
RAPIDS REVIEW



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Minnesota Butterfly 11

Christopher Paris



The Rapids Review

A literary arts magazine

A publication of Anoka-Ramsey Community College Creative Writing Club.

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Bows and Arrows

Joshua Chase

Someone told me
that sin
is an archer's term
that means
“missed the mark.”

Myself
I've never been good
with a bow.

Outside

Lydia Klismith

Under our multitude of naked trees,
dad sets his crusty coffee mug
at the edge of our wilted garden.
He picks up a rake in his wooden hands,
weatherworn by decades of work.
Fifty-three rings line his palms.

The rake drags and crunches,
the metal teeth pierce leaves
like a needle through a blister.
Painless, once-living,
ugly as a whole,
utterly fascinating under a microscope
like the ridges of my father's wooden hands.

I warm my belly with coffee
every morning, even the weekends.
I cup the warmth in my willowy hands
and count the rings of my age,
wondering if I will ever have the same
tarnished beauty as my father.



Winsted, Minnesota 3
Pearl Vasseur

Because I Can

Devon Humphrey

The rain is calling for me again
In bursts and pops of amber coating,

and the cement outside is wet
again
and probably always will be.

Come on sugar-coated doe,
let's go for a walk.
I'll teach you how to hunt,
take a bite out of these haunted woods.

Smoked foxes,
A dozen birds tacked to old oaks,
such a scene for dreaming
or nightmares?

There's a code drifting along the creek,
if only it would stop and tell me what it's been trying to say.

The sun is creeping up on us again,
soaking the dry brush in conspicuous promise
of Spring
of Summer.

The next door neighbors can't wait for a thawed out ground
and I smile at them
because they're there

Because I can.

The Weight of Things

Joshua Chase

Maybe someday I'll learn
that all of life is not symmetrical
and I shouldn't expect it to be.

Sometimes a face is just uglier
on one side than on the other.

Even my own is scarred unevenly

and though I sometimes want to
take steel to my right brow
I don't.

The field will never be level
and fairness is relative
and even lopsided things
have their place

despite the awkward weight
when held in the hand.



Blue-footed Booby
Bridgette Gergen

Running

Maggie Galleymore

“GOD DAMN IT! Laura get your daughter! This isn’t a buffet and she won’t eat her food because her ‘peas are touching her potatoes’!” My dad would mock me with his bombing voice as he would pound his big gorilla fists on the marble table. His fists I knew very well as did many other things in that house. The walls especially knew my dad’s “Hulk” knuckles. “If only I wasn’t such a picky eater I wouldn’t have to sprint down this stupid hallway every night to get away from Mr. Anger Issues!” I thought to myself as I would prepare myself for the evening dash down the hallway. Sometimes I think the reason why I managed to stay skinny while growing up in that household was not because I wouldn’t eat my peas because they were touching my potatoes, but because I was running all the time.

The night it got really out of control, as if it was always perfect, was the night I had my red chair come launching at me down that same hallway I’d run down every night, that glossy red chair soaring through the air straight at me and on the other side was my dad. I was hoping my dad didn’t have good aim but my dad in fact had great aim. The chair had struck me on my whole five year old body and that was it, I had blanked out. I woke up to the sound of my mom’s blood curdling screams and fortunate for me the perpetrator left the scene while I was unconscious. I guess that was the deal breaker for my mother since she had put me in the car and drove off to her friend’s house with only the shirts on our backs. I’d look at my mother in the rearview mirror as I sat in the back seat, something we both had about our eyes were the same. Through the melting mascara on my mom’s face and my disorganized expression on mine, we both had the look of victory in our eyes. As if we had defeated the monster.

Odd as it is, I went to school the next day. Instead of walking a block to go home, my mother picked me up from school and drove us back to her friends. Though I felt a sense of happiness for not having to go

home for another round of the running game, I was in a mix up of emotions. I didn't know that it was not normal for fathers to abuse their children. I thought that life was just that way. I felt my mom was breaking up our family. That was the day that my stomach turned to knots and for the first time in my life, I was scared of something, leaving and not coming back.

“We need to leave and go far away” my mom tried to explain to my confused ears. “You're going to go to a new school and meet new friends” was what she attempted to convey to me. We had to leave my mom's friend's house and move into a battered women and children shelter because my father would try to find us.

The shelter we stayed at was located in the rougher parts of South Minneapolis. I remember what the first shelter smelled like. It smelled of dust and old things mixed with strange food smells. May I remind you, I was a picky eater, after all I felt it was my fault we were in that mess, all because I didn't want my food touching. At first, I spoke to no one except my mom. I felt like an orange in a pile of apples. Although we were all fruit, I was still obviously different. The majority of people in the shelter were African American and Hispanic and in the suburbs, it was the total opposite. I would observe the kids run around the shelter laughing and playing with one another. I would wonder why they were so happy all the time and why they were here.

After getting used to the shelter itself I started talking to kids that would ask me to play. Everyone and everything was different and new to me. Skin colors, languages, foods, the type of music played, even games were different. Camille, a girl my age that I grew close to in the shelter taught me my first hand game:

*“MS. MARY MACK MACK MACK! ALL DRESSED IN BLACK
BLACK BLACK! WITH SILVER BUTTONS BUTTONS BUTTONS! ALL
DOWN HER BACK BACK BACK!”*

This was the song we'd sing while slapping each other's hands in a pattern so the clapping would chime along with the song. Another game I was new to and became very good at was “double-dutch”. It was jump

rope only with two ropes instead of one. Two girls at the ends of each ropes would swing them in circular motions, one rope would swing one way and the other rope would swing in the opposite way. I would jump in the middle of the swinging concoction and jump to the rhythm of the ropes tapping on the cement pavement. I began to love the people at the shelter. I started to have a feeling of home and family at the shelter.

Unfortunately, the shelter housed bad things as well as it housed women and children. Diversity of skin colors and cultures were not the only diversity I was exposed to. Drugs, alcohol, gang violence, and poverty were also a reality I came to realize at such a young age. There was nights where I couldn't sleep because I'd hear gun shots out of my window. "*Pop pop pop!*" was the noise I became too quickly immune to. I'd crawl down my bunk bed on to the floor with my mom and pray to God that nothing bad would hurt us. One night I snuck out of my room to the kitchen downstairs only to find a woman with her baby in one arm and her heroin needle sticking out of her other arm, unconscious. The baby had clearly soiled itself because the staircase smelled of poop. I did nothing. I didn't even know what the woman had done or why the needle was in her arm. I did what I was used to and ran.

The reason I want to become an English teacher with an emphasis on creative writing for high school in an urban setting is to show teenagers that there is much more to life than abuse, gangs, drugs, violence, poverty, etc. Teenagers in these settings have their stories to tell and sometimes their pain comes out through guns, gangs, drug use and more. I believe the reason why I went through such a life is to tell a story and help kids get out of similar situations. Children shouldn't have to be exposed to such an evil world. What have they done to deserve any of the hardships life throws at them? If gangs, drugs, abuse, and etc. are all they see, then they will believe that life is supposed to be like that and grow up to be the same thing they were exposed to. Kids should be kids and should have an equal opportunity to succeed in life. The more you experience in life, the more you listen to people, the more you question how life should be, the freer you will become as a human being and the less running you'll have to do.

The Almost Eighteens

Nissa Vang

Like Olympic marathoners,
they stand at the start line,
their toes dancing,
teasing the dusty white chalk.

Some are bent over,
clenching their stomachs.
Others make conversation,
like boys in a locker room.

A few will start off running,
not hesitating to look back.
The others will seize the opportunity,
and blame the dust
for staying behind.

The well trained and fit are
confident,
the unready
insecure.

They elongate their long,
and toned legs.
Stretching them
to move
beyond their limits.
And I'm hoping
I'm just hoping
For tomorrow
To come.

Overwhelmed

Thomas Streed

The copier is broken,
spitting out all different sheets of paper.

The computer went blank,
the blue screen of death.

Eight million people lined up,
asking questions that are impossible.

Emails from my boss,
yelling at me to do it this way or that.

Head in my hands,
wanting to scream,
feeling like a change

I quit.



Chair

Chris Alexander

Leap

Elaine Kenny

Jennie talked as though her words would propel us through the dark. We were on the way to her favorite restaurant, a pricey and out of the way place we usually reserved for special occasions. I'd promised to take her if I won the tournament, and it was only a short detour on the way home. I didn't mind. I was relieved the weekend was over. It had been a real battle across the tables and I hadn't counted on Mark Halstead attending. Mark had been a tougher opponent over the last couple of years and I had had to step it up, considerably. Traditionally, Jennie didn't hang around the tournament and found ways to stay amused. This year, it seemed she spent most of her time in the hotel's bar, and she was already in bed when I got back to the room last night. She had been chipper enough that morning, so I let her go on about whatever she was talking about – something about her job – as I regrouped.

With the tournament out of the way, and none scheduled until spring, I could focus on more immediate things.

The restaurant was a proper reward. The first time she'd brought me here I was surprised, expecting a neon soaked roadhouse boasting an old-fashioned Friday night fish fry. Instead, The Café is a wonder: maple walls lined with bookshelves from floor to ceiling, intimate tables draped in homey blue and white checked cotton, the smell of fresh bread and savory soups and sauces, a chalkboard list of seasonal entrees. We took a table facing the lake, and I looked forward to the kedgeree.

We ordered our drinks, and I took my time with the bread, buttering a piece for myself and one, lightly, for her. Jennie fidgeted, plucking at her skirt and blouse as she looked around. She was the most other-directed woman I'd ever been with and often self-conscious about

her appearance. I hadn't said anything, but she'd gained a bit of weight since the summer. I could tell it bothered her.

Jennie looked me in the eyes, and I wondered if she would bring up the marriage issue. I had told her a few months ago that we should be married, that it was time, but she argued, wanted something more, my involvement. I didn't refuse but she went off on another crying jag, a trick of hers that was supposed to have some sort of effect. She accused me of not *hearing* her, so I'd left until she pulled herself together. She hadn't brought it up since. Tonight, I had something to discuss, and winning the tournament provided just the right setting.

“Jennifer, I want to talk about the future.” I took a deep breath. “I want to share with you my plans, a dream I have. It's something I should have done some time ago, and I suppose I've been reluctant to commit.” Her eyes were bright. “Within the next five years, I want to be the top Scrabble player in Minnesota and in the top ten in the country. I'm going to step up my game, go to Club both Tuesday and Thursday nights, and on weekends, whenever there's an opportunity. And I am going to the Nationals this year.”

Jennie leaned forward slowly and gripped the edges of her seat; my intentions had a clear effect. The tablecloth pulled down a little, and she straightened it, and her skirt. She drained her water.

“Wow,” she said. “What brings this on?”

My breathing resumed, stomach relaxed. “I've been thinking about it for quite a while. I think it's time. I've been playing for 15 years and I think it can take it to the next level.”

Our food arrived – Jennie had the halibut – and I arranged our plates and ordered another round of drinks. The kedgeriee was a delightful mystery. Layer after layer of thinly sliced smoked salmon, feathered over a mound of crabmeat, capers and jasmine rice, with a veneer of thin, sweet

coconut juice underscored by a hint of brine. I thrilled at unwrapping each sweet pink slice. I placed a morsel on the middle of my tongue and curled it around in an embrace. With the beer, an exquisite Belgian *witbier* that was transcending in its own right, the weekend was complete.

“Wow,” she said again. “Anything I can do to help? Work less? Give up a shift or two at the restaurant?”

“No, no, nothing like that.” Her jobs were important to her, and I was open to working more hours if the agency needed me. “No, all you need to do is keep on being my amazing Jennifer.” I gave her a smile.

She dawdled, working through the entrée as though it were an obstacle course. She hadn’t even finished her first glass of wine; how she could drink a generic white zinfandel was beyond me, but she said she liked it. She used to like beer, the home brew I made, but bartending had cheapened her tastes. Probably she was trying to diet without being obvious. I offered her some of the kedgeriee, but she refused it.

“My name isn’t Jennifer,” she said, suddenly and with widened eyes. “It’s Jennie, with an IE. Jennie Lee. It’s the name my mother gave me.”

“I know that. But I like how Jennifer sounds, I think it suits you. I didn’t realize it was a problem,” I said.

“You don’t like to be called Chuck, or Chet, or Charlie, do you?” she asked. “You’re always Charles.” She was right. I loathed hearing my name bastardized. I am definitely a Charles, and I had always thought she could rise above her name.

“Did you ever call Victoria ‘Vicky?’” she asked.

“Of course not,” I said. “She liked her name. And for good reason.” Victoria was the woman I was involved with just before Jennie. She and I had shared a great deal and were still friendly.

Jennie gazed outward, as though she was looking for a specific title on the shelves, then looked down and leaned forward again with another great sigh.

As the waitress cleared our plates and listed the night's remaining desserts I could see Jennie's interest was sparked. "We'll take the check," I said. She didn't need the calories, and we still had an hour and a half drive. "I'm sure you're anxious to get home," I said, to lessen the sting of the denied dessert.

"Sure. Let me visit the restroom first."

* * * * *

Jennie had a tendency to linger, so I took my time with my pint and went outside to enjoy a smoke before we got back on the road. I saw my duffel bag on the sidewalk as I lit my meerschaum. Negotiating a cab ride to the Cities took about an hour and cost me the rest of my tournament winnings.

I moved at the end of the month and had to leave the cat with her. She had wanted me to take it, claiming she hadn't wanted it in the first place, but the move and apartment rent meant I would be working close to 30 hours a week, and I wouldn't be able to give a cat the care and attention it deserved.

Memory Lies

Trieste Fay

It says you made love under a fig tree in the Georgia savannah,
even though you have never been to Georgia. You remember
him whispering sweet lullabies, and the way the wind
gently pressed on the tall grass that hung over you like long fingers,
tickling your belly as your lover blew you a kiss,
that kiss you carried around in your heart all this time,
until, when you looked up into the searing southern sun,
highlighting your bare body, twenty years later,
you forgot what he said, in the shade of the fig tree.

One Cactus, Nevada

Devon Humphrey

They sat outside in that American sun with the sweat of abandonment running down their mood swing jawlines and along the muscles they didn't care to possess. The man with the worn brown cowboy hat swore and kicked up a patch of dirt which was almost the same color as the air it filtered into. Romano, a young man with a cotton blue shirt on and a black cowboy hat, laughed in frustrated response as he gazed at his dead cellphone and through it. "Nothing but stupid," his grandmother's old catchphrase sauntered through his tired mind. Juan paced an invisible line dully, cursing under his breath and his untrimmed, cracked mustache. What was there to do now? It was too hot now to play the blame game with each other, so each fumed with the desert weather and fantasized about water. Some lone water fountain, even a cupful of water. They did not dare dream of waterfalls or sweeter things. It was much too hot for that.

Juan and Romano had been stranded in One Cactus, Nevada a few hours ago with the promise of "I'll be right back." Fat chance, jerk. Romano picked up his love, a worn flamenco guitar that his father had given him (unknowingly) as a parting gift when he was fifteen. He strummed the guitar once and it was as kind as the day was hot. A bead of sweat dripped from his eyebrow. He started to play. The steel strings and his calloused fingers tapped and danced like old enemies, good friends. Juan turned his attention to him. The music reminded him of the water Isabel had poured over her long Mexican locks only to drip and soak into the bed of his appetite. He took off his sweaty hat and started fanning his sorry face. Romano fed his thirst to the guitar, pleading with it as he worked this niche of the universe. Drugs couldn't get him this high.

He didn't stop to mop the sweat from his deeply tanned forehead. The song purred and licked at their leather boots making both of them tap

out a rhythm, any rhythm. Juan cracked a smile which showed off a row of white teeth and a few silver ones.

Romano closed his eyes as he continued to play. Breathing wasn't as natural as this, this.. music. His soul must surely live in the cracks and splinters of the wood, always trying to get out and move on waves of sound. He thought of the fire that started in the dining room, his first pair of boots, the time Esperanza smiled at him, and that other time.. He could have shed a tear if he had any water left in him. A black truck ambled up to the two men and lurched to a halt. Juan put his hat back on and Romano let his music melt into the dead landscape.

"Sorry for the hold up, guys, I blew a tire on the way to town. Ready to go?"

Washing the Virgin

Trieste Fay

My mother washed the white bed sheets every Sunday
afternoon when morning mass was over, and she was filled
with the body of Christ. She bleached the stains so they disappeared,
unnoticed. And on the third day, after Helios had his way and the wind
kissed them dry, she would iron with intensity. Steam would rise up,
linger and shine on her stern face.
Sometimes making her weep.
Sometimes making her angry.
Sometimes making her uncomfortably warm inside,
with the woman she was.

Sometimes when I am washing my body, I remember
what Sister Mary Francesco said to me when I asked
about the virgin Mary's immaculate conception.
"The details of conception are not for young minds.
Our blessed mother was holy.
You are a dirty child."

In confession, I could not tell the truth, even to God.
So I lied to appease the Father.
Maybe he could absolve me of my sins,
if I came
to mass every Sunday, faithfully,
said the rosary three times as penance.
Then, I would be forgiven for my unholiness,

my unwillingness to accept that my mother
was virtuous and the Son who saves me
was not a bastard, born on stained sheets.



Veil
Erin Green

Baby Binge-and-Purge

Joshua Chase

I can't shake the thought that some day
my daughter will be just like me.
She's ten months old and recently discovered
her gag reflex.

Ever since then, she's been jamming her fingers
into the back of her throat and holding them there
as her eyes tear up and her face
gets all swollen and purple.

I tried to chock it up to innocence --
a small child eagerly exploring her own body --
but I can't help noticing she does it
whenever I leave the room.

Every time I step away from her
to go to the bathroom or prepare a bottle
she starts blowing chunks. (Though it's more like a paste --
a gooey concoction of apple sauce bits
or puréed sweet peas and bile.)

It's as if she's already developed
her own self-destructive tendencies,
personally gratifying ways to sooth her
separation anxiety or whatever other issues
her young life has been saddled with.

Does infant bulimia exist?
Is Baby Binge-and-Purge an actual thing?

Sometimes I lay awake at night
worrying that by some rule of genetic freakdom
I've passed her my masochistic need
to hurt myself in order to feel ok.

Or maybe DNA has nothing to do with it.
Perhaps I burdened her with a host of psychological horrors
when I spent the beginning of her life
in drug rehabs and jail cells.

And that's the fear: That despite my best efforts
the damage is already done and I've destined her
to spend a lifetime in moldy church basements
trying to 12-step her way to some semblance
of a normal life.

Sounds like Sunrise

Lydia Klismith

On the radio there is a solo pianist
playing something slow
and a little sad,
but that isn't my point.
What matters is that
I can hear the whisper
of his clothing as he leans forward.
I hear the seat creak.
I hear him exhale slowly through his nose
as he ends a painfully melodious line.
It is the sound of a dying songbird.

I hear his anticipatory breath.
In my mind's eye I see his fingers rise up
and come crashing down,
little men without parachutes.
There's a thud
and a bang.
The pianist,
his hair sticking to his head with sweat
his brown eyes rolling in his skull
watches his bony fingers shudder across the keys
and for a moment
he is afraid he is possessed.
His heart feels overworked,
his pulse is tight
he can feel it pushing into his skin
like the blood wants to escape.

He decides that if he is going to die
that this would be the time to do so.
He carries on playing.

I listen, and wonder if he is still alive.
For all I know, he is long dead
and this recording is all that is left.



Winsted, Minnesota 2

Pearl Vasseur

The Remembering Dead

Ashley Croteau

During the day
the dead begin to cry.
They toss away their looks,
cracked and raw
like dried out skin,
shriveling into the body.
They remember their children
laughing in the summer sun,
its rays beating down
and grabbing ahold of the skin,
digging deep into the pores.
They touch their cracked
porcelain faces. They howl
like disciplined dogs.
They remember the day
the sky turned gray,
rain trickling down their new wooden
home, thunder roaring from above.

Timeless

Devon Humphrey

I could sit on dusky porches and watch the sun fade for years
Both hands relaxed on the armrests as whispering sands of time
shifted between my toes
Scattered through the desert like secreted birds made of grated stone
In my temple of time I sit and watch
Drinking only the feelings that come with exposure
Years swell the bones and coax bridges out of shorelines
Miniature headstones palpitate the boardwalks of the world
Mussels clinging to every gritty second of compassion
Yet
the desert clamors for my soul like rest for the weary
Branches of unremembered moments sway and snap
lazily in the nonexistent breeze of a landscape that
just can not stand one
The book in my hand falls with a shuff of sand to
break its fall
These gray eyes find their peace in dreams of day
and humbling skies of blue
Murky with the lure of Sangria
A day is forgiven

Just another Day

Dehcontee Dee

Bang, bang, bang, and they were in. Under normal circumstances we had been more than likely to reach for a phone, dialed the most popular number known to man, and hoped the police reached us in time before things got ugly. But this time, the country had fallen apart, the system had broken down, people killed each other for reasons they couldn't define, there was no such option as 911. We just sat there; held our collective breath, praying to what we believed in to spare us a day to tell our story. Because I lived, it is with great felicity that I carry out my commitment to the God who heard us on that night of terror.

I was swaddled in fright, dread, and pain when four armed men broke into our house. It was a silent night in July 2003; even the frogs from the nearby swamps had ceased croaking. But some forty miles away from our safe haven, the so-called liberators and the tyrants they sought to put away were at each other's necks. My family and I were halfway into a state of mind where worries about the civil war did not reside when we heard a big bang about 2am. Two hour earlier, the older folks were sitting up speculating the arrival of freedom. Someone quoted a radio source as saying that plans were in the pipeline for a peace-keeping mission to Liberia. This invited an air of hope that brightened up the night. We performed our daily ritual with more zeal than ever before – singing the loudest and praying the longest. Then, we stretched our tiny bodies on the war-time beds (mats spread out on a concrete floor covered with a pile of clothes). Sleeping on those uneven surfaces was a hazard. I remembered repositioning my body to avoid the pain until the state of natural unconsciousness sank in. It was near this point, between sleep and awake, that I heard the huge knock. It felt like someone had just pierced a sword through my heart. We were in trouble!

Our sanctuary was a three bedroom house made of dirty bricks plastered together with wet clay. Both the front and back doors opened into the living room; the rooms did the same. Our room, which was the

largest of all, aligned with the other rooms on one side but crossed them a little so that they formed an L-shape with our room directly opposite the back door. The doors frames were attached to the wall by two long steel nails, stuck in a fairly round hole drilled into the bricks that was then sealed with wet clay. Once dry, the doors were held pretty tight in place with aluminum tower bolts securing them from the inside. On that faith night though, the back door wasn't held tight enough for those ruthless looters who effortlessly broke it down. Since our room door was directly facing the back door, it quickly caught their attention. When they got to our room door, they decided to make their work a little easy. With a strong arrogant voice, someone barked, "Open the door!" There were eight persons in the room. My mother, my oldest sister, and I along with my mother's friend and her family, who we had followed on our nearly twenty-mile walk to safety, but much like myself, I figured that everyone's feet were cramped with panic. The room was as quiet as a cemetery - once movable bodies become lifeless. I guess everyone was a saying a prayer because there was nothing else to do. No one made a sound, but the river of tears that flowed down the women's cheeks said it all.

After a few stern barks and a string of death threats, the plank door came crashing on the concrete floor with an impact that sounded much like an explosive device. Four men armed with AK-47 rifles and machetes entered. My heartbeat suddenly skyrocketed. I shivered in fear, hoping that God would save us from those fearful beasts that smelled so muggy like they haven't changed clothes in months. "God, just another day, "I prayed. My clothes began to stick to my skin. Water dripped from my face like I had run four miles on a 90° F summer day. They stared around the room for about a minute or so before the tallest one of them all broke the silence with a military strategy to an unarmed and helpless bunch like us. He was 5' - 8", weighed about a hundred and fifty pounds - if at all he was not wearing more than one military trouser and black shirt. With a harsh tone like the one that was barking at the door, he said, "Nobody make noise; we get our manne [men] all around das house. I will kay [kill]

anyone dat make noise!” My eyes watered. The thought of death permeated my mind as I looked at those brand new machetes glittering in the hands of people with corrupt conscience. “You bring all money you get here,” he continued. The women were scared to death. They tried to say something, but their lips quivered so badly; they did not make sense – whatever they were saying. Did I mention that I was the only man? With three guns pointed at us, the furious leader of our attackers flapped the assault rifle on his back, held the machete firmly in his right hand and embarked on a thorough search for hidden treasures.

It was a quick, rough search. Obviously we did not have a lot of things. He knew we were internally displaced people, from an urban city, that had come to seek refuge in the remote community that was yet to be touched by the tentacles of the war. That meant we had only essential stuffs like food, maybe money, and that is exactly what this belly-driven government militias were looking for. The rebels seeking to remove then President Charles Taylor had fought their way to the capital city capturing many things including the two major ports of entry. More than ninety-five percent of the goods and everything else enter Liberia through those ports. The government was losing everything. Its soldiers were hungry and obviously angry. Since we (the civilians) were the grass on the battlefield of two elephants, we were bound to endure their weights. He emptied all the bags we had, taking every parcel of rice that we have spread throughout our runaway bundles. At this point, I felt the wind of death blowing in all directions. If we survived the guns and machetes tonight, then we will slowly give up our ghost to hunger within a few days. “The war has just started,” I told myself. I could live with the sporadic gun sounds, as scary as they were, but it was unthinkable to survive without rice. As though this wound wasn’t enough, the pachydermatous gang leader with little value for life insisted that everybody stand up. “Stand up, you stupid people,” he commanded at the top of his cruel voice. “You’re here sleeping and we’re on the line fighting for you? I want all the money now!” His right hand swung up as he said this, elevating the machete to a height right above my mother’s head. I almost shouted my guts out.

The gate of death had just opened, and my mother was about to be thrown in. This thing was getting unbearable, but overwhelming fear contained the pain inside. I was just fourteen years old. Everyone was shaking. I straddled up against the wall; my legs just couldn't serve me right. I almost crashed; more water streamed, this time from somewhere else. My mother was the only parent I knew. A huge drop of tears gushed from my eyes and flow down my cheeks with less viscosity. More followed. He held the machete in upwards with his left hand and checked the women with the right while his accomplices watched closely without a blink, putting his filthy hands everywhere. He took away the little money my mother had wrapped at the tip of her lapper. Worse of all, those savage robbers took away our gold dust (rice, Liberian's stable food, was as scarce as gold dust). The whole ordeal lasted for about fifteen minutes, but the panic and fear that it inflicted on us still lives on – actually, it will never leave. Nobody was physically hurt, but painful days of hunger, nightmares, and sleepless nights were few of its many residues thrust at us.

There were several other people that had similar and even more gruesome experiences during the course of the almost sixteen year's civil war. Many were either shot or chipped dead. Some survived with brutal wounds. Few, like my family and I, narrowly made it through without physical scars. Every time that I reflect on this incident and picture the machetes, the muggy criminals, imagined the level of perspiration I am yet to experience since, and most importantly my promise to God, I feel blessed. We were no better than those who lost their lives, or those who were grossly violated. We were no different than those who have been reduced to beggars as a resulting from disabilities they sustained during nonsense war. This is my testimony; this is an experience that helped me to build faith. Thank God for another day.

From The Train

Ashley Croteau

The tracks begin to shake
from the hefty weight of the train.
On my window streaks of water
slide down the glass like liquid mud.
Thunder like heavy drums
and a dark figure under a crumbled bridge.
Pressing my face into the glass, I see a man,
a paper sign, droopy and damp,
ink running down like a blood smeared wall.
Beard scruffy, hair matted.
A gray trench coat possessed
holes like a worn out rug.
Lips cracking, and curling down, eyes sunken.
This man who makes me ask the question,
where has he been?



Man
Lisa Kill

Keeping it Clean

Josh Steenhoven

The concept of dance.
They threw it in the mud,
We pulled it out and washed it.
No more dirty moves,
just respect and pride.
Breakdancing.

Stand up wait for that perfect beat,
boop, bop, bump.
hit the ground knees spinning,
Use hands like support beams for a wall.
Like a needle and thread, grab left foot with hand,
and bring right leg through.
There's no time for mistakes,
the whole room is watching,
dance together in unison.

I roll onto my back
use my hands,
as if they were springs
and kick up,
to bring me back to my feet standing.
I quickly jump after,
pausing in the air,
before shifting to a handstand,
my legs positioned to appear
like the Nike logo.

The performance is finished,
and I just now start to regain my hearing.
The crowd of people are on their feet yelling.
We kept in clean.
No suggestive moves you see in clubs,
no calling people out like in the circle,
but real clean dancing.

Sweet Grape, Sugar Bear

Weston Burns

Botrytis cinerea is a noble fungus which grows on Riesling grapes towards the end of harvest. It is known for causing an evaporation of water, resulting in a grape that is richer in flavor and color. An admirable bond between beauty and grotesque...

She looks at me with tender grace,
Shattering my walls and exposing my chivalry.
I struggle to contain the colorful beast within
From devouring her whole.
His love's glutinous appetite wants to feast on her soul
And ravish her transparent heart until absorbing into spellbind.
Only then will this maiden's true love
Kindle, ignite, and burn corona.
Evaporating all blood and life
From the beast's beating heart.
Leaving just me.
Just a good hearted man.
She *is* my botrytis cinerea!



Dusted

Kali Anderson

Grandma Olson Raking Leaves

Anthony Erickson

A cove of dying limbs
Hang, shedding
Superfluous skin
Abandoned stale children
Compost heaps
Gone to seed their kin

Acres of shadows
Looming
Like dangling chains
Links of leaves
Clanging in the gentle breeze
Rattle rustled sounds.

Flares of sparkling sun,
Tempering
Her mettle, steels
Her blades filing
Raking light beams cross
Vibrant foliage piles
Of deciduous autumn flesh.

Colors of cluttered rust
Stacked across, sleeping
Stagnant growth covered up
Cold remains
Forming winter
Foggy breath clouds

She puts her blades to rest
As I dive,
Being six
Feet high up in the air,
Into heaps waist high
Making out angels
With deciduous autumn flesh.

A Story

Thomas Streed

Walking into the cemetery,
feeling the heavy fog.

I find her grave,
take the red broom in hand,
and sweep away the leaves and grass.

From the stone,
which reads “ Beloved grandma, mother,
and wife.” 1920-2009

The picnic blanket,
one the grass next to her,
sitting cross legged staring up at the sky,
I choke on my words.
Will she hear me?

I open my mouth,
the words pouring out.
I tell her the story of everything,
everything I never got to say.

Malign

Lydia Klismith

It starts in my right foot, the pressure building between my toes and the asphalt below. When the pressure becomes too much, I feel the energy travel like lightning through my calf to my knee, then to my hip, then to my vertebrae. My spine uncoils, the bones fan out and tendons stretch. It reaches my shoulders and it releases with a snap, my arms and the bat moving like a whip. With an explosive connection, the mailbox is sent flying from its mount. The contents fly out like sparrows and flutter down like lost feathers. I hold my pose for a moment, painfully aware that I am flesh and blood and bones. I imagine that this must be what it's like to be a corpse in the body-world exhibit. I feel beautiful.

I relax and the feeling is gone. There is an impressive mess spewed across the cul-de-sac. Lights flicker to life at the Covettson residence. I run back to my house, clutching my little brother's baseball bat. I'm barefoot and cold in my blue polyester satin pajamas. Dew drops from the grass soak into my pant legs. I'm in the back yard before I hear Mr. Covettson's voice, loud in the empty cul-de-sac stage.

“Bastard! I'll find you and snap your neck!”

As I climb through my bedroom window I'm afraid he knows it was me. But he couldn't. I've only talked with him twice, even then briefly. He doesn't like kids, especially not fourteen year-old girls, I'm sure. I crawl into bed and curl myself inwards. I feel the pull of my abdominal muscles fold me in, and I crumple closed like a window blind. Last night, I opened the bathroom window blinds. Across our lawn, I could see into Mr. Covettson's kitchen. Mom was with him. Dad was still at work. It was late.

She was naked.



Spine
Lisa Kill

It Happened

Trieste Fay

It happened
at sixteen,
when I
was pretending
to be someone
I was not.

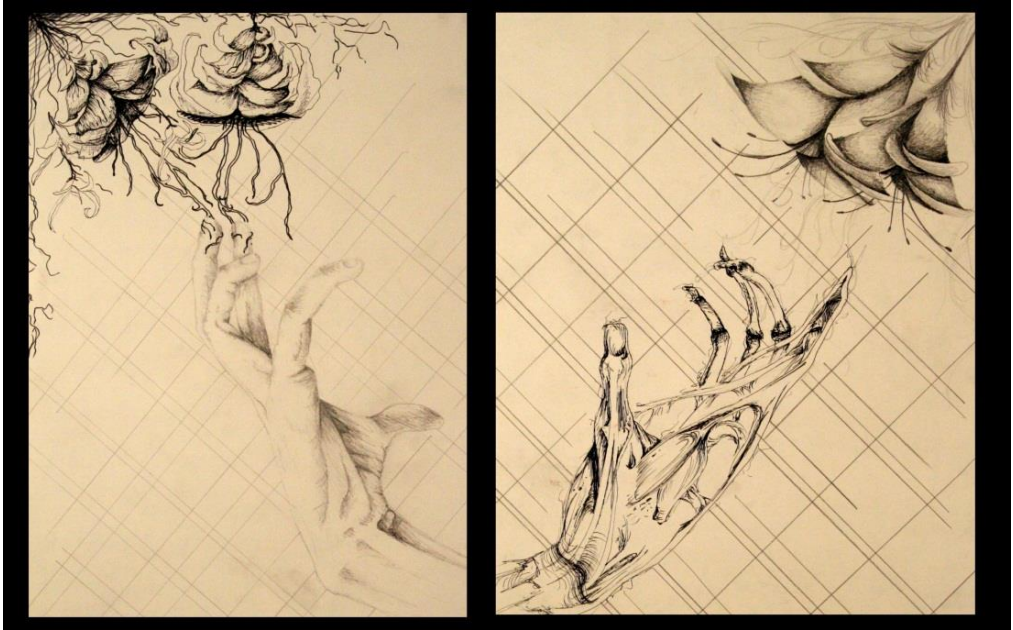
Too naive,
too drunk,
or too insecure
to know
any different,
when a boy
took my trust,
thrusting
his voice
in my ear,
telling me
this was
what I wanted,
to stop crying,
to stop
making it bigger
than it was.

My silence
does not mean
it stopped, nor
that it
didn't happen.

Hate

Lydia Klismith

I woke up in the shower with my socks still on.
It was four AM, and I could see a thin
Line of a red horizon cut through the dark.
I had dreamt that my heart had burst.
Magma pooled out,
Sunk into my stomach,
Burned through my intestines,
And sat in the cup of my hips
Where it bubbled and hissed.
It didn't hurt.
It was just weird,
Being eaten
By something that didn't have a mouth.



Give and Take

Austin Eckstrom

Bony Fingers

Julia Shir

“Work your fingers to the bone and what do you get??? Bony fingers!!”

I sigh. This sing-songy chant, led by my mother in her mellow voice and joined by my brothers in their squawks is not exactly what I had had in mind for this morning.

We are in the garden. To be specific, the green bean patch. And before I can run off to read that book that I checked out from the library (I loved to read), I must pick every green bean off from every bush in my row.

It is hot. The sun is beating down, the deerflies are zooming around my hat, sweat trickling down my back, and my bare feet are covered with dirt. Even the scratchy leaves from the green bean bushes are sticking to my clothes. Yes, I am a mess. The air conditioning in the house would be a welcome relief right about now...or maybe a cold shower, but I am in the green bean patch and will stay there close to another hour.

This wasn't unusual. Every other day, the beans had matured and were ready to pick again. And I and my siblings were used to “working our fingers to the bone.” Not that we actually wanted bony fingers—I'm not sure where that came from—but our dad was the only employed parent, so we were used to working to make ends meet. Our mom, a nurse, had given up her job to be a stay-at-home mother when my older brother was born. Because our family only had one income, we tried to grow or raise more of our food to save on the grocery bill, which was quite high since there were six of us children.

My mom tried to make the work fun by singing or offering incentives. Green bean picking was more than just a task. It was a race! So now I am in the garden, perched on an upside down pail, leaning over the bushes, not just picking, but also racing! And whoever would reach the end of their row first would receive the glory of being the fastest bean picker.

I do pick fast. I tip the bush over with one hand, and with the other, yank the five-or-six smooth, long beans off of the plant, plunk them down into an ice cream pail by my feet and hoist myself, my bucket-seat, and my ice

cream pail to the next plant. And the next...

When the heat becomes too much for me and various other siblings, we run across the yard to a large plastic barrel. An hour before, we filled this up with cold water from our well. Now, we take turns dunking in the barrel. We became quite distracted from our work, for a new contest arises. Who can dunk in the icy cold water the most times in a row? Who can stay under the longest? Who has the courage to dunk first? When our legs feel numb and tingly and our heads feel like our brains have frozen, we can hear Mom's voice once more from the garden, calling us back to work. Clothes plastered to our backs and legs, we happily scamper back to the garden and finish our work there.

Later, we would sit at the kitchen table and snap of the stems of each bean, then chop and wash the beans while listening to a story on tape. Mom would cook the beans and can them in quart jars, to be placed on the pantry shelves for winter eating. We were meanwhile free to go play outside: biking, building forts, swimming. And maybe in the evening, instead of reading aloud to us like he usually did, Dad would let us watch a comedy together on our old VCR, for a special treat.

We didn't have a television, we didn't have a Wii, we didn't even have video games, and computer games and movies were rare. We were a Working Family. Our lives were filled in the summer with working hard and playing hard, in addition to reading many books. If my parents said, "Today is family fun day," every one of us children knew that there was extra work to be done, whether we would be picking wild grapes and making jelly or making soap or even 100 gallons of apple cider for the freezer.

But even on non-"family fun days", there were raspberries, tomatoes, corn, squashes, peas, and apples to be picked and made up into jams, sauces and juices, as well as frozen to be eaten later.

There were dogs, chickens, and pigs to be watered, fed and kept in line. The dogs would have puppies to sell, and what could be more fun to play with than fat little puppies? The chickens laid eggs and roamed the barnyard, occasionally attacking a child but the child simply learned how to

fend of a vicious rooster and keep the upper hand. The pigs had to be slopped and watered twice a day.

The cows were a great deal of work. They had to be fed, watered, and milked twice a day. The milk needed to be kept cool, the cream must be skimmed off the top to make butter in the butter churn, and milk cooked in a large kettle on the stove to make cheese. The work of keeping a cow paid off because we could make ice cream whenever we wanted to...and whenever our arms felt up to cranking the ice cream maker in order to produce sweet chocolate ice cream.

If the cows got out of the pasture, the whole family threw on shoes or ran out bare foot as fast as possible to herd them back in before they went to far, and someone would have to fix the fence where they got out. Once, the cows traveled several miles to a neighboring farm to visit the cows there. Our phone rang early in the morning with someone asking us if we were missing our cows. Not seeing them, all the drivers in the family jumped in to cars and drove to find them. My older brother was driving with me riding shotgun when we found the cows. We ended up walking them home across several plowed fields. I was barefoot but the walking was good!

Now I am a college student. I only occasionally help with the work of the farm. But as I am headed off to do some studying, I can hear my mom telling my younger brothers: “It’s a work day today. We’re making pickle relish with the cucumbers.” And I smile, knowing that as much as I am glad to be off studying, Mom will find some way to make the work fun for these boys. They will grow up with knowledge and skills they would not have had if we weren’t a Working Family. I know that I, too, have gained much from being part of this family, learning that work is fun.

A Sleeping Baby

Erin Green

Send my soul to a sleeping baby
Keep it in her care
For she knows the way to Heaven and God
She can tell me where

Send my soul to a sleeping baby
Keep it safe for me
For she is innocent and pure
And she will set me free.



Minnesota Butterfly 2

Paul Kantorowicz

