

The Rapids Review

A Literary Magazine

2004

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Connecting with Art: Firing the Imagination Writing Contest

FIRST PLACE WINNER
Inspired by "Sunflowers" by C. Beck

We

James Autio

We are the hollow stems.
We are shades of color.
Our eyes follow the sun.

When rain comes we bow our heads,
cool water trickling down our necks,
seeping through soil
to fill the empty spaces.

And that cold on our toes
is like *life* from the Earth, itself,
struggling to climb toward the sun.
We are the conduit.

We are the quivering leaves
when night-rats return to claim the field,
but barn owls won't bother themselves
about our trifling concerns.
They swoop. They snatch.

The crunch in hayloft and rafters
leaves us free to be,
to mill about outside.
Our eyes await the dawn.

Sunrise.
We are the hollow stems.
We are the faces giving praise.



Sunflowers

C. Beck

(Non-student artwork owned by ARCC)

Connecting with Art: Firing the Imagination Writing Contest

SECOND PLACE WINNER

Inspired by "Kristian Reading" by Stella Ebner

Inside

Renee Grissom

Inside
is color and detail and light,
fragile iris petals that curl
backwards, with the liquid energy
of life flowing through tiny cells,
delicate lines that crisscross and swirl
winding their way into the symmetrical designs
of an intricate spider web,
a snare. Enchanting entrapment
to draw you into the deep orange
of the midnight sky, and the moon
in its brilliance,
drowns out all the stars,
including that 100 watt sun,
in the salty ripples of the knee-deep ocean.
Chemical reactions change shadows
into swirls of vibrant red and yellow,
and light becomes grey, and separates
into tiny crystal particles.
All colors melt together
into ice, in the perfect definition of art.
Protected on the outside, by solid shields
of black and white.



Kristian Reading

Stella Ebner

Woodcut

(Non-student artwork owned by ARCC)

Connecting with Art: Firing the Imagination Writing Contest

THIRD PLACE WINNER

Inspired by “Kristian Reading” by Stella Ebner

Unforgettable You

Jason Petersen

As I lay on the floor of the city park, the sweet smell of bodegas breezes in
The grit of the city itches and tries to sway my attention
But they can't take me away from my thoughts of you

A cacophony of road construction, car horns, hustle and bustle rages in
The sun winks in and out of clouds of white and grey
But my thoughts remain focused on you

The grass is warm and holds colonies of tiny workers
Beneath are the cultivators of the soil
And my thoughts remain on you

While riding in the car of a thunderous train bound for the port city
The lines of shadows breeze by like the frames of a silent movie
And all I can think of is you

Aboard the vessel that lies in stealth beneath the sea
Commands are shouted, buttons and knobs are manipulated
And I keep seeing glimpses of you

As I read through my log of my memories at sea
I notice that you are mentioned more than the flurry of my vast adventure
And you are with me in spirit for the rest of my days

Connecting with Art: Firing the Imagination Writing Contest

HONORABLE MENTION

Inspired by "River on the Plaza" by Mike Carson

River on the Plaza (Perfect Moment)

Carrie Skovlund

What would you give to capture that perfect moment again?
The fleeting whisper that feels as if time
Is suspended in one fragile raindrop
The yearning kiss of the warm sun
The textured leaves ablaze with beckoning colors
Orange, red, squash yellow, exuding vitality
The peaceful river with merriment bubbling beneath
It too, can feel the tense excitement in the air.

What would you give to live that perfect moment again?
A golden hue casting the world in a new light
An energy among friends that is contagious
The laughter that chimes as clear as the clinking glasses
A rush as heady as a twirling dive, knowing
That a curl of happiness has passed your way
Speaking words that have no meaning, but announces
I too, am worthy of this moment.

What would you give to feel that perfect moment again?
A certainty that the path of your life is in your command
A promise that alerts every nerve in your body
That life is about to hand you a precious gift
A peace that settles deep in your soul
Residing as snug as a warm blanket
A tinge of bittersweet sadness that

This too, shall pass.



River on the Plaza

Mike Carson

Oil on Canvas

(Non-student artwork owned by ARCC)

Priorities

Kristen Bleninger-Sundar

On the curb in front of a downtown grocery store
Thomas hunches in his rocking back-and-forth state,
having forgotten long ago that a plastic bag taped
around his right lower leg is not ordinary.
As passers-by crinkle their faces and pull their shirt collars over their noses,
they sneer as if the stench of schizophrenia, homelessness,
diabetes, and hearing loss could never happen to them.

Someone calls 911 to remove the nuisance.
At the county hospital the doctors irrigate his leg with
saline and meticulously count hundreds of maggots
swarming in the rotting meat of his leg.
At the end of the day he politely thanks the nurse
for a cup of coffee.

Amidst the swarm of suits and microphones,
The camera bounces off Kevin's diamond earrings.
From behind the long table
this hero to thousands of boys with hoops in their eyes
and men with money to bet
declares that his SUVs and his designer wardrobe
will stay in Minnesota.
"The future of the team looks good," he says.
He smiles as he fingers the gold chain around his neck
and accepts his contract for millions.

The Night That Went Berserk

Royce Renteria

It was a typical night for a couple of ten year olds on summer vacation, or so it seemed. We were up late playing Super Mario 3. As my brother began his turn, my thirst for the blood of Goombas and Koombas had subsided in the presence of a thirst for tryptophan. I proceeded to the kitchen and poured a glass of milk. A quick glance at the clock revealed it was only 2:15 a.m. The night was still young. I was certain my brother, Carlton, would conveniently forget to notify me of my turn, so I gulped it down and headed back to take my place in battle.

When I was back in my room, an eerie feeling crept over me like the blanket of dusk at twilight. My rubber hand puppet, George, as we called him, sat atop my dresser. He still looked the same – a creepy little green goblin with a mouth and eyes you could move. He sat at an angle, but oddly his eyes glared at me as knives. At once, I stopped looking at him as though afraid of being stabbed. I tried not to think about it, but his devious smile was burned in my memory. Soon my brother asked if I could get him a glass of Kool-Aid. I remember thinking how convenient it would have been had he asked me to get it moments before when I'd went to get a glass of milk. Of course, I also realized how convenient it was for him to wait until he was about dead...probably hoping I'd miss my turn.

I acknowledged and proceeded to the kitchen. As I was leaving my room, though, I felt someone staring at me. About two steps from the door, I stopped dead in my tracks and looked over my shoulder at a stuffed Christmas-themed bear named Jingle Bear. His piercing black eyes stared right back at me. It wasn't a friendly stare, though. His thick white hair covered his beady eyes, but only in the middle. I couldn't believe it. He was giving me the evil eye. As I continued to the kitchen, I was getting more nervous with every step. I reached for a glass but abruptly stopped midway. My arm was still in the air as though frozen in time while my eyes were affixed to the clock. 3:55am!?! Ironically, chronological time leapt forward as my arm was frozen in time, yet my jaw fell open.

Consumed by fear, I darted back to my bedroom. Immediately my brother asked where his Kool-Aid was. I just shook my head, jaw still open. "Look at George!" I blurted. Looking at me as if I were losing my mind, his head shifted back with one eyebrow raised and the other lowered. Then he looked, stared a few seconds, then looked back at me. This time both eyebrows raised. "Yeah. Look at Jingle Bear," I continued. As he looked, his head tilted sideways and now his jaw dropped. "Now guess what time it is," I challenged. He shook his head, contemplating a realistic answer, then said two. I smirked and replied, "Yeah, probably a few minutes ago. But now it's almost four!" Then I took him to the kitchen to explain how it was just 2:15 moments before that. Twilight broke and this time dusk tucked us both in tight and snug.

By now most 10 year olds would have crawled into bed with mom and dad. Not us. We were soldiers. After I told him it was almost four, we both looked at the clock, then each other, then the knife drawer, then each other again as we both nodded. We both had the same idea and were ready for George and his accomplice. There was an arsenal of weaponry ready at our disposal, and we chose the sharpest knives possible...Ginsu. A step below a machete, but a step above the standard butcher's knife.

We marched back to the bedroom to face the enemy. Carlton, with a tight grip on his knife, didn't waste any time and immediately took George by the right hand. "George, this is for the safety of all of us," he announced. In one fluent motion, George's hand fell to the floor, rolling as though it were a head freshly chopped off by a guillotine. By this time I was already working on the bear, whom I declared a prisoner of war. My primary objective was to mitigate his seemingly hostile intent. I abandoned my knife in exchange for scissors which I used to cut the hair from around his eyes. By the time I was finished he looked more like a raccoon than a bear. I threw him in the closet and Carlton turned around and did the same with George.

Evidently my mother heard their screams...or perhaps the sound of them hitting the wall...that's still debatable. She entered the room and my brother and I stood frozen, knives and scissors in hand. In the interest of national security, we reluctantly gave a semi-realistic account of what actually took place. Despite our best efforts, she didn't believe a word we said. Being our commanding officer, we surrendered our weapons and were ordered to remain in our barracks...lights out.

To this day, my brother and I look back on that night. Many questions remain unanswered, questions that defy reason, some of which are probably best left alone. But we lived. We lived to fight another day. And we lived to tell our story, of the night that went berserk.

Slaves to Music

Adam Obremski

It's time to bow to me.

All hail the noise that I screech.

AHEM! I said, all hail the noise that I screech.

That's right. Cease your pointless little conversations and listen to me.

Hey! Scold the one who still speaks.

Now that I have your attention, please turn the knob to the maximum setting.

Oh...don't worry about that. Your ears are suppose to bleed!

I command you show me your allegiance.

Rolling down your windows is a good start. Now, I want you to recite along with me.

Hello! Not everybody's doing it. Good job, you encouraged him with a nudge.

Now, raise your right hand into the air with the pointer and pinky fingers held out.

Then, bop your head until it falls off your shoulders.

When you're tired of holding up your arm, proceed to pump it until it's sore.

Okay, it's time to complete the synergy.

Scream "WOO!" until you can scream no more.

Finally, bounce around your seat until I finish the anthem.

Now you are all slaves to me!



Falls Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland

Joshua Fox

*Rapids Review Staff Award for Best Overall Contributor***Black Covers Black**

Joshua Fox

The warm blood on my hands
My grip is lost
Fumbling the bandage
Eyes open
Just the black of death
Where the hell am I
Go back to sleep
I don't want to
Think of something else
When is the next hockey game
What day is it
Do I even love Kristin
Warm blood on my hands
Shit this isn't working
It never works
It was your fault
Just find a bottle
Empty, Empty, Empty
Finally
Finish it off
Just keep running from them
Think of something else
Can I really be a photographer
Deep breaths
Warm blood on my hands
You are losing it
No I am not
You are fucking nuts
Just one valium
Where the hell are you now god
Kick in, Kick in
You failed them
No I didn't

They're dead 'cause of you
Mind begins to numb
Thoughts slow to a stop
The silence ringing in my ears
Black covers black
Just the warmth of blood on my hands

Rebuttal to a Misinformed Bleeding Heart

Kristen Bleninger-Sundar

Your Birkenstocks don't fool me.
Your words don't either—
Yoruba du du Congo.
I know those words too.
I may even go their some day.
But there's a REALITY
beyond your poetry reading,
a reality beyond the dreadlocks
and the patchouli oil and the sandals
melting in the July sun.
The reality is that you will
drive home in your air-conditioned car,
listen to your favorite CDs
relax at home in the 'burbs or trendy uptown,
and tend your neat little herb garden.
You'll watch your cable TV and your DVDs
and take calls on the cell phone
you claim to hate.
You'll go to your job on Monday
just like the rest of us.

I hear you.
And I feel
for those "up to their crotches" in Congo mud,
for those who live in unimaginable refuse,
for the dirty-faced hungry kids on TV,
for those the world forgets.

But before you point your finger
at an entire nation, at your own culture,
don't forget that you sleep soundly
under America's security blanket—
even nude if you want to.

There won't be any war or hunger
raging through your bed in the night.
Don't forget you've been vaccinated,
your cervix scraped every year,
your lungs heard with a stethoscope,
your belly happy every day.

You think you are a citizen of the world
because you can string your pretentious words
into four pages of
drivel.

You think you've got it figured out because you can
chant.

You can't be every person.
You can't live every culture
no matter how many books you read,
no matter how many news programs you see,
no matter how many causes you support.

You are a product of America,
even if you wear Birkenstocks
and reek of patchouli.

In the Eye of the Beholder

Darla Maciewski

On the beach in Playa Del Carmen, swimwear is different. Swimwear is nearly optional. Bodies of different sizes and shapes shimmy into suits often made with another in mind. Every body is a work of art. Not all perfect art, in fact, some quite like a Picasso – distorted and somewhat grotesque.

The beautiful, young, ripe bodies of the Brazilian goddesses lounge on beach chairs. Usually in a group, rarely alone, these women ooze beauty. Their dark, long tresses brush against their shoulders as they gather it wet from the sea and twist it gently before wrapping it around a small band of rubber.

Without pause in their conversations, they remove their tops. The American men pant, ogle. Beads of sweat form on the men's brows. The women replace beads of sea water with droplets of perspiration on their own chests. Their breasts sometimes natural and soft spread out across their chests as they lay back on their chairs. Some like firm globes that stay put and perky even when lounging. Knees raise and lower in conversation. Feet, once wet, now covered with drying sand.

Walking in shallow water, a man of 70 holds the woman's hand gently. He has his nose covered with white sunscreen and his chest is a blanket of gray curls. His belly is round and full – although not flabby. His legs are thin and spindly – seemingly too thin to carry the body attached. He wears a hat, mostly beige with some non-descript writing. The only other thing covering the man is a pair of black Speedo's. They are tight against his bottom, tight against his flaccid penis. He doesn't notice the Brazilian women with their breasts on display.

The woman holding gently to his hand is not a conventional beauty. Perhaps in her youth, she was a stunning woman. Today she is slightly bent in her shoulders. Her gray hair slicked back from the sea water revealing her face – sunny and warm with lines of happiness surrounding her eyes. She too wears a black bikini. The bottoms tugged up to cover the lines on her tummy etched by the babies she proudly carried within decades before. Her top droops with the weight of her pendulous breasts that barely resemble those of the Brazilian beauties on the chairs.

The beautiful women tire of their time in the sun. They retrieve tiny t-shirts from their bags and pull them down over their bodies glistening now with sweat. They laugh and chat as they gather their belongings, pay the waiter, and kiss each other on each cheek, each heading off to their own destination.

The couple walking in the sea also tires of the time in the sun. They walk anonymously from the surf up the beach where they gather their towels. The woman slips a sundress over her head, the man slips on a pair of white shorts. As they leave the beach, the woman slides her hand from his and runs it lovingly up his forearm, giving him a warm smile.



North Minneapolis

Joshua Fox

The One That Got Away

Eric Rudell

Flesh tones turn gray
At the sight of her
She is the epitome of beauty
Cold quiver, shake you think
You try to speak but can never get the words out

You freeze in place you
You stare at the smile on her face
Just as she's walking away your brain
Sends an emergency transmission
Open mouth now, Speak

Something's gone wrong system failure
You lost your window of opportunity

Stuck in Spin Cycle

Brandon Powell

Attempting to turn this spin cycle off, has failed.
This one lost article of cloth
will do wonders screwing up life as we know.
After searching for twenty years, realization has set in. . .
in a tantrum you forage mindlessly to retain your past
only to be knocked out.
Saving past material only corrupts future ambitions.
The spin cycle has now seized,
proceed to detonate present existence.

Like Sunflowers

Bill Haley

We stand in conformity,
obdurate against a wind of doves
yet supple to a breeze of hawks.

We follow the Sun to old horizons,
the ancient land that cradled our forebear,
to root in sand and drink the prehistoric forest.

From a distance echoes a mighty glissando,
a tide of screaming locusts,
a thousand sickles passing through crisp green stocks,
as gamma through flesh, as blood through sand.

If only our green leaves were hands,
our yellow peddles ears
and our blacken seeds eyes,

if only to feel the breeze,
hear the wind
and see what we've become.

Lost

Cheryl Busch

What kind of dad makes his daughter run deer like the blue tick hounds in Alabama? I am thinking this after he and his friend Kenny left; I told him I didn't know the woods and would get lost. But, he said, "Just wait here for about five minutes, then walk two to three hundred yards in that direction," as he pointed behind me, "and you will come to a fence. Follow the fence until you reach a clearing, and I will meet you there."

I don't know how far two to three hundred yards is, but I am certain that I have walked much further, as it seems I have been walking for over an hour. I have been making as much noise as possible, as I was told to do so that the deer would be scared and run towards the hunters. I am the one who is frightened, not the deer. What if I am lost and never come to the fence? I stand still to listen, hoping to hear the sound of the hunters, only all I can hear is the sound of the wind rustling the crimson and gold leaves as they fall from the ceiling of the forest that is blocking out all but tiny slivers of the late afternoon sunlight. I begin to walk again. Is this the right direction? Or did I get turned around when I stopped? It is like walking through a funhouse maze; everywhere I look all I see are naked brown posts jutting into the air, holding the ceiling of crimson and gold. Each one looks the same as the one I just passed. My eyes strain ahead, looking as far as my eyesight will allow, hoping for just a tiny glimpse of fence. Why didn't I think to ask what kind of fence I was looking for? Is it a wood fence or a chain link fence? For all I know it could be one of those little tiny barbed wire fences that are naked to the eye until you are upon it.

The air in the woods is suffocating; it smells moldy from the dead and decaying leaves that are blanketing the floor of the woods. The only sounds I hear are the leaves rustling above me and my own footsteps as they crunch the dead dry leaves under my feet. As I walk, I continually trip over the small branches that have fallen like Lincoln logs. What if I trip and break my leg and no one ever finds me?

What will I do if it becomes dark? It is awful cold out here, and a fire is out of the question for I have no matches. I have no food, and now that I am thinking of food I am awful hungry. The biscuits and bacon I had for breakfast have not lasted very long in my stomach. Why was I so worried about my weight that I wouldn't have taken the ham sandwich dad offered me earlier? What will I do for water if I am lost out here all night? There are not even water puddles that I could drink from.

I hear the sound of branches cracking not very far away. What could that be? What if it is an animal like a big black bear? The bear approaches me, licking his lips, rearing up on his strong rear legs with the razor claws of his front legs coming toward me, mouth open ready to eat me for his lunch. What kind of Dad would send his thirteen-

year-old daughter out into the Minnesota wild with nothing to protect herself from the wild beasts that could eat her? I really need to learn to shoot a gun. I could see myself raising a rifle to my shoulder, placing my eye up to the sight, and aiming the barrel straight at the heart of the big black beast, pulling the trigger just as it is about to lean forward and sink its jaws into my skull. The beast would look at me with shock in its wide dark brown eyes, and then fall backwards to the ground.

Come on, get it together, that wasn't a bear, that wasn't a bear, that wasn't a bear. Just keep walking. You will see that fence soon; it has to be just ahead. Dad wouldn't send you out looking for a fence that didn't exist. I see more light ahead. There must be a clearing or something up there; just keep walking in that direction. Soon I come to where the light is coming from. It is a large round area with tall grasses. I leave the protection of the woods; this area is like a green sea, surrounded by a wall of trees. But this green sea is empty with no one or nothing around. As I step into this clearing, I am blinded by the brightness of the sunlight streaming down and touching the grass. It is so beautiful, grass to my knees and the sound of birds chirping a musical melody that is being played just for me. There is a spot where the grass is folded down making a soft green bed; this must be where a deer spent the night. I am so sad for that deer; she must have slept out here in the middle of nowhere, all alone and cold. I can see her curled up on the grass in a ball like a baby trying to keep warm, and I feel her single tear as it rolls down her face because she is scared. Then I realize my cheek is wet and as I brush away the tear. I hear an owl "hoot...hoot...hoot" but I thought owls slept during the day. My voice crackles as I scream as loud as my vocal cords will allow "Daaaaaad" "Keeeeny," "Where are you?" and in response I hear "hoot...hoot...hoot" again. Then it dawns on me, that's not an owl, it is the sound I have heard a hundred times before when I hunted with my dad in Alabama. It is the sound a man makes in the woods to communicate with the other hunters.

I start walking as fast as my legs will carry me across the clearing, in the direction of the hoots. Just before I reach the wall of trees that would plunge me back into the dark, dreary world of the woods I see him emerge into the clearing. I throw myself into the arms of my dad. Tears roll down my face. Then anger floods over me and I begin pummeling his chest with my fists and yelling, "How could you send me alone through the woods looking for a fence that didn't exist?"

Awaiting Your Decision

Renee Grissom

Chipped china crème pitcher,
fragile misplaced thing of beauty,
on a splintered unfinished wooden table
in a tumbled down shanty
by the railroad tracks.

Train thunders by,
earth shakes, shack trembles,
table vibrates, and with each turn
of the heavy iron wheels
the china pitcher
rattles closer to the table's edge.

If the train is one boxcar,
one second too long,
the china pitcher
will be shattered forever,
fragments in the dust,
on the dirt floor
of this deserted place.

Coffee Ashes

Mary Buzzell

Sadness in the darkness of her coffee cup
Sadness in the ashtray buried deep

Chipped dishes of bitterness passed upon this table
Hot broth of shame long simmered, poured off the ladle

The butter of regret spread thin on bread
Smoke ashes burn the words never said

She sits in the quiet with the ticking of the clock
Voices from the counter of men's radio talk

Ashes on the table with paper things and coffee rings
Soft soprano echoes of broken children sing



Boy on Dock

Renee Grissom

The Zoo

James Autio

Congregation and Communion

Back at the room, bare
except for where I'd nailed Christ
to the wall, we debated
the holy words, even in jubilation
fortified by drink.

But in the ennui and boredom it brought
we created the church
and its steeple
with only our clumsy paws.

Later, loaded
and no longer limited
by tactile sensation,
we set off to seek fulfillment
in the afterhours calm
of a nearby zoo.

We scaled the fence
as monkeys chattered
and snakes sang in the moonlight.
Like animals, we ran amok,
calling out to each other in the dark.

We thought to search for something unlike.

And when at last we found it,
we formed a line, each of us taking turns
spanking the penguin
on her warm, velvet bottom.

Faded

Jason Petersen

This place I frequent during the time of my decline
Used to be a place of abundant radiance

Ships still paddle by with their flailed stacks that puff out smoke
But the plaza and its colors have disappeared from the foreground.

There was a time when a plaza on this river was washed over with color
Brilliant reds shaded the bright tables
Hues are brown and grey marked the cobblestone paths
Deep green flowed through thick grass and foliage

The picnics we prepared were befitting of such a scene
But the kids with the kites and deserts are grown
And they have other things to do or not enough time

With time this scene may return to its original brilliance
The plaza and its colors need to return
And this empty place will thrive again

Metamorphosis

Darla Maciewski

A butterfly emerged from a fat brown cocoon, spreading its wings in awkward motion, antennae twitching to pickup on its new reality. Adolescence.

Like springtime, sometimes adolescence strikes early. Such was the case with George. At age eleven, things began to blossom and change. The chub was the first to go. Next up was the face that resembled mine. It now resembled that of his father. The child voice became a man's. Hair grew in crazy places – under his nose and arms, all over his legs. Dark hair, while the stuff on his head was still a boyish blonde. External metamorphosis was only the start.

We live, the three of us, in a small basement apartment. The neighbors trudge through the snow in front of our window, giving us the unique view of their legs and waists. We live in this place, Me, George, and little Alyssa, his two year old sister. They say that great change happens in those first couple of years of life, and I certainly agree. However, the change in adolescent George was one that amazed more.

At the start of middle school, a new creature woke up in my home. Clad in black, baggy legged pants, with chains, zippers and pockets growing throughout the garment and a black t-shirt, a different one each day, but each day the same. Insane Clown Posse, Twiztid, ABK – all musicians of questionable talent whose names and faces graced the front and back of each t-shirt. The baseball cap he wore religiously at home and every non-school moment covered his shocking hair, hair that morphed between green and red and sometimes blue. Rarely did I see the dirty blonde that I gave birth to. Hair that had grown to shoulder length was now groomed short to the scalp around the ears, long enough on top for a multitude of braids. Braids that stood on end. Pippy Longstocking in black attire.

George, who had always been a docile being, shed the boy he had been and allowed the hormones and stretch of adolescence transform him into this unusual creature. One who causes his grandma to fret about how awful he looks. “Are you really gonna take him out like that?” I shrug my shoulders and smile. Creative, imaginative, wildly amazing. An Individual like few others – except those like him, Juggalos.

The metamorphosis of groupies seems to follow a historical pattern. The deadheads in the 60's and 70's followed the Grateful Dead with their tie-dyed shirts and their laid back attitude. The head bangers in the 80's and 90's enjoyed heavy metal music. Most wore their hair long and wild - free to fly about as their heads thrust forward and back with the beat. Some were pretty boy glam rockers with the makeup of women. The Juggalos are followers of the bands George worships. Juggalos are all ages, from mere children to adults. They attend performances clad in the makeup of their heroes – white faces with black designs around their eyes and intricately drawn on the flesh of

their faces. They choose attire that matches their newly painted faces, or perhaps it is that they choose the makeup to match the attire. The music is a rap of aggression and emotion that stirs the angst of their followers.

I discovered the world of the “Juggalo’s” around his twelfth birthday. Reluctantly I drove to a club in Minneapolis. Dropping off George and his two friends took a leap of faith. I had seen the way the “Juggalos” interact, a nod, a “what’s up”, a piece of knowledge that they are one of the same, much like folks who drive Harley Davidson’s – always a nod for their fellow bikers, whoever they are. A leap of faith that my twelve year old man would be able to hold his own in the sea of painted faces that waited for the doors of the club to open. A line of people similar to my own little boy. Creative, imaginative, wildly amazing.

Not wanting to venture far, I hung out near by and tried to relax. When the fans started pouring out of the club, I met George at the car. Exuberance oozed from George’s pores as he described his night. First there was the “Faygo” spray – a strange ritual where the fans would shake and spray Faygo brand soda all over themselves and others. Then the body surfing. My little boy high above the floor at the mercy of the muscles of his comrades below him. Floating across their hands, occasionally precariously close to being dropped, only to be boosted in the air again. Shoes missing in a sea of painted faces with distorted mouths in the midst of a rap. The stage diving. My baby body surfing forward until he reached the stage. Once on stage with the worshiped ones, he danced around, fist in air until his body flailed forward landing back into the waiting hands of his comrades.

As I heard the tale, my mind drifted back to a time four or five summers ago. I had taken George to an outdoor festival to see his favorite band and mine. At one point, a teen boy put George on his shoulders to allow him to see better. From there he was transferred to another teen and then another. My baby was being crowd surfed. Horror mirrored in our faces until he was returned safely. That day there was utter panic – tonight that panic became exuberance.

The next day, the pain of moving in ways he had not experienced prior to the show, slowed his body but didn’t slow his spirit. Again and again the concert experience was duplicated as each beloved band brought its show to the road. Each time, my heart sinks knowing he is still a little boy in a man’s body. Each time my brain trusts the instincts of a child who amazes me.

George is a child who continues to show the many facets of his being as he changes, metamorphosis occurs daily. His physicality and musical tastes are only a small part of what makes George a beautiful emerging butterfly. He is a son, a kind, helpful son. Carry in groceries? “No problem.” Clean up that area you call a room – I call a pig sty? “Sure, I guess.” Not always on my time schedule, but accomplished in a time acceptable to my limit. George is capable of being who he is without apparent self-consciousness or embarrassment.

George is a brother that a two year old could only dream about. One who takes time to play. George will take Alyssa in his arms and spin, spin until they both stumble and laugh. A brother who will go to the playground and catch his sister at the end of the slide. A man/child who happily gives up his evening to spend time watching the *Wizard of Oz* with the family “Dorothy.” A brother who will help buckle her “Dorothy” shoes. A brother who happily sings along with the itty bitsy spider and teaches his sister the names of all the characters on the posters aligning the walls and ceiling in his room. He takes the time to educate her about his world, the world of the Juggalo. George is a brother who welcomes his sister into his world, but allows and fosters the growth of her own creative, imaginative, and wildly amazing blossoming being. Her own metamorphosis is encouraged.

Metamorphosis struck his sexual being. There was a time not so long ago that George was horrified by the topless women who approached him in Mexico on the beach and in the sea to chat. Last spring the thought of the near naked bodies he would see on the beach provoked giggles and whispers amongst George and his friends. Anticipation and budding sexual awaking stirred. Upon arriving in Mexico, he could hardly wait to toss his belongings in the hotel room and fly down to the beach to check it out.

As loving and committed as a sixth grade boy could possibly be, George took on a sweet mate at the beginning of middle school. Eighteen months later, she is still in his life. They are adolescents. Stolen kisses between classes. Hand holding at theater group. An occasional movie with friends. A couple that has lasted longer than any grownup relationship I have experienced in many years. Romantic is my son. On the eve of his mate’s birthday, he eagerly plopped quarters into a machine in the local grocery store. He loaded his hands with plastic bubbles, each containing tiny plastic rings. A gift not nearly romantic enough for a boy of so many facets. George searched his room for the perfect idea. He came upon a few other rings, some that had once adorned cupcakes, a bracelet found at the bottom of a swimming pool, an address book with Curious George on the cover. All in all 18 gifts. He found a pair of those pants with many pockets and zippers and put the gifts in each pocket. Two in each spot. Enough to give gifts each time he would see his mate in school the next day. Creative, imaginative, wildly amazing, son, brother, romantic – who is still willing to share his plans with his mother.

His school offered a chance for parents to live the lives of their children. George stayed home; I went to middle school, performing a metamorphosis of sorts myself. Trudging through the halls, meeting all the teachers who would time and again fill me in on intelligence not used, creativity put in all the wrong places. All the same until one unique, original instructor was able to articulate the wonder that is George. She sees the creative, imaginative, wildly amazing child who is fast becoming a man. She sees the beauty of his difference. The warmth of his soul. She credits me. “What a creative, imaginative, wildly amazing mother you must be to have fostered the being that has become George.”

I again put myself in George's shoes for Halloween. I donned his pants with zippers, pockets and chains, his black t-shirt and black hat, both with Insane Clown Posse logos emblazoned on them. I added his bracelets and spiked collar and went out with Alyssa, the teletubby, to trick or treat. He was happy to see the metamorphosis that took place – mom becoming George. I tried without success to have him dress as me. He instead wandered off looking much the same as usual, wearing his own costume of sorts, to join his friends.

The butterfly that is adolescence continues to stretch and flap its wings. A beautiful display of color. A butterfly that can move from flower to flower, branch to branch and back again, relishing the ability to show different facets of its self without venturing too far away. It is a wondrous thing that occurs when the butterfly emerges from its cocoon. As the butterfly grows and stretches its wings to full potential, the beauty only increases. In time, the adolescent metamorphosis will be complete. At that time, instead of a cocoon, the butterfly will leave behind a man.

Overdose

Joshua Fox

A pill to kill the thoughts
Alcohol won't drown them out
Staring at the ceiling light
Feel it start to take effect
My heart beats against my ribs
Thoughts start to drift away
Empty black seeps into my mind
Will tonight be my overdose
Or will I wake
Eyes shift through thoughts of death
The bells are my only prayer now
The eight holy symbols of eternal peace
They do little to stop the killing of me



The American Dream

Joshua Fox

Lead

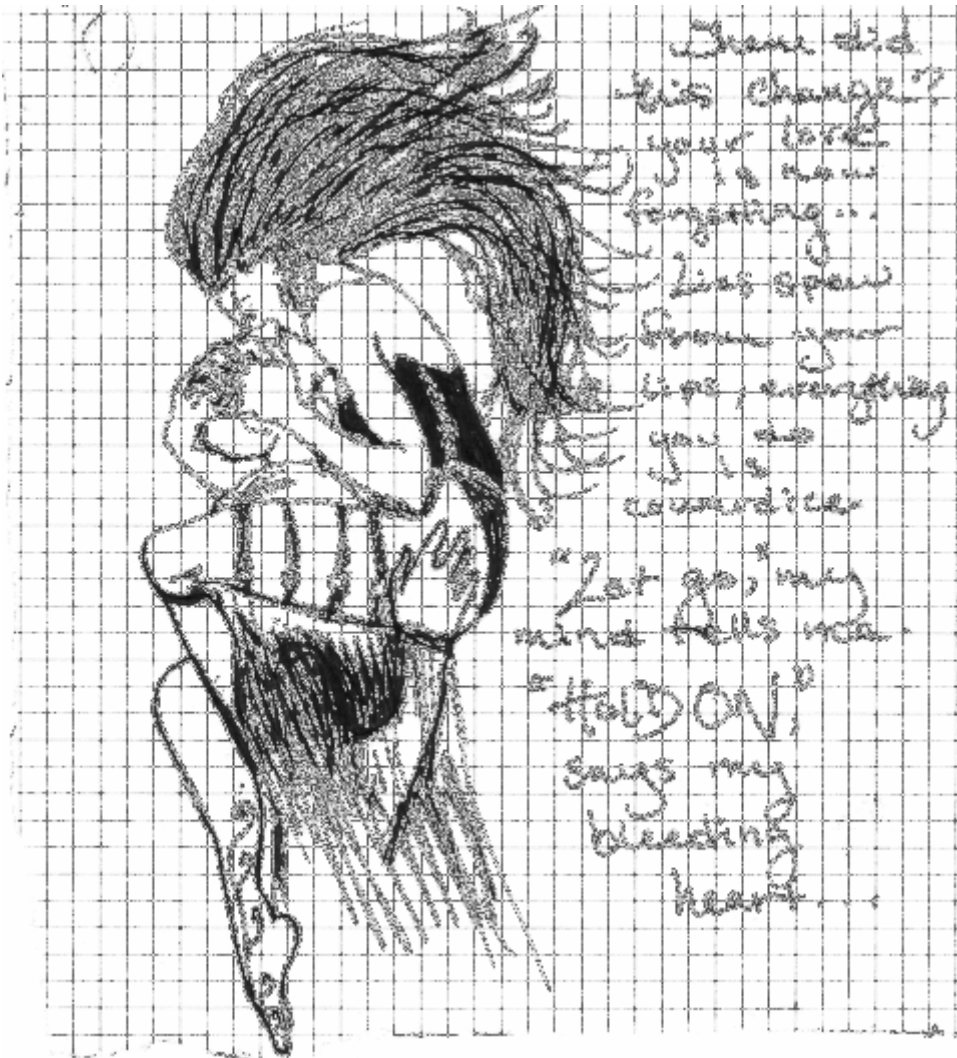
Zachary Flategraff

Noxiously I lead lanterns
through caves
with a tactile awareness
of lead

gasps of air
are spared for me
though forgetfully
between these walls
of how coulds,
why comes
and what abouts

some empty eternity
lies in wait
for me
an entity
embodied
in a restless notion
that rapes the shore
of some shaky
ocean

the sterile climate
of sleep
bottles fractured impalements
that dig deeper
than a flagpole's base
of concrete



Anonymous

Village Rain

James Autio

We stroll, you and I.

This is the lane
where every home wears a hedgerow;
garden gates hang ajar. A man
thrashes wet shellac against a fence
while neighbor kids cackle in the thicket.

This is the market square
where venders hawk veggies.
This is the church where we were
to marry. The steeple still probes the sky.

This is the tree by the river
where you kissed me first.
Seedlings clutch at dirt as dark clouds sag.

Here stood the footbridge
where I took your hand.
You pulled it back and went to Prague,
and took that bridge with you.

This is me, still sighing
to see your linens wriggle on the line,
to call to you, and together
we'd rush to pull the wash.

Instead, you scuttle Czech streets;
I vodka tonic,
and massive fluffs engulf the grey putty.

Fusillade

David Lincoln

My father is the most arrogant, pompous jackass you will ever meet in your life. I am not referring to the man that gave me my big feet and dark complexion. No, that dick was an evil, satanic, wife beater. The man I call “father” is the creature that raised me. This short, fat troll is a stone in my pocket. The unrelenting weight of it restlessly scrapes my leg, pulling me from my reverie, disturbing the normally placid, undulating waves of my thoughts like the abrupt and thunderous crack of a tree shattering the surface of luke warm water.

“David!” An angry munchkin’s shrill voice tears through the heavily plastered walls. I can picture the angry, white foam flicking from his lips and fat, red tongue as he spits my name. The stone swells larger in my pocket, as if the hard, abrasive surface is sucking the very moisture from the already dry air. He is pissed and as always he will try to force his indelible mood upon me. No matter how hard I try to castrate the desire to enamor his flesh with jaded, inimical remarks, I know that soon steam shall billow from my ears and acid from my mouth. I refuse to allow him to derive the self wanton justification that he longs to grasp in support of his libelous speech. “David!” Swelling ever larger the stone begins to grow warm, then hot, taking longer this time to painfully scald my leg where a thick callus has begun to armor my resolve.

Rising to my feet, I deliberately fill my lungs with a deep breath of the now putrid air and go to face the unavoidable condemnation of some unbeknown, and incomprehensible crime. I know what will happen. He will start off in a tirade about all my imperfections, then he will attack me with evidence of my indiscretions, which could be anything from a speck of dust on the floor to a piece of paper left out on the dining room table. “What the hell is that, you idiot?” he will say, and I will wonder why it is that upon his return the first thing he does is try to find something that I have done wrong or could have done better. For god’s sake he won’t have even taken the time to remove his shoes!

As I make my way across the tan, checkered, linoleum floor of my partially remodeled kitchen, I hastily map out everything I had done throughout the day, vainly searching for a clue as to what horrible deed I could have committed this time. I have vacuumed the basement, I put my shoes away, my bed is made; but still I know that no matter how hard I strive to maintain the perfection he demands, I will always fail. Stepping through a roughly framed doorway, I turn and lay sad eyes on the familiar rise of the beige colored stairway. Lifting my right foot heavily from the yellowing linoleum, I take the first step toward the furious maelstrom impatiently awaiting my arrival.

Upon my arrival he will already be far beyond angry and with the proclamation of my offence he will become a hypocrite. He will not listen to reason, for he loves only the sound of his voice and self-righteous afflictions. I will try to contain the sarcastic remarks straining to burst from the prison of my jaws. To make him feel pain as his acidic tongue strikes nothing but the hardness of an impenetrable wall.

Pausing for a breath, my father will gasp, sucking in the stinking air with pathetic lungs. Through his thick, translucent glasses he will see that he is unable to penetrate the defense skillfully woven to contain the belligerence I long to set free. He will scream with his impotence and attack once again with unrelenting fury. Soon enough, the foundation will begin to crumble as he pushes his offensive in new directions, seeking a way in. He will attack my personality, my thoughts, my skills and integrity. Digging beneath the wall, he attacks without reason or for-sight, but with the blindness of the ignorant, ignorance not even the thickest glasses can fix. He will begin to screech about respect, about listening to him no matter what he says. He will rant about himself and his self perceived perfection.

Growing disgusted as my wall begins to weaken under his onslaught, it teeters as the mortar holding the wall together begins to fall out, dislodging bricks, which in turn disintegrate becoming dust before striking the torn earth beneath my feet. In a vain attempt to hold my tongue, I will clutch the pitted surface, holding the bricks in place, willing the wall too stand as it crumbles about my desperate body.

Seeing light through the fissures he has torn, he will lash out, striking with resounding passion. Sullenly, I will realize that the wall will not stand much longer. Already I feel the breath of freezing air rolling in the pit of my stomach, as my eyes begin to grow hard, and blood begins to boil throughout my veins.

As the last bit of mortar crumbles from the mass of bricks about my feet, I am left with only my thoughts and one soft brick in either hand. As they begin to dissolve turning my skin a dusty, burnt brown; I turn my eyes up and look toward the day I can reach within my pocket and grasp the stone between two tightly clenched fists, casting him forever from his treasured hideaway. No longer will I be subjugated to his belligerence and self proclaimed superiority. I will be rid of his presence, his arrogance, and unrelenting belittlement. Soon enough I will be free of him, but for now I wipe my stained hands on my clean, white shirt and let the oppressive, disillusionment envelope me. Casting my self into the inferno, I loosen my wired jaw, and I let my slippery tongue untie itself. My sarcastic tone and belligerent attitude threaten to overshadow even his disjointed proclamations. He revels in the contest, drawing strength from my retaliation, absorbing every cleverly phrased retort like a black hole dragging in everything within his grasp. I can hear his thoughts, “hah, David you are just like me!” and I cringe in disgust knowing that it is true.

When he grows exhausted with the insurmountable excitement of having driven me into untold rage, he will stalk away; the sound of his buttery feet slapping the hard, wood floor echoes in my burning ears. Looking for something to do, my father will brush back his greasy, black hair with pudgy, brown fingers. He will sit on the well worn couch and turn on the television; eventually even he gets bored with the sound of his voice.

Silently, I will burrow into my thoughts, continuing the viscous dialogue with him, pointing out all of his faults and picking apart the facade of his logic. I will tell him I wouldn't cry if he died, but that doesn't mean much. I wouldn't cry if anyone died; I would feel no remorse or sadness. I am numb to the world, to its joy and injustice.



Mike Mitchell, Jr.

Alone

Trains

Bill Haley

Not as many trains came by then,
when he brought pleasant roses.
How she loved mother's day, her birthday.
On the window shelf they sat in the morning sun,
their scent echoed their eternal bond.
Now, they've turned to plastic.
Why? Because they last, she says,
like memories.
The sun thinks they're real,
its warmth still kisses the purple petals each day
in hopes of a slight turn of affection, that's never to be.
The cat thinks they're real.
He still chews the leafs and stems
in hopes of a morsel, that's never to be.
They twitch and dance the same, to the vibrations
of the train cars passing over the seam in the rail
but the echo is a slight of plastic,
surely, that hurts.

She keeps many old things about the house,
mostly animals and things.
None of them are real of course,
yet they too, dance to the passing trains.
They don't move much,
a quarter of an inch a year perhaps.
The most expensive ones she keeps in a glass cabinet;
they sparkle under its small halogen light, except one.
An old shaving cup with its brush leaning to one side,
not worth much, maybe five dollars at best.
But it's the most treasured of all
because it's still alive
with the memories of a lost husband,
who brought the pleasant roses
when the trains were few.

Falling For You

Renee Grissom

It wasn't like a wildfire
that consumes everything in its path,
blazing with unbridled fury;
because wildfires leave behind only
blackness and ruin, the smell of burnt death.

And it wasn't like fireworks,
startling bursts of color, deafening blasts of light,
a fuse that you quick set a match to
and then turn and run away from
before it blows up in your face,
a thing to be observed only from a distance.

It wasn't like a wild ride
on an amusement park roller coaster,
that changes direction without warning
throwing you against the restraining belts,
then drops suddenly, leaving your stomach
at unbelievable heights.

It wasn't a nuclear explosion
mushrooming up into the sky, blatant as a road sign
shouting its presence in bold black letters
or the detonation of a hydrogen bomb
knocking you off your feet, re-arranging your entire world,
because it wasn't that sudden,
even if it was that powerful.

What it was, was the force of the ocean's waves
that crash over the shore, as you sit
on the beach in Delaware, on an almost winter day
wrapped in a favorite old quilt
that's not quite warm enough to keep out the chill,
inhaling the smell of the salty coolness of seaweed in the wind
and you look and you find, that one perfect shell,

that you know you'll hold onto for the rest of your life.

What it was, was climbing a sheer rock face,
jagged edged cliff, straight up,
and falling.

When the rock beneath you gives way
to nothingness, and you drop,
to find yourself caught in the solid grip of your climbing harness.
Secure.

But it takes a while for your heart rate to go down,
and you exhale shakily and rest your forehead
against the rock wall, thanking the stars
for all that is solid and strong and safe,
cold sweat, adrenaline rush.

What it was,
was love.



Wolf

Renee Grissom

Mellifluent Patriarch

David Lincoln

I am sitting on my grandparents' worn out sofa. It is almost nine o'clock, and my grandmother has fallen asleep in an old, leather easy chair. A little line of spittle, seeps from the corner of her mouth as she tosses, jockeying with the seat cushions for a better sleeping position. She is a loving, kind old woman, living the narrow spectrum of her life to the fullest every day, gleaning every drop of pleasure from even the most trivial things in life.

Waking with the golden rays of the sun as a proper farm-wife should, Rosemary rises from the bed she has shared with her husband for the last fifty years. Quietly, so as to not wake Jim, she quietly dresses herself in a pair of worn out jeans and a yellow button-up blouse. With practiced ease, she silently opens the creaky door to their bedroom, and steps out. Creeping down the stairs, she tiptoes through the hall without turning on the lights she prances around every loose floorboard until finally she is in the kitchen and is able to start breakfast.

Fifteen minutes later Jim awakes to the heavy, penetrating odor of salty bacon and lightly peppered eggs. His back aching, he lets the smell of breakfast pull him slowly from the bed. Stumbling down the beige, carpeted stairs and bumbling into the kitchen, Jim greets his wife in a groggy haze. Wrapping his arms fondly about his frail wife, he gives Rosemary a gentle peck on the cheek and sits down to the breakfast laid out thoughtfully before him. Standing on the opposite side of the small, oak table, Rosemary scrapes eggs and greasy bacon onto her ravenous husband's plate, which never seems to become more than half empty before it is filled once again by Rosemary's flashing, spatula. Finally full, Jim concedes defeat and raises his hands in submission; his wife has once again made more food than he or anyone could ever possibly eat in one sitting.

After seeing Jim off to work in the fields, Rosemary pushes in her husband's chair and collects the dirty plate and fork left carelessly on the table. Setting the plate in a large, steel sink to soak, she lets her mind wanders to the garden, which is beckoning to be groomed by her effortless grace and skill. Pulling herself from her reverie, she finishes the dishes and reties the ever present apron draped about her neck, its red embroidered roses covering her like a thin sheet of armor.

Stretching stiff, arthritic joints, she makes her way past the old armoire that is struggling beneath the weight of her grandchildren's faces. Pausing to take a second look, she smiles to herself. Lightly brushing the fine dust from a simple, gold picture frame, she drifts from reality. Breathing slowly she relives each frozen moment, as her eyes bounce from one picture to the next: Christmases the children are probably too young to remember, pictures of David being tossed off the end of a dock by his Uncle Gerard, struggling to keep his head above water as he learned to swim. Reluctantly turning from the heavily laden shelves with a shadowy smile still on her dry, tanned lips,

she slips on her old, worn shoes. As she steps outside into the cool caress of the foggy morning, a light breeze tickles her bare ankles as she shuffles through the wet lawn, making her way toward her tiny garden shed. Like sponges drowning in the bottom of an old cast iron tub, her shoes suck up the heavy dew not yet burned off by the rising sun.

The ear shattering sound of Grandma Rosy rummaging through the stuffy building rises over the melodic chirping of several yellow finches resting in an apple tree nearby. Saws, hoes, and rakes are knocked from the walls in clattering succession, as she digs, looking for the particular shovel and bucket of flower bulbs she needs for today's planting. Stepping out of the petit building and into the tall, bent grass, she surveys her small, three acre garden; the cucumbers are coming up well and so are the tomatoes, but the kohlrabi is still taking its time. Letting out a raspy, delicate sigh, she sets to work replanting the flower bulbs she had dug up and dried the year before. Setting herself gently on her knees, she uses the small garden shovel to peck a six inch hole in the hard packed earth. Reaching into the bucket, she feels for the right flower bulb and carefully positions it in the bottom of the hole. Then gently, almost as if she is tucking a small child into bed, she pushes loose soil over the bulb and gives it a firm pat. Rising back on to her sore feet, she picks up her bucket and takes one familiar step to her right. Bending over, she sets down her tools and once again kneels in the crusty earth. Taking the shovel in the palm of her hand, she cuts yet another perfect hole. Thus, begins the first of many long rows yet to come.

Hours later in the intense noon sun, she stops to wipe off the thin, filmy sweat sheeting down her forehead and beading up at her brows. The long grass now stands straight and tall, the weight of the heavy dew no longer threatening to snap their wispy strands. Panting, she takes a brief swig off the garden hose she had turned on to soak the bulbs, as they lay in rest beneath their fertile blanket. Exhilarated by the sudden shock of the water's refreshing temperature as it freezes her worn, front teeth, she launches herself vigorously at her work. Until almost halfway through her planting she jumps, startled by an abrupt sound.

Turning her head back and forth, casting her eyes toward the bushes and near by cornfields, Rosemary searches diligently for the source of the potentially dangerous noise. Unable to identify it, she is puzzled by what she has heard. Cocking her ears she listens inventively as she sets back to work, tediously scraping holes in the ground and plugging them with flower bulbs. The brief interruption has transformed the atmosphere of her mood, from one of relaxing fulfillment to one of tension and heavily pervading fear. Edgy, Rosemary repeatedly looks behind her back as she works; at the age of sixty-seven she does not look forward to dying just yet. Or even worse being attacked and mauled by some strange dog or wild cat. Faintly hearing the sound once again, she immediately leaps to her feet and takes off running toward the house as fast as her weak knees will carry her, excited to be answering the rare, angelic ring of the old, dial telephone. Rushing into the house, she forgets to take off her muddy shoes as she reaches for the phone, loudly chastising herself over her senile fear "damn woman; you're getting too old to be afraid of a ring in phone."

After saying her goodbyes and placing the phone back on the receiver, with shaky, exuberant hands. Rosemary picks up the CB-radio and makes a call to Jim in his new combine. Hardly able to contain her joy, Rosemary announces to Jim and everyone else that may be listening in on the frequency, "Jim, the kids are coming!"

After hanging up the mike, Grandma Rosy gently eases herself into an overstuffed easy chair. With the mud on her hands beginning to dry, she reluctantly falls asleep, looking forward to having her old split level home filled with her young grandchildren's delighted screams and unrepressed energy. Gently waking my grandmother, I help her to bed. I am older now and can appreciate her for more than just cookies and sweets. Although she still works very hard in her garden, her bad back and small, thin frame are starting to get the best of her. The garden seems to shrink just a little more every year, as tough weeds begin to reclaim land lost to them so many years ago. She will push on, however, for as long as she is able; stubborn and fixed in her ways, she will not let anyone assist her while she is still able to force her body into action. The thick pain contorting her face, as she wields her garden hoe against the thick stems of her ancient adversaries, is as obvious as a black dot on a white sheet of paper. Life is not worth living unless you live it to the end. This is how it has always been and always will be for my grandmother, no matter how often or adamant her loved ones are in their offer to carry the burden of her labor. She loves life, and carries its weight well on two fragile shoulders.

Fire walker

Patrick Marsh

I used to live in a wondrous place
Under the deep lava rock, of a mountain face
Where the warm breeze brought perfect tranquility
Where the rhythmic tide brought a constant serenity
Paradise this was and always will be
Forever an emerald tear in my memory
Because on a faithful day, the mountain
Erupted in fire and flame
And it came running down the mountain
In a hurry to meet with us
In a hurry to cinder our flesh
We ran as fast as foot could
We wished we could fly away, we would
But as the fire water drew on tide
Their was not a place for us to hide
The youngest of my island kin
Grew frightened, by the red waters din
And ran out from my sweaty arms
Into the river of impending harm
It was there, I saw
My child be devoured, by the lava's maw
And through this terrible feeling now reared
That I knew no child I would make
Could ever be borne
Without me silently grieving
For this mournful feeling of kin leaving
Never in the ever
Shall I feel relieving
Whenever I sit with my new children to talk
I think of my first son
Who tried to fire walk

Liberty Realized

Patrick Carty

When I lost my freedom, I thought I would go mad. I nearly did, actually. Through stubborn defiance, I had stumbled headlong into a position where liberty was all but denied. Attracting the attention of a band of social workers, and after observing my apathetic behavior at length, they determined that I was to be sent to Northwood for behavioral adjustments. I found myself in a city that became my mental prison during the winter of 1999, a city that I had traveled to as a child with wide, unblinking eyes, the city of Duluth, Minnesota. Back then, as I watched the immense ships on the immense lake, and marveled at the ranks of buildings rearing above the mighty Lake Superior, I couldn't imagine a city more perfect. When I returned to Duluth after many years, the city was just as beautiful, though I wasn't nearly as content to be there.

The house that served as a base of operations, a proving ground and launching point both, was in the first ranks. Three stories on East 4th street became my home for a matter of months, though I only called it 'home' on one occasion, and I glowered every time I remembered that slip of the tongue. It was an old house, expensive, in a good state of upkeep, and on property with a prime view of the lake that can be mistaken for an ocean. That view is especially striking from the bedrooms facing east that looked over the dark, frigid waters. Waking up with a picturesque view of the most immense body of fresh water in the world every morning is a hard thing to beat, even while wearing invisible chains. I was never sure if any of the other kids in that house admired the lake waters like I did, but I never did get sick of catching sight of them.

I was up there to learn, learn to play the game, and eventually change my behavior based on those teachings. I had been a quick learner for being almost completely blind to reality, though the anguish generated from some of those lessons made the speed a negligible bonus. Through experience, I had gradually come to accept my lack of freedom and not fight the leash wielded by the Northwoods staff quite so hard. The anger and resentment towards the whole situation never subsided though, at times blinding me, at other times making my blood boil. If nothing else, that gave me the will to keep flinging off of the lumpy mattress that was my bed every morning and getting to East High School, to show those that were always observing that I could play their game.

Everything having to do with East was my responsibility, and mine alone. I slipped out of that house on 4th Street in the morning, and trudged back into it after school was done. But during the hours between, I was free, allowed to screw up or thrive at will. Although the temptation was enormous, I never once gave in to the desire to wander down to the lake and lay on the rocky shore. Much the good that I hadn't, as seen by the day that I was late for gym class, enough to miss roll call and nothing else. When I

returned to the house that afternoon, I was promptly chewed out for skipping class, which I hadn't come close to doing.

It was then that I realized the risk of the high stakes game I was playing, and the skill of those I was playing against. If I won, I would go home and everything would be forgiven, a little wiser for my time. If I lost, I would be kept there, ground into dust for not conforming, for not learning that defiance is a detrimental feature of freedom. I was reminded of those facts in subtle and not-so-subtle ways almost on a daily basis. The stress of being apparently ignored when I stepped out the door, ignored when I stepped back in it, but in reality being observed the whole time started to get to me. I felt like an electrified wire stretched to its limit.

I resisted the flow of events more than once, each time with steeper consequences, each time putting me another step farther from freedom. That included a bright, biting cold morning that I refused to go to school on the grounds that I felt sick. "You'd have to be puking all over your shoes for that excuse," Paul said, with his usual friendliness. Massive Paul, who quickly ceased being friendly and started being serious, all 275 pounds of him, all of it muscle, every ounce ready to back up his statement that if I didn't get my ass to school, he would take me by the neck and throw me into the English class I was coming close to being late for. I ended up playing the game that day like I did every other, aside from being driven to school for once, with Rammstein blaring on Paul's car stereo. Towering Paul, whom I later threatened, as only an idiotic kid would. Resisting never proved to be worth it, in the end.

Hours ticked by into days, days slipped into weeks, weeks fit into months. The cold of the city seeped into my bones to the point where I believed that I could step into icy Superior and feel right at home. Day in and day out the tension was scratching at my brain, trying to goad me into doing what would be catastrophic. But in late March, the game was coming close to being over. Around that time, I was given a grudging nod.

I stepped lightly out the door of the house into a new Spring Friday, where the crisp air greeted me. I had decided to leave my trustworthy jacket back in the bedroom that I shared with someone who was not progressing very well with the game, and the weather was being obliging. Catching a view of the lake from the shower-fogged bathroom window that morning, I had remembered to return its lifeless stare. The whole winter I had thought of the thing as a spectator, but realization slowly dawned that I had been drawing strength from its ageless waters.

With that sparkling water on my right, obscured by large houses and trees for most of the trip over to East, I took the time and enjoyed the stroll. Without a heavily laden backpack, the walk was decidedly pleasant. A few fluffy white clouds didn't keep the sun from sharing its warmth, and the sidewalks were completely clean of snow, revealing their true color. The smell of growing things wasn't too far off, but I would be out of the city and at home before I was blessed with those sweet fragrances. Still, it seemed as if the city had changed personalities overnight. Instead of setting up pitfalls, trying to get me to fail in my endeavors, it had switched tactics and was trying to win me

over with its beauty and pleasant weather. It made a good case for itself in that regard; the city is spectacular when it's not trying to freeze you into submission.

I pushed open a front door of the stark old brick-and-mortar building that is East and headed for the office. The long building's cavernous hallways were nearly empty, seeing that Spring Break was mostly in effect, and the vacuum that remained was unsettling. As I walked into the cramped, stuffy office where students parlayed with the secretaries that maintained the school, I thought, not for the first time, that what I was doing might not go smoothly.

"I'd like to withdraw," I stated without pleasantries or delays. I had been waiting to say that for months, and planning it for weeks, in anticipation of being allowed to enroll in the high school I should have been at all along, back home in Anoka. Aside from being taken aback for a second, the plump woman, most likely a mother of children older than I, pulled out a couple of papers from one side of her cramped desk for me to sign. Apparently this, like many other things, had been organized behind the scenes for the most part, which I found both reassuring and distressing. Signing the papers, I felt something vaguely reminiscent of adrenaline enter my bloodstream, which was accompanied by euphoria. The school had been a prison and a playground, tormentor and teacher, and I had just withdrawn.

I thanked the woman, and proceeded to strut down the still empty hallway, and out the side door that I had always exited the school from, only this time under drastically different circumstances. A great weight was gone, as quickly gone as it had arrived months before. Grinning wider with every step, until the grin broke out in a smile, I stopped on a part of the cement sidewalk with a direct line-of-sight to the vast lake. The smile I had worn since giving up the pen finally slipped off my face as I stood there, amidst the barren gray trees and ritzy old gray multi-story houses. Reflecting on lessons hard learned, it dawned on me that I was a free man. Relief hit like winter storm surge, and I shuddered from the psychological chill that touched what the winter cold never could.

I had won their game and reclaimed what is granted as birthright in this country, what I had given up not realizing what it was or how I was doing it. While watching those dark, endless, smoothly immortal waters, the euphoria I had initially felt in the school didn't subside. It did, in fact, settle right alongside the natural rhythm of my heart's beating, never dulling, never ceasing, never becoming familiar. Finally, after fifteen years of being American, I understood what it really meant to be free.

Winter's Wing

Mark Riverblood

Life of ache, season then year
Autumn of tooth. Mornings
With swollen orbs and unseen tears.

Lonesome spring. Yet much to yield...
Blue edge of universe doth beckon;
Down the stairs and out, wish upon hope

Beauty, strength, and grace!
Floating slow in zigzag magic,
Yes! Behold—he would marry this butterfly

Vows imbued by graceful cloud.
A drop of nectar, one of honey;
Promise. Mixed and placed on finger's ring

Heavenly swirling joy! Rushing
Kaleidoscope o' flower and color.
Love, World and Soul through eyes

Twilight awakens new delight;
And Bliss. To the meadow, dew drops
Lead the way. Carrying her, delicate to their Sun

Dawn and day 'til fall he learns,
Greeting the blossoms – each
Scent, yet another tiny, cherished witness

FROST

Icy terror. Edges close in.
No dew will light the path, He stumbles,
Falls again. Knowing grass slices trembled flesh

Withheld breath. Place her gingerly

In the window, muted rays warm fading
Body. Wings, once pure; Dull, dry and tattered.

Dreaded now first light-
Silent thumping now up and down the pane.
Scales raining, he cups her with crushing hands.

Vision wrenched with pang and sorrow.
Bleached bones, Earth and Past command –
Forgo, it is time. Return stolen Love to Sky.

Awake but dead, stabbing shame.
Blindly down to gravely sill.
He knelt. Then Raised to lips,

A withered wing.

Waiting for You

James Autio

I thank God
that the water under this frozen river
doesn't seem to be flowing
enough to give a clear picture
of the awkward thinness
upon which I stand.

I could be in the warming shack
sharing cocoa with an available beauty,
trying to find my way inside her snowpants,

yet I'm standing here
– God help me –
on this fucking ice
despite the occasional
cracklings.

The Great and Infinite I Am

James Snyder

The Great and Infinite I am...

I am that scared little boy.
I am that silly boy that grew out of it and now
I am a frozen moment in time
that is me today and someone new tomorrow.

I am a ball of fire
when I am aware of myself and
right now I am aware of who I am.

I am a wicked writer who
commands prose
from the depths of my idea machine
and I am aware that if one piece,
one cog, wheel, belt,
one hose is missing
I am not functioning.

I am a deep, dark, vast region of thought
that spins a tangled web of existence
through the line of time that marks my page.

I am a mixed up adrenaline junky.
Whose addiction feeds off the external
and steals lines from the drama of life
to save for those who follow.

I am a steam shovel
that picks up the broken pieces,
the fragmented thoughts,
and recycles them into works of art
to be enjoyed by those
with no license to do the same.

I am arrogant for good reason.

I am humble for the same.

I am an arrogant, humble professional
who once at work shows his skill
in such a way that
awe must necessarily follow.

I AM RELENTLESS!

I am full of myself at this moment.
A cup of thought that at any second
will tip and cover the floor that
is my reality. Flooding and drowning
the microorganisms that are my misfortunes.
My misgivings.
My mistakes.

I am a cancer on the skin of the planet and
I am the hope for the cure.

I am anxious like the lion in charge of the pride,
tired of searching for the answers,
tired of always looking over my shoulder
for the young challenger.
I am ruling my pride with a gentle hand
because I am fair
like the perfect court.

I am a sword.
Doubled edged. One side
for judgment and
the other to console.

I am old and young.
I am dark haired with a few
gray pieces of wisdom that elude
to a limited amount of stress.

I am a tired, confused human,

whose soul is wrought
with enough iron that
my will is one and the same
with destiny,...immovable.

I am finished!

That Fateful Morning

Kevin Wojciechowski

Getting up at five o'clock in the morning is hard enough, much less getting up on a cold, wet, breezy day to go deer hunting. Going hunting is not only about escaping from everyday worries; it is also about being alone in a dimension that only you, yourself, can reach. Hunting is a joy, a thrill, and for some, it as a way of life. For those who have never experienced hunting, the kill may be the only understandable aspect. However, hunting is more than just the kill; it is like a mini-vacation that is so close to everyday life, yet a vast wilderness away, even if it is in your own backyard. It is a ritual, every fall to awake early before the sun has even risen, get geared up and motivated for what hopefully will be an adventurous hunt.

Awaking from a cold, dead sleep to an annoying beeping sound in my ear was not how I wanted to start the last day of the 2003 shotgun season. My hopes were to wake up refreshed, ready, and excited to go. Dazed, I somehow recalled the previous night's call from my grandfather, stating he would not be attending the hunt this particular morning. I was disappointed and tired, and not at all raring to go, but also not willing to let my discontentment get the best of me. I had decisions to make that could change the outcome for the day. I could either walk the treacherous mile and a half through the cold, wet, and marshy swamp to my tree stand, or I could hunt in my grandfather's tree stand which was only a half mile through the woods. Each stand has its pros. My tree stand was located out in the middle of nowhere which made for a very calming atmosphere, with no one around to share the same experience. Thus, I am the only one to tell any exciting adventures that I happen to stumble upon. On the other hand, my grandfather's stand was very close to my father and brother's stand and the walk was less enduring.

Dressing for the long day ahead entailed putting layers upon layers of clothing on, in an attempt to stay at least half warm. The layers were heavy and dragged me down even more than I already was. For safety reasons, I placed my blaze orange vest over my thick, Columbia winter jacket. It was a tight fit. The last piece of important clothing to put on, in my mind, was my Remington hat. Now I was ready.

As I picked up my Remington 870 shotgun, along with my Winchester slugs, scent bombs, a buck knife, and some hand-warmers I found in the garage, I analyzed the weather outdoors. It was blowing snow and not at all inviting. I decided to stay close to the rest of the hunting party. Thus, I would be hunting out of my grandfather's stand. I then loaded everything into my truck, jumped in and drove the five miles out to the land

On the drive over, I saw all the usual blaze orange drivers in their vehicles making their way out to their own plots of land. The sight of the road kill from the previous night was unpleasant. It was a doe and her fawn. The time was 5:30 a.m. and the sun had just started to peek over the horizon. I was almost there. As I made the last

turn into my uncle's plot of land, my anticipation grew stronger. I could feel my heart beating faster as I prepared myself for an unforeseen kill.

I made the journey out to my grandfather's tree stand with my younger brother, my father, and my uncle. My heart was still pounding. I wasn't sure if it was due to the anticipation of the hunt or the effort of trudging through the cold and wind. Whatever it was, it didn't matter. The thrill of adventures ahead was far more important than my state of being. I made the short, but steep climb into the stand, and got situated on my hunting chair. It was still too dark to see very far. Nevertheless, out of the corner of my eye, I caught the tail end of four deer darting into the thicket. The first signs of a good day of hunting were shining through with vibrant colors.

I settled back in my stand, longing to get another chance at a kill. I waited and listened. It was like an eternity. The wind had begun to howl. In an attempt to keep warm, I tried to align myself with the tree to block the cold wind. I started to regret my earlier choice. Other than the four whitetails I saw darting into the brush just before sunrise, I hadn't seen anything other than squirrels playing tag from tree to tree. I started to daydream about the possible adventures I might have experienced if I had made the choice to take the longer, more enduring walk out to my own tree stand. The huge antler scrape marks I had seen the previous day were flashing through my head over and over again. Images of huge bucks were haunting me, like a nightmare, yet so real. If only I wouldn't have been so lazy earlier, I could have been setting my rifle sight on a trophy buck.

I was startled from my unpleasant daydream by a sudden movement off in the distance. Not more than one-hundred yards from me stood, what I thought to be, two does making their way towards the stand where my father and my brother were positioned. After taking into consideration the distance and the obstacles blocking the path of my shot, I concluded there was no possible shot from my location. I once again shifted my attention elsewhere, again watching the squirrels chase one another from tree to tree. I looked at my watch for the first time since I got out to my stand, it was ten minutes to eight. Only another fifty-five minutes until "get-down" time.

The cold and wind continued to worsen. I attempted to think warm thoughts. My mind wandered through some wonderful experiences I had in my grandfather's stand. I recalled my first doe from that stand, the stories my grandfather told me while hunting, and the countless hours since then coming out empty-handed.

My thoughts were interrupted about ten after eight, when I heard what sounded like someone crinkling tissue paper. The noise was odd. I looked around for any movement. There, right next to a beaten path through the woods, was a little grey fox running through the leaves. My hopes were diminished. The cold weather had begun to get the better of me and I thought about getting out of the stand. It seemed useless to keep sitting there. I looked at my watch again. It was twenty after eight and time was not on my side. I knew there would not be an afternoon hunt. That left only twenty-five

minutes left to get a kill and make the day a success. I was tired, cold and most of all, frustrated.

My mind drifted into a half-awake state. I wasn't thinking about anything, just staring straight ahead, trying to pass the time. A doe ran behind my stand and startled me back to reality. To my amazement an eight-point buck was following not far behind. He crossed in front of my stand, not more than twenty yards from me. I released the safety off my rifle, placed my sight right behind the shoulder of the buck, and pulled the trigger. Immediately the deer began to run. I couldn't tell whether or not the bullet hit. I sighted the deer in again and shot. That time I knew the deer had been hit because it fell against a tree almost instantly. My adrenaline was pumping. I jumped up. I was exhilarated, shocked, and emotional all at the same time. There was my first buck laying on the ground, not more than forty yards away.

A few moments later, I heard two more shots come from the direction of my father's and my brother's stand. In my heart I knew that my brother had also just gotten his first buck. I waited impatiently. Finally, I decided enough time had passed to ensure that my buck was deceased and it was safe to get down out of the stand. I walked over to see my buck. Just as I got to the buck, my father and my brother were coming up the path. Without saying a word, my father gave me a thumbs-up, meaning that Kyle, my brother, had gotten a deer. I answered back the same way.

The feeling of shooting my first buck was unbelievable and almost indescribable. It was somewhere between that "new car smell" and winning the grand prize. One thing was for sure, I felt like I was on top of the world. If only my grandfather had been there to see both of his grandsons shoot their first bucks.

Artificial Palindromes

Leland Kruse

Where's Jesus

Oh... there he is...

in that bottle

wait a second...

that doesn't say Jesus

it says jack daniels

...I always get those words mixed up

Daddy

Anna Thurmer

It was fall, my father's favorite time of year. The twin maple trees in our back yard were aflame in brilliant reds and golds; and piles of leaves sat near the porch, begging us to jump in them. The air tasted cold and smelt of ice and frost; winter was only a few short weeks away and already its spirit hovered ahead, just out of sight. Yellow grass crackled bitterly under our feet, and we wore winter jackets fresh out of storage. Summer was almost over, and my parents were getting separated.

We walked outside to sit between twin maple trees dad and I had shot birds out of with my b-b gun earlier that summer. My father sat Indian style in the dry yellow grass, my sister on one side and I on the other, and with his arms draped across our shoulders tried to make us understand the reason for their separation and the ensuing consequences. He talked forever, his dull blue eyes never wavering as he calmly told us the most heartbreaking news of our young lives. We sat there, listening with bated breath, blinking back tears, trying not to let our emotions take over and leave us unable to hear anymore. He was so intelligent; everything he said made sense, and he had this way of just grabbing hold of my mind and changing my feelings and ideas so that they matched his exactly. I never once doubted what he was saying. He spoke of my mother and him not getting along, of my mother acting crazy all the time, of his inability to control her, and of my mother's excessive lying. We were like a pond, and his words were little drops of poison slowly polluting the waters so that everything looked distorted and fiction could be mistaken for fact. He very effectively poisoned me against my mother that way, making me loath her for years afterwards. Near the end of his speech, he lost the calm, patronizing way he always spoke to us, and I saw real emotion from him for the first time.

"Come here my goat boys!" he cried, grabbing us both in a fierce hug. I remember the deep lines in his face seemed to sink a little more into his skin, and the lines on his forehead drew down into his slightly bushy black eyebrows as his eyes filled with water. He ran a big, ink-stained hand through his close-cropped black hair that had just started to gray above his ears. He pinched the bridge of his nose between two thick fingertips and exhaled loudly. "I love you all so much, more than anything in this world! I would give anything to make you happy, anything!" His voice cracked on the last of it and the tears started to roll freely down his face. "I'm not proud of a lot of things in my life, but I am proud of you girls. No matter what happens, your father will always love and care for you more than you could ever imagine. I promise you that." On a cold fall day in Aitkin Minnesota, my father, a six-foot tall man with infinite strength and reserve, hugged us both tightly and sobbed like a child.

What I didn't know at the time was that my father had a severe alcohol problem, which resulted in my mother having to wear sunglasses and long sleeved turtlenecks to

hide her most recent punishment at his hands. I remember the fights, the yelling and swearing followed by my mother crying and trying to leave but always coming back, she always came back. This separation was, in fact, only the first of several to follow. But we did live alone for almost a year, and I cried for my father more than I have ever cried for anyone. I know now that the reason they separated that first time was because my father had been drinking the night before and had blackened my mother's eye and strangled her so hard that it left a red welt around her throat for days. My mother was finally trying to free us all from this abusive relationship, but I was blind to that. I only knew that my father, my "Daddy", was leaving. I didn't know that he had really been punishing our family for years, punishing us all with his words, punishing my mother with his fists, punishing himself with his drinking.

I did some major growing up that year; I lost a lot of sleep over what happened, and most of my innocence left when I watched him drive out of the garage and turn right at the road, the old ford truck quickly dwindling into nothing. My relationship with my mother changed very quickly over the first few months; slamming doors, cold shoulders, and sharp words became commonplace. We fought almost every day, and I was always eager to blame her for everything. I hated her for letting my father leave, and she knew it. It must have killed her to know that after all he had done to our family I still preferred him to her and actually thought her the cause of all the problems in our family. It took months before I could let her into my life again, that talk with my father was still so fresh and close to my heart and I was too stubborn to hear the truth at first because I still loved him so much.

Why this particular memory of my father stays so clear in my mind is a mystery, but it's there. To this day I recall the maple trees in our back yard, my mom's little white garden fence half buried in dead leaves, the chill scent on the air, my father's old brown flannel shirt with his pipe and tobacco pouch in the front pocket, the sound of him banging that old black pipe against his hand to empty the ashes before he lit it up and that familiar bluish-gray smoke rising to hang about his face, and my feelings come rushing in hard enough to take my breath away. I remember the feel of his tears on my forehead as his strong arms held me, rocking gently back and forth in time to his sobs. I remember the way his voice cracked as he talked, becoming unintelligible as the tears came pouring out. Most of all, I remember the way he smelled; his half-and-half tobacco mingling with his after shave and the sweaty smell of his favorite old shirt. These smells always meant stability, safety, trust. I would never think of my father the same way again.

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