross set off to one side, with streaks of various shades of red streaming from the disproportional head, hands, and feet. Like Saturn's rings, circles of thorns rose around the triangular chest, and the mouth of the man with matted black hair formed a toothy misshapen circle that reminded Mike of a distorted scream in a horror movie.

"Padre," Joaquin said, interrupting Father Mike's thoughts. "Where shall we hang the picture?"

He turned around and asked his own question. "I don't know, Joaquin, what do you think?"

Joaquin lifted the large painting and walked it over towards the first three pews in the center aisle. He angled it and then stepped back to study the image within the carved frame, his brown hand rubbing against the gray stubble on his chin. Father Mike walked back to stand beside the janitor, and struggled to find words to express his jumbled thoughts.

However, Joaquin spoke first. "I'm a simple man, Padre..." He paused then whispered, "I see Señor Willingham in this picture."

"Pardon me?" Father Mike took a step back. Had he heard correctly?

Joaquin nodded. "Such misery...pobrecito...not to know his children, his wife...what is left without memory, Padre? Do prayers stop tambien? A man who forgets in sickness...this picture shows his fears...so we all remember...and we all pray for strength if it happens to us."

He looked at the sorrowful expression on Joaquin's face. Mr. Willingham's dementia had been hell on his wife and their children the two years before his death. How many times did the family ask for counsel from their priest? Did he truly understand the family's trials? Had his words given them any comfort? Could fear be stronger than faith?

"What would it be like to literally lose your mind?" He spoke, but

he was merely thinking out loud. "Not able to grasp memory, not to remember faith and love, the faces of your children, your wife? Not to be able to remember prayers or even God…what comfort is there when you forget God exists at all?"

Joaquin placed his hand on his priest's shoulder. "A sick man forgets God, Padre, but God never forgets, verdad?"

Father Mike nodded. "Si, Joaquin, es verdad, you're right." He gave the older man a gentle smile and then leaned down to lift the painting. The weight of the ornate frame surprised him. His groan echoed in the empty church.

"Let me help you, Padre." Joaquin stepped to lift from the other side. "We could hang this near the velitas."

"Yes, by the votive candles is a good place," Father Mike said, feeling the weight of the painting in his two hands. "But I think we can wait to hang it. Let's put it in front of the altar for the weekend masses. This painting will be my inspiration for the sermon."

He wasn't sure exactly what he would say, but he knew by his faith in the Holy Spirit, Mrs. Willingham would be pleased.

Zhid!

Richard S. Pressman

Little Lillian hated to walk home from staying late at school for the writing club, her favorite, especially since she had to do it alone. The dark early November Friday afternoon shed little light on the dingy street in her dingy western Pennsylvania town. There was some light coming from the houses along the way, but she felt like an alien there. These people would not talk to her or her family. Unless they had to, they wouldn't even talk to the Brickers, they who owned the clothing store on Main. She was only eight, and those awful boys just would not stop. In their dirty, unkempt jackets, they crabbed at her, as if they hated her. She didn't even understand what it really meant. Zhid. Zhid. Was it some other language? Russian? Polish? It certainly was not her own language.

They were so big, coal-miners' kids, maybe even fourteen, and she was so small. Why could her brothers not be there? But Lew was already working in the drugstore after school, and Jack was always helping Dad with the pig tallow. It was disgusting, the smell—and it wasn't kosher, pork wasn't kosher. Worse still, the waste had to be stored in garbage cans just behind the kitchen door. The stink was everywhere.

But the war was on and the French and British armies needed the tallow for their guns. Pretty soon, everyone said, the Americans would be in the war. War! That was why Papa Morris had fled the Ukraine back in 1904, before she was born. He didn't want to be drafted into the Czar's army, drafted to fight the Japanese. What Japanese were, she did not know. Her father often talked about how poorly the Russian soldiers treated the Jewish soldiers, endlessly calling them names, giving them the worst jobs, and making them eat pork, or eat nothing at all.

Was she an American? She didn't think so. Americans spoke English and they were blond. Even the boys. What was she, anyway? She knew she was a Jew. But what did that mean? All she really knew about it was that it made her family and the few other Jewish families in that filthy western Pennsylvania coal-mining town of Windber always afraid. Why did they dislike us so?

Her papa says they're willing enough to do business with him. But they never invite him into their homes. They must think he's filthy, just the way those Polish and Russian boys seem filthy. And they are.

"Oh, God. Here they come again. It's that awful Sergei. And that mean Stanislaw, too."

"Hey! Zhid! Hey, Zhid! Where yu goin'? Wanna come my house? Eat some pork, Zhid? No?" They laughed and laughed and laughed, so proud of themselves.

She started to run. It was only two blocks.

"Hey, Zhid! Where yu goin'? Dontcha like us? Hey, Zhid, we're gonna getcha, Zhid."

"Oh, God. Where is Lew? Papa! I want my papa! Only another block... They're not following me. Oh, thank God."

"Ach, mein got!" cried out her mamma, throwing her arms in the air. "Voot hahs hahppened you? You vas runnin! Vhy vas you runnin'?"

"Oh, Mamma, it's those awful boys again. Why can't they leave me alone? Why can't they leave us alone? Look. Look out the window. They're laughing. Oh, Mamma, why do we have to live in this awful, dirty town?"

"Ach, meina tochter, meina tochter. Iss much voise in duh alta cawntry. Much voise. Dere's pogroms. Do you know vhy you tateh, you papa run away from duh village in duh Ukraine? Pecause de czar vas going to put heem in dih ahmy in dih var mit dih Japanese. Many boys die in dih var. Zo he runned avay unt cum tuh dis cawtry. It not so bad, not so bad."

"But, Mama, I hate to go to school because I'm always afraid of those boys. Why do they hate us so?"

"Pecause dere tatehs teach dem."

Just then she could see Papa's wagon with old Max the horse. Papa was waving happily to them, while the Polish woman across the alley, Mrs. Petrovski, waved to him. Lillian could not understand how it could be that she was the mother of that awful Stanislaw. Why was she so nice but her son was so mean? Lillian could see that the wagon was full of rags and other stuff that later in life she would call "junk." But to her parents it meant money. She didn't understand then what it meant to be poor because so was nearly everybody else—Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Jews. Maybe not as poor as they were, but poor. So why did they have to be so mean?

That night at the dinner table, in the light of the Sabbath candles, Lillian's fears were the subject of the talk. Papa, with his big, round, warm face and bushy mustache, was sanguine, talking much like Mamma. He knew how bad it had been in "duh alta cawtry." Thirteen-year-old Sophie didn't dare say a word, fearing to talk out of turn, while eleven-year-old Paul was befuddled by it all. But

seventeen-year-old Lew and fifteen-year-old Jack were incensed. They wanted to rush right out of the house and drag those boys out of their humble homes and "give them a good thrashing."

"Dawn't act like a couple uh Cossacks, poys," said Papa as firmly as he could, while red-golden-haired Mamma—she was even named Goldie—nodded approvingly. "Vhat you tink diss iss? You do dis, you tink nottin' gonna hoppen you? Unt vhat hoppen us? Huh? You tinka daht?"

"Well, gee, Pa," cried Jack, jumping up from his seat. "It's always like this. I know that Paul, too, is afraid to walk home from school. And so was I when I was his age. Even now, I always look around me. You never know when you're gonna get those nasty comments. And poor Lew. Every time he has to take that trolley to Johnstown and back to Windber to bring the kosher chicken, he takes so much abuse; I don't know how he stands it."

Lew said nothing. He sat there, as it seemed to Lillian, lost in thought. Yet he also was watching everyone's faces, especially Papa's.

Said Lew rather suddenly, "I'll clear the dishes. You sit and rest, Mamma." But he gave a look to Jack that suggested Jack should follow him into the kitchen.

"Uh. I'll help Lew," Jack said, almost jumping up. Lillian was glad they closed the door because, even in the cold of early November, the family could still smell the stink of the waste from the tallow-rendering.

But from the kitchen, Lillian, mystified, could hear the clatter of dishes and pots, louder than normal, so she could not hear what her brothers were saying. At the table, Mamma Goldie and Papa Morris conversed with the three children in a calming way, with Papa telling stories about his day out collecting rags and other junk, always saying that his customers were so kind, so kind. Goldie looked at Morris, as if she were comprehending a message unstated.

Lillian could hear her brothers making noises that were not from washing dishes. The noises came from near the back door by the steps from the kitchen to the second floor. How odd, she thought, that they didn't come right back to the table to join the family. And they walked strangely softly. Goldie noticed, but said nothing, seeming to think nothing of it, while Morris was engrossed in his own talk, his concern the three younger ones. Then Lew and Jack finally came back to the table, as if they had not a care in a world, their world nevertheless so full of both kindness and hatred. Then

suddenly…

"Zhid!! Zhid!! Cum out! Cum out! Ve loav you. Ve loav you."

The family jumped out of fright, Lillian the most, while Lew and Jack held back smiles. Who could be disturbing their peaceful Sabbath meal? They all peered out the edges of the windows. And there they were: Sergei, Stanislaw, and three others, all young tough teens.

"Ach, Gut. Vat ve do?" asked Papa Morris, really of himself. But it was clear he wished to do nothing at all. "Cum, kinderlich. Ve vill pay no 'tention. Dey go vay soon"

Mamma Goldie seemed to agree, as she cautiously moved back toward the Sabbath table, as if a very shot could ring out. Lillian knew it was because of the pogroms they had always feared back in the Ukraine, the Russian Czar's Ukraine. Meanwhile, Lew and Jack silently slid into the kitchen and ran up the stairs that led to a door to the kitchen rooftop.

Then, Lillian could hear her big brothers tromping on the roof over the kitchen. More anxious than fearful, she ran to the top of the steps to see, as her family scrambled behind her.

"You boys get away from here!" shouted Lew, our savior. "Get away!"

But the nemeses merely laughed and taunted some more. "Zhid! Zhid! Go beck tu d'ole country. Ha, ha! No one loavs you, Zhids!"

Just then, from against the wall, with Lew on one handle and Jack on the other, they hauled out a large can of stinking garbage—garbage kept outside behind the kitchen, for that it was they had been doing—and carried it to the edge of the roof, over the heads of their taunters…and, suddenly turning it over, they dumped it right on their arrogant, hateful heads.

They howled and screamed. "Dirty Zhids! You dirty Zhids! Ve get you vor deess." But they just ran off, licking their imagined wounds.

For the first time in a long time, Lillian laughed. She laughed and laughed. And so did everyone else. Even Mamma. And even Papa.

Gopala Marries Carla

Kalpana Mukunda Iyengar

The phone rang for two minutes, yet no one picked it up. The Iyer family who lived on East Park Street was expecting their daughter to come back from the US to get married. The mother was running around looking for a suitable match for her intelligent and beautiful daughter, Devayani. The father had decided that his daughter would have no problems marrying his sister's son, Gopala, who had just returned from his foreign trip to London from work. The families got along beautifully with many contacts each year. The children had grown up together sharing the same swing in the backyard, going on trips to different vacation places, and attending the same university. The cousins spent countless days in each other's house without any inhibitions or restrictions. While Devayani chose to become a doctor, Gopala decided to major in law. A doctor and a lawyer would make a fortune and they would raise a comfortable family, thought the parents. Gopala's mother, Kaikeyi was a show off, who demanded a lot from others. She was bent upon asking for at least the outhouse on Devayani's property as dowry. Devayani's mother, vatsala was a humble woman, and kept a low profile in social circles. She had no demands from any one. The fathers were Thirupavai and Vishnu Sahasranama group buddies.

The phone rang again, yet no one picked it up. Devayani arrived at 2 a.m. from Houston. As it was a long flight, the parents decided to let her rest that day. She slept for about five hours and woke up to the sound of people talking in the living room. She could hear her uncle, aunt, and her parents. "My son is very handsome," said Kaikeyi all of a sudden. It was needless to say anything about Devayani; she was a pretty and well-accomplished woman. "Several young men have come forward to marry our daughter," said Doraiswamy Iyengar proudly. This comment/announcement was to attack Kaikeyi's impressions about her son. Vatsala stood up and offered to go to the kitchen to grab tiffen for the relatives. Vaidehi followed her to the kitchen and noticed the new table in the dining area. "Is this new, Vatsala," she said mockingly. "Oh, Kaikeyi, we have had it for years. I removed the plastic protective cloth since it is just two of us in the house now," said vatsala politely.

Devayani came down to join her family. She wore a beautiful saree; a black cotton saree with green border. She looked stunning

that all the members present had to look at her twice. Kaikeyi had to say something, especially if everyone was happy, "I wish you had not worn black on an auspicious day like this, Devayani." Everyone decided to ignore Kaikeyi's sarcastic remarks. Everyone adjourned to the living room with hot pakoras, uppama, kesari bath in their plates. The coffee machine was switched on in the kitchen. There was a pause of about ten minutes, although it was difficult for Kaikeyi to stay quiet for that long. She was known for her volatile tongue in her family. Gopala came rushing in as if he was about to board an airplane. Everyone except Devayani stood up to welcome Gopala. She did not think it was important to welcome her own cousin who played with her when they were growing up. Kaikeyi was offended and said, "If you do not respect him now, what will you do once the wedding is over?" Gopala and Devayani were shocked to hear the parents' trick on their children.

Gopala requested the parents to leave with him so that he could discuss an important news with them. Devayani had nothing to say because she had heard from her cousin about his affair with the Mexican woman from Galvaston, Texas. When Kaikeyi found out, she threw a fit upon hearing her son's proposal. Gopala said, "I would like for both of you to go to London with me next month to my wedding. It will be performed in Our Lady of the Guadalupe church."

The father was ecstatic, "You killed us, Gopala; why don't you take off your sacred thread? Please do not light my funeral pyre when I die because a son who lets his parents down is not worth that last obligation he owes his parents." The crying and wailing made Gopala leave the home immediately. He went to Devayani's house because he knew he was always welcome in that house. He decided to stay at his aunt's house until he left to London for his wedding.

Gopala got married without anyone except Devayani from his family in his wedding. It was sad, but he was in love with Carla. His family had disowned him for marrying outside his Brahmin caste. A year passed by, yet there was no news from Bangalore. Meanwhile, Carla gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. They named him Jose Krishna Iyer. The baby was quite chubby with dark curly hair and fair skin. After the baby came, Gopala decided to visit India to see his family hoping that time would have erased the disappointments. They arrived at the Bangalore International Airport at 1 a.m. and there was no one to pick them up from the airport. The other

travelers went home with their respective families, but the Iyers were wondering where to go. Gopala decided to stay at The Windsor Manor on J.C. Road so he could visit his parents who lived in Malleshwaram.

The house was demolished and they had decided to build an apartment complex instead. There was no one to welcome the new bride or the new baby. Gopala went to Devayani's's house to find out about his parents. Gopala's aunt welcomed the couple heartily and requested them to stay with her. There was no news of Gopala's parents. Devayani had decided to remain unmarried; she had buried the thought of marrying her cousin in her heart the day she heard about Carla.

Gopala had to sacrifice his parents, Devayani, and his roots just to marry Carla. He regretted his decisions after he found out that both his parents had died heart broken because their only son betrayed them during the sunset of their lives. Gopala did not know whom to blame—his fate, Carla for marrying him, Devayani for not revealing her affection towards him, or his parents who were incapable of changing!

Wing Chun Split

Lexys Martinez

The tell-tale sounds of people training became louder and louder as I approached the door of my martial arts school. Glancing through the open window I saw that he was there conducting the class for this evening. Sifu Robert must have had something else going on and couldn't make it. My mouth shifted into a frown as I readjusted the weight of my red duffel bag on my shoulder. Why did he have to be the one teaching tonight? Why couldn't it have been tomorrow when I had my British Literature night class, the only night class I need to finish up my Master's in English.

Bracing myself, I slowly opened the door and took a quick look around to see exactly who was there and what was going on. The gym was ablaze with energy. New students, known by their white shirts, were practicing their footwork along the white tile floor, occasionally bumping into the white walls. At the back of the room, three slightly more advanced students were practicing basic self-defense techniques on the Wooden Dummy, the sound of their arms making contact with the wood fading into the pleasant background noise. Still, others were practicing their forms in front of the mirrors positioned on both sides of the room, each one concentrating on getting the movements correct.

Turning my attention away from the new students, I focused in on the advanced students, the black shirts, who would be training with me for the next hour, but to my dismay only saw two other ones besides himself, making the next class only a class of four people. Swell.

As I set my stuff down and changed into my martial art shoes, the class lined up in the traditional Chinese way to bow out to Grandmaster Yip Man's picture that forever hangs on our wall. Incense floated off the incense holder in front of the banisters placed on either side of our grandmaster's black and white face. Placing their right fist into their left open palm, the students bowed low, eyes looking straight ahead as is the custom. I only had a minute to get ready before it was my turn to get on the floor and begin my training for the evening. In less than thirty seconds, the white shirts would crowd around me as they prepared to leave.

"Hurry up, Mei. You should have come earlier if you were going to take your time." Xing called out from across the room.

My eyes narrowed as I finished tying my shoes. Leaving my

duffel bag underneath my chair, I stood up and moved to the center of the floor, where the other two black shirts were. They looked at me apologetically, but said nothing.

Xing was the highest ranking student at this school, aside from myself. He is an out of the ordinary 6'1, lean and muscular Chinese man. If it wasn't for his serious and stern personality, his slightly long, jet black hair and black eyes would almost be attractive. I had been told that he was ten years old when his family moved from China to the United States. Almost immediately he began school here and practiced Shaolin before he began attending this gym nearly six years ago. I had started a mere two weeks after he did, and from the very beginning he took his studies seriously. No one contradicted him on what he did. Should anyone anger him and end up with him as a partner, they would be in for a ride. Sometimes, I'm the only other student who can hold my own against him despite his constant criticism of my technique.

If anyone asked him why he disliked me so much, he'd give any number of reasons: I don't practice enough because I'm not dedicated, I'm not in class enough because I focus too much on getting my degree, I'm arrogant and let my rank get to me, but the real reason is because I'm a woman. A woman who is a third level primary technician or in American terms, a third degree black belt, the exact same rank as him. He is very firm in his belief that women should not be allowed to get to the rank I am now. He accepts women learning martial arts, but not advancing to such a high rank. I love Wing Chun, my style, too much to let it stop me, but Xing does dampen my passion a little every once and a while.

By the time we have all bowed in the white shirts are gone and so we are able to practice the "secret" techniques that they aren't allowed to see.

"Xing, Mei, we're actually going to have to leave half an hour early. We are night audits at sister hotels and we were both called in tonight. We had already planned on coming so decided to just stay for the time we could." One of the two black shirts explained right before Xing announced what we would be working on. The other black shirt shifted his feet and gave a nervous shrug.

Xing smiled at them, though I could tell the news didn't please him. It meant we would be alone together, something that never ended well. "That's fine. Work is important too."

For the next half hour Xing made sure we weren't partnered together, I suppose trying to put off the inevitable, but before long, half an hour went by and the other black shirts left.

As they walked out of the door and shut it behind them, he turned to me and frowned.

"What do you want to work on?" I asked him, trying my best to stay patient.

"What have you been practicing? Last time we trained together, your technique was sloppy." He responded, his eyes cold.

The anger rushed to my cheeks. Somewhere inside of me something snapped. I wasn't going to take it anymore. I was tired of the hostility and insults. I was just as good as him, I trained just as hard.

"That is it." I whispered and took a step back. "Three years I have taken your sexism and criticism and I am done with it. Either you get off your high horse or something else is going to happen you arrogant, over-confident pig. You were fine when we first started training together and for the first two and a half years of our martial arts career we were almost friends, but as soon as I continued to advance in rank with you, you turned into a pompous jerk and I'm sick of it. Don't bring up your 'reasons' now, Xing because we both know it's because I'm a woman. I'm ready to prove once and for all my skill to you and show you that I'm just as good."

I gauged his reaction as soon as I was done speaking. His pale face was frozen in a mask of shock and anger, but before I could open my mouth to apologize for my outburst, he rushed at me with a punch aimed directly at my face, with his own a mask of concentration. I couldn't help but smile a little. Accepting my challenge was a slight show of him beginning to accept me as an equal. If he thought I was so far beneath him, he wouldn't have wasted his time.

I slapped his punch away and used an upward palm strike, slipping my feet between his for a leg sweep when he countered both at the same time. In the split second that followed before my next attack, I saw a tiny smile form on his mouth.

Joy filled my heart at the action. Finally I had gotten through to him. While it was a fight to prove myself to him, it was a fight that might help close the split that developed between our friendship and his firm beliefs. Maybe after this challenge, we would be able to move on with our martial arts career and instead of fighting against each other, we could help each other grow both in technique and skill.

The Adventures of Noland Di'Baw

Isaac E. Lucio

"Okay boys, picture it. It's night, the clouds are so thick you couldn't even see the stars. A lone imp, me, flying over the Dead Woods with only the light of the moon to guide him..."

"But," a voice grunted.

Noland paused, his arms frozen in a grand sweeping gesture, and looked around at the gathered crowd of Grunt Demons, exceptionally strong, but barely two brain cells to rub together. Their skin was an odd pastel green and in their mouths were two tiny pointed teeth on either side.

"But?" Noland asked, glaring at the crowd and feeling his overly large, pointy-toothed smile wilting at the edges.

"How you see the moon if stars are gone?" One of the demons in the front asked.

Noland sighed and crossed his arms. "The stars were blocked, not the moon."

The crowd let out a collective "Ohhhhh...."

"Now," Noland said, returning his hands to their previous position in the air, "A lone imp in the dead of night, flying as fast as he can when, suddenly, he hears a loud screech!" Noland jumped in the air, waving his hands around, drawing a gasp from the crowd.

"What was it?" Someone asked.

"Shh he's saying," another grumbled, shoving the first with a closed fist.

The other demons cheered as the two began punching and shoving each other.

Noland cleared his throat.

The crowd froze mid-motion and turned back to look at Nolan.

"A Wyvern!" Noland shouted with a small leap, "A horrible huge-winged monster with the head of a lion and talons of an eagle was flying straight at me."

The crowd gasped and turned back to Noland, completely forgetting their conflict.

"I knew my only hope was to escape in the trees, so I swooped down low and weaved through the treetops." Noland spread his wings and mimed zigzags. "The trees were so close together that even though I'm small, the branches hit me as I passed them, scraping my arms and wings, but judging from the loud crunches and snaps coming from behind me, the wyvern was still following."

Another voice from the crowd asked, "How?"

"How, what?!" Noland crossed his arms again and glared

"If trees too close for you, how wyvern follow? You tiny." He lifted his hand, which was bigger than Noland, for emphasis.

The crowd nodded and murmured its agreement.

Noland sighed, "The crunches and snaps were tree limbs breaking. I'm too small to break them, but the wyvern wasn't."

"Oh," the demon said. "Okay."

"Ha!" His friend laughed, pointing at him.

"Anyway," Noland said loudly, before another fight could start, "I was zipping through the trees, and boom!" He punched his hand. "Lightning struck the tree directly in front of me."

"It was raining?" A demon asked.

"No," his friend replied. "It was *lightning*."

"Oh," the first demon said, amidst a chorus of laughter.

"Well, it was raining and lightning," Noland said, shaking his head. "Anyway, it was directly in front of me. I tried to avoid it, but it was too close. I fell out of the sky with burning tree branches all around me." He began pacing on the counter he was standing on. "I fell to the floor hard and could smell smoke before I could lift my head. The forest was on fire."

The crowd gasped again. A few of the demons covered their mouths with their hands.

Noland smiled his pointy-toothed smile, "I got up and tried to fly, but my wing was broken!" He sagged his wings and mimed the injury. "So I ran, looking and listening for the wyvern. The fire was spreading so quickly that I was afraid I wouldn't make it out of the forest alive..." he sighed and fell to his knees.

"What happened?" A demon muttered.

"He's telling!" Another grunted, raising his fist.

"I tripped and fell against a tree," Noland said loudly, putting the back of his hand against his forehead. "Then, right as I had given up, it started to rain, and the fires died out."

"Wait," a Grunt Demon said.

"What now?" Noland sighed as he sat down on the edge of the counter.

"Wasn't it raining already?" He asked as he scratched his head.

"And lightning!" Another added, getting a chorus of grunting agreement.

Noland rolled his eyes, "It started to rain harder."

"Ohhhh…"

"Right, so…" Noland said, tapping his chin as he tried to

remember where in the story he was, "The fires died out." He stood up and smiled briefly, quickly changing it to a frown. "That's when I heard the wyvern again."

"What?" the questioning demon said, "Where it been?"

Noland smiled and shrugged, "I have no idea, I was kinda running for my life, you know."

"But..." the demon started again.

"Anyway," Noland spoke over the demon, "it was flying straight at me. I knew there was only one chance." He crouched on the ground. "I waited till it was right in front of me, then rolled out of the way." He rolled to the side, drawing a gasp from the crowd. "It flew straight into a group of trees, fell, and didn't get up again." He stood up and put his hands on his hips and spread his wings out in a heroic pose.

The demons laughed and cheered.

"Ahem," a voice coughed from behind the crowd.

A few demons jumped, startled, and shouted "Wyvern!"

"Tari?" Nolan said, tiptoeing to try and see over the crowd.

"Yes," she answered, flying up and hovering in the air, "the boss would like to see you, Noland."

The demons gasped and started talking to each other all at once.

"Sorry boys," Noland shouted, even though no one was listening anymore. "Duty calls." He flew over to Tari and they began walking down the hallway.

"So," Tari said, "about your story..."

Noland smiled, "You wanna hear it? Okay. Pic..."

Tari glared, "Noland."

"What?" Noland rubbed the back of his head with his hand.

"Dead of night, over the Dead Woods?" She raised an eyebrow at him.

"Well, okay," Noland said, shifting uncomfortably, "maybe I exaggerated...it might have been around six, and I may have been flying past a building with a dead looking tree in front of it…"

Tari rolled her eyes. "And the wyvern?" she asked.

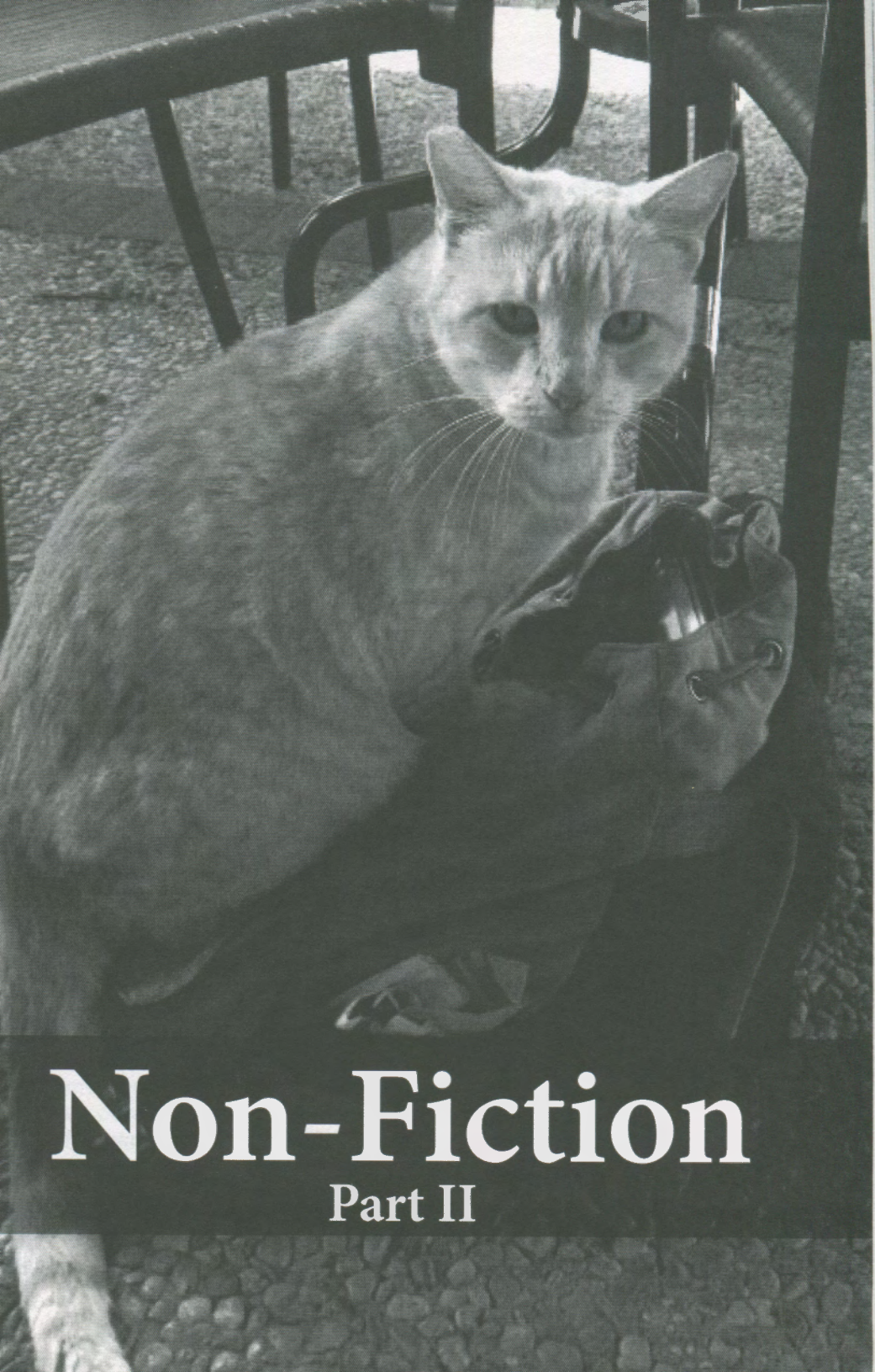
Noland laughed nervously, "Well, it might not have been as much a wyvern...as it was a bat." He glanced at her out of the corner of his eye, "But it was a big bat!"

"And it attacked you?" she asked with a sigh.

"Well, no..." Noland said, smiling, "it glared at me...but it was thinking about it. I swear it almost swooped!"

Tari laughed, "My hero."

Noland smiled and flexed his arms.



Non-Fiction

Part II

A Summer in Michigan

William W. Gilbert

My family and I often go back to my home state of Michigan to visit family and friends. As we packed up our vehicle and headed out for a cross-country trip, we decided our first major stop for sightseeing would be the city of Memphis, Tennessee. I had always heard about the good blues music and even better barbecue places in town, and we stopped at the world-renowned Rendezvous Café. The atmosphere was exciting and enjoyable with blues blaring from the speakers and the sweet smell of barbecue permeating the air; I knew it would be a great experience.

Our next stop, as we traveled north, was St. Louis, Missouri. We had reached the mighty Mississippi River and could see the Gateway Arch growing larger as we approached it. I can recall the river from many of the books I had read as a child, such as, Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, and wanted the opportunity to gaze at the crucial waterway. We stopped and stood by the banks for a while, observing the power of the magnificent flow. We continued our trip and the plan was to take an elevator to the top of the Arch, unfortunately, the day we arrived, there were no tours scheduled. We made the most of the situation and drove around, taking in the sights of the historic city. Downtown St. Louis was an interesting mix of old architecture and new buildings. We stayed for a few hours and then headed farther north.

We stopped outside of Indianapolis, Indiana and slept in a nice, little family-run motel. The first thing we did was find the swimming pool. It was a coolly, refreshing oasis and I relaxed and planned the rest of the trip. The next day, after traveling through the rest of Indiana and Ohio, we reached the great state of Michigan; we immediately went to visit with all the family that we had not seen for a year. First stop, my mother's house. It was awesome seeing the old neighborhood and spending time with my mother, brothers, and sister. I decided to give my children a tour of my childhood home. I showed them where my brothers and I would play all kinds of kid games and various sports. I showed them the trees that we would climb and the ditch where we would play King of the Hill. It was wonderful being able to share my childhood memories with my own little children. They enjoyed every minute of it. I became emotional watching them do all of the same things I did as a kid. My two-year-old son, William, played in the same spot near my

mother's porch that I had played so many years before and it was a wonderful sight to see. My seven-year-old daughter Kimora swung on the same swings as I had when I was her age. Her giggles sent chills through my body as I remembered my mother pushing me as I pushed her. The memories that we were building then are the ones I pray they continue to hold on to throughout their lives so that they may have a lasting connection to their childhoods. I hope to continue to make the trip, year after year, with my loved ones and keep the tradition going.

American Dreamin'

Luke Villafranca

CRACK!

And when he hit me I could feel his hate. His bloodshot eyes. His anger. His fear thrown into a box with me. My American brother hated me. And he didn't even know me.

CRACK!

This is my alter ego. I'm seeing stars for the first time. Not just stars but a star pattern of red, white, and blue flashes behind my closed eyelids each time his glove slams into my face.

CRACK!

Another fusion of pain flashes before my eyes. Right now, as my very thoughts are being rocked inside my head, I can hear the beginning line of our story. I'm a newborn in the fight game. These are my first words: What am I doing here? How did I get here? At this time, I already know the answers because the end is in the beginning. It's not about winning or losing. It's not about pride or pain. It's about witnessing hate transform into brotherly love. It's about having fun.

But there's no fun in forever if we're never atop the mountain with our hands raised together. These boxers, these fighters, the man in the box with me, the ones yelling outside it, me, we wanted something better. We wanted to be tested. We seemed destined to learn from each other. We have to help each other because that's what we were put on this earth to do. The most important stories in the world are the ones we tell ourselves. Now, I'm telling you. Glove up.

Fighters. They are bled red, scared white, and beaten blue so that they may pledge allegiance to the colors that symbolize their pain. An American flag. A red, white, and blue ring. An eagle screaming "No surrender!" as America clips its wings. In God We Trust. Swear to live and die on this day, everyday. Right hand to the Man..

"I like the head knockin', body rockin' fights. I like getting hit. Hear me out. I like feeling my opponent's power because at that moment I know how much more powerful I have to be in order to win. I realize how powerful I really am," says the fighter.

When I hear this, life gets real. This is real life.

What Did You Call Me? The Life of a Half-Breed

William W. Gilbert

I recall being hit with it for the first time in the fourth grade. I was standing in a long line at the cafeteria, anxious for my grilled cheese sandwich and tater tots. That's when I heard it. "I hate that little half-breed bastard!" I paused for a moment, besieged by bewilderment. The harshest language I had ever heard in school until that point had to do with either someone having cooties or somebody's momma being stupid or fat or some combination thereof. One thing I was certain of. He couldn't possibly be referring to me. I had a father.

But what was this "half breed" thing he spoke of? With my curiosity sufficiently aroused, I turned around to gawk at the poor kid whom this obnoxious fifth grader had chosen to pick on. Bewilderment turned to anger when I realized it was I who was this disdainful "half breed" fellow. But why was I upset, other than the fact that he had completely ignored that I had a father and was not therefore a bastard? I was thoroughly unaware that I would soon comprehend the meanings of such harsh words and that eventually I would be using those very words for my own gain. Over time, I have explored the various uses of a derogatory term and the ways in which my own community has adapted its meaning.

Hurtful words can have a profound effect on the psyche of a child. For example, I can recall multiple occasions of sadness and anguish because of the mistreatment I endured simply for being dissimilar in color to my fellow classmates. I have also found that simple teasing, using even minutely harmful words, can be painful to a child. Think back to a time when someone may have called you a name that to him seemed harmless, but, that in actuality caused you to feel dejected. It may have been something as small as being called a "meanie," and you felt as though you were not being mean, which caused you to feel woeful. On many occasions being taunted personally led to my aggressive behavior. I always felt the need to defend myself whether attacking verbally or engaging in the occasional fisticuff. The mocking I endured made me not want to attend school for fear of another fight. Children have also been known to be prejudicial and not perceive themselves as such, so it continued. For instance, I have observed a group of children turn away another child simply because that particular child used a

color on his or her painting that none of the other children cared for. This child seemed to be confused as to why she was being rejected and the other children looked as though they saw nothing wrong with the scenario.

One word can be detrimental to a whole race of people. When a derogatory term degrades a group of people within our community, the community as a whole suffers. The word nigger is a prime example. In the past, Caucasians used the word to signify the worthlessness and degradation of black people. Some members of the black community have taken the word and replaced the negative connotation with a more positive slant, making it a cordial greeting in certain social interactions. I readily accept this premise because I can literally view the issue from both sides. I am the product of an interracial couple. My black father and white mother raised me in a predominantly black city and neighborhood.

I constantly visited with my mother's side of the family and had no recollection of my white relatives using the word around my siblings and me. I do know that my maternal grandfather was a very racist man who repeatedly beat my mother in an attempt to sever her relationship with my father. This took place before my older brother and I were born. The emotional and physical turmoil this put my family through was apparent to me, in that I never knew my grandfather, and only after he died did my grandmother finally accept us as her grandbabies, dark skin and all. The same cannot be said for the black half of my family. My aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews all use the word as if they were born pronouncing it. The word has taken on many meanings within the black community. When used as a possessive adjective, it becomes a term of endearment such as, "that's my nigga!"

I too have used an emotionally scarring word to empower myself and others with similar characteristics. At a very young age I came to embrace the reality that I was different. I began to enjoy the fact that I had two very distinct parents who utilized both of their culturally diverse heritages to teach us how to be well-rounded members of a melting-pot society. I influenced my brothers and cousins to use the name half-breed to symbolize the idea that blacks and whites could not only co-exist, but could produce extraordinarily well-adjusted children. My mother taught me to believe that half-breeds actually have the best of both worlds.

The inner city is a very melancholy, harsh, dangerous place to

grow up. The sheer lack of economic opportunities lends itself to a downtrodden environment. I always considered myself lucky to have the option of leaving my depressing city and riding a few hours north to my white aunt and uncle's farm. There I was able to just be a kid. I was able to play without the fear of a drug-addicted person attacking my friends and me. I could stay outside long after the sun had set and feel safe. I could just be William, not the little half-breed or the nappy-headed boy, or the uppity almost-white kid.

I appreciated my double heritage so much that later on in life, while a fixture in the hip-hop scene; I took on the moniker "Mr. Half-Breed." While portraying this half-breed character I enjoyed a small amount of success. I chose my rap name to reflect my dual heritage and to compare my ferocity at the microphone to that of a vicious, mixed-breed animal. I had the pleasure of meeting an abundance of people who really appreciated the fact that someone understood his biracialism and was proud to speak on the subject. In the end, I learned that our words don't have the same effect as our actions. We can call people names and degrade them verbally, but the real pain is inflicted when the verbal abuse turns to physical abuse akin to that suffered by countless black citizens during the Civil Rights era. We must always remember that sticks and stones may break our bones, but words can never hurt us.

I hope that there will never be another time in our lives when we can be callous enough to demean anyone based upon his or her skin tone or ethnicity. I like to think that I have helped convert a racial epithet to an innocuous word. It is my wish that other dangerous words detrimental to the relationship between diverse cultures be so reviled as to diminish their usage. As such, I am continually amazed at the power of love. This very power allowed my black father and white mother to produce four lovingly distinctive, separately powerful, constantly evolving "Half-Breeds."

Island of Condemnation

Natalie Moreno

"My world as I knew it was changing. That's when I knew, Llego la hora, the time has come, and we left." It was 1960 when my grandfather decided to flee Cuba, but first he had to ask permission. Travel restrictions were being highly enforced at this time under the orders of Fidel. My grandpa went to Castro's Regime and asked for a visa to Mexico to take his wife and son on vacation. The only thing he left out was the fact that it was a one-way ticket there and he wasn't planning on returning. Arriving in Mexico, Pepo checked his family and himself in as visitors on vacation touring Mexico. The next day they did just as they said.

Their journey started in Merida. They took a bus through Mexico City to Monterey and eventually to the Rio Grande where they crossed the border to Laredo. Fifty years later, when I asked my father what he remembered, he said: "I was young, three years old. I remember my father placing my mother and me in a small black tube. She held me tightly and Dad began to kick; he was the motor to our salvation." When I asked my Pepo what he remembered he took a sip of his coffee along with a deep breath. As he sat down on his couch my father translated, "I was cold. My legs had gone numb from kicking. I was exhausted, every time I felt like giving up I would just look up at your Mema and dad and the pain would go away." And as he looked up at my dad he said, "I knew what I was fighting for."

Arriving in Laredo, they immediately turned themselves into the U.S. government as Cuban refugees. Pepo and his family were sent to a Cuban exile, a camp where all of the political refugees fleeing the island were kept. Their camp was in McAllen, Texas. Upon arrival they separated the men and women; children went with their mothers. My Pepo was alone. When I asked him how he felt at the time he said to me, "The only thing that was on my mind was misereve mei, domine, Cubanus sum." Have mercy on me Lord, I am Cuban.

Three months after leaving Cuba they were sent to San Antonio to have their paperwork finalized. Once they were citizens of the United States, they began a new chapter of their lives. However, that's when the real life struggles began. My father told me, "Pepo only brought with him what he cared most about: Mema and me."

They left behind everything. They had nothing, no home, and no money. However, the hardest thing for them to have to leave behind was their family. My Pepo was the youngest of sixteen brothers and sisters. He left never knowing if he would ever see them again or how they would be if they stayed in Cuba. My father lost the memories he could have had growing up in Havana. My grandparents and father knew the sacrifice needed for a better and brighter future.

Trying to start a new life made their transition in America difficult. My father once told me, "Just imagine yourself in a new country that you know nothing about not even the language." But the truth was I couldn't. I am eighteen years old. Thinking back I can't remember a time in my childhood when I was as scared as my father wordlessly described to me he was. Simply being in his presence I felt his memories coming back and haunting him. I asked my Pepo the same question. His response was similar to my father's. However, his fear wasn't for the future it was for his Cuba. His homeland was under attack and he felt as if he abandoned it. He paused for a moment as if the world of his memories had become so vivid, that he was reliving his precious moments in Cuba before the revolution.

Having no money made finding a home difficult. Luckily, my pepo managed to find a one bedroom shack behind a house downtown for his family. Pepo told me, "The owners were very nice and understood our desperate need for a place to call home." They offered Pepo free housing. Once he found work in construction, he insisted on paying rent.

Even after 50 years, that same blue rugged house is still there today. It is actually protected in the King William area of San Antonio as a historical landmark. My father took my sister and me to see it and proudly stated, "You see that shack behind the house? That was my first home in America." He paused for a moment; while taking one last good look at the house, he smiled. The silence ended with, "Who wants ice cream?" My sister and I quickly jumped up "me, me, and me!"

As we ate our ice cream my father shared another story with us. "One day when Pepo came home from work he handed me an ice cream. He told me to enjoy it. It was the first ice cream I had since we had left Cuba. I was five years old. I did just as he told me. I ate that ice cream up and boy was it good! Later on that night Mema came up to me and asked if I knew why dad got me ice cream. I just

looked at her confused then she told me, 'He was able to get you that ice cream because, instead of taking the bus he walked home to have enough money to get it for you.' I didn't quite understand the value of what she told me then, but I hope you girls can learn something from it". We finished our ice cream and took home with us a valuable lesson. It was the first time I truly understood the meaning of sacrifice.

To this day, my father has not returned to Cuba. Whenever my Pepo goes he always returns with horror stories of how life in Cuba is. "No toilet paper?" I couldn't believe it, I didn't want to. The simple things that most would take for granted like toilet paper or even a light to guide you in the night are things that they have lived without for years. When I asked how life in Cuba is today, he took a step back and sat down. His eyes filled with misery, "It's a nightmare. The light that once filled the streets at night are gone. The hope of the Cuban people is gone. The rations of food for the month are so small that they wouldn't even last you a week but somehow they manage."

Recently I was offered an opportunity to go on a mentorship program in Cuba. When I mentioned it to my Pepo he told me, "What the tourist see and how the people live are two different things. Just know, that if you go, everything you see will be a lie." Unlike Cuba, the very fabric of who I am has a firm foundation. It has been composed of two things: the sum of truths gleaned from my own experience and the knowledge received from my roots. Trying to write down all of what has unconditionally influenced me seems like an impractical task. However, the very essence of what I will carry with me and pass on through generations to come is that my family's memories and my own will prove to be the most potent truth.

The Barrio Rules

Luke Villafranca

Número Uno: Shock The World.

"He doubted me. He asked, 'Are you sure your guy can fight?' And I answered, "Let me put it this way for you this way: if I tell you that my guy can fight and all I show up with is a coffin to put in my corner of the ring and it opens and a dead man walks out…your fighter better be ready to doggone fight." John Michael Johnson was my fighter. He became a three-time World Champion. Listen. You should know this. To get people to pay attention, you have to shock 'em at the beginning."

That's the voice of Coach, Champ. He's a seventy-eight-year-old Korean Conflict

Marine Infantry Veteran. He'd like to be carried out of the gym feet first. What's he going to do? Throw in the towel? He says forget that stuff. Quitin' is stigma. He's the boss. I ain't got nothing special about me, Champ. The only thing I got special is that I made my mind up to be special. Like you, I ain't afraid to work. Anybody who ain't afraid to work, greatness will chase them; they won't have to chase it. Greatness is a lot of small things done well: schoolwork, sayin', "Yes, Ma'am / No, Ma'am," pants pulled up over my waist. Small things, they make greatness.

You, Champ, should live as a humble human being, but within yourself you have to believe you're great. Because if you don't believe, how can you expect anyone else to? Believe so that when somebody sees you, they respect you like royalty because you walk as kings and queens. If you don't get your mind set to think like kings and queens, you'll be at the mediocre level when there's nothing mediocre about you.

Remember, there's no such thing as an unimportant person. We should accept and appreciate people for who they are. Coach taught me that. Coach and my people at the Zarzamora Street Gym didn't just teach me how to fight. They taught me the rules of life when they taught me the rules of the barrio. You're going to shock the world, Champ.

Número Dos: Be water, Vato. Flow.

"You and me, Luke, we grew up different."

Turning to see my barrio brother eye to eye, I nodded my head.

I grew up where most people know most people. I was raised in the Catholic school system. I'm still in it.

He grew up gang bullshitting and stuff in San Antonio.

Our worlds collided inside the gym where the F-word is used like an amen inside a Catholic church.

Hold that thought.

Ask yourself, "Can't any place where people go to better themselves be a holy place?"

I wish you could ride with me from St. Mary's to the Zarzamora Street Gym. Maybe you can.

Picture us leaving class together, walking past the Mercedes in the parking lot and that white Porsche that's hotter than a fifty-dollar pistol from the Westside. We make it to my car. It's about 6 o'clock.

Outside the University's gates, we're in a part of town where the literacy rate is as low as the gas prices are high. The bus stops are full. Earlier in the day, kids that should have been in high school were waiting to be picked up to go to work.

It must be encouraging to live in a place where even the sidewalks are uneven.

At the gym, people find balance. The fighters training inside may not have a mother and a father, but they have Coach, the trainers, and each other.

We park next to a couple cars that have seen too many miles. We walk alongside the tagged building that's about a hundred years old to head inside.

You have never parked in the Westside. You have never boxed before. You have perceptions and misconceptions.

Now, I'm going to leave you on your own. Picture yourself all by yourself in this new world. You'll walk over the broken Budweiser bottle and empty Frito bag into a world of rattlin' chains that slow with the rythym of the bags as you walk in. Fighters look away from their envisioned opponents. All eyes on you. Beads of sweat gather on your forearms beyond your rolled shirtsleeves. Sweat in the air. You'll ask the quiet man with the timer where for the boss. You'll stop at Coach's desk to shake his his hand. Como te sientes? How do you feel?

Numero Tres: Use The Ring

Coach says, "I'm glad he's here (pointing to me) because I want you to hear this too. Pull up a chair. (Pointing to one of my barrio brothers) He's worried that he has lost his boxing skills because he's been away. Listen, you haven't lost anything. You've still got it. You know what it is? It's your conscience. La Conciencia. Everybody has one. You were gone for two weeks. For what reason, I don't know. If you were doing what you should have been doing while you weren't here, if you would have been running and training, you wouldn't feel guilty. But you were smoking weed and messin' around. You feel guilty and it's bothering you. But God the Father sent His son, Jesus Christ. He suffered and died for our sins. (Coach wipes the face and arms of the former juvenile inmate turned Golden Gloves champ as if he is cleansing the champ's soul with the blood stained towel.) He washed away your sins with his Holy Blood. You've already been forgiven. Any figher, you mess up and your conscience tells you that you did wrong. What you do is you go off by yourself and you say a prayer and you ask for forgives from our Lord Jesus Christ. Somewhere in the plan His Son (raising his hand) raised His hand and said, 'I'll go and give my life for their sins.' That's what happened. Now go get in the ring. Use the ring!"

I shook both their right hands. The champ ended his handshake with a clinch and a snap. He stepped between the ropes he ring to do his thing. He shadowboxed. He nodded at me. He had understood Faith. He would take care of his conscience with his tiempo in the ring.

The Fight Goes On

Remember, Champ, wherever you go, get busy with work. Stay busy. You better recognize where you are. Respect everyone. When you go into the jungle roar like a lion. Never give up. Remember Coach. Don't let your schoolin' get in the way of your education. Don't be an educated idiot. Give back. Help each other. Keep praying as you keep living. And stay cool.

Coyotes

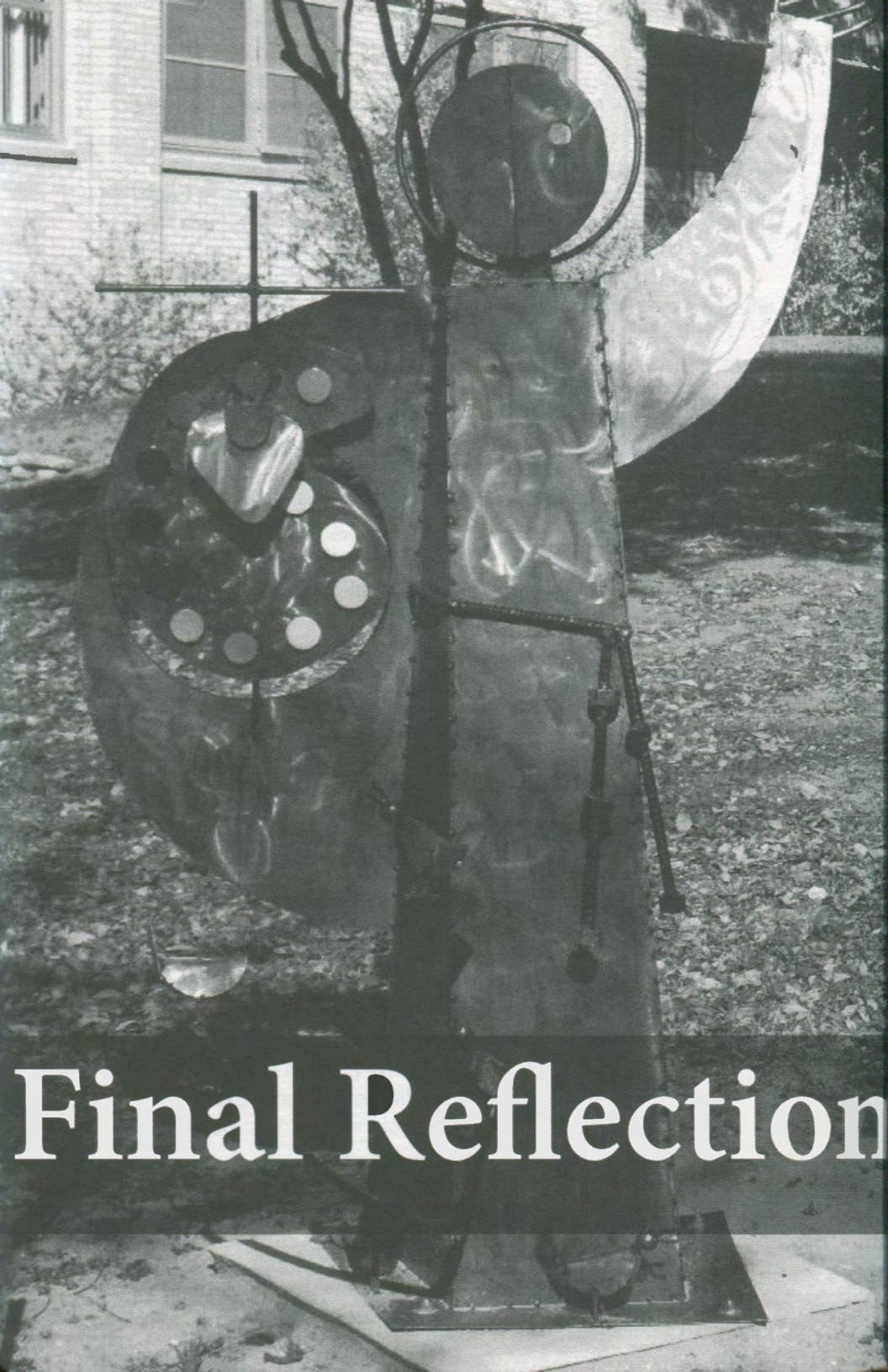
Benjamin Schweers

I. Long and drawn-out howls resonated through the frigid air as we sat wide-eyed and open-mouthed. Unsure of whether or not to be scared our necks tingled solely due to the sheer wildness of the howls echoing like someone lost crying out. We knew they were close. February, one of the only cold months in Texas and we camped at Enchanted Rock in the light layer of frozen rain that fell as soon as the wind and the ominous clouds pushed the sun beneath the cliffs, and in the darkness the ancient rock began to moan. We climbed the rock earlier that same day in freezing wind and found frozen puddles of left-behind rainwater in tiny craters next to randomly assigned patches of green grass. Survival grass we called it. Down in the canyons everything was brown and dead. Only the four of us sat in sleeping bags drinking wine next to the expansive pink rock outlined in the darkness by the bright stars of a moonless night and the glow of a faint skyline illuminated by lights from the nearest towns. A second pack of coyotes joined in from the opposite side of camp and the howls rolled over the hill country, carried by breaths of freezing air to the walls of our tent.

II. Again they came at Lost Maples, where rain from days previous left the trails and the steep cliffs along the river wet and muddy. Near the campsite we found a lone paw-print and saw where her claws sank deep into the earth as she traversed the landscape in the days before that day, in the hours before that hour. A herd of cattle grazed the campsite and we made a corral out of twine and rotting logs between a grove of maple and oak trees a short distance from the edge of the cliffs. Above the cliffs the moon rose from the horizon and irradiated the river winding through the hills and shone down brightly on our tent. A few lone howls echoed atop hills and resonated down into frozen rivers held in the palm of the valley's hand. Dark clouds moved in all directions and sparks of lightning flashed while the small pack of coyotes persisted in their questioning of the night until those clouds consumed the sky and took away the moonlight. The next day we moved down the cliffs and into the gorges left by the river and we did not hear the howls anymore.

III. Cries echoed again in Caprock Canyon. Five days in

Comanche holy land along desolate trails of little grass and no vegetation concealed by tall red canyons. Skins tanned in the hot Texas summer as the sun beat down on us and any other traveler. We spent long hours on the trail searching for a lone patch of grass that could shield us from the dirt and the dust and the wind. Next to an abandoned railroad tunnel that had been cut through the red cliffs we pitched our tents and on the other side of the tunnel we found a deer carcass. As the sun began to disappear over the top of the canyons hundreds of bats exited the old tunnel. An owl swooped down from a cliff above the tunnel and scooped up a bat in its talons and then flew to a lone mesquite shrub growing from the side of the canyon. Making a guttural choking sound the owl swallowed the bat whole while we played cards below in the tent and through the mesh above us we could see the stars. Shifting wind blew the smell of decay towards the tent and in all directions coyotes began to howl like a triumphant warrior returning home. We smiled at one another and listened to our friends in the night. One long howl accompanied the tiny yippings of what sounded like children both weeping and playing filled the air before they moved off into the darkness and their yelps grew faint, until next time.



Final Reflection

Twenty Years Since My World Began

As I walked through the English department offices in spring 1993, I noticed a tired adjunct faculty member and one female student cranking the mimeograph machine, rolling out piles of pages with purple letters and stapling them together as a booklet.

"What are they doing?" I asked the department secretary.

"They're putting together the campus literary magazine," she replied.

I smiled, thinking their job was a good example of patience and dedication to the writers at St. Mary's University.

Who would have guessed the following semester I would not only replace the adjunct, but also be invited to create another version of the campus literary magazine?

Twenty years and fifteen issues later, I gather together experienced students in new technologies that prepare a magazine for an on-line publisher. Four weeks after we place the order, the next edition of The Pecan Grove Review arrives to our department. How far we have come since typewriters, mimeograph stencils, and staples!

In Volume Ten I described the history of this reincarnation of the many literary magazines to represent the writers from the St. Mary's University through the years. And as I prepare to transfer files, suggestions, and old issues to the next faculty moderator, I also make time to reflect upon the personal experiences that shaped my teaching and writing the last two decades.

From the beginning, I chose English students from my creative writing classes to serve as editors. I invited students who had demonstrated dedication to the craft and showed me creativity, courage, and commitment in their daily writings. They were often the quiet ones in class, not overextended by Greek life, SGA, or athletic responsibilities. They weren't the students selected as President's Ambassadors or workers in campus life. In each student I asked to become a PGR editor, I saw possibilities to grow in confidence, to learn new skills, and to realize the chance to become a novelist, book editor, or graphic designer might start with this project of

patience and dedication.

When I thumb through the fourteen issues of PGR in my office, I am very proud these student editors are now published authors, teachers, lawyers, police officers, photographers and non-profit representatives. The current staff members have plans to attend graduate school in journalism and film; enroll in the five year English Master's program; and seek employment in graphic design and publishing. I am so proud of all of these young men and women who have worked hard to bring the best literary magazine to campus every year.

I am also eternally grateful to the fifteen students who chose to become the ultimate editor (now a position called Art Director) and sit alone in the computer lab or at home on a personal computer to number pages, fix format issues, and proofread several times before sending the manuscript off to the printer.

Next year it will feel odd to be teaching writing and reading portfolios and not think, "There's someone I should invite to become a PGR editor." In place of recruiting, I will encourage writing students to become a published poet, fiction or essay writer in the next volume. I will always encourage my colleagues to submit their writing for publication as well as contribute to the magazine with my own poetry and prose.

When my world began as a teacher at St. Mary's University, I was eager to share my experiences as a poet and writer. What I didn't expect was a new respect for the hard working editors, publishers and designers who share their talents and skills to present a quality published product. As a published author, I appreciate the difficulty, the creative energy, and the numerous headaches that arise while taking a manuscript through drafts, copy, and production.

Thank you to Dr. Ann Semel who first asked me to take on this extra job that gave me so much pleasure (and a few headaches) for twenty years. Thank you for the support and encouragement from my department colleagues and the administration of St. Mary's University who always inspired me to create a better issue than the previous year. Finally I salute my friend Louis Cortez in the Academic Library, who worked with the on-line publisher and guided the student editors through the maze of technological programs with confidence and good humor. He never criticized my technology shortcomings, but just filled in the gaps with his own production

talents and skills.

Twenty years ago when a small group of students christened the St. Mary's University literary magazine The Pecan Grove Review, we began a new chapter of a student publication with a university legacy. For those students who love writing, but don't see themselves writing for The Rattler, here is an outlet, an option, and an opportunity to share poems, essays, and stories with our university community.

I pass the faculty moderator cap over to my friend and department colleague, Dr. Ito Romo, and look forward to reading the next issue under his capable leadership.

Thank you to the editors of Volume XV for your generous spirit and dedication to this endeavor. You have blessed me with your presence in my life.

Diane Gonzales Bertrand
Writer-in-Residence
St. Mary's University

Pecan Grove Review VOL. XVI
Publication Date: Spring 2015

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 30, 2014

Additional questions can be directed to Dr. Ito Romo, faculty moderator iromo@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.