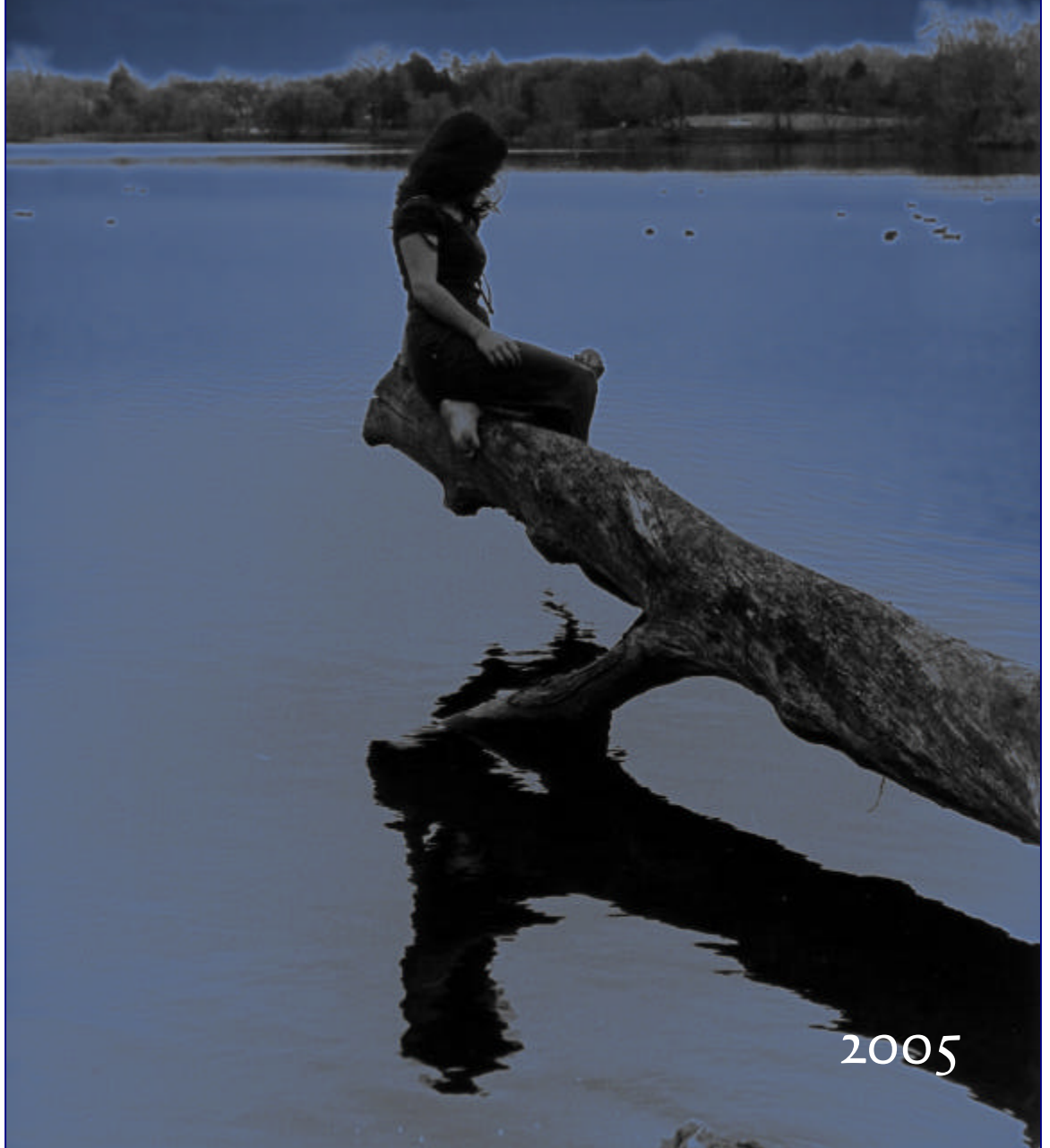


The Rapids Review



2005

The Rapids Review

A Literary Magazine

2005

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*Connecting with Art: Firing the Imagination Writing Contest***FIRST PLACE WINNER**

Inspired by "Clothesline" by Wilfred Loring

La Ropa de mi Familia

Patrick Marsh

My name is Rosa
Though Ms. Wetherby calls me Rose.
Rose, a red flower adorned with thorns;
Rose, a red flower which carries beauty even as it wilts.
But my real name is Rosa,
And I am not from this city.

I am not from these homes,
White as this clothing that catches the Colorado wind,
Our the white clouds meandering across the sky
Silhouetting lawns a springtime green,
Shadowed by powerful cars as big as trains
That sound as thunder does when it moves.
I am not from Colorado,
Or even The North as we illegal aliens have named it.

I stare at the green lawns
As I hang the white clothing upon the clothesline,
I know these Americans do not know the color green
As I do.
I am from the deepest green
The jungles of Peru in the south,
Where great green trees as big as these homes
Tower and block the sky blue heavens
The trees give refuge to the chattering monkeys
And great colored birds,
Which dash between the wide-limbed eyes,
Knocking fruit adrift in the wake of their feathery stream,
That would fall and split open on the jungle floor,
Which my Little Brother and I would collect
Under the rustles of the leaves.

The old brick village my home
Sat in the cluster of the green mountains,
Quietly in one of the green mountains velvet laps.
Our little brick village my home,
As old as my father's name,
Had a quiet stream running between our stone homes,
That at night gathered the surrounding candlelight
And turned the night-cloaked stream
Already soaking up the starlight
Into a warm and cozy orange.

As I hang these clothes
Upon this high clothesline,
I feel the force of the cold Colorado wind
Tickling the calluses on my brown wrists
The calluses I carved in the velvet mountain falls,
Where with my mother washed our clothing clean
In the dark pool beneath the white waterfall.
My mother would sing and hum as we washed,
And splash water over my face.
Then, as we finished, my little brother would wait in the jungle,
And leap out, and scare us on the jungle path.
We would then walk together and then wait
To meet my father returning from the fields
Covered with dirt from the fresh tilled earth.

All this above me was before the Men came,
The Men With Guns,
Who made my father work the fields,
And took all the crops he raised away from him,
Always taunting him with a rifle barrel
Until my father rebelled
And was killed somewhere in the jungle.
They then took my mother in a truck
To the green mountain's valley
Where I heard the gunshots echo.
So my brother and I fled to The North.
And here we are.

Now, here, I work for Ms. Wetherby
Keep her house, make her food,
Wash her clothing.
She showed me how she wanted them washed,
In a great boxed machine of sorts,
With dials, knobs, and switches
That I did not understand. So,
I washed the clothes with my hands,
Between my callused wrists,
And heard my mother's
Sweet humming,
That I now hum
To only myself.



Clothesline

Wilfred Loring

(Non-student artwork owned by ARCC)

*Connecting with Art: Firing the Imagination Writing Contest***SECOND PLACE WINNER**

Inspired by "Sedna" by Unknown Artist

Sustenance

Bill Haley

The tale spoke on weathered lips,
an old hunter on young ice, cracked,
exposing its emerald veins.

Like spirits that dance in white bears,
we too spanned the salted fathoms,
to seek our sustenance beneath the yellow eye,
which never fell from summer's sky.

You
embraced our feet with oiled skins,
ornate our necks with bleached bones,
gave us strength with dried flesh.

Together
the bounty faded with the closing of the yellow eye.
Fat and buoyant, we separated to replenish lost progeny, for men returned with
plenty, and men never seen again.
Now the harpoon rests, white with age,
the cold grows warm and the seas impure,
as we pass to history alone,
carved from a single stone.



Sedna

Artist Unknown

(Non-student artwork owned by ARCC)

Connecting with Art: Firing the Imagination Writing Contest

THIRD PLACE WINNER

Inspired by "Clothesline" by Wilfred Loring

Summer Breeze

Stephanie R. Pruitt

The warm summer breeze,
Smells of Lilac in the air,
Blows the freshly washed clothes on the line.
The clothes dance
As if they have their own spirits.
They wave and they flap
As they try to get loose from the line.
But the clothespins have a tight grip,
So the clothes can only dance on the line,
While the warm summer breeze passes by.

Connecting with Art: Firing the Imagination Writing Contest

HONORABLE MENTION

Inspired by "Sedna" by Unknown Artist

Sedna

Jennifer Jamison

Man and beast alike
Thriving on the ocean's gifts
Live in harmony

*Connecting with Art: Firing the Imagination Writing Contest***HONORABLE MENTION**

Inspired by "Clothesline" by Wilfred Loring

Memories Hanging on the Line

Jill Naslund

Clothespins hanging on the line,
Bring back memories of days gone by.
Mother hanging our clothes to dry,
Day after day,
the clothes would toss from side to side,
waiting anxiously to completely dry.
Sounding like a ship's mast, as it sets out to sea again.
My brothers and I used to play amongst
the clothes on the line
Making tents, pirate's ship, and carnivals for Jerry's kids.
Summer after summer,
Finding secret passages through the colored maze.
We begin to board our ship again.
Hearing the laughter of years gone by.
I hang my own clothes to dry.
The clothesline takes me back through time
To a place where we laughed and played all day.
Johnny's batman shirt and jeans flew in the wind,
And Jill's sheets set sail for the west
during a summer's wind.
While Jimmy's swimsuit hangs on by one pin,
I hear my own children creating a plan.
I come too, with tears in my eyes.
How lucky I had been to be with my brothers again.
Only in memory, although amazingly real,
The clothesline had taken me back through time.
Realizing where I had been, laughing at myself,
I begin to hang the basket of clothes in the wind.



Untitled

Jahan Vafaei

The Dream Weaver

Patrick Marsh

I dreamt of the dream weaver
Spinning its treasured dream
Up and rising from the cloudy depths
On tremulous wing rising
To spread its wings amongst the pillars
And sink its web into the floor
Until the web lies strong and complete
Like no other dream was before
And left glittering in the sun
For all the muses to adore

I dreamt of the dream weaver
But only dreamed
Nothing but a vision beneath my eyes
That ends with realities scream
So in the morning I stagger to the mirror
And saw a small piece of dream appear
There stood the dream weaver

Later, We Ate

Kevin P. McCahill

“He doesn’t understand.”

A phrase used often when I’m around.

“*Ting bu dong*,” I say, the foreign Chinese words stumbling off my tongue.

The unintelligible language—the badge of a foreigner making it clear that he is far from home.

I sit in the front seat of a taxi, idly thumbing the strap of my camera bag.

The headmaster is in the backseat screaming at his wife, her body pressed against the hood, refusing to let us leave.

The noise is heavy and so my students are silent, pressed like ants into the cement by the force of his anger.

And for once, I am glad I can’t understand a word he is saying.

He shrieks again and swings the taxi door open, steps out, and then closes it.

Hard.

Earthquake hard.

It shatters the window’s glass into a thousand mirrors which now reflect moment.

He pounces at her, slaps her, grabs her hair and throws her to the ground.

“So sorry, something about another woman,” a student whispered to me, his eyes locked on the scene.

She gets up and he slaps her again before they are separated.

And all the while, I, a dirty American kid in a torn t-shirt, sat trapped in the front seat.

It was only then that I realized I was in a foreign land, with strangers.

**Tomahawk G10 Linerlock –
3.5 Inch Stainless Steel Blade**

Renee Grissom

He borrowed my knife
and used it to cut
our names
and my heart
into the bark of the birch tree,
out back in the yard
hidden from view
where only we would know.
The incisions were clean
and deep, the kind
that take half a lifetime to heal.
It hasn't been half a lifetime
but it has been six years
new layers of bark
have grown over the tree
so no one would guess
at the scars beneath,
but when I close my eyes
and look inside
I can still see him cutting
his name with my knife
into the heart of my birch tree.

gears

kalen c. passa

this will have to suffice as the venue.
a skull cut from the carbon carbon copy.
transparent eyelids keep me safe always awake.
fluorescent heart crossed by ribcage
constructed smile overexposure to ivory.
arms like wings like leonardo's drawings.
serotonin and literature learned stimuli.
random eye movement deep sleep and data.
a concept of zero naturally invented chemistry
i carry this shell

&
the sou
nd of t
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n.

Jake's Shadow

Bill Haley

Jake wasn't out of prison long before forgetting he was ever there. A botched convenient store robbery had got him nearly 5 years in the slammer. Now he was 29, back home, living in the same house he grew up in with his divorced Mother, still unable or unwilling to find work. Jake always thought of himself as a thinker, and he started to think all right, like how to make a quick buck, selling come dope or ripping somebody off. Yah, that's how Jake thought; hell, he'd even steal from a church for God's sake. Jake always kept his eyes peeled; he liked to sit in a chair and look out the window just in case a good idea or opportunity would pop up in that little warped mind of his, and soon a big one would pop up, a real big one.

Mrs. Blanchard was Jake's long time neighbor. She knew Jake better than he knew himself, because Blanch – as she liked to be called – just happened to have been Jake's high school English teacher. She thought of Jake as a boy that was headed down a one way street, a highway to hell to be exact. Why, just the thought of that boy living in that house raised her blood pressure. Blanch was retired. Her husband had passed away some years before, leaving her a substantial amount of money. She was a real sharp dresser and liked to wear expensive jewelry, especially gold.

Jake was still sitting at the window, dreaming and thinking of just how he could get rich when he noticed an aging Mercedes coming down the street—it was Blanch. He watched carefully as she pulled into her driveway and stepped out of her car. Her sequined bracelet glistened in the setting sun as she made her way towards the front door of her modest split rambler home. All those tiny, gold plates dancing around that bracelet looked mighty fine to Jake; “like a million bucks,” he thought. He wanted it and planned to get it.

Blanch usually hit the sack early, reading a chapter or two of a favorite novel before falling asleep. That night, a new moon had pulled the shade down on the usually placid neighborhood; it was black as coal. “Perfect night to get me that bracelet,” Jake thought to himself as he walked out to his garage. There he grabbed a flashlight, crowbar, and black stocking cap, then smothered axle grease over his exposed skin. Old Jake looked the part alright, just like a pro.

The evening air was thick with mid-summer humidity, still and quiet; why you could cut it with a knife. The soft glissando of a train's horn echoed from a distance as Jake made his way toward Blanch's yard. Jake figured he'd come in through the basement window since thick rose bushes secluded it. To Jake's surprise, Blanch had left the window open. The washer had overfilled the laundry tub that day, soaking the carpet. She hoped the fresh air would dry it out. Jake had to turn on his flashlight to see the best way to slip down through the window, when suddenly, he caught sight of a little lizard scurrying across the sill, scaring the shit out of him. The flashlight beam then jittered

across the opposing basement wall as Jake looked for a way to slip in. Then he saw a couch directly under the window, and Jake was now in. He quickly found his way to the stairs. His heart began to race as he slowly made his way up the steps. Opening the door he figured he's turn off the flashlight and make his way in the dark so not to wake Blanch, but now that new moon began to haunt him. Jake couldn't see a thing, but he knew he couldn't turn back now. He made his way past the kitchen and into the hall, but old Blanch was a light sleeper and heard someone coming up the stairs. Blanch was no frail woman. She kept an old hunting rifle that her husband had left her under the bed; now it was cocked and loaded as she waited for the door to swing open.

Jake was sure which room was Blanch's, for as night fell he watched for the last light to go out, and he knew it was the last door on the left. With crowbar in one hand, he reached for the door handle, thinking, "Should I open it slowly or just barge in..." He opted for the latter. Meanwhile, Blanch drew her sights on the center of the door, and then, while Jake was trying to get his last bit of nerve to bust in, the wooden floor gave out a loud "creak". Jake froze, losing his cool, and began to sweat profusely, wondering if she heard it. Well, Blanch sure did, and remained steadfast, as the rifle was reassuring. Blanch figured it was most likely Jake and called to him, "Jake is that you? Get your ass out now." This only angered Jake; after all, he never did liked being told what to do, especially by Blanch. Jake had to sit through that damn English class while being constantly told what to do by that woman and certainly wasn't going to take it anymore. Anger turned to blind faith; Jake reached for the door handle, fumbling, turning it the wrong way. Suddenly the night air broke with a loud pop. A light instantly came into Jake's head as pain ripped through the center of his face. It was green, purple, white, and red, moving around like a lava lamp, or the center core of a hydrogen bomb before its inferno rises towards the heavens. Slowly it faded, as if you shut off a neon light in a pitch black room, while its florescence glow continues till it's just a shadow, just a shadow, just a...

Strella at Breakfast

Crischelle Navalta

She said, “You put too much salt—
it’s hurting my gums!”
my little niece told me
as she ate the Spanish pancakes
I had made. Gently I asked,
“Why do they hurt?”
“Because I got a cut in my mouth,”
she explained in her child voice
as she looked at me and smiled
sweetly. I felt forgiven
as I sat back, sipping coffee,
watching her go about her
business with breakfast.

She ate with her small hands
using the tips of delicate fingers
to pick up the sticky fried rice,
as she dipped her fried potatoes
and eggs in catsup.
All together in one plate
she *is* her food—
a bit of Filipino—a bit of
old colonial Spain—and then
this thing we call “American.”



Ocean Painting

Justin Cameron

Born in America

Ungia-Banah “Jay” R. Morrow

I was born in this country prematurely,
With the first instinct to fight,
For what my savor died for and the Lord blessed upon me,
And I did—for weeks I fought!
As my mother cried hopelessly,
In that hospital room watching innocently,
As the passion flowed through me,
Giving me strength from my veins,
To hands to my feet,
In till that day she could console me and love me,
Before America could corrupt me,
And influence me,
Before I walked blindly,
Searching for Martin’s Dream,
With no help from lady liberty,

My mother raised me from a sick baby,
To a grown man,
Who America has drove crazy,
Whether it’s from my own ignorance,
To shit I see on T.V. and witness daily,
To the regulations they try to impose on me,
This country may threaten to lock my body up,
But I’ll be damned,
If it can take my soul away from me,
America ain’t God,
So why the fuck should I pledge allegiance to thy,
And shed blood for a president who don’t give a fuck about me,
But no matter what I am:
Born in America, Raised in America...
And I will continue grow in America,
Be more than just American.

Eraser

Leland-Jason Kruse

When we kiss

It's like our lips melt together.

Two lovers,

passionately embraced

We're on fire...

Children playing amidst the ashes

Of a friendship

...erased

Driving Dad Crazy

Jennifer Jamison

"In the course of twenty crowded years one parts with many illusions. I did not wish to lose the early ones. Some memories are realities, and are better than anything that can ever happen to one again."

Willa Cather, *My Antonia*

I have many fond childhood memories of my visits to my great-grandparents' house: the pungent odor that would nearly take my breath away—which I only came to appreciate in my adulthood; the old-fashioned candy jar full of stale, spongy, orange circus peanuts always centered on their kitchen table; picking chokecherries from the giant emerald bushes in their backyard. However, my favorite, most vivid memory of my visits with them is the day my dad first let me drive.

They lived at the bottom of a hill on a beautiful lakeside lot surrounded by white birches and glasslike, lily pad-filled water. Their rickety, weather-beaten dock was the hottest spot for crappies on the entire lake. Many times a boat would be parked in front of the dock, and my great-grandpa would shoo the anglers away so his granddaughters could fish.

I was fourteen, and it was a scorching hot day. The humid air hung on us like a heavy wool coat. My dad, sister, two young cousins, and I had just finished fishing and were packing our gear into the van when my dad asked if I'd like to drive us back to our cabin, only a short distance away. Shocked and amazed, I didn't respond with words but quickly ran around to the driver's side and hopped in before he changed his mind. The lamb's wool seat cover was itchy and hot against the back of my thighs, but I didn't care; I was actually going to drive! My thoughts were racing. What would my friends think? They would be jealous. I would be the talk of the eighth graders. My sister, who was ten, stood waiting for him to say he was kidding, but he never did, and she reluctantly climbed into the van and took her place on the shaggy bench seat in the back. This was long before the days of car seats and mandatory seat belt laws, so my small cousins, aged six and seven, also climbed in, and, as a treat, my dad let them sit in the green and white webbed, aluminum folding lawn chairs that we had been using on the dock.

Our family van was a 1976 ripe tomato-colored relic with orange and yellow vinyl graphics on its sides. It was originally a cargo van, so there were just two nappy, lamb's wool-covered bucket seats up front and no windows on the sides—just two small square ones on the back doors. The interior was quite luxurious in its day, with its wall-to-wall-to-floor-to-ceiling multi-brown shag carpeting and a U-shaped bench seat in the back that converted to a bed. It also had a coveted 8-track tape player and two boxy speakers—one on each side of the "U" flanked by rather ornately carved wooden posts much like the posts used in a home's stair railing. There was a rectangular, wood-

paneled cabinet that sat alongside the wall of the van behind the driver's seat that contained an assortment of auto supplies: an ice scraper, washer fluid, bungee cords, and other necessities. This was exciting to sit on as it was freestanding, and when my dad took left turns too quickly, the cabinet would tip, and we would have to catch ourselves so as not to fall off and roll across the floor of the van.

I tugged the seat forward so my feet would reach the pedals and, at my dad's suggestion, adjusted the rearview mirror—not that I could see anything through the chocolate velvet curtains that covered the back windows. Everyone was ready as I twisted the key in the ignition. I shifted into drive and punched the gas pedal; the van lurched forward, causing my cousins to giggle loudly. I eased my foot off of the pedal and began making my way around the iris garden, which was no small feat as there was no power steering in the van. It took all my strength as I wrestled with the leather-covered steering wheel and snaked my way around the garden, driving intermittently (only a wheel's width) on both the lawn and the garden. I slowly made it through the turn-a-round and began making my way up the long, narrow, winding driveway.

As I passed the picture window, I clearly recall seeing my great-grandpa grinning and giving me the thumbs-up. I swelled with pride until I realized that while I was busy watching him, I had driven off the driveway and onto his lawn. I quickly jerked the wheel and got us back on track. I continued weaving back and forth up the drive, alongside the lake, past the dock and the stone fire pit. The hill was getting steeper, and my dad said to give it more gas. The van lurched again as I pressed the pedal harder and urged the van up the hill. We were moving faster, and I was starting to feel a little cocky as I felt more in control. Suddenly, with the intensity of an air horn, my dad yelled, "STOP!" I immediately stomped the brake to, and nearly through, the floor of the van, causing everyone, and miscellaneous fishing gear, to lunge forward. My sister narrowly missed being speared by a flying fishing rod, and my cousins were simultaneously trapped in the now-collapsed folding lawn chairs.

My red-faced, bulging-eyed dad was erupting with profanities. "Jesus Christ! What the hell are you doing?" I looked at him like a deer caught in headlights. "You can't lock up the Goddamn brakes at the top of the Goddamn driveway!"

I tried to plead my case. "You told me to stop."

"Yes, I told you to stop, not stomp. You can't just pull out onto the Goddamn road without looking both ways." It never occurred to me to stop and look both ways. After all, we were on the outskirts of a small town—population twenty-something.

I reluctantly crawled out of the driver's seat and, to my horror, noticed that passengers and rods weren't the only things strewn about the vehicle. The minnow bucket, and its three double scoops of crappie minnows, had spilled all over the brown shaggy floor. My dad must have seen the look on my face for he turned and saw the mess, too. He jumped out of the passenger seat and yelled what we already knew. "Jesus Christ! There are minnows all over the Goddamn van!"

As he slid the side door open, a wave of minnows poured out onto the steamy, rocky driveway. He now stood, speechless, staring at the silvery pile of minnows flip-flopping in the sandy gravel, gradually suffocating in the dirt. He shook his head and ran his hand through his hair. I was afraid of the fury that was coming. But, then I saw the lines in his face soften and the corners of his mouth turn slightly upward. He calmly scooped up the minnows—most were already dead.

My cousins had quietly escaped the grasp of the collapsed lawn chairs with a little help from my sister. I instinctively climbed into the passenger seat, as I knew this excursion had come to an end. We rode the rest of the way—the whole way, I guess, except for the length of the driveway—to the cabin in silence. None of us dared make a sound. The smell of lake water and dead fish had already begun to waft through the van.

I was holding back tears of embarrassment and failure. This was no great story to tell my friends. I would kill my sister if she mentioned this fiasco to anyone. My dad's quiet laughter interrupted my thoughts, and he said, "Not a word of this to your mother, deal?"

Relieved, I replied, "Deal."



**Winter as it Appears from the Vantage Point of a
Snow Angel**

Jessica Pahl

The Arrow Riddle

Patrick Marsh

Arrows speak a hidden song
As they speed across the ground
Of a separate riddle made
Far from the blacksmith hammer
That crafted their arrow blade
Times where blood is common
Flowing and building on the ground
Or creeping along the green
Battles are said to be lost
One arrow at a time
Or so the generals say
But do they truly know
Having dodged the arrows
So very long ago
The arc of the arrow has changed
For war is a shapeless shape
Never truly made
And when the arrows fall
The shadow cloud darting
Their whistles drown
All the living sounds
Save the screams of the wounded
and the many shields rising
Under the arrow storm

And under all this
A silent riddle is spoken
Under the arrow song
What do arrows
And heroes
Share and fade
In times of war
Many more are made



Crucifixion
Justin Cameron

Revelation

Renee Grissom

When he started
the glass was half full,
or maybe it was already
half empty
but either way

he had all the answers
to life, my father
the difference between purple and orange
and which one was the right choice
for a bathroom rug.

As he sat there
and told me how to run my life,
the water trickled out of his glass
until it was only a quarter full.
Soon after it was three quarters empty.

After it was emptied completely
I watched the lamplight
reflected in the cuts
of the glass,
now dry in his hand,

and I looked, down
at my own plastic tea cup
cradled in my lap
and found,
it was more than half full.

The Refuse of Pain

Leland-Jason Kruse

I refuse to be captured
I cannot combat life
I am the refuse of pain
the sadness of life
he says we can never be together
I cannot combat life
I am afraid I must agree
your love lusts after my envy
I am the refuse of pain
the sadness of life
he says we can never be together
your pain lurks down my corridor
I am afraid I must agree
your love lusts after my envy
your pain lurks down my corridor
and I'll never lift a finger
but we're all gonna call you a whore

The Abandoned Shell

Sarah deRosier

The day you opened your heart to me
Was the day I found my purpose
The shell released and you came into me
Transforming to a new entity
Receiving this gift
Allowing us to become a unity
Placed on the earth for one reason
Tranquility and bliss

Yet meaningless words
Cannot defy actions
The change was clear
After the softness, the yang befell
Fading into memory
You rejected my spirit

I blurred out of sight
Added to the unfortunate lists
Of had- and has-beens
Broken promises and shattered dreams
The plunge from sane to insanity
Was inevitable

Back to the shell, return to individual
The time spent with you is only a shadow in mind
Wanting and desire slips away
Swearing never to feel again
Nor waste my gift with any other.



Dancing

Bethany Dorfe

The Loss of Innocence

Josh Thulin

Based on the original story "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" written by Tim O'Brien
Retold from the perspective of Mary Anne Belle

It has been nearly 35 years since I arrived here in Vietnam, and as I sit here at the airport in Saigon awaiting my flight back to the "world" I find myself looking back on that summer in 1970 that would change my life for good.

After Mark Fossie, my boyfriend, had been in-country for about 6 months I received a letter from him, asking me if I would come and visit him at his base in Tra Bong, a village in the mountains west of Chu Lai. Just the thought of leaving everything I knew and traveling halfway across the country scared me to death, but eventually my love for Mark won over, and I found myself on board a plane bound for Vietnam.

After two days of flying in half a dozen different planes, I finally arrived at Mark's base in Tra Bong. It was like I had stepped into another world, onto the surface of some alien planet. The heat hit me like a rampaging elephant; the humidity was so high it made it almost impossible to breathe. The first thing I noticed was the smell, a mix of rotting vegetation, feces, and bodies. Even though we were miles away from any combat, the smell still made my eyes water. The foliage was all encompassing. Though the base was centered in a large clearing, the bush was so dense I felt as if it were closing in on me at all times. When I first saw Mark, he was stripped to his boxers digging a bunker on the perimeter about 50 yards from the tree line. He was encrusted from head to toe with the heart and soul of Vietnam, I didn't think it was possible for a human being to become so dirty. He had changed so much from the boy that had left me 6 months ago in the U.S. He looked as though he had lost about 10 or 20 pounds, which I didn't believe was possible because he was pretty trim even before he left. There was also a hardness in his face that I didn't recognize, a look a man might get from seeing things no person should ever have to see.

I stood there for about 5 minutes before he looked at the landing pad and saw me. His eyes were bugging out of his head as he dropped his shovel and ran to meet me. We met at the center of camp with a hearty embrace and a flurry of passionate kissing, much to the delight of the other men in camp. He said that he was the luckiest man in all of Vietnam; he couldn't believe that he had pulled off the impossible by bringing me here. As he put me back down on the ground, I looked around slowly and saw that every eye in the base was on us. I think the men were more surprised to see me than Mark was. The only time the soldiers got to see American women was when they got shot up in battle and had to be sent to aid stations of city hospitals, and even then they were rarely in any shape to enjoy it. Mark took my luggage to my own personal hut (he called it a "hooch"); from there he proceeded to give me the grand tour. I found out that the base was actually an aid station that gave basic emergency and trauma care. From there they

sent the casualties to hospitals in the nearby cities. He took me to different buildings around the base: the mess hall, the medical ward, operating rooms, etc. When I asked him about the small grouping of “hooches” near the perimeter, he just said, “That’s where the ‘Greenies’ stay sweetie; you’ll want to steer clear of them.” I could tell from the inflection of his voice they were highly disliked by the rest of the men. I found out later that the “Greenies” were actually the Green Berets, a Special Forces unit that was sent out to do only the most dangerous missions, where precision skills were essential. Over dinner Mark introduced me to the “guys”, Rat Kiley and Eddie Diamond, his two close buddies on base. They immediately took a liking to me, along with the rest of the guys on the base. It was partly because of the plain fact that I was a woman, and an American no less, which most of them hadn’t seen in months.

After two or three weeks, the novelty of being with my boyfriend on a military base in another country began to wear off. I had read in letters that Vietnam was constant action, that there was always another battle to fight. Honestly, I was starting to get bored, but at the same time I was becoming curious about my surrounding and some of the things kept around the base. I learned how a “Bouncing Betty” worked, what happened on an ambush, I met “Tunnel Rats”, learned how to shoot machine guns and handguns, how the grunts cooked food in the bush, what lay behind the mountains in the west, and how to set booby traps. I figured that if I was going to be here for awhile, I might as well learn something. I also began to spend some time in the medical ward and emergency room where I learned the basics of first aid and trauma care. Before long I found myself taking short walks into the bush, not too far or long, a few minutes here, a few yards there. I wanted to know what exactly lay beyond the wall of green surrounding the base.

Over the course of the next few weeks, I noticed that I was changing; I no longer had my bubbly schoolgirlishness, I didn’t wonder what was going to happen tomorrow, or the next day. I only focused on the here and now. Nothing else mattered. When Mark asked me what was wrong, I just said, “Nothing’s wrong honey, really. I’ve never been happier in my whole life.” Ever since I had taken my first step onto the Vietnamese soil, I could feel the jungle calling to me. It was beckoning me, inviting me to explore its insides, the trees, bushes, hills, valleys, and creeks. I was being seduced by the jungle’s romance, its mystery, its allure, and its ghosts. Then one day I answered its call.

Periodically the Greenies would leave on patrols or ambushes, and they would be gone for days at a time, sometimes even weeks. When they returned, they just seemed to appear from the mists. You didn’t hear them coming; even the birds were unaware of their presence. These men were truly one with the jungle. I knew that they were the only ones who would be able to help me answer the jungle’s call. One day I happened to bump into one of them outside one of their hooches and when I asked if I would be able to shadow them during one of their ambushes, he looked at me as if I had just told him I was Jane Fonda. “An ambush is no place for a woman,” he said through clenched teeth, then he walked into his hooch and slammed the door on me. Over the next week I persisted, constantly asking if I could join them on an ambush. Now that I look back, I think the

reason they said yes was not because of my persistence, but because if I came with and got killed they wouldn't have to listen to my nagging anymore.

They provided me with proper camouflage, face paint, and an M-16 machine gun, and they also taught me how to move in the jungle without making any noise. Two days later we started off into the jungle late at night. The squad leader said that I would have to keep up because they weren't here to baby-sit me, that I was the one who wanted to come along. Much to my surprise, I found that I enjoyed crawling through the bush and the mud. To me it was like a game, testing myself to see if I could be quieter than anybody in the group. After about 4 hours of traveling, we set up our ambush and sat down to wait. An hour later a V.C. patrol stumbled across our ambush. There was an explosion of light noise, and then I found myself thrown into the ground by a grenade that had exploded nearby. Amazingly enough, I was unhurt. To my surprise I was not scared one bit, stunned by the suddenness of the attack, but not scared. After a couple of seconds, I regained my composure and began to fire my M-16 into the bushes until the clip was empty. Then the jungle fell silent and we moved on. When we returned to base the next morning, one of the Greenies told me, with a hint of respect in his voice, that I had taken out three "gooks" during the ambush. That day Mark caught me and asked me what I thought I was doing going on an ambush. "Please not a word. I'm exhausted we'll talk later, ok?" I turned and began walking to my bunker, but then he yelled, "Not later, now!" He said that he didn't want his girlfriend going out on patrols and ambushes with a bunch of animals. I told him I was completely capable of taking care of myself and after much arguing we came to an agreement; I would cease going out late at night with the Greenies, and once Mark returned to the states after the war, we would get married. I only agreed to this to get him off my back—the jungle was my lover now. I had no intention to stop going out on ambushes. Over the next few days, I tried to let Mark down easy, slowly ignoring him more and more each day while continuing to go out each night with the Greenies.

After a few weeks of patrols, I was able to move more silently through the jungle than the Greenies themselves. I could sneak up behind birds during the middle of the day, paint a cross on their backs, and leave without their even knowing I was there. The Green Berets rapidly became impressed with my innate talents. During battle I switched to killing gooks with a knife, and finally with my bare hands, because using a weapon seemed too easy. I would stand up during the middle of a fire fight and watch the tracers snap by just for the adrenaline rush. One night while I was singing in the Greenies' hooch, Mark blasted through the door and called my name. I could tell by the look on his face that he was making a last ditch attempt to win me back. "There's no sense in talking I told him. I know what you think, but it's not...it's not *bad*." "Bad?" he murmured. "You're in a place where you don't belong," he added softly. I told him we were over, Vietnam was my home now, and I didn't know anything or anyone else. After I was finished, he slowly shrank out the door and left; I never talked to him again. At this point even the Greenies thought I was crazy because of all the risks I was taking while out in the jungle, so one night while we were out on an ambush I slowly slipped away

through the mist, never to return again. Over the next few months I followed different units through the jungle. I would listen to them tell stories around their fires at night. I heard them talk about a guy at a base on the Song Tra Bong river who had shipped his girlfriend into Vietnam, and how the “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong” had left her honey had disappeared into the jungle. How the military searched, it seemed, every square inch of the jungle from Saigon the 17th parallel, how the ghost of the sweetheart still haunted the jungles. After about a year of wandering, I joined a group of Montagnards, a rebel group of Vietnamese fighters in the nearby mountains and lived with them for the next 34 years.

Now as I sit here waiting for my flight to arrive, I wonder if I really am doing the right thing. I have spent the past three decades making the jungles of Vietnam my home, moving from mountain to mountain and valley to valley. Not once have I set foot in anything larger than a farming village, and sometimes I think that I know the countryside of Vietnam better than the people who live there. Though I had completely severed my connection to my friends and loved ones, and sometimes even humanity itself, not a day went by that I didn't feel a longing to be back with my family. Sitting here in the airport I am filled with apprehension. How are my parents? Are they still alive? Will they even remember me? To my surprise my thoughts turn towards Mark Fossie. What became of him after I rejected him for the jungle so many years ago? Did he even make it out of the war alive? Would he even want to talk to me if he did?

As these thoughts swim through my head, a flight attendant calls my flight to began boarding, and I pick up my bag and take the first of the last steps on my long journey home.

Thanksgiving

Nik Renshaw

When I was five or six
I saw a man with no teeth.
He chewed his hamburger
with his hands, kneading
it like bread, then gently
placing the mush in his mouth.

When I was seven or eight
I saw a man with no hands.
He carried things with his teeth.
He would gently lower
his head, adjusting
the object with his lips, softly
taking it into his mouth.

I didn't laugh or point. I wish
I could, but not
even a smirk. I envied
those men. They had each been blessed
with one half, and when I looked
in their eyes, I could tell they knew it.



Gas Pump

Josh Thulin

Symphony of Skin

Sarah deRosier

After you leave will I ache like honey?
Raw like bitter chocolate
In these dreams a shadow still whispers
Of sweet moments when our delicate skin felt music
I live to worship our symphony
Smooth over and beneath
Never stopping the eternity of beauty within.



Guitar and Candle

Renee Grissom

A Letter to My Son

Ungia-Banah "Jay" R. Morrow

You look for daddy,
But he's nowhere to be found,
You ask your mother, "Where is my daddy at?"
She tells you,
But you are too young to understand,
So you continue on and play,
Hoping that he calls,
So you can ask him,
When will he come over
And see you again?

Daddy knows what you are feeling son,
And he doesn't mean to break your little heart again,
But daddy had to back go up north,
To continue to evolve as a man.
You are just a child,
So I don't expect you to understand,
But daddy promises,
That one day soon he will come and play with you again.

I know you love your mother,
But she is not daddy.
There are different things that he does with you,
That makes you happy,
And plus mommy been tired and extra busy
Since she had that other baby,

Son, you just don't know how much your daddy loves you
And how much it hurts that he can't be with you right now.
He is losing sleep.
If it was up to him,
He would move you, your mother and baby to the same town,
But that's not a reality.
The best daddy can do is continue to send you money
And pray for you,

And again promise you,
That there will come a day when he won't have to leave you.
Just continue to love him,
And tell your mother he still loves her too.



Forest

Justin Cameron

Lips

Leland-Jason Kruse

lips
spill
moist
lust
on to pages
spreading dirty
macrophages
spread disease
in close contact construction
lips, the beginning
begot...
destruction

the color white

kalen c. passa

a rehearsed exodus
fashioned by light &
fabricated by violet
they decipher
destinations from bloodlines from skylines
plagiarized by every solitary stroke
the amalgamation of night and
day
warm the external
cautioning the clouds
that never exhale rain
it makes the faces out
as something spared for eyes
kept alive
in a homogenous design



Untitled

Misty Briesemeister

Release

Renee Grissom

The sparkling non-alcoholic wine
proved more intoxicating than champagne
we downed a whole bottle
Nicole, Seth and me
drinking from stolen Dixie cups
we lurked in the open
doorway of our van
hidden by the darkness of the parking lot
the more we drank the funnier it got
pretending to be drunk was far better
than the actual thing
jokes that weren't funny
made us cry with laughter
tears freezing
on our eyelashes and cheeks
we drank to our health, we drank
to long life, we drank
as a tribute to friends who were gone
we coughed, laughed, cried
and drank again
teeth chattering
numb fingers laced together
we three
wiping cold noses
on the sleeves of our coats
too young for champagne
and our parents too strict
we danced to our own music
sliding over icy pavements
for a snowball fight at midnight
screaming "Cheers!"
more drunk than sober
pear flavored carbonation
putting the sparkle back into life.



Untitled
Angie Berlin

Sassification: The Definition of a Strong Woman

Tamonsha Williams

*That double espresso- eyed diva
That has flare
And is fully aware of the way the boys stare
As she gives a seductive glare
And then walks by as if she doesn't care
Hey, she's just a diva
See she's swift with the gift
And it ain't no myth
Check the fullness in her hips
And the wisdom she spits from her lips
It's that intellectual sassification
All the way
That sassy, sassy way
The brothers all spazz
For a whiff of the brown sugar coated sass
And the sweetness she has
Leaves you craving for your next sugar high
See she's so sophisticated for words
And so sassy to put up with anyone's BS
She is the definition of a strong woman
Not so easily described
But she is equally deprived
She stands out for her infinite wisdom
Her everlasting courage
Her means of respect
Her diligence
Her strong mind
Her sound heart
And her faith
These are her guides through life
She has gone through gray times
And she goes through her golden days
Which gives her hope
For the future
Now you ask,
Who is she?*

*She is your mother
Daughter
Sister
Cousin
Friend
Fiancée
Or your wife
She is your mentor
For life
She gives life
She replenishes life
She makes life worthwhile
That why she is your equal
She should be treated with respect
Royally inclined
Mentally she shines
Forever and ever
One of a kind*

Change on the Floor

kalen c. passa

He woke up on a Tuesday with a belt around his neck. It was fastened to a horizontal bar in his wardrobe in the single, shallow closet of his apartment. He only had two belts. One was black and the other was brown. His current situation reduced him to the latter, and he quickly dressed himself. He was late, half-conscious, and horribly bent into a wooden folding door.

“That doesn’t match, you know.”

“I know.”

It was a fashionable wreck, and he conceded to his mirror. A maroon halo, sized too large for his cluttered head, had slipped all the way to his neck overnight. He rubbed it with a half-grin and a squinting eye. He let out a grunt and decided he needed the assistance of his only turtle neck. He would wear no belt today, rather than a brown one, rather than a broken and frayed black one. He would have to purchase a new belt to formalize his black, semi-dress pants. He would certainly be late for work.

His gas gauge ran a spectrum of about a hundred degrees, he guessed. It was slanted too far to the right. It was nearing empty. The car was sold to him as its fourth owner. It was old, and it was cheap. The tires ran the same harmonious and unelaborated course to his job. 11.4 miles there and back every day with little discourse to offset the dangerously high odometer. What else was new? An employee.

She was attractive, and this excited him. It made his blood feel purposeful as the majority of it was sinking below his loosened waist, correlating with his stomach. He removed his eyes from the curves of her shirt to the nametag above, which stuck at an acute angle outward from her breasts.

“Gwen! I’m Riley.” He pointed at her with his entire hand. She took it and that also excited him some.

“Hi,” she said. Her eyes quickly fell to the floor after they finished shaking hands. This meant she was shy. This also meant Riley had to take the initiative, although it wasn’t in his nature, especially with the attractive types.

“This is your first day, right?” He leaned back onto the counter and faked a casual pose by crossing his arms. He hoped he didn’t sound too interrogative or boring.

“Yeah,” she said. “I’ve always wanted to work in a pet store. I mean, I only have a cat, but, I don’t know, I just love animals I guess.” She sounded unsure. Maybe she was a ditz. Maybe she was manipulable. Maybe he would make-out with her in the back room. They would have to hide, though; they would be at the mercy of the bell attached to the front door.

“I got the job because I needed it, really. I don’t even have a pet. My apartment won’t let them actually.” She pretended as if residing in an apartment building would be a normal situation for an apparently seventeen-year-old boy. He probably meant with his family, she thought. He didn’t, though, and he was actually nineteen. She herself was also nineteen and lived with her parents and got the job to at least *pretend* she was helping them pay for tuition.

“So where would I start to learn about selling pets?” Riley chuckled with remembrance. His thoughts were distracted from conversation.

“That’s right, you’re new.” He felt dull after this comment and insisted that Gwen follow him.

“I usually feed all *these* guys every morning.” The store had a lot of fish. She held her hands together behind her back and watched him climb a step ladder and sprinkle fish food into the tanks. She decided it looked like a salt shaker. He decided he had a good perspective of her cleavage, but didn’t take the chance. He wouldn’t risk coming off as a pervert. His thought process read something like: *honestly, did she try to present her chest like that, with her arms back and forcing her sternum out*, although the vocabulary was most definitely skewed by his hormones’ dangerous influence. He showed her the rest of the feeding schedules.

“What comes next is the register, I guess.” She was probably two years older, he guessed. He wondered if she has worked a register similar to the store’s in the past. He rapidly hit a bunch of buttons on the keyboard. It was color-coded and divided into categories. “If I’m going too fast, or just sound dumb, let me know, okay?”

“Okay.” She smiled. Still, with her hands behind her back. Still, her nametag caught up on her black, neck-less shirt. He register made a weak ring, popped open, and Riley began to break a bunch of rolls of change. When he got to the pennies, he stopped. His movements became slow motion and his eyes became as stiff and as assiduous as a taxidermist’s prized masterpiece.

“Do you ever...” he trailed off, frustrated with his wording, or just lost in his thought, which poured too quickly off his lips. She braced for a personal question. “Look at these pennies,” he corrected his syntax. She noticed his eyes radiate with the blue glow of the computer screen, emphasized by what might have been the start of tears.

He rested his wrists on the edge of the till and let the pennies pass through his fingers. Once they all ran through, like an hourglass, he picked them back up and let them fall back through the crevices of his hands. He thought it was relaxing, but he thought about the pennies even more. The third time through their hypnotic courtship with his fingers, he pinched them together and offered them to Gwen. “Here,” he said. She looked up from his hands to his hazy eyes. She figured she should have been confused, but somehow miscalculated. She was overwhelmed with a peculiar and sympathetic feeling for him. She figured she had never felt this feeling before and it was dancing slow circles from somewhere under her ribs to her throat, mixing with traces fright. She removed her

hands from her back and Riley passed the giant heap of change into her hands, dropping only a nickel's worth to the white tiles behind the counter.

"What do you want me to do with these?" she would have asked. But the foreign situation quelled her question to the back of her mental itinerary. He stared at her for a second before removing his hands from the top of her new burden. The pennies that stuck to his hands fell with the others to the floor. One rolled beneath the counter and made a sound hardly audible, but spun resonating for several seconds. The boy and girl both listened to its noise before he spoke.

"Drop them. Let them slide through your hands." She was hesitant and at the mercy of his temporary insanity, but he was also the manager on duty. She slowly opened her fingers and let several cents crash to the floor. "Look at them. They're brand new. We just got these from the bank this morning." Until now she didn't notice their inexperienced, metallic gleam. "So how do you feel?" he asked.

"Confused, I guess. What do you mean?"

"Don't you feel that?"

"They feel new." She hoped this was the right answer and looked up at him with eyes similar to those that the innocent and orphan puppies two aisles away bestowed on unsuspecting customers. Elsewhere in the world, once they mature, people dine on them.

"Yeah" he said. He was no longer concerned with her physical attributes and hoped to receive the same intellectual and emotional spark he was feeling to be returned by her. "Gwen, you are holding the start. The very beginning of this country: the penny. Everything is driven by it. But right now, this rare chance, you are holding it. Can you feel that? Don't you feel more powerful? More in control? You can alter the entire cornerstone of the most powerful nation. You can mold everything into anything you chose." Although he sounded like a cheap rendition of a power-hungry villain with little understanding of the economy, she knew he was serious and considered his remark.

"If you look at it that way, yeah, you're right. But what about everything else? All of the money already floating around? And this is only a few bucks worth!"

"You mean the recycled, dirty, tainted money." Somehow in her head, she tried to make a connection between President Lincoln and his previous speech, but the thought was fruitless. 'Emancipation' slipped through the synapse. "It's just, I don't know..." His statement switched to a submissive and regretful tone.

More pennies escaped the collapsing structure of her smooth hands. Riley stared down at them and their great contrast with the tiles.

"Are you okay?" she asked. Her hands were completely still in front of her, a talking manikin selling a handful of pennies behind the counter of a local pet store.

"Yeah, I'm fine." He was rubbing the left side of his neck and offered his right hand to her stash of pennies. "Let's put these back." She let the pile slowly migrate to his

hand. He removed his left hand from his injury and cupped his hands together. She let the pile fall faster, but with enough grace to balance the money against gravity. He dropped them to the drawer and she handed him what pennies she could rescue from the floor. He closed the register. A receipt was printed with a familiar and boring buzzing noise. He ripped it off and threw it in the waste basket.

Riley looked up, slighted with embarrassment, and met her vestige. The girl was not as malleable as he thought. She was standing with her hands behind her back, and he wanted to kiss her.



Music to My Ears

Bethany Dorfe

Pride and Punishment

Sharon Adams

What on earth am I trying to prove? It's Saturday morning, 7:30 a. m. on a beautiful June day in 2003, and I'm standing in the middle of Grand Avenue in St. Paul. A cold, damp breeze sweeps down this wide thoroughfare, and it feels like my skin is under attack by millions of invisible icicles, even though the obnoxiously cheery DJ on the public address system assures me it's actually fifty-five degrees. My body shivers, only being clad in a tee shirt, guaranteed to breathe and let one's body sweat evaporate instantly, and a pair of shorts with a small pocket attached to the inside of the waistband – only enough room for my car keys and nothing else. I look up, searching in vain for the sun that had been visible only moments before. The huge, puffy, cotton ball like clouds that are such a welcome respite from the boiling wrath of the sun on most summer days, today seem to resemble huge snow drifts left by a winter blizzard. Why am I not still in my warm bed, asleep?

The same obnoxiously cheery DJ announces that the runners for the next race will begin lining up in fifteen minutes. Good, I still have time to escape. All I need to do is slowly work my way to the edge of the crowd, maybe make a comment about needing some last minute “something” from the store on the corner. While making my way to the store, I could quickly remove the paper number safety pinned to my tee shirt, crumple it into a small snowball, throw it back to those snow drift clouds, and just keep walking – all the way to my nice warm car.

Some more experienced runners notice me. “Is this your first race?” they ask. Damn, so much for my escape plan. “What gave me away?” I ask as I try to look like I really fit into the crowd. “Well, maybe the look of sheer panic that's written all over your face.” They smile, lead me over to the water table, and encourage me to drink at least two cups of water. Drink water – how can anyone drink water with a lump of indescribable fear the size and weight of a bowling ball in one's stomach? After taking a few sips of the ice-cold water, my new friends take me across the street to get in line. *Great, let's get this stupid race over with.* Then I find out that the line I'm in isn't the starting line, but the line for the port-a-potties. In the religion of running, using the port-a-potty before a race is part of the ritual. As I get closer and closer to this “race rite,” the odor is not that of incense, as one would expect in a religious rite, but the stench of urine, feces, and vomit.

When I finally was able to breathe again and vowing never to return, it was time. My runner's magazine suggested that when running your first race, you should position yourself towards the end of the pack of runners at the starting line. That way, you would not start the race by running too fast in an effort to keep up with the fastest runners. I suspect that what it really meant was, “Hey slowpoke, get out of the way of the real runners!” After we went through a few, quick, torturous contortions they referred

to as stretching, I said goodbye to my friends as they made their way to the front of the pack.

At least I was out of that frigid breeze, stuck in the middle of this sea of humanity. *I wonder if I will be able to hear the starting whistle, gun, or whatever they use to start this death march.* There was no need to worry about that. The crowd began to surge forward, like a tidal wave surges onto the beach – the race was on, and I was caught in the current.

Ok, Ok, pace yourself, breathe in rhythm, I chanted to myself, *one, two breathe in, one two breathe out.* The crowded sidelines clap, wave, and scream support for friends and loved ones that pass by, runners full of energy and confidence that the beginning of a race inspires. My body starts to finally warm up; it feels good to stop shivering. The sun, which had been in seclusion for the last twenty minutes, finally deigned to make an appearance in all of its ethereal splendor. I feel its warm and comforting rays surround me like an invisible shield, daring any cold breeze to try to penetrate its armor. My legs feel strong, thanking my lungs for the oxygen they send in great abundance. I can do this; it's not as hard as I thought. The turn around point must be just over that next rise in the road. I think that because I see runners coming back in the opposite direction. *Why are they sweating so much?* Tee shirts seem to be molded to their bodies like a second skin. Hair that should be blown back by the wind now resembles hair that had been through a violent rainstorm. It was then that I spotted it. I heard that some races had what are called mile markers along side the road, so runners could pace themselves and slow down if they were going too fast, or speed up if going too slow. But some sadist decided that instead of placing a marker at every mile, they would put a marker at every one-half mile. I had just passed the first one-half mile marker. I still had over two and a half miles to go.

All of a sudden, the sunlight that had been my protector was now my attacker. Looking up, I prayed for my snowdrift clouds to once again make their appearance, but they seem to have melted away, as snow is so apt to do when exposed to an unrelenting blast furnace. As I feel the sweat start to trickle down from under and between different parts of my anatomy, I begin to become more philosophical about the whole thing. Anyway, it will be a good test for my expensive tee shirt and see if it really does what it claims to do. *All right, start sopping up the sweat. Any time now - I'm waiting. Make me feel cooler as the tag you came with said you would.* Passing the one-mile marker, I decide I can't believe anything I read.

My legs begin to make a request for more oxygen. Fair enough, I'll just start taking deeper breaths. *One . . . two . . . breathe in, one . . . two breathe out.* That seems to do the trick; my legs like me again. The confidence that had faded at the one-half mile mark has now returned as the halfway point is in sight. Now, do I slow down to drink a cup of water as I turn back for the finish line, or do I tough it out and keep going? A zealous racing fan calls out the time to the runners as they begin the turn to go back, and I

realize why my legs are no longer protesting. Taking deeper breaths has slowed my pace considerably. At this rate, I'll probably be one of the last ones to cross the finish line.

So I forget the water and just keep going. *Faster, faster, I can do it. I'll breathe when I'm finished, if I don't die first. Legs, don't ask for more of anything, you won't get it.* A God-sent numbness descends, anesthetizing my entire body. I'm floating above the pavement. When my feet land for another step, they land on a cushion of air. That is, until just after the two-mile mark.

Something I had done earlier that morning has now come back to haunt me. Everyone told me to "eat something" before a race; your body needs the fuel. I never eat breakfast; I'm just not hungry in the morning. But I ignored my body and had two pieces of toast, some orange juice, and a half a cup of coffee, as suggested by the books and magazines I've read. It was at this time my breakfast decided it had had enough bouncing around and decided to leave. Thankfully, I was near one of the many trashcans situated along the race route. After cutting off two runners, I made it just in time for the grand farewell. Bending over the can to accommodate my breakfast's departure, I see evidence of other people who were just as stupid as I was. I stood up and took a deep breath. Big mistake. All along the race route are food vendors of every ilk, from American hotdogs to Greek shish kabobs. Their odors waft and mingle in the air as a nauseating perfume that forces me to take a second bow.

All right, now, do I run or walk the rest of the way? My legs, lungs, heart, and stomach shouted WALK, but my brain reasoned that I was near the end, there was nothing left in my stomach, and that after this race, I would never run again, so go ahead and run. O.K., I'll run and cross the finish line in triumph, proud for not being the last to finish! The blessed numbness that just a minute before had been my savior was not to be found as my feet slammed into the pavement, sending shockwaves through my body that no Richter scale could measure. Forget about pace, forget about breathing, just put one foot in front of the other and take no notice of all the runners passing you. This was my new mantra that would sustain me, even if it was just for the next few minutes.

There it is, Nirvana, Heaven, the end of my punishment is in sight. The legs that are now made of rubber bands and wet cement just don't get the message that it's almost over. Ten more seconds, keep me going for ten more seconds, and then you can do whatever you want. That seemed to get their attention and they started to move faster, as if they had a mind of their own. I crossed the finish line in decent time, at least decent time for a forty-one year old that had only started running two months before. My legs make good on that bargain to do whatever they want and convince my brain to either sit down or fall down. So I sit on the nearest horizontal surface (namely the curb) and drink the water that is being thrust upon me from all directions. While consuming some of the post-race provisions, that only minutes before my body would have rejected, I think to myself, *that wasn't so bad; maybe I'll do it again . . . next year.*

To Oxford, Mississippi, and Back

Crischelle Navalta

(For LH and MLK, Jr.)

Pines border the windy
Mississippi highway.
Gusts make clouds of dust
collect on the car.

Winters now where kudzu
are the only green you see,
beside the needles of pine.

The sun far-off follows
while our shadows cast,
long lost in the slender trunks
turning crimson.

Evening comes soft
like a gray wall
made of down.

The cotton fields' low
for the back that
breaks with every bend—
this I imagine.

In the horizon—
a reddened sky with
silhouettes of the
houses on the hill—

of picket fences,
and our *dreams*
deferred.



Self Portrait
Renee Grissom

*Rapids Review Staff Award for Outstanding Contributor***The Artist's Excuse**

Renee Grissom

It began as a painting of the sea,
but after the first wash
of aqua color over weathered canvas,
the phone rang and my mother
was in the hospital with hypothermia
after nearly drowning in the frigid northern water.

My son came home drunk
in the middle of the day,
staggered up to his room on shaky legs
and turned on a pounding,
pathetic substitute for music.

The dog threw up sea green foam
on my wife's Persian rug,
and it had to be cleaned up before she came home
from the Vitae Nail Spa
with her perfect French manicure:
she would go into shock from the horror of it all.

So I scrubbed, but the fumes of the carpet cleaner
made me sea sick. The driving beat
from my son's dusty attic room
turned the thunder into a monotonous rhythm.
The lightning lost its special effects and went
back to 75 watts, filtering through
the cracked black lamp shade in the corner
of the tiny white office I call my art studio.

I stubbed my toe in the doorway
on my way back from the kitchen
where slimy soap water grows cold
in a sink full of last night's dinner dishes,
only to find the painting had capsized on the canvas.

The sea sank into the sky,
and creating endless rows
of a single yellow sunflower
was the only way to escape
the hollow wreckage of this day.

I'm sorry, if I never finished the dishes.



The Library
Bethany Dorfe

Burning Bush

Ungia-Banah "Jay" R. Morrow

One thousand three hundred sixty eight soldiers dead,
One thousand three hundred sixty eight soldiers missed,
And many more wounded,
Burnt by the flames of a contentious war,

1,368 families' hearts become broken and emotionally sick,
But as I am writing this
1-2 more families will receive that haunting phone call,
No one wants to get,

As the phone is answered,
Numbness suddenly, slowly creeps in neck,
The phone drops abruptly,
As face sinks down into the chest,
Before it is clutched by hands,
Shaking uncontrollably and wet,

Swiftly, the walls are consumed of echoing screams,
"Burn bush burn" is yelled by loved ones,
Who are grieving and pissed,
Anarchy has erupted,
This family has lost sight of liberty's peace,

For that moment,
Time stands at attention,
While the bush continues to burn day after day,
Over and over again.

My Father and Cookware

Patrick Marsh

All sorts of people are blessed with odd habits and hobbies. These odd habits and hobbies lay somewhat dormant until they are exposed to a new setting or atmosphere. A common example of this is when a child experiences embarrassment at the hands of their parents in a public setting. During the course of my life, I have experienced multiple occurrences of this very scenario. My family is odd, twisted, and very much demented. I do not evade this phantom of family dementia, but embrace it, and marvel at its power and magnificence. The greatest magnificence I feel mentioning is one of the many odd traits attained by my father. My father has an inhuman obsession with cookware, spatulas to be more exact.

The whole thought of our kitchen somewhat disturbs me and causes my face to shudder into a series of violent twitches. This facial deformity was produced by the twisted maze of destruction that is my father's kitchen. My father's kitchen takes on the appearance of an over-stuffed boar atop a savage's platter. Well, it looks somewhat decent from the outside appearance of its brown cabinets and tidy counters, but underneath them lay a totally different world. Underneath the counters and cabinets is a horrible underworld of lost dishes, dusty silverware, and other unknown increments of destruction. All of these tools are jammed into the cabinets in a reckless manner. If an earthquake were to occur, certain death awaits you in our kitchen. Once the authorities would arrive at our home they would find a great dusty pile of cookware where our kitchen was, with a few mangled limbs laying close by. Sometimes, I dig in the endless abyss of our cabinets looking for a fabled object that is essential to the production of my food. After muttering some unique vocabulary, I emerge from the cavern angry and on the brink of insanity. My body is usually covered in a slimy dust that is sticking to the massive amount of sweat I had produced. If a guest of our household were to see me after I had emerged from one of my hunts, they would scream "what the bleeping-bleep is that?" When such a scenario does arise, I have found it not wise to charge at the person in an effort to explain my ghastly appearance, for this only instills more fear in their already panic-driven mind.

Besides the rare garage cleaning, unloading the dishwasher was one of the most intricate and enigmatic procedures I would ever participate in. After opening the ageless dishwasher, I would find a huge inventory of dishes and other odd objects. If it weren't for my brilliant memory, I would never be able to recall the exact place where each relic went. The artifacts that I unloaded were strange and odd. There were rusted pans, cracked bowls, twisted forks, huge knives, long spoons, and many little containers, too small to bear any true purpose. However, the one item I unloaded more than anything was the infinite spatula. There were brown spatulas incrusting with age, rubber-handled new spatulas, metal-handed spatulas, red spatulas, blue spatulas, magenta spatulas, and

the rare wooden spatula. I even feared my father purchased some invisible spatulas that were waiting in the shadows ready to appear for me to unload them. There were many spatulas. I even began to have nightmares of spatulas populating my own living space, my fathers thirst for spatulas finally destroying his kin. But luckily that has not happened, yet. One day my father talked about building another pantry for his various dungeon devices. My mother's face would wrinkle with anger. "You are insane! We have enough cookware as it is. My God! It will be a whole pantry full of bleeping spatulas." I am not a prophet or seer, but I could tell that in my immediate future should we have to deal with the horrible parasitic population of spatulas, my parents might be separated.

There are great perils in our world, none except nuclear war or space alien invasion can compare to my Father's Kitchen. Mixed between the ever present spatulas, dusty shelves, and horrible abominations that lurk in the deep recesses of our cabinets, I do feel a slight affection for our kitchen. I will not deny that my Father's Kitchen provided substantial nourishment over the years; in fact, it was all mostly delicious. When I marry in my far future, I fear I will warp my wife's mind with the same insanity my father used on my mom. I draw comfort that my spouse may feel that spatula obsession is not relevant, since I am destined to follow in his footsteps, as will my spawn.

The Rapids Review

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The logo for AnokaRamsey Community College. It features a horizontal line above the text "AnokaRamsey" in a bold, sans-serif font. Below "AnokaRamsey" is the text "Community College" in a smaller, regular font. To the left of "AnokaRamsey" is the text "CAMBRIDGE • COON RAPIDS" in a small, all-caps font.

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