the bridge

2004

the bridge, Volume 1, 2004

Bridgewater State College

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A STUDENT JOURNAL OF FINE ARTS
Bridgewater State College
2004
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Bridgewater State College
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Printed by RPI Printing, Fall River, Massachusetts

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Comments and inquiries can be sent to thebridgejournal@bridgew.edu
Mission Statement

the bridge is entirely student produced and run. Our charge is to serve, as we are dedicated to showcasing the artistic talents of the student body while providing internships in editing and in graphic design. Our goal is to excel, as we wish to pay a debt to our alumni, keep a promise to ourselves, and set an example for our successors.

Cover Art

Derek Riley, 2003 recipient of The John Heller Award.

The annual John Heller Award was established in 2003 to recognize a student whose body of work exemplifies excellence. The award received its name from one of Bridgewater State College’s most beloved and distinguished faculty. Professor Heller taught in the Department of Art from 1968 to 2001. He was an inspired artist, a dedicated, gifted teacher and mentor, and an unselfish giver of his time, wisdom and expertise. The cover of each edition of the bridge is dedicated to his memory.

Cover design by John Butler
This inaugural edition of the bridge is the culmination of a journey that began eight months ago with a simple idea: provide a forum with which to showcase the artistic talents of our students. But simple ideas often translate into complex acts, and so it was with this project. To arrive at this point, the staff had to overcome many obstacles, some small, some large, and any one of which could have proved fatal were it not for the people who, at crucial moments, extended a helping hand. The staff is especially indebted to: President Dana Mohler-Faria and Vice President Nancy Kleniewski, for their trust, optimism, and loyalty; Ms. Susan McCombe, for much too much to mention; Dr. Charles Nickerson, whose long-time desire for a campus-wide student journal served as a source of inspiration; Dr. Ronald Pitt, whose enthusiasm about this venture matched and threatened to exceed our own; Ms. Linda Hall, for her graphic design wizardry and dogged support of all things student-centered; Professor Mike Hurley, for allowing his publishing-savvy brain to be picked; and the mailroom’s Paul Auger, James Ferguson, and Michael Lehane, whose gracious assistance enabled this show to finally get on the road.

Of course, there would have been no “show” without the generous support of the Bridgewater State College Foundation, for which the staff is eternally grateful. The staff is also grateful to the following people and departments, listed in no particular order: Ms. Deanne Farino; Mr. David Plante; Ms. Rosann Kozlowski; Ms. Cathy Holbrook; Dean Howard London; Professor Magaly Ponce, Professor Mercedes Nunez; Dr. Roger Dunn, Dr. Brenda Molife, Professor Rob Lorenson and the Department of Art; Dr. Evelyn Pezzulich, Dr. Tom Curley, and the Department of English; Ms. Andrea Garr-Barnes and the Office of Multicultural Affairs; the Department of Philosophy; the Department of Foreign Languages; Dr. Mark Kemper; Dr. George Candler; Dr. Ruth Hannon; Dr. Anna Martin-Jearld; Mr. Scott McNeilly; Ms. Betsy Scarborough; Mr. Frank Freitas and RPI Printing; Professor Alan Rosen (University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth); the Academic Achievement Center; Professor Ed Homewood (Harold Washington Junior College, Chicago); Dr. Raymond ZuWallack; Dr. Alan Comedy, Ms. Ann Matthews and the Office of Affirmative Action; Mr. Geoffrey Oldmixon and The Comment; Mr. Mike Shea; the Department of Communication Studies and Theatre Arts; everyone who offered encouragement along the way; and, finally, to the students whose 342 submissions confirmed this journal’s necessity.

It is the sincere hope of the editors that you admire the works that have been selected. It is the sincere hope of the advisor that you also admire the editors. For the last eight months, these seven remarkable students committed themselves to bringing you this journal. They worked weekends, nights, and over winter and spring breaks. They would be working now (happily, tirelessly, devotedly) were there more work to be done. Their dedication to fulfill their mission never waned, and their belief in its importance never faltered. John Butler, Lauren Carter, Kaitlin MacLean, David Mitchell, Courtney Smith, Jennifer Stodder, Christina Warsheski -- these are their names, this is their triumph, and they deserve our applause.
To
President Dana Mohler-Faria
For this incredible opportunity
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Introduction

“What’s the name going to be?” This was the first question many of us asked after we were selected as editors. It seemed to be a very important thing to know at the time, more important than, say, how we’d actually go about putting together a student journal of literature and visual art, of which none of us had any prior experience. We also wondered how many works we would receive (deep down, there was the irrational fear that we wouldn’t receive any, and yet we allowed ourselves to hope for 50. We received an astonishing 342!) What would the journal look like? we wondered. How would we make the selections? What would be on the cover? Would we have an office? We had many, many questions, but the one we found most pressing was our original one. The right name, we felt, would be crucial. It needed to embody what it was we were trying to accomplish with this journal. We needed, in a word, representation. With the bridge, we found exactly what we were looking for.

It was a logical choice. We liked how the name would pay homage to the school and its host town, but, more than that, how it would speak to the link that the journal hoped to establish not only between students, but between students and faculty, artists and art patrons, current students and alumni, and BSC and the community at large. It would speak to the act of connecting, of linking together a diverse and talented group of students, points of view and forms of expression. Yes, we felt, the name was in place. That decided, the call went out for submissions, the works poured in, and the selection process began.

Selected for this issue are works from alumni, freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors and a graduate student. Eleven different majors are represented, as well as many works by artists whose majors are undeclared. And yet the artists included were chosen without our awareness of the above facts. It was an entirely blind selection process. We, as editors, had no knowledge of any artist’s name, major or year until the final decisions were made. All we had before us was the art, and that was all that mattered. We were guided by our search for excellence, and in the end we were humbled by what we found.

We were humbled, for instance, reading a writer’s touching story of her father’s fight to retain his dignity while struggling with Alzheimer’s, and we were humbled by a teenager’s struggle to overcome drug addiction. We were humbled by prose and visual images dealing so honestly with loneliness, jealousy, alienation and irrepressible love, and by works involving murder, attempted suicide, racism and religious hypocrisy. Some of these subjects sound discouraging, but, to the contrary, because of the skill with which they were handled, they are proof of Ralph Ellison’s statement that “good art is a celebration of life.” The works here, we feel, are good, and they are life-affirming. They are a celebration of the lives of the artists who created them, and they are a celebration of the art of living. They have the ability to open us to new perspectives, to teach us more about the world around us, and, in so doing, more about who we are. They have the capacity to make us realize that, despite our differences, we are all connected in some vital way. They have the power to link us. They have the power to unite us. They are - this is - the bridge.

The Editors
March, 2004
My father’s hands shake constantly. It’s most noticeable when he’s eating dinner. He balances some food on his fork and brings it up to his mouth, but the shaking makes almost all of the food fall back to the plate. He fills his mouth with what he has left and repeats. I’m not sure what the cause of the shaking is; the doctors say it’s a neurological disorder, but I think it’s from the chain saws. My dad is an arborist, the fancy word for a tree surgeon, and I always wonder if the fierce vibrations of his machine left his hands thinking they were always holding it, reminding him of his work.

For my dad, the shaking is a nuisance. It makes eating difficult. Writing nearly impossible. It makes his cigarettes shake between his thick, yellow fingers and makes the ashes fall off the head too soon. He holds his hands together a lot, almost like he’s praying, rubbing them together constantly, bending and stretching his fingers, flexing and relaxing his fists. He does this while he stares off with his head cocked to the left, his mouth open, his eyes wide, hardly blinking. I think it’s because his hands hurt.

When I lived at home, nights were routine: he comes in at nine, working until he can’t see anymore. He comes in through the basement door and doesn’t come upstairs for a long time. I’m not sure what he does down there other than take off his boots. He comes upstairs, walking slowly, like he’s in pain. Maya, my dog, is perched on the top step, tail wagging, looking down the stairs and waiting for him to come up. He bends down, slowly, to greet her, meeting his face with hers.

“Oh, hello my little girl! Did you miss me today? Did you? How was your day? Aw, you’re a good little girl! Hello!” This goes on for about ten minutes. Sometimes I count his words: 45 for the dog; none for me. I’d be leaning my back on the kitchen sink, one foot crossed over the other, arms folded across my chest, dressed in my black ensemble with hair freshly dyed with cherry Kool-Aid, watching my father greet my dog. I wish I could teach her not to like him as much as she does, like the way I taught her to sit. I wish I could say to him, “Hey, asshole, I’m your little girl, remember?” I wait patiently. “Did you eat your supper, puppy? Are you hungry? Oh, you’re a good little girl.” He glances up at me, then back at the dog. “Didja feed her?” he’d ask. “No,” I’d say, and walk away, wondering if I should count “didja” as one word or two.

After she is fed and he is full, he sits by himself in the living room, wrapped in his green, hooded bathrobe, watching The Weather Channel, hoping for a storm to blow trees or branches into the streets so he could go clear them. Other nights—nights when there is no storm in sight—are loud. He gets angry about something and punches things, mostly walls. His hand goes clear through them, leaving a big hole.

There are dozens of holes throughout my house. They’re almost all patched up, but I could go through right now and tell you where every one of them used to be and what caused them. There’s the one under the oak clock that hangs in the stairwell. You can still see the raised plaster from him not sanding enough.
That was the night my sister didn’t do the dishes on time. The one in the hallway across from the bathroom got there because I was playing the piano while he was sleeping. Then there’s the hole next to my parents’ bed on my father’s side that he still hasn’t fixed. I’m not exactly sure what happened that night – just another fight between the two of them that left a hole in the wall and my father leaving the house in a drunken fit vowing never to come back, swearing at my mother. He came back a few hours later. Some of the holes couldn’t be patched, like the ones that went through our bedroom doors. You can’t patch wood; you just buy a new door.

The ritual of patching the holes would usually take place quite soon, as my mother didn’t want anyone to come and see the holes, see that our house and our family were broken. I got to like those nights when he fixed the walls, and I think he knew that. He always did it when we were home, usually after dinner. It was almost like a performance, almost like an apology. He did it slow and careful, like the way I paint. Maybe I learned it from him. He would cut some old screen that he had in the basement and tie it into the wall, troweling on two layers of thick, wet plaster. The second coat would have to dry for a while, then he’d sand down the dried plaster, prime and paint it. I’d sit on the couch, smoking a cigarette, watching him. He’d ask me for one sometimes when he finished, and we’d sit there looking at his patching, and I’d think about how quickly a wall could get fixed.

We never said anything after the patchings; we’d just sit. And smoke. I didn’t even like cigarettes then. I just liked sitting there with him in the quiet. It was seven years that I smoked with my dad in that house, from when I was thirteen and living there to about twenty, when I’d go home to get my mail or visit my dog. I would light up with him, the two of us sitting outside, me sitting with my knees crunched up to my chest and him standing with his head far back, tilted up, sometimes with his eyes closed. I think I was just trying to prove something to him, or we were trying to prove to each other that there’s at least something we have in common. I think he was disappointed each time I quit.

And then the call from my sister in mid-May changed everything. Or almost everything. Or almost everything if just for a moment. I answered, in the middle of organizing some papers for a writing presentation, and I heard her crying on the other end. A big sniff, a hollow hello, and loud sobs followed by a nasally, “Dad had an accident at work today.”

An accident for my dad, the arborist, could have meant a lot of things. In the past it meant torn rotator cuffs, twice, in both shoulders. It also meant a broken rib once. A sliced arm. A lost finger.

She was never one to begin a conversation with, “Everything’s all right, but…” so I didn’t know if everything was all right. I guess that phrase just makes you think that everything’s not all right, but immediately I thought he was dead. Or I thought a chain saw cut him up. Or I thought—maybe the worst thought? —that he got sucked into his chipper.

My sister was always emotional. She cried over everything. I tried to calm her down, to get her to tell me what happened, while from the other end of the phone I sat, rolling my eyes at her. “I don’t know how bad it is,” she said through her dramatic sobs, “but he’s at the South Shore Hospital.” I told her I’d be there soon, leaving my writing for later. And I was annoyed. This phone call, as urgent as it was, had ruined my routine. It made me stop in the middle of the paragraph.
that I was revising, that I was getting so proud of, and I had to save, mid-sentence, the unfinished draft, and drive.

On the way to the hospital I tried my mom’s cell phone. Voicemail. I tried my brother. Voicemail. I kept driving, not in a panic, just driving, wondering what had happened. Wondering how my life might change when I got to the hospital.

I pulled into the lot, unsure of where to park, walked into the front revolving doors and went up to the Clinique-green desk that said “Information” in four different languages. There was an older woman with a blue volunteer button and a mauve smock sitting behind the desk. I gave her my dad’s name, and she typed it into her computer, typing with just her index fingers, and I watched how her wrinkles made her fingers fatter than they probably were in youth, how her wedding band pinched and made the fat of her finger puff out a bit, wondering how she’d ever get the ring off, and noticing that her hands shook a lot like my dad’s. “I’m sorry, dear,” she said. “He’s been transferred.” She couldn’t tell me what happened or what condition he was in. Just that he was now at the Beth Israel in Boston. I knew it couldn’t be good.

I got to the hospital after a long, traffic-filled drive up the expressway and a dozen cell phone calls with no answers. I was amazed at how calm I was. How I didn’t even care that there was traffic. How I didn’t cry. How I sung along to my Ani DiFranco albums while thinking of how I would react. What I would say if my dad was dead. What I would wear to his funeral. Wondering if Bryan, my boyfriend, would get to stand with me in the family line, if he’d have his hand on my back the whole time, rubbing it, and smiling little, reassuring smiles at me. I didn’t know if boyfriends could do that, or if it was reserved just for husbands. For legal, lifetime companions.

I got to the hospital and met up with my mom, brother, sister, and aunt. They told me that he fell out of his tree, fell 40 feet right to the ground, because his rope broke in half. I tried to picture 40 feet in my mind, but I couldn’t, couldn’t gauge it. I couldn’t visualize 480 inches stacked up one on top of another, reaching up high, pointing at the sky like tree branches. I couldn’t picture my dad collapsing all of those 480 inches. I couldn’t picture them breaking in half from the weight of his body, his chain saw, his boots and his belt. When I tried to picture it, it was in slow motion and silent. It was a graceful fall. A slow, foot-first fall. Maybe even a jump.

He was in surgery now, and the doctors thought he’d be okay. It was a miracle, they all said, and Bryan told me how just the week before, at my brother’s wedding, that my dad was talking about his trees and how if you fall 15 feet you’re done. Dead. Gone. But he, somehow, 25 feet higher, was alive.

I didn’t cry that night. I’m not sure what that says about me or my dad or how I feel about him. I was in this weird state where I didn’t know how I felt. I was sad. I was scared. I didn’t care. I wished it was worse than it was. I was just confused, disoriented. My dad could have died, I kept telling myself. And I didn’t know how I would have felt. I didn’t know if it would be relief or pain, grief or anger, passivity or deep sadness.

I went to the hospital again. He was on morphine—a lot of morphine—and was crying because he was in so much pain. He was talking about the pharaohs and how they were trying to steal his arm. He called me down close to his face,
and whispered in my ear: “Don’t let them take it, Andrea. I need it.” Later when the nurses were in the room he was yelling and swearing, screaming at the nurses: “Fucking pharaohs! Get them away! I’m not selling my arm!” And I couldn’t help—maybe because I was immature, maybe because I was nervous, maybe because it really was funny, maybe because I was embarrassed—I couldn’t help but laugh.

He came home after a while. I forget how long it was. But all summer it was my job (mine because part-time work is not as important as full-time work, and, being the youngest and in school, I only had a part-time job) to take care of him. But I also took the job on without much hesitation. I went to their house at six every morning to find my dad sleeping. I got close, made sure he was breathing, and then played with my dog. He’d call me from his bedroom when he woke up, slurring my name so it just sounded like a bunch of vowels strung together, and ask me to do various things: fluff his pillow, get more blankets, take blankets off, take away his pillow, change his socks, help him up, crank the metal screws that were going straight through his left arm, change his bandages, clean the puss from the holes in his body, get him drinks, bring him the plastic jug to piss in, empty it into the toilet, roll him over. It was exhausting, but I did it.

A lot of people were surprised by my nursing duties. Scores of people who know about my dad and me told me that I should let him lay there alone and suffer. Dozens of people told me that a man like him didn’t deserve a daughter like me. But I felt this obligation, this subtle obligation, that I almost enjoyed, to stay there with him.

I’ve heard a lot of girls’ stories about their fathers. And there’s something there between dads and daughters, something that’s just not there with mothers. If my mother was sick, I thought, I wouldn’t have gone. But there’s something there with my dad that I want. Something that I so badly want to understand and to fix. And fixing him, or nursing him, or whatever it was that I was doing to him, was my way of beginning.

After a good, long month he got out of his bed and started standing. He wanted to go outside, he told me, so I (who stands just five feet tall and can hardly carry anything more than two gallons of milk in the house at one time) carried the wooden gliding rocker from the living room outside to the front yard. I picked the chair up and it glided forward, then back, in my hands, and my body was awkward over it, trying to grip it and keep it still. I carried it down the stairs, almost falling, trying to squeeze through the front door with this chair, without letting the cat out, without letting the bees in, without tripping, and I put it on the front steps. I helped him down next. We got down the stairs and into the chair, and he sat back, mumbled, slurried, sighed, and spit. “Aehaaah,” he said, and I understood now that that was my name, “geh’meh a hat.” I went back up the stairs, found an old baseball cap, came down the stairs, outside, and put it on his head. “No,” he said, after I went in and came out again, “geh’meh ma’ tree hat.” I rolled my eyes, went back in, into the bedroom, and found his hat, a green one with yellow embroidery: “Simple Tree Man.” I got it for him for Christmas one year but had never seen him wear it. It was covered with dust, so I cleaned it, brought it out, and set it on his head. A few minutes later he wanted an O’Doul’s. A few minutes later, another. Then new socks. Then a blanket. Then a wet towel. I put the towel on his lap and he pulled me in toward him. “You’re a sweetheart,” he said, speaking even more clearly than
he had before the fall, staring at me. “A real sweetheart.”

I never heard him use either word: “Sweet” or “Heart.” I had never been that close to his face. I stared at him like that for a long time, his eyes glazed over from the oxycontin and morphine, and noticed the gray hues in his eyes that I never noticed before. I wish there was someone walking by who could have taken a picture in that moment: my dad, hurt, casted, broken, with my chin in his large, shaking hand, holding me, the daughter who I was convinced he had no use for, close to his face. I just looked at him, loving the moment, then shook out of it, said, “Cut the shit, Tom,” and walked up the stairs, smiling the whole way, and sat in the kitchen over a cup of coffee, smiling, because my dad thought I was a sweetheart.

I continued for the rest of that summer to care for him until he was able to walk, then drive, then, finally, work. And I thought we were fixed. I thought maybe now he would take care of me. But when he got better and didn’t need me anymore, when his hands worked again and when his speech was comprehensible, he started swearing again, started punching things again, and, the moment that made me know that it was over, when he threatened to kick me out of the house (which I hadn’t lived in, mind you, for three years) because I got in a fight with my mother, I knew he was better again. And that I wasn’t a sweetheart. And that things would go back, back three months, back with holes to patch, like nothing had ever happened.
I killed a woman. I tried to kill myself, but I lived and she died. She was seventy-six years old, and she had a husband and a son and two grandchildren and a cat. She’d had a hip replacement a year before to improve the quality of her life. Now she’s buried in the cemetery a quarter of a mile from my house. I used to walk my dog along that route, but I don’t anymore.

I grew up on the coast of Maine, where the cause of death is hard work and cold, raw air. My father was a fisherman who developed early onset Alzheimer’s at the age of forty-five. He lives like a jellyfish in the nursing home, floating without direction, seemingly incapable of thought, subject to where the tide of brain deterioration takes him. My mother died in childbirth. I am an only child.

In the town of Dalton, which has a population of less than one thousand, the people are strong and weather-beaten. It’s a fishing town where the fish fight back. Faces are chapped, lips are cracked, and smiles bleed. The damp gets into your skin and your blood. It gets into your head. I stayed until I was twenty-two, working in the cannery. We canned sardines. Dalton was the leading sardine producer in the east. Everything smelled like sardines. The smell slipped in between the air molecules, riding them across town, through open windows, under doors, and out onto the sea. It permeated. I soaked in scented baths for hours and double-washed my clothes, but nothing helped. I still carried it – that smell, that constant reminder of the limits of who I was. I felt like my future could never extend beyond the reaches of that sardine smell. Then Alec came.

When I first saw him, he was standing on the dock outside the cannery. It was early November, and the water was inky blue and choppy. I was downwind from him and could smell his Polo cologne. The spicy smell and his stance told me he was an outsider. He stood like a museum-goer admiring an outrageously famous painting but trying not to look too impressed. His arms were folded, his chin slightly up and tilted to the side. He peered sideways at the frothy waves. It looked to me like he was scrutinizing them, evaluating their form and texture. Later I would find out that I was right.

To Alec, art was everything, and everything was art. He could slice and matte anything; he saw the shades of life and of people, of joy and of sadness as chiaroscuro. He did it to me, too, even though he denied it. I could tell he always thought there should be a touch more light in my eye or more shading at my jaw line. He thought the real me was somehow unfinished, that the stroke of an artist’s hand could complete me in a way that nature hadn’t. It’s not like I completely disagreed with him. I did feel a certain hollowness in myself. But before Alec, I was always able to seal that part off, to keep that icy part from freezing the rest of my warm insides. It was being trapped in a frame, I think, that put me into real trouble.

I spoke to him that first day. I strolled right down the dock with the wind tingling my scalp. The wood of that dock was gray and so worn that its surface was soft. You could carve your initials in it with a fingernail. I glanced back at the
cannery and thought that all of Dalton’s landscape looked as though it had been washed in cyan. He noticed me coming, and I suddenly felt like a child in my dirty sneakers and windbreaker. He spoke with an accent. South African, he told me. He was a dealer of African art. Stone sculpture mostly. Not the masks and warrior imagery that so many ill-informed Americans associate with Africa. His artists were not half-naked tribesmen; they were guys who lived in apartment buildings and wore blue jeans. Hearing this made me feel somehow disappointed and then small-minded. I remember at first thinking that I should research this urban Africa and then laughing at myself as I thought of how distant and small and absurd that seemed as I stood on a flimsy bit of wood stuck way out into the ocean.

He had been up in Canada, in Quebec City. He was considering renting gallery space up there. He’d recently reconnected with an old schoolmate who had settled in Quebec and was thinking of putting him in charge of the space. He had taken a meandering route home, back to Boston, so as to “experience a bit of American life along the way.” As if musing over us like we were bits of paint spattered on a canvas was the equivalent of experience.

We walked back up the dock together. He brushed my hand. Electricity. The wind blew my hair into my mouth, and I tasted its saltiness. I asked him when he was leaving, and he looked down at me and said, “I think I’ll stay awhile.”

I quit my job and we spent two weeks like kindling, creating warmth. I fell in love with him. Alec could rest his chin on my head as we stood, embraced. He could lift up my body with one arm. He loved that.

I moved to Boston with him. It was rushed and maybe foolish, but it was like I’d been standing on the edge of a cliff with something huge and dark chasing me, pressing me, and it was either be crushed or jump. So I jumped. He lived in a one-bedroom apartment in the South End. At first, it all seemed so novel. The vertical lines, the solid squares that everything was made up of. Leaves fluttering past windows on updrafts. In Dalton, the leaves passed windows on their way down. Maybe I should’ve known then. Maybe I should’ve known that the geometry of the place was all wrong.

He cut out a few shapes, made a little space for me. In his closet, in his refrigerator, in the concave of his body in bed. I fit because I’m small and because I shrank a little every day I was there.

It was early morning when I took the pills. The morning light was lonely, like it missed the dark broth of night it had been strained from. Alec was already gone. He often left early to be with his art. He said it awed him just to sit in the empty gallery and gaze at the sculpture. The gleaming springstone calmed him, he said. It gave him hope. Its smooth curves reminded him to always think of the future. He told me all of this over a cup of chamomile tea that dotted the end of another day alone. I remember thinking that I wanted to be his calm, his hope, his future.

I guess I was trying to kill myself. I mean, I know I was, but it seemed less like a decision and more like an action, a simple motion. Like the wave of a hand. The bottle was just there, and I emptied it. Swallowed. It was aspirin, which didn’t even seem like a drug to me. It always seemed so benign, so pure, like water, like a compressed, chalky water. It comes from coal tar, which sounds so organic, like the clay I dug for at the beach as a child. Aspirin is a salicylate. It can be derived from
willow bark. It’s modified tree bark. It’s what we give to children, and it’s safe for dogs. It has a pleasant, tangy taste. It seemed so natural, so easy. It was so easy. The tablets went down like water.

I remember the fever and throwing up once. After that, it’s blank. They say that sweating, seizure, and collapse followed. If only the atmosphere could have sucked more out of me, like a vacuum pump. More sweat, more air. More love. Then I wouldn’t be left like this. I used to think that there was some swollen distance between life and death, like a hill rising between two cities. Now I know that distance only exists in our hope. Death is as close as the cool side of a pillow. Six more seconds, six more inches, six more prayers, and she lived. Six more tablets and I died.

Alec found me. He said later that I knew he was coming home that morning. He said he told me he had a brunch with a prospective buyer and that I’d known he’d be home. It’s as if he tried to snatch away the one bit of autonomy I’d exercised since I met him. He took my despair and squeezed it, wrung it out until it was just a limp, damp self-pity.

He didn’t call for an ambulance. Maybe it was a decision based on his judgment of me, of my feeble act. Maybe it was panic. He tossed me in the back seat of his Toyota. I know this story well because he’s had to answer for it so many times since. He sped out of the parking space, running over a broken beer bottle. Glass crunched under the tires, but he didn’t slow down. He kept accelerating, as if an increase in speed would reverse the chemical reactions in my body. Some still-sick part of me thinks that maybe it was love that made him do it. He ignored an octagon, miscalculated an angle. It was bad geometry. He pulled out of our street to take a left onto Washington by the huge cathedral that always made me cower. Maybe it was like a blur or maybe like a strobe or maybe he couldn’t even see it. Maybe he was blinded by momentum. He hit the Mercury Sable at its passenger side door. Seventy-six year old Marian Curry was seated there. She and her husband, who was driving, were returning from their son’s house. It was their granddaughter’s birthday. There were construction paper flowers stuck in the space between the seats.

I don’t live in the city anymore. I moved to a suburb about twenty minutes north and rented a room from a couple whose four children had all moved away. There are no high-rises here. No crashing seas, no salt air. There’s just a quiet, glazed with refrigerator hum and the scent of lilac. The house is big, and the landlords agreed to let me have a dog. I’m quite sure that they think I’m fragile.

I went to the local animal shelter and let the high school girl who volunteers there choose a dog for me. That’s not the way it’s usually done, but it seemed right to me. I didn’t feel qualified to determine anyone’s destiny, canine or otherwise. She set me up with a four-year-old mutt that looks like a cross between a beagle and my grandmother’s old handbag. Down the street from my house is a white-shingled congregational church. On Saturday mornings, you can usually find a bride floating down its steps, looking only ahead. The light in a bride’s eye is something that Alec would appreciate. The church is bordered on three sides by a graveyard that dates back to the 1860s but still has room for new residents. I walked my dog that way – out of my driveway to the right, up the hill that makes my dog choke itself on its collar because I can’t keep up, and past the church – for
three months before I knew that Marian was buried in there. Her husband had apparently grown up here, in this town that I chose as my sanctum, and his first wife was buried in that very cemetery. She died in childbirth in 1947, but he had promised to dwell in eternal rot by her side and was a man of his word. So when he dies, he will be sunk between his two loves: one young, one old, both prevented from further aging by death.

I saw him there once, at the gravesite. That’s how I knew she was there. I recognized him from the photos that had been all over the news during Alec’s trial. When I saw him, it struck me as so strange. He was just this man, this slight man with perfectly erect posture. He was standing northeast of the sun, and his right side was illuminated. It was a still day, and I could see the way his hair fell in a straight line across his forehead, like a little boy’s haircut. I thought of walking up to him to say, “I’m sorry,” but it seemed like a cruel thing to do. To just drop myself in the middle of his shimmering reminiscence, like jetsam into a still pond. I just turned and walked home, tugging my whining dog along. I haven’t walked by there since.

Alec was charged with vehicular homicide. There was a trial. Front pages and sound bytes. It was all so loud and garish and bizarre. People thinking that Alec had killed her. People believing that, her family believing that. Attempted suicides are put on a mandatory ten day psychiatric hold, and I spent most of that time waiting, hoping to be arrested, too. I felt like if I could just pay my penance in some real, concrete way then I could heal. I longed for the justice of Greek mythology. I thought, I would gladly hold the heavens on my shoulders or exhaust my arms rolling a heavy ball up a hill. But no one came, and I was released, deemed no more dangerous than anyone I might pass on the street.

I moved into my house, and I started making paper fish. It’s what I can do. This rote exercise, with its creases and folds, is a salve to my wound. I make twenty every night. I put them in the windowsills, on bookshelves, and over the doorjamb. They hang from drawer fronts and doorknobs. There are hundreds now. They’ve enveloped my desk. They pepper the floor, but I never step on them. Some are floating in glasses of water left on my bedside table and bureau. The ink from the paper is slowly bleeding into the water, tinting it. There will be a time to stop making them, but it’s not yet. I make them for Marian, whose life I took, and for Alec, for peace.

Mandy Simoneau is a senior majoring in English.
Yesterday morning I had breakfast
With a ghost of Michelangelo
We shared my toast
And I found that I could not stop staring
He was talking about bicycles
He was being inconsequential
He was acting
As if there was no such thing as marble
As if the edge of his jaw
Wouldn’t carry the world
As if the whiteness of him
Was by chance
I tried to be cool.
I made no references to the ceiling
And I never asked about Despair.
~But I think he stirred his coffee with a paintbrush~
I tried to close my mouth
And only tremble
It was a morning I found myself
Too human
Too prone to conversations with myself
While others are speaking
I casually rearranged the fruit bowl
Until it looked sufficiently inspiring
I was being too dramatic
To think twice
…But when the explanations fade into rivers,
Running alongside your chair
When all that is beautiful is found
In the accidental face of a stranger
When he has looked down,
Only to look up at you again,
And there forms before you
A certain definition of truth
and forever…
~A girl tends to get a little nervous.

Wendi Field Murray is a senior majoring in Anthropology.
Fly Away Sketch
a poem by Melissa Hassan

Storytelling, story time
drinking, smoking as the night goes by.
I saw a vision as he talked.
It was a sketch of the past
an echo of life lived,
an awakening I had.
Yesterdays are left to play their part in making us,
shaping our lives, our many, many selves
we transform into each day.
The priest agreed.

He reasoned to his followers
to live, breath-move forth
allow for change, newness, life.
It can eat at you
break you, following behind like a stalker.
In a split second, my
father told me, the 20’s fly
like a bird
away, too quick, a blink
gone as fast as you lived it.
I’ll catch it like a kite.
I’ll smile up at it,
fly away.

Melissa Hassan graduated in May 2003 with a B.A. in English.
When I heard the gun go off, I immediately dove to the ground. I landed on something sharp and hard, but I did not dare to get up. I felt a sense of panic that I had never experienced before. My heart was beating out of my chest and I did not know how to react. I heard two more shots being fired. People around me started screaming and crying for their safety. I screamed too as I pressed my knees against my forehead, my chin against my chest, and wrapped my arms around my shins. As a child I used this position as a form of protection every time I thought there were monsters under my bed. It always worked because in the mornings I woke unharmed. I wasn’t so sure it would work this time.

All I could think about was that if I moved the shooters might come for me, so I laid there motionless, praying that this nightmare would be over soon. All of a sudden, I heard the tires of a car burning against the ground, speeding away. I thought the horror was finally over. But when I got up I saw my best friend David lying still on the hard cement, blood gushing from his mouth and nose, and I knew that the horror had not ended, but really had just begun. By just looking at him, I could not tell whether he was dead or alive. I later found out that he was, in fact, dead.

David and I had met in the sixth grade and we became friends instantly. We were in the same English class and shared a desk. He was supposed to be in the seventh grade but had been kept back a year because he had just come from Cape Verde and still needed help with his English. Being thirteen, he was older than all the other kids in our class, and he was also the biggest, standing 5’6” and weighing 110 pounds. Our classmates used to make fun of his size by calling him names such as Godzilla and Giant D. David was very sensitive and would get really upset when kids harassed him this way, his light, pale face becoming very red. He would try to fight them but I would always step in and encourage him to walk away. He was my buddy and I wanted to be there for him.

Back then I was more of a tomboy and that was mainly why David and I got along so great. We lived three houses apart from each other and from Monday through Friday we would walk to and from school together. On warm weekends we played soccer in the morning and went bike riding in the afternoon along with other kids from around our neighborhood. We would also go to the pool at the YMCA to swim. Those days we would compete with one another for who could stay under water the longest. Even though David would always win that game, I would always beat him when we played tennis. We did these activities throughout elementary school up to the end of seventh grade. During the summer before eighth grade, however, our activities dwindled and we spent less and less time together.

David had always been easily influenced and felt very insecure about himself. He really cared about what others thought of him and even though he tried not to show he cared, I could see it. He started hanging around with boys who were two or three years older than him. Some of these boys were a part of a
gang known as C.V. Rasta, which translated means, Cape Verdean Delinquents. Most of the members of this gang were high school dropouts. They were usually unemployed so they went around Brockton stealing whatever they thought was valuable and selling it to buy marijuana, alcohol and other drugs. If they thought that there was a possibility of getting caught during any of their missions, they would get their younger recruits to do it for them. I hated all the members of C.V. Rasta. I thought that they were “wannabes” who had watched too many mafia movies. I felt that they robbed kids of their innocence and used them to do their dirty work. They were considered cool by some kids so David wanted desperately to be a part of their gang. By the end of the eighth grade his wish had become a reality. He was an official member of C.V. Rasta.

By the time we entered high school David began to change. He was becoming impatient, aggressive, swore more, and was disrespectful toward others. He was getting into a lot of fights with kids, even those we hung out with when we were younger. It got to the point where it seemed like every kid around our neighborhood was David’s enemy. Kids were intimidated by him and adults always looked at him with disgust. My parents, who once welcomed David into my home, began to prohibit him from coming over. I was never comfortable with the person he had transformed into. I knew he was nothing like the person he was pretending to be, but I did not want to tell him who to be. I wanted him to find out for himself.

By our junior year, I only saw David once in a while and when I did see him, he was with some Rastas. It wasn’t until one day when he decided to take time off from his busy schedule to walk me home from school that we spent time alone. We stopped at a corner store to buy drinks and the store clerk followed us from aisle to aisle and shelf to shelf to see if David was going to steal anything. That’s when I decided I needed to intervene and talk to David about his lifestyle. I planned to wait to talk to him at a party my cousin was having later that evening. He was going and that would be the next time I would see him. Little did I know, I would never get the chance to talk to him that night.

My cousin Olga’s sweet sixteen party was supposed to be a joyous event. My family and I arrived at around ten o’clock that night. The scene inside was pretty calm, with a lot of family socializing, but by eleven-thirty everything changed. People had shown up all at once. There were crowds inside and outside in the hall. Inside, some people were sitting, others dancing, and those who were not lucky enough to find a chair were just leaning against the walls. The atmosphere was muggy. It felt like it had to be a hundred degrees, so I went outside for some fresh air. Outside, the scene was magnificent. The moon was glowing against the dark sky, and the summer breeze felt really refreshing on my skin. There were crowds of people, both boys and girls standing and talking to one another. As I made my way through them I saw David standing across the street. I saw a car stop right in front of him and all of a sudden I heard shots being fired. When I got up from the ground to see the damage that was done, I saw that David had been shot. He had been hit three times in the chest. His once-white shirt was now red with blood and there were puddles of blood around him. I could not believe what I was seeing.

It felt like it had happened in slow-motion, like someone had paused a movie to re-examine the details. Seeing my best friend dead on the ground ripped
my heart into pieces. My mind went blank and I did not know how to react. I felt tears falling down my cheeks and my heart ached. The pain and agony I felt could not be put into words. I could not believe that God had taken him away from me without any warning.

Days after David died, I still felt devastated. I did not even attend his funeral. Not that I didn’t want to, but the mixture of pain and anger that I felt did not allow me to. I could not bear seeing someone who was so full of life lay helplessly in a wooden coffin. I could not stand the thought of him not being able to grow old and gray or have kids and do all of the things that people live for. I felt that there were so many things I needed to say to David, and so many things for us to do. And none of that could happen now. When I first met David I thanked God for bringing him into my life, but when he died I was angry with the killers for murdering him and with God for letting it happen. I felt that God had made a mistake and I prayed desperately for Him to take it back and somehow bring David back into my life. I strongly questioned God’s motive for taking him away. I demanded answers, but I did not know where or whom to get them from. I was hopeless and needed some kind of closure.

A week after David’s death, I reluctantly made the decision to go to his house, not so much for my own comfort, but for his mother’s. I entered the house and as I made my way through the kitchen, I saw his mother sitting on a dark brown leather couch in the living room. She was wearing a long black dress and had her hair wrapped with a long black scarf. Three days prior to David’s death was the last time I had seen her. She had been dressed in bright colors, singing loudly and laughing at David’s jokes. The difference in the way she looked overwhelmed me. She looked like she had aged ten years in just eight days. Her face was pale and wrinkled. Her eyes were swollen from crying and her lips were dry and chapped. Looking at her made me feel a kind of sympathy I could not express. David was her firstborn child and she wanted nothing more than to see him happy. I walked over to her and as soon as she saw me she began to cry. God knows I wanted to cry with her but somehow I held my tears back. I wanted to be strong for her and give her the emotional support that she needed. With my arms wrapped around her, she laid her head on my shoulder and cried painfully.

While we were hugging, I glanced over her shoulder and saw David’s room directly in front of me. The door was closed and I debated whether or not to go in. After minutes of going back and forth in my mind, I decided that I had to go in. I took a deep breath and opened the door. The room was dark and cold. The window shades were drawn and the lights were turned off. Even though the sun was shining outside, David’s room felt like it was night. I turned on the light and was surprised by the mess I saw. The black and white shirt that he wore the day before he died was laying on top of the bed, his black Timberland boots looked like they had recently been tossed across the room and there was a pile of dirty laundry against the wall. On top of his brown bureau laid a journal. David loved to write. He mostly wrote rap lyrics, but now, as I read his journal, I came across several poems. As I shuffled through the pages a particular one caught my eye. It was entitled “Angie,” the nickname he had for me. Tears started falling down my cheeks as I read it. In the poem, he was explaining how I was his best friend and how I was always there for him. He mentioned how he knew he had made some mistakes that
disappointed me but that he was willing to change his lifestyle for me. The entire poem was flawless, but the sentence that really stuck in my mind read, “Hopefully one day Angie will see me as more than just a friend.” It was in that moment that reality struck me. I wept hysterically because I knew he was not coming back. I cried at the thought that my best friend had fallen in love with me and I was too blind to see it. Mostly, I cried because I had felt the same way toward David and now I would never have the opportunity to tell him.

I found my closure in David’s room that day. I cried until I couldn’t cry anymore. I was no longer angry. I did not feel angry with the people responsible for taking him away from me. I came to terms with the fact that David was dead and that he was not coming back. I learned from his passing to never hide my feelings and I apply this lesson in my daily life. I now believe that God has a time scheduled for everyone. I have come to accept that August 17th, 2001 was David’s time.

Angela Andrade is a freshman majoring in Psychology.
"Grief" Sniper Series
Susanne Piché

Drawing

Susanne Piché is a freshman majoring in Art.
Sara Beatty is a junior majoring in Art.
Mark Gallagher is a senior majoring in Art.
Sandy Parsons is a sophomore majoring in Elementary Education and Earth Sciences.
Christina Sarkisian is a senior majoring in Art and Elementary Education.
Beaded Bracelet
Laurie Amberman

Jewelry

Laurie Amberman is a senior majoring in Art.
Mandy Lyons is a junior majoring in Art Education.
Anne Bergstrom is a junior majoring in Social Work.
It was entitled “The Great Brain Robbery.” The video lasted twelve long minutes. I sat in shock with about one hundred stunned strangers looking like deer caught in headlights. Tears I had tried to hold back began dripping down my scarlet hot cheeks. I thought, What the hell am I doing here? What an insane way to kick off a day-long conference for Alzheimer’s caregivers: showing a twelve-minute video of adorable old people being robbed of their dignity, giving testimony on how Alzheimer’s Disease was eating away at their brain. I remember just shaking my head in dismay, for myself, and for everyone else in the room. I certainly wasn’t expecting a festive environment at the event, but there had to have been one or two positive messages for family members to take away. I left the conference on a quest to find some place where I could turn to, to get some positive support. Throughout my search I went to meetings, made phone calls, visited online chat rooms and read many books. Nowhere did I get the kind of support that would prepare me for what lay ahead.

I knew that I was already in denial of my denial. You see, Harry was my best friend. He was also my dad. After my mother suddenly died of a heart attack one gloomy Saturday afternoon, our relationship evolved into a very deep friendship that went way beyond me simply being his daughter. I was privileged to know him as a person, not just as a parent. I was thirty-four, and he was a sixty-seven-year-old child trapped in an old man’s body. After his diagnosis, we became roommates. He happily started hanging out with my friends and me without missing a beat. He loved to have a good time. Parties, movies, barrooms, dancing, going out to eat, and alcohol consumption were some of the activities he took part in. Though I was an avid skier, he never did put on a pair of skis, but I know he had at least considered it. Because of his active, fun-loving lifestyle, his diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease in the very early stages left us always hoping it was a mistake. I figured, doctors make mistakes all the time, don’t they? There is no sure way to diagnose Alzheimer’s disease, except by autopsy.

From extensive reading, I learned that Alzheimer’s was a very unfair disease. It could basically develop out of nowhere, and interfere with one’s ability to remember simple things, eventually wiping out any memory of how to dress and eat. Throughout the disease’s progression, there could be difficulty expressing thoughts, unpredictable mood and personality changes, suspiciousness and the inability to complete routine tasks such as personal hygiene.

Death is the end result. There are no cures.

Harry started off slow, simply forgetting names here and there. He was very well-liked and had lots of friends. He should have; he worked for the same company for 47 years. I often thought he knew everybody because we would be shopping at the grocery store, for instance, and random acquaintances from his past or present would come over and say hello. He would try his hardest to pretend he knew who they were, but I knew Harry didn’t have a clue. That’s when I began to finish sentences for him. At first I didn’t realize that I was doing it. It was just a natural response. He protected me as a child; it was my turn to protect him as an
Denial is a very strong reaction. Harry’s forgetfulness was getting more and more frequent, and I pretended not to notice. He was still driving his car. I must have been out of my mind to go along with it. He was dating this woman (at the time he was seventy-four and she was seventy-seven) who lived in New Jersey. We lived in Massachusetts. He would travel in his big, blue Chrysler with the velvet seats down I-95 to visit her faithfully every month. He could almost make the drive with his eyes shut since he had been doing it for about 30 years. In my heart I knew his highway driving skills were not up to par, but I didn’t want to take away an ounce of his independence a second before it was necessary.

About nine o’clock one particular night, however, I was dragging myself home after an excruciatingly long, hard day at my job. When I arrived home it was just getting dark. And as I approached my back door, I found a note tacked to it that read: “Call the Police Station.” I silently panicked. Nervous, I made the call and found out that, luckily, my father was fine. He had just gotten lost in Orange, New York, near the Tappen Zee Bridge and was being held at the local police station until someone could come pick him up. They wouldn’t share his condition though, or any other important information, just that he was fine. So, I dropped everything and made a mad dash to New York. I don’t clearly remember the three hour drive because my heart was pumping so hard, and well, I was truly frightened. I remember being confused though, trying to navigate around the Tappen Zee Bridge area with all the ramps, roads and highways going off into every direction. I even got lost at one point trying to find the right exit. Finally, somehow, I arrived at the police station around two in the morning. There was Harry, happy as a clam, sitting on a high, navy blue swivel chair watching closed-circuit police station television. One hand contained a McDonald’s hamburger and the other held a cup of Dunkin Donuts coffee. He was perfectly fine, acting like it was no big deal that I had to drive two hundred miles to pick him up. He seemed oblivious. Or maybe he was scared, and never said so.

Needless to say, after that encounter, my personal life was put on hold. I tried hard to maintain my identity and personal goals. I attempted to return to college to complete my degree. I don’t know what I was thinking! I was working a full-time job, attending school on the weekends, studying and taking care of my father in between it all. I didn’t get much sleep. The program at school was one full weekend a month, so I felt it was doable. And it was, in the beginning. Harry could be left home alone at first, but as time went on I would get nervous about leaving, and would take him to school with me. He didn’t mind, he would have a blast. Being around young people made him happy. The school administrators would feed him coffee and donuts while I was in class.

One time I had to work late and couldn’t find anyone to drop by the house to check on Harry. So, I trekked home and brought him back to work with me. He had fun going anywhere with me; it didn’t matter what we did. That night he occupied his time sweeping the entire building while I worked. His neat little piles were so focused and concise. I think he felt as if he had great purpose when he was sweeping. In the car on the way home, however, he started to act worried. Asking him what was wrong, he said, “My daughter is going to kill me.”

“What!” I replied.

“Sandy is going to kill me for staying out this late,” he said again.
“I’m Sandy, your daughter,” I replied. He repeated his worry again. That was the first time I realized that sometimes he didn’t recognize me. Eventually, it became too much. I felt like I was on a subway train that was increasingly becoming stuffed to capacity with people, and I was unable to push by them to get off at my stop. It was overwhelming and frustrating.

I would get so frustrated witnessing him forget how to do the simplest of things. Often I would get so mad, so unsettled and so scared that I would lock myself in the bathroom and scream as loud as I could until my mouth stopped making any sounds. Sometimes I would have to run out of the house and head down the street at top speed, and just run and run until I couldn’t run anymore. I would go up to my room and dramatically (the drama felt good) fall down upon my bed and sob and sob until it felt like my tears would dry up forever. I felt that if I could exhaust myself of these emotions, then I wouldn’t feel them anymore. Once Harry heard me and came into the room. He patted my head like I was a cat. I think he forgot how to comfort someone. When I would get that worked up, I don’t think he knew it had anything to do with him, thank goodness. I tried my best not to let him see me upset.

Some days I would come home from work tired and grumpy. Harry would greet me at the door all upset that he had misplaced his wallet. He did that often. I think I had to help him search for it a million times (the drama still feels good). The wallet was another symbol of his shrinking independence. Sometimes it would take days to locate it. It usually turned up in one of several weird places: under the carpet, tucked in the mattress, in the pocket of an ancient suit jacket way in the back of the closet or hidden behind the mirror hanging on the wall. He was very clever. It was a game he would play. He would hide the wallet to test his memory. Upon finding it, he would break into a huge smile, give me a great big hug and start to dance. His dance looked like one that a football player performs after making a touchdown. He would be so thrilled that my grumpiness would instantly melt away.

About three quarters into Harry’s illness, however, I devised a solution to help maintain, or restore, my sanity. The solution was simple, once I understood that it wasn’t about how I was feeling or about it being my father’s fault. I had to stop taking his confusion so personal. I thought our life was, and had to be, about truly being in the moment. And that moment had to be cherished for whatever joy it could possibly bring. That moment had to be saved. I got my camera and started taking pictures.

I photographed Harry whenever there was a communication breakdown between us, and a mutual frustration had started to set in. This may sound like a silly thing to do, but the camera completely distracted both of us from our angst. I think it may have been the bright flash of the strobe. Regardless, I was amazed at how much it helped alter the mood for both of us. So much so, that I started to photograph him all the time, not just in the moments of tension. Looking through my lens enabled me to see the moment as it was, not just as it felt. I was learning not to judge. I was learning, finally, how to cope. We reinvented activities like going to the movies, feeding ducks at the local pond, walking the dog and going out to eat. Whenever the going got tough, we got going. And I took photos.

Every morning upon waking, I would write (whatever thoughts were floating around in my head) three complete pages in a journal, using stream-of-
consciousness. I called these journal entries “morning pages.” This was another creative tool I used to get out all of my frustrations before the day began. It actually worked quite well. The more creative outlets I had to express myself, the better we both felt.

But, unfortunately, creativity didn’t stop the disease from progressing. Eventually it became clear to me that I could no longer take care of Harry by myself. Serendipitously, I found a young woman named Marina to come in and spend time with him so that I could go to work and not worry about his safety. She was wonderful. She became an instant member of our family. Harry’s communication skills were starting to fade, but Marina found ways to keep him going. Playing golf was his favorite thing to do and even though Marina didn’t know how to play, she learned. Each day they did an art project, practiced ballroom dancing in the kitchen and took the dog on adventures. They took field trips to the zoo, went mall-walking on rainy days and even visited a community garden to tend vegetables. My favorite story from Marina was about their trip to a nearby go-cart track. Harry spent the afternoon driving around and around in circles. Marina said everyone ended up in tears because of the obvious joy Harry was experiencing. He hadn’t driven a car for a long while, and, I think, it was a great way for him to experience that sense of motion, that sense of freedom, he so greatly missed.

A core group of good friends would come by so I could continue working, grocery shopping, take short skiing vacations or attend weekly yoga classes. I actually felt sane again. Harry was not getting better but I knew he was having the best time that he could possibly have.

After a short bout with pneumonia, it was time for Harry to go to a nursing home. It was not safe for him to be at home anymore. The time had come to let go. My job was over. I had given it my all and my best. Now, he was to be cared for by experienced nurses, with whom, among other things, he ballroom danced for eight months, until the very end.

He passed on at age seventy-eight.

Through my lens I was able to stop time. I found hope, not despair. And I’d found it because I’d sought it, for had I not, it never would have found me. Living in the moment was what got me through the day. Grabbing my camera in the peak of confusion and using it as a positive tool alleviated the tension and frustration just enough for both of us to re-direct our energy into a place of hope. I realized we had what we needed inside of us to get by. It just took some time to find it. I have no regrets. When Harry died, I felt no guilt. There was nothing I’d forgotten to say or do. Perhaps that’s the irony of a disease like Alzheimer’s. In Harry’s rapid forgetfulness, I was reminded daily of why he was my best friend.

Sandy Parsons is a sophomore majoring in Elementary Education and Earth Sciences.
An Old House in Camden, South Carolina
Jennifer Griffith

Jennifer Griffith graduated in January 2004 with a B.A. in English.
Having an African-American father and an Italian mother makes me biracial. In the predominantly white, suburban town where I grew up, it also made me different. As a child I was no stranger to racism. Quickly realizing how irrational and utterly useless it was, I was determined not to become a helpless victim or a bitter victimizer in its losing game. I believed that racism had explicit causes, effects and boundaries, and that by understanding all three I could rise above it. But everything I had come to believe about racism changed on the night that I stared into its face, only to see my friend’s eyes staring coldly back at mine.

That warm, fateful night started off in a deceptively ordinary way. It was the beginning of September, school had just started and it was the first eighth grade dance of the year. As usual, the dance hall was too hot and overcrowded with middle-schoolers expending enormous amounts of nervous energy to the beat of the latest song. There was the DJ up on the stage, spinning records like Rob Base with “It Takes Two,” the Fine Young Cannibals singing “She Drives Me Crazy,” and Digital Underground rapping about “The Humpty Dance.” There were the obnoxious pink and green flashing lights that are a mandatory part of every middle school dance experience. The chaperones stood dutifully along the walls in between floating balloons, one eye on the adults they were conversing with, the other on the excitable pre-teens they were there to supervise. I was surrounded by a circle of friends, fully immersed in dance steps like the Roger Rabbit, the Running Man and the Kid n’ Play. My new Keds squeaked on the freshly polished hardwood floor as I twisted my feet to the Half Step.

I began to move towards the back of the dance hall, where the light was dimmer and the music was louder. That’s where I saw my friend Mike, half-standing, half-dancing somewhat uncomfortably in a crowd of his friends by the stage. Mike was handsome, funny and popular. We had been close friends for several years and we’d always enjoyed an easy, laid-back camaraderie with one another. His friendship was important to me, and I got the feeling that mine was important to him as well, though he would never openly admit it. He was a popular guy in middle school; he had a macho image to maintain.

I jumped next to him, and trying to loosen him up, I smiled and encouragingly said, “Come on Mike, this song’s awesome, let’s get down.” But he must have been embarrassed in front of his friends, or trying to come off tougher than he felt, because he laughed at me and said, “You look like a retard, stop sticking your chest out like that. God, why do you always have to show off at dances?” He was not smiling like he usually did when he gave me a good ribbing. I wasn’t sure what his problem was, and honestly, I didn’t care. I had more important things to think about, like what song the DJ was about to play.

I am not sure exactly what happened next. I think that my indifference must have angered Mike, because I vaguely remember hearing him continue on, like static mildly disrupting the song I was trying to listen to. I think he wanted to fight, and the fact that I was genuinely not fazed by what he had to say only made
him angrier. A few of my friends came over and joined me. Mike continued to try to argue. Finally, in the half-serious, half-joking tone we often used with each other, I muttered, “Dude, why don’t you relax and give it a rest? I’m trying to have fun. If you don’t like the way I dance, just don’t watch.” And with that I returned to dancing.

First I saw the look in his eye. It was a look I had never seen before, and never wanted to see again. I believed I could see black holes where his pupils should have been, endless space that swallowed me in its angry gravitational pull. Then the word hit me like a fever.

My skin was burning hot, but inside I was cold, so cold. I don’t remember what words came before or after it in Mike’s sentence. I heard it once, in an instant, and then I heard it again and again, as if I had entered some infinite cave in which the word “nigger” just bounced back and forth from wall to rocky wall. The cave, I realized, was inside my mind.

Just moments before I had been completely oblivious to the outside world and what may have been going on in it. Now I was utterly at its mercy, the effect of every particle of air, molecule of sound, minute vibration and ray of too-bright light that existed around me. My sensations felt all wrong. My fingers felt too short for my hands. I tried to stretch them, but they just remained taut. My feet were planted on the shiny floor like a tree held to the earth by long, strong roots. There was too much air around me, and yet none of it would seem to enter my lungs. I tried to focus on one object, on one moment, on one thought, and found that I could not. There was nothing inside my mind but that treacherous word and confusion.

As many times as I’d been called a nigger, the word always packed a punch that knocked the wind completely out of my slight body. There was no way to avoid that pain when it came crashing down on me, so I had learned to ride it out like a violent wave that brings you back to a peaceful shore. But this time was different. Because this time it was Mike that had called me a nigger, and Mike wasn’t a school bully, or a random individual who didn’t know me from a hole in the wall, or a discriminating parent that didn’t want me dating their son. Mike was one of my best friends, and I just knew that friendship was a boundary that racism would never cross, a barrier that its hatred could never penetrate. And yet here he was, in a hot, crowded dance hall, with an army of his friends standing behind him, calling me a nigger like it was my name. It was the greatest betrayal I had ever known.

In that moment, the foundation that supported my view of the world, at least in racial terms, simply collapsed. Suddenly prejudice and racism didn’t fit neatly into the box I had compartmentalized for it in my mind. I realized that no matter what else I was, no matter how upstanding a citizen, how hardworking an employee, how honest an individual, how good a friend, the common denominator of my existence could always become “nigger.” It was a realization I was simply not ready to accept on that shiny dance floor, memories of frantic foot races on empty streets and trips to the science museum fading away, left only with a friendship tainted, dissolved, and a question mark hanging above me, wondering about a place that racism couldn’t reach, and how I might get there.

Off somewhere in the distance I heard Led Zeppelin filtering through the air with “Stairway to Heaven,” the last song of every dance, signaling that our time...
there was almost over. At the thought of going home my spirits lifted momentarily. At home I could rush up to my room, slam my door shut and lay silently in my bed. In my bed there would be no pink and green flashing lights, no white Keds, no shiny floor, no friends standing at attention, and no betrayal. I could lie there and be completely still, and open my eyes and see only the darkness, and I could stare into it until I drifted into a deep sleep that put what had happened at that dance in my past, and separated my past from my future.

Looking back on it, I realize that for a popular guy in middle school, allowing a girl to insult you in front of your friends is the social equivalent of flushing your image down the toilet. I think that Mike was probably just trying to restore what he perceived to be his own tarnished image by damaging mine the best way he knew how, with the most potent word he had in his arsenal of verbal insults. I want to believe that while he was trying to hurt my feelings, he didn’t realize he would hurt them as deeply as he did. I need to believe that. But I’ll never know for sure, because after that night, I never spoke to Mike again.

By the age of twelve I was fully prepared to deal with racism. It was a fact of life I couldn’t ignore, or succumb to, or perpetuate, so I did what I believed would only make me stronger: I stared it in the face without flinching. I was prepared for the racial slurs, the demeaning comments, the stereotypes, the discouragements, the forbidden dates, the rejections, the mockery, being considered “too black” by whites and “so white” by blacks, all of that and more. I was prepared to face racism from my enemies, acquaintances, strangers, and people who knew me but simply didn’t know any better. But I was not prepared to look into the once-familiar eyes of my close friend Mike, on a warm September night at our first eighth grade dance, and see racism there as well.

Lauren Carter is a senior majoring in English.
The world is so black and white that sometimes I wonder if there is room for gray. I know that we have all had to fill out forms that have asked for our nationality or race. “Please check the one that fits you best: White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, or Pacific Islander.” Then there is always that one category at the very end of the list that sums up the “leftovers” of the world: Other, the gray. I am Cape Verdean and Azorean, and I have always been just “Other.” For years I didn’t think I mattered much because my category was always the last one on the list and was not specific to any certain nationality. As I got older, when people would ask me if I were black or white, I would often sadly respond, “I’m Other.” However, I have come to accept the fact that being gray in a black and white world isn’t so bad. In fact, it’s not bad at all.

My mother’s family is from the Azores, which is a small chain of islands off the coast of Portugal. The majority of Azoreans are of European Portuguese descent and are therefore predominantly light-skinned. My father’s family is from a chain of islands off the coast of Africa that together comprise Cape Verde. Cape Verdean people are of African and Portuguese descent and often range in color from very light to very dark. My mother has very light skin, and my father’s skin is fairly dark, and I use to resent the fact that this disparity in skin color was replicated in their two children. Because I am the darker child, I often thought that my little sister’s complexion would result in a life so much easier than mine since, unlike me, she wouldn’t be called, “Oreo,” “Half-Rican” and “Mutt.” She would never hear the phrase that haunted me for years: “You are the whitest black person I’ve ever met.” She would never have to deal with being gray.

Throughout my high school years I felt that I was supposed to “act black” in order to fit in, because I have dark skin. I was confused, having bought into the crazy notion that people should act their color. I would wear my big Fubu sweatshirts and listen to rap music, and never in a million years would I have ever admitted that I listened to classical music, or that I preferred wearing Gap jeans and Polo sweaters. “You’re black,” society was constantly telling me, “and so that means do this…” And, naively, I did.

I was often jealous of my little sister. She could listen to classical music and wear all the Gap jeans she could afford, and no one would look at her oddly for this because her light skin made it okay. It made it right. Society may look at her strangely, however, if she listened to rap music and talked in slang. In this sense, we can live completely different lives from one another. She can “act white” and be seen as normal by society’s standards, whereas I can “act black” and be seen as normal. But if the roles were reversed, it wouldn’t seem correct. As of now my sister is too young to fully understand these absurdities. Hopefully, society will change before she has to.

Throughout my life, particularly in high school, being gray inspired me to ask myself many questions: Am I wrong, for instance, because I’m dark and I don’t speak “ghetto”? Am I white because I wear Gap and Polo and not Fubu and Ecko?
Am I not in touch with my culture because I prefer classical music to rap? Are there rules and regulations on being black or white?

Over the years I have answered most of these questions. I have learned that society will view me however it wishes to view me. It can either accept the fact that I don’t choose a side on the racial spectrum, or it can choose to continue questioning me. And, in the end, the choice it makes doesn’t really matter. Because I have also learned this: the most important view of me is the one that I have of myself. I don’t have to act a certain way because I have a certain color skin. I can do what I please. But if the world wants to remain black and white, that’s fine, because I am finally comfortable with being gray.

Taylor K. Uhlman is a freshman majoring in Management.
“No! I can’t. There’s no way in hell.” For the entire month of August, nearly every conversation I had with my stepfather ended with me shouting this at him. I had just turned fourteen and was getting ready to enter high school when he began trying to convince me that I should try out for the all-boys golf team. At the time, I had played golf for about two and a half years, and throughout that period, when I’d gone golfing by myself, I’d taken a lot of shit from the men on the course. I’d overheard conversations, for instance, about how girls don’t belong in the sport. These comments were ignorant, and I did my absolute best to ignore them, but they angered me nonetheless. And that’s why I initially resisted my stepfather’s urgings. However, in the end, I decided that perhaps some good might come from my participation. So shaking things up and making the team as the lone girl became my new objective.

I wasn’t overly confident about my skills, but for fourteen years old I was an okay golfer. On average I shot about 15 to 20 over par (the average number of times it takes to hit a ball until it goes in the hole). However, I didn’t feel comfortable with people watching me golf. It made me very nervous.

I will never forget the day of that first golf tryout. I didn’t know anyone on the team and when I got there, all the boys kind of looked at me as if to say, “What the hell are you doing here?” I felt like a spot of red in a pool of black, like I didn’t belong. Everyone was paired off into teams of two by the coach, Mr. Beaumont. My partner was a junior named Jon. Unlike a lot of the other boys, Jon was really nice to me. He had been on the team since his freshman year and assured me that there was nothing to worry about.

I’d love to be able to say that I blew them all away and played better than I ever had before. Unfortunately, this wasn’t the case. I played awful. Every time I sensed the coach’s eyes on me, something bad would happen. Most often, I just made a really bad shot. But a couple other times I missed the ball completely. It was pretty embarrassing. I went home that afternoon after shooting 19 over par and yelled at my stepfather for convincing me to try out until my throat stung.

The next day I had to go back for one more day of tryouts. Luckily, I played much better. I only improved my score a little, shooting 17 over par, but my swing improved and my nervousness subsided. A couple of the boys trying out even praised me for having the courage to try out for the team. It was one of the hardest things I’d ever done.

On the first day of high school, I went to Mr. Beaumont’s classroom (he was also the school’s biology teacher) and scanned the list on his door for my name. I remember that my finger shook like crazy as it dragged down the list. When I saw my name, I almost had a heart attack. I was listed as an alternate, but hell, I was on the team! My mother’s eyes glowed with pride when I told her the news.

I didn’t begin to really compete until the end of my sophomore year, the second year I was on the golf team. The very first match I played in I golfed in the last spot, number ten. I’ll always remember the first words out of my opponent’s
mouth when he found out he was playing me. “Ha! This is who I am playing? But, she’s a girl! I hope I don’t make you cry, sweetheart!” I swear, I would’ve beaten the living shit out of that bastard if I didn’t know that I’d get kicked off the team. My teammate, JT, calmed me down and told me to concentrate on kicking his ass on the golf course. Fortunately, that’s exactly what I did. I ignored every comment he made to me about girls not belonging on the course and just played my hardest. I ended up shooting seven over par, a high score for me at the time. My opponent certainly didn’t have much to say after I’d beaten him.

At the end of my junior year, my coach named me captain for the next season. I was the first girl captain the high school golf team had ever had. It was an unbelievable feeling of accomplishment.

During the summer before my senior year of high school, I lost my temper on the golf course for the first time. I was waiting for my turn on the 17th hole with three of my teammates when I heard a man laughing obnoxiously behind me. I turned around to see a man of about 45 years with a beer belly and gray-black hair. When he saw me he stopped laughing for a moment to glare at me. He then had the nerve to say, “What the hell do you think you’re doing on the golf course? Shouldn’t you be home cleaning or cooking or doing other womanly duties? This is a man’s sport, honey!” I don’t know what came over me, but I ran over and punched him in the face. My friends had to pull me away because, otherwise, I would’ve kept hitting him. I think the guy was too shocked to do anything else so he just walked away, his face beet red. Luckily, he didn’t tell anyone about my outburst, so I didn’t get in trouble. It felt great to let out that anger.

I played in the number five spot throughout my senior year as captain. I shot between five and ten over par most everyday on the course. All the attention I received for being the only girl on the team and also being the captain on top of it made me feel really good. Finally, most of the attention was positive with fewer and fewer negative comments from men each day.

Before I came to Bridgewater for school, I brought my little sister to her first golf tryout. She, too, was nervous as a freshman girl, but it helped that I was there to introduce her to people. She made the team and I hope she can follow in my footsteps.

Trying out for the golf team was probably the best thing I have ever done for myself. It built up my confidence and taught me a lot about who I am. I learned that it’s not a bad thing to be different, that it’s okay to stand out in a crowd. Sometimes, a spot of red is exactly what a pool of black needs.

Tiffany Jefferson is a freshman majoring in Elementary Education.
I have not thought of Mrs. Marron in a long time. Thinking about spring and planting and renewal probably brought her to mind. It is the image of her tall, strong body clad only in an old, worn-out bathing suit, a tank style, bending over from the waist with her legs straight, as she planted a garden in her backyard. I would avert my eyes from her because, in bending, her breasts were exposed. I felt embarrassed for her since she was too busy to be aware of her mistake. It didn’t matter that her yard was a sort of enclave, set apart from the neighborhood, and that no one but a few children ever came by. It still seemed indecent and sinful.

This was just one piece of evidence that Mrs. Marron was different from my own mother and any other mother I knew. Mothers, in my experience, only wore suits modeled after their girdles—a garment that constricted and covered all the right places so that there was no real hint of what lay underneath. Mrs. Marron was not the type of woman who wore girdles either.

From a young age I was fascinated with Mrs. Marron. One of my fondest memories was going over to her house Saturday mornings when I was seven and hanging around outside under her kitchen window until she noticed me. Mrs. Marron would invite me in for breakfast, which was just what I wanted, because I had recently discovered her French toast. She cooked it with so much butter, sugar and cinnamon that it would ooze over the top of the soft, golden pieces of white bread. Each bite was so tender that it just plain melted in my mouth. It was my first experience with the sublime.

After a summer of Saturdays with the Marrons, my mother found out what I was up to and scolded me. I was forbidden to beg for food anymore. Of course, I tried to explain to my mother just how delicious the French toast was and maybe she could try cooking it like Mrs. Marron did. I might have gone too far there. My mother said that Mrs. Marron wasted good butter and that using cinnamon instead of maple syrup sounded suspect. Sadly, I have never again tasted French toast that comes close to Mrs. Marron’s.

The Marron house was the last house in a row of three—my house stood across the street from the White’s house and then beyond the White’s backyard was a private dirt road where the Marron house stood. It was an easy run from my house to pick up Sheila and Maureen White and then off through their backyard to play with Kathy Marron, who was a year younger than me. Sometimes we would play with her younger brother, Petey, and almost never play with her little sister, Terri. Terri was young enough to be of no consequence to us, and it did not help that she had a deformed belly button, which always bulged slightly through her clothing.

Their house was the oldest in our immediate neighborhood and the property went up against the Merritt Parkway. In all, they owned over two acres of land—private and lush with shade trees and a lovely pond with a pretty, little round island smack in the middle. They even had a white summer house in the middle of their front yard that looked like it belonged on the town green and where we would often play dress-up. The winding dirt driveway led to both the formal front
entrance and to the back of the house where there was a garage, the old-fashioned type that had wooden doors that made it look more like a stable.

The house and yard were run down, although I didn’t notice this until I was nine or ten. By then word had gotten to me from Sheila and Maureen, whose mother was much better at sharing local gossip than my own, that the Marrons were poor. It seems Mr. Marron had been a manager for a paper company and had lost his job. Even before the loss, he didn’t make all that much money. One day I ran over with Sheila to play with Kathy, and Mrs. Marron was leading the three children into the house, all of them holding clothes, obviously not new. We asked them where they had been, when one of the kids said Goodwill. Sheila and I ran home to tell anyone who would listen that the Marrons wore used clothing from the Goodwill store.

How we gloated and laughed about their family from that point on, and the Marrons knew it. Who knows what makes children so unkind. I liked Kathy Marron and her family, despite the fact that they never really fit in with our families or the neighborhood.

I remember the first time I was allowed to go into the private areas of their home. It was a revelation to me. As I walked through their empty dining room of shining hardwood with beautiful windows overlooking the backyard, I entered the main hall where there was a gracefully built staircase that faced the front door and then into the expansive living room that led to a greenhouse. The living room was outfitted with the only real furniture they owned and it was very pretty, but creepy since I knew no one ever enjoyed it. The greenhouse was a bit run-down, but it was chock full of plants and smelled of moistness and dirt and green things growing. It was hard to breathe in this room; the humidity and dirt in the air repulsed me, as if I were being buried alive in my own grave.

The upstairs was even stranger. All three kids slept in cribs lined up in a row, although only one was young enough to qualify. The parents’ bedroom was above the living room with the same huge proportions, with nothing but a bed and a bureau. No toys, no books, no knickknacks adorned the walls or hallways. I asked my father that day if it was all right that older kids slept in cribs. He asked me who that would be and I told him what I had seen that day. He said it was fine and some families didn’t have money to buy all those beds right away. And, incidentally, I was to make sure this information was not shared with others.

Not that either the Whites or I owned much or looked any better. We wore uniforms and hand-me-downs, and the only toys we owned consisted of Barbie dolls and baby dolls. For Maureen, Sheila and me, our Barbie doll collections were our pride and joy. We played with them for many long hours; not the dolls actually, but with the construction of their houses and furniture, using whatever was around. Also, we would trade clothes and accessories because we got tired of our own stuff. Kathy Marron owned a Barbie (a newer and nicer one than any of us had), but all her doll’s clothes were hand-knit by her mother. Outfits, both glamorous and casual, with matching accessories all lovingly made by Mrs. Marron. We stopped playing Barbies with Kathy because we said we couldn’t trade clothes with her, but really it was no fun looking at her pretty Barbie wearing chunky fabric all the time.

What made the Marrons different seemed to be Mrs. Marron. She was a good deal younger than her husband, and perhaps 10 years younger than our
mothers. I secretly thought she looked like Doris Day with black hair since they had the same build and perky face. Mrs. Marron didn’t do the New York Times crossword puzzle (they never had any newspapers in their house) and this was the only recreational visiting my mother ever engaged in. On Monday mornings she would visit with Mrs. White and go over the Sunday puzzle over coffee. Mrs. White was a bit more social, and I think had more daily contact with Mrs. Marron, but they weren’t friends.

I remember sleeping over the Marron’s house on a Saturday night, which was strange because we had church the next morning and people always went to church with their own families. I packed my pajamas and toothbrush, along with my dress, slips, patent leathers, and hat, and when I went downstairs all dressed and ready for church, Mrs. Marron was serving Tang to her children. Now, for me, Tang was a treat that I looked forward to drinking at their house. My parents didn’t even allow chocolate milk and thought Tang, a non-food item and not suitable for consumption. Although tempted, I told Mrs. Marron that I was going to take communion and therefore I had to fast. She smiled and said that God didn’t much mind if people had a drink of water with a little something added to it. I knew she was wrong, but I always did what adults told me to do and went ahead and drank a tall glass of that wonderfully sweet orange drink, and with every gulp I tried to imagine how I would word my confession to Father O’Connor on Friday.

The morning got even more complicated for me. I realized I had to drive with them to church and the two cars they owned were funny looking two-toned sedans from the 40’s. I sat in the back, feeling strangely out of place wedged in between Kathy and Terri. In the front seat I looked at Mrs. Marron, and I was paralyzed with horror because her outfit was outrageous. Her clothes were definitely not like any church clothes I had ever seen. The hat on her head was wide-brimmed and looked as if Bette Davis might have worn it a decade ago. Her dress was flamboyantly colorful, with large clusters of flowers and a skirt that flared out farther than mine did. Mrs. Marron’s features were luscious and provocative by themselves, but with red lipstick and mascara, they were obscenely pretty. I imagined that every single person in our church would be laughing at her, and I would be laughed at too, since I would be sitting in the same pew.

Eventually the people in the neighborhood, including Sheila, Maureen and I, awarded to Mrs. Marron a respect that never faded. During the years her husband had sporadic work, Mrs. Marron had to feed her family. One spring day she went out to the sunniest area of her property and started digging. She dug and moved dirt for months. Her children were sent outside to play in the morning, the doors were locked so they could not run in for anything, and they would be unlocked when Mr. Marron came home from work in the evening. By the end of that summer her garden was admirable, but by the end of the following summer, her garden was at least half an acre of glorious vegetables and fruit, which included rhubarb, raspberries, strawberries, fruit trees and exotic vegetables like eggplant and peppers. Mrs. Marron canned everything and was able to feed her family well through those tough years. She was a marvel.

Then one day the neighborhood was informed by the State of Connecticut that they wanted to buy some of the land along the Merritt Parkway, including the Marron’s house. A few years later, the transaction occurred and the Marrons ended
up buying a lovely newer home in the bordering town of Wilton, near the reservoir. By that time, Sheila, Maureen and I rarely saw Kathy anymore because we were at Catholic schools while the Marrons attended public. I don’t know that I ever formally said goodbye to any of them except Kathy.

A few more years passed, and we heard that after school Kathy had found Mrs. Marron in the nearby woods with her wrists slit. The talk was that Mrs. Marron had been reluctant to leave her first home and had never recovered from the move. It was also said that Mrs. Marron had remarked a few times that she never thought she would see 40; that old age was not a part of her future.

Time passed and we could almost forget that the Marrons once lived behind the Whites. The state indefinitely postponed their plans for expanding the parkway after they razed the house. The land got wild with brambles and maple saplings. Most anyone who happened upon the property would find no signs of the Marron family--there were no remnants of a cellar, or bricks from the chimney left behind. But our families, the Minors and the Whites, knew where to look. We had only to walk up to the sunniest section of their yard that ran alongside the pond. Every spring since the Marrons departure Mrs. White and my mother would go pick the rhubarb and bake strawberry/rhubarb pie and rhubarb fools. Then in June one or two of us would be sent out to pick the strawberries that still thrived, and later still in the season, the raspberries. We would eat them on our morning cereal. Usually Mrs. White would say out loud, expecting no response, “Can you believe that garden? It is still producing beautiful fruit. How many years has it been since Gloria Marron died, anyway? She certainly was a remarkable woman, the way she took care of her family through those hard years.”

Then, as now, when I recall Mrs. Marron I would feel a heaviness inside me, a confession not confessed, and sorrow for a silly child who could only be afraid when faced with differences, instead of delighting in the profound beauty of a woman who was Mrs. Marron.
Debra Brandzen is a senior majoring in Art.
Lauren Marsh graduated in May 2003 with a B.A. in Psychology.
Derek Hambly is a junior majoring in Art and English.
Little Box of Secrets
Rose Esson

Sculpture
Elizabeth Scarbrough is a junior majoring in English.
Stained Glass

Danielle Mullett is a senior majoring in Art.
Heidi Gfroerer is a junior majoring in Art.
Elizabeth Colburn is a freshman majoring in Art.
This isn’t how we used to live together. My ex-girlfriend and I, I mean. We didn’t sit down and talk like this: her hands and wrists tied to her chair with strong, nylon rope. We didn’t keep guns in the house either. By the sink I found a black, snub-nosed revolver that puzzles me as to how it made its way into my possession. Most nights her lips weren’t hidden by a piece of duct tape and her mascara wasn’t smeared down her cheeks. I think the gun might’ve scared her because she has been tied up before. We used to curl up on the couch under a warm blanket but now I sit across from her, sharing my attention between the gun by the sink and her tied to my dark-stained, oak chair, and I wonder how I got myself into this mess. I wonder how much of this is John’s fault. And I wonder when, exactly, I will get a good night’s rest.

I met John about three weeks after Rachel left me. I picked him up one night outside a bar in the downtown area. I couldn’t sleep so I got a second job driving a cab in the city four nights a week. I hadn’t gotten a good night’s sleep since Rachel left. Sleeping alone for the first time in years didn’t sit well with me. It was sad reaching over in the middle of the night to grab more bed rather than her. I’d just lie awake at night, going over every memory of our relationship: the good, the bad, what I did wrong. And normally I slept like a baby. You know those wake-up strips that line the breakdown lanes of highways? They were made for people like me. I’d drive home from work in the afternoon and fall asleep at the wheel. I would fall asleep on a clothesline if I could balance myself properly. I’m sure you can imagine how tough this insomnia was for me. I asked my doctor for some pills and all he did was tell me to get some exercise.

That’s easy for him to say.

So rather than stare at the paint blotches on my ceiling night after night I thought I’d make some extra cash, get to know the city better, meet some interesting people. With John I would soon learn that interesting was an understatement.

The streets were littered with bar hoppers standing at every corner, waiting to cross or hail a cab. I watched through the rearview mirror as he slid into the back seat with a casual air that suggested he wasn’t half in the bag like most of the people I picked up at this hour. It was three in the morning and I was only halfway through with my shift. He wore a flannel shirt and jeans that seemed lived in, as if he hadn’t left them in days. His appearance was very similar to mine—short, dark hair and a few days worth of stubble. It was like watching myself slide into the back of my own cab, though he seemed to be in better shape than me. As I shifted into gear and left the curb, he hid himself from my mirror into the far left corner of the back seat and zoned out, directing his attention to the passing buildings as we left for—

“Weymouth,” he said, barely audible in a deep, gruff voice that suggested he had been smoking since the sixth grade. “An apartment complex called Weymouth Commons, right by the highway exit.”

Hmm. That’s where I live. So did Rachel before she moved out.
“Some coincidence, that’s where I live,” I said, trying to make conversation, “I’ve never seen you around.”

He didn’t seem to care. His attention remained out the window. “I try to keep a low profile,” he paused. “George.”

He must’ve been reading my license.

“You look like you were working on a nice hangover in this picture,” he added.

I smirked. My lips hadn’t broken from a frown in weeks. Without Rachel in my life I had little to smile about. My life had become sleep, work, eat, work, sleep. Once in a while I had time to slip in a little TV. But rarely did I go out and have fun anymore. The picture-day hangover followed one of my nights off watching TV with John Dewars. But telling him that would make me sound pretty sad.

“That’s right.”

“You ever come out around these parts? Ever go out at night into the city other than for this?” He was turning into quite the conversationalist.

“I used to once a month or so.” I suppose I really didn’t want to talk about it.

“Not anymore?”

“Not much of a reason to anymore. I recently broke up with a girlfriend. She and I would go out for dinner in the city on occasion and see a movie or a show or something.”

“You don’t have any friends to hit the bars with?”

“Not really. We had mutual friends who side with her now. And my jobs don’t really give me much of an opportunity to make friends.”

“Jobs?”

“I’m a postman during the day, full-time. So most of the time I’m out delivering and don’t really talk to people in the office much.”

“What about this job?” he asked, as I noticed him take his attention away from the street and direct it towards me. “Don’t meet many friends this way?” He was smirking.

“Not many, no. What’s your name, man?”

“John.”

“John, you are the first person I’ve picked up that I have perceived to be normal.”

“Well, looks can be deceiving, remember,” he said with a smirk.

“Yeah. A lot in life can be deceiving.”

Rachel left me one morning four months ago because we were getting older yet I wasn’t acting like it. We had gotten along fine. We both had our flaws and we would fight like couples do. But for her what we had wasn’t enough. All her friends were getting married and having children. She was twenty-five and sharing an apartment with a postman who dropped out of college. I didn’t have any friends. Her friends were my friends. They all liked me fine, I was nice enough. I treated her well and never abused her. She just got bored. Like she said, she was becoming an adult, and her relationship needed to change with her. I refused to grow up, to commit, to give in. I saw marriage as an institution. Locking myself into commitment was frightening to me.

Always being there with each other.

Till death do you part.
Then kids? Clearly I wasn’t ready for this step.

So we talked and she decided to move out. Ever since she left I had trouble finding the good in anything most days. I couldn’t even appreciate the sunlight and unseasonable warmth during a day in the middle of October. She moved out and ruined the one nice day of the fall.

Now, much like the changing of fall to winter, my days have become darker and colder without her in my life. I hadn’t slept in months but what I wanted more than sleep was to feel the smoothness of her skin against mine again. I told John all about this one night when I had a night off from driving the cab. I had been seeing him in the building lately so we decided to go to a local bar and watch the Celtics game. I never liked basketball much but I hadn’t gone out in months so I would take any excuse to have a beer somewhere else than on my couch.

The bar we went to wasn’t nice by any means but I liked it. It was the atmosphere that I wanted when I went to a bar. They didn’t bother putting any shit on the walls like sports memorabilia or town photos but they kept the old hardwood floors swept cleanly. The lighting was low and kept me feeling isolated from everyone else. Unnoticeable. I didn’t mind strangers but I did mind these people. The fifty-year-old divorced men who eased their pain with cheap vodka or gin. I can’t drink expensive gin and these people are sucking down bottles of gin with a name like Barton’s on the label? To me, that’s just torture. They all depress me because I see myself as one of them in 30 years if I don’t fix whatever problem Rachel said I have.

John and I didn’t watch the game much. Apparently he wasn’t too into basketball either:

“I just needed an excuse to hangout with another guy,” he said, “I didn’t want you to think I was asking you out or anything.” I laughed, and then there was a brief moment of silence. “I’m not gay,” he assured me.

So we talked for a bit and I told him about Rachel leaving me and not being able to sleep. We also exchanged some stories to lighten the mood.

“Come on, tell me about the most embarrassing girl you ever dated,” he said in between sips of ale.

“Dated? I haven’t dated many girls, and I’m not actually embarrassed about any of them.”

“All right, well you must have some embarrassing story of a chick from college. One night you get a little drunk and your friends gave you shit about it all semester, maybe?”

“Well there was one girl,” I admitted, staring down into the copper ale as if it were a microphone. I was doing all I could to hide myself from his glare. I didn’t want to see his reaction and relive those embarrassing days of college. The days my dormmates teased me about “Long-faced Mary.”

“Excuse me?”

“Her name was Long-faced Mary,” I continued. “She had a long face.” “Abnormally long?”

“She went down on me one night and it looked like I was getting a blowjob from Mr. Peanut.”

John let out a subtle laugh that seemed to start at the pit of his stomach. There was a devilish grin on his face that implied he could picture what I was saying.

“Kids at school were pretty mean to her too. This one kid, at least once a
week, would go up to her in the dining hall and say, ‘Hey Mary. What’s the matter, why the long face?’"

His laugh rose to a dull roar and it surprised me that no one turned to look in our direction to see what all the fuss was about. The bar was small enough to carry our laughter from one end to the other.

“I don’t see how you don’t have any friends George,” he said, “you seem like a pretty cool guy to me.”

“Thanks. It never really bothered me, though. I’m used to being alone. I didn’t have many friends when I was growing up either. I was just too shy, I guess. I had an imaginary friend when I was little because I didn’t have any brothers or sisters. He was a duck named Leonard. I’d always have conversations with him while playing Legos, and it sounds pathetic but he helped pass the time. College was good for me, living in the dorms helped and I met cool people. Then I met Rachel there and I slowly edged my way into the social circle.”

“So college was fun?”

“Yeah, it was great, but then I couldn’t afford it so I dropped out junior year. I always intended to go back but I kept putting it off and putting it off. I’m a bit lazy like that. I suppose that’s one of the many things she couldn’t stand about me.”

“I wouldn’t let this thing with her bother you too much. Maybe she’ll realize she was wrong and call you one day. Not all women need to be married. A lot of them think they do or a lot of them want to because all their friends are doing it and they feel left out, but there are few women in this world that actually need to get married at that age.”

“Honestly, I wish I could do that for her but I can’t right now. Truth is, I miss her and want to make her happy but I’m not ready. I’ll be married and have kids that are more mature than I am.”

“Exactly man, you can’t do that to yourself.”

“Yeah. I just wish I could tell her how I felt, how much she meant to me.”

“Like sit her down, get some closure, that kind of thing?”

“Yeah. I think if anything, it’d help me get over her, help me get some sleep.”

“Well call her up sometime.”

“Yeah.” And I looked back down into the abyss of wheat, barley and hops in search of some answer to my troubles, like a liquid magic eight ball mapping out my future for me. I began to admire the way John went about his life. He and I were different in so many ways: his opinions, his behavior, and his sense of humor. He was everything I was afraid to be: crass, outgoing, tough. He told me stories of bar fights, one-night stands, and road trips. He wasn’t bothered by women or caught up with anything in his life. He lived for the moment and did everything for himself. Not in a selfish way, though. He was just looking out for himself because no one else would. We got along fine for two guys who’d just met.

“So what is she like?” John asked.

“She’s fun. She’s very sweet and caring. She’s got this sexy, petite body with a natural beauty I always loved about her. She rarely wore makeup. She was one of those women you loved to wake up next to.”

We talked about her for a bit, then for the first time all night we turned our attention to the basketball game. We stayed until they kicked us out around
one, then headed back to the apartment building we both rented from. He wanted to play some video games but I needed to be up early. My mail route needed to be ready to go by seven.

“I’ll see you around then,” he said.

“Yes,” I assured him, “of course. Later.”

A few weeks later I got a call from Rachel. I was surprised to hear her voice on the other end of the line. We had only talked briefly since the breakup. Most of it was in regards to picking up her things at the apartment. Things were hard on her too and she just got emotional when she saw me. It reminded her of what she wanted with me but couldn’t have, she said.

“I was wondering if you would be free for some coffee tonight,” she said faintly, almost nervous that I would say no.

“Of course I would,” I responded as casually as possible, trying to hide that I was thrilled that she wanted to talk to me again.

“Great. Do you wanna meet me at the Dunkin’ Donuts by you?”

“Yeah, that’s fine, I’ll be there in a couple of minutes.”

“Okay, see you soon.”

Click. I was much too excited to be going to have coffee with her. I could hardly put my jeans on and tie my shoes I was so anxious. On the short drive there my mind was racing as to what I wanted to say to her. I wanted to ask her how she had been and what she had been up to. How work was and if her family was doing fine. If her Thanksgiving was okay and if she had been going out. I wanted to know it all.

Things were awkward, as I expected they would be. There was a lot of scanning the coffee shop and staring into our cappuccinos. We interrupted each other often and smiled shyly about it afterwards. It reminded me of our first date and that made me even more depressed. But I was glad to hear that she had been okay, and it made me feel even better to hear somewhat of a concern in her voice for my feelings as well. She looked great as she always did but it wasn’t overdone. She wore a nice charcoal, turtleneck sweater, a pair of jeans, and her Puma sneakers. I didn’t want to see her look too amazing, it would just make me miss her even more. And if things weren’t tense enough, Rachel made sure that the situation was as uncomfortable as possible—

“So…are you seeing anyone?” she asked with a hint of anxiety in her voice. It kind of caught me off guard but I was relieved I didn’t have to lie about it to make her feel better.

“No. I’ve been real busy lately and I’m really not ready for that yet.” I almost didn’t want to look at her as I waited for her response to the same question.

“How about you?”

“No,” she said smiling, looking into her cup. “Same reasons too.” You could tell, though, that something was on her mind. Maybe she didn’t believe me.

“What have you been busy with?”

“I got another job to make some extra money. I’ve been driving a cab in Boston for the past month and a half. It’s going pretty well, I have no complaints.”

“That’s pretty interesting. You always seemed to know the city well when we were there.”

“Yeah. And I actually made friends with this guy in the building. He’s
pretty cool. We usually go out to a bar and get some beers once or twice a week. He’s not like many people I’ve met before.”

You could sense her shock at me actually opening up and making friends with someone else but deep down I could tell she was happy I wasn’t totally alone.

“George, that’s great! He must be a good guy.”

“Yeah. You’d like him.”

Things got more comfortable as our cappuccinos got cooler. We caught each other up on our lives the past month and she told me all about Thanksgiving at her mom’s house. It was a different holiday for her this year because it was the first in five years that she was living back at home. It was so good to see her smile again. One can only go on memory for so long before a dose of the real thing is needed. But like most of the joys in my life our meeting didn’t last forever.

“This was really nice, George. Thank you for coming here tonight,” she said.

“Well thanks for calling me, Rachel. It was so good to see you.”

“We’ll do this again sometime soon, right?”

“Absolutely,” I said with a smile and immediately followed with a quick hug. I watched her get into her car, smile at me, and wave as she drove off before I even unlocked the door to mine.

It was great that she still cared about me and was worried how I felt about all this, but it was tough to see her again. I was mesmerized by the deep mocha of her eyes every time I stared attentively while she talked about whatever. Her perfume reminded me of dates and getting ready in front of the big mirror we had in our bedroom. And the way she bit her lip when she was shy or embarrassed made me melt right in front of her. I needed to find something to get my mind off her.

“A hooker?” I said, half-surprised. The other half of me was figuring this was the type of thing John would come up with. “That’s your answer to me being single?”

“I believe they prefer to be called escorts. But yes, my answer to you being single is to get a hooker. You need that tension release. You need to stop feeling bad about yourself, go out, and have a good time.”

“You feel this is a good idea?”

“Absolutely.”

“And you do this? You go out and spend money on a hooker?” Every time I talked to John I learned something new and even more fascinating about him.

“Hook-ers, actually,” John said, matter-of-factly. He wasn’t embarrassed about it in the least. He said all of this, arguing his point, as if it were completely acceptable social behavior.

“You’re kidding.”

“Why?”

“I’m sorry, I’m just having a hard time understanding this logic of yours.”

“What’s so bad about being with a hooker?”

“For one, think of how many guys they’ve been with.”

“Please, in today’s society most women have been with so many guys you’d probably find a hooker who’s been with less men. Think about it, with dating you drop close to three hundred dollars a date between drinks, dinner, and a movie. You can spend half that or less and at least it’s a guarantee you’re gonna get laid. Plus,
you don’t need to call her in the morning, and if you want some more, you just go out and get someone else. Why does that not make sense?”

“I’m sorry but you just have a method of thinking that I’m not quite used to.”

It scared me to live in a society where people like John might make decisions for the masses. I suppose his argument wasn’t all that unjustified, but he still hadn’t convinced me to his side of reason. We continued to watch TV on my couch and I continued to be confused with what I should be doing with my life. The past couple of months I have appreciated more and more the time when Rachel lived here. This place was a mess! Not that she was the only one that cleaned, but I suddenly lost interest in keeping the place clean without a woman around. I left boxers on the coffee table on top of old magazines and newspapers. Old pizza boxes became obstacles on the floor and with that stain under the end table I was sure I wasn’t getting my security deposit back on this place.

Last night I had the strangest dream about Rachel that frightened me to a cold sweat when I woke up. I picked her up in my cab late in the evening. Her friends were sharing a few drunken giggles before the door was ripped open and she pulled herself inside. She barely lifted her head off the worn out, black leather of the back seat and didn’t notice I was driving. After the first mile she passed out and instead of taking her home I took her back to my apartment, carried her into my kitchen, and left her there all night. So you can imagine my surprise when I woke up for a glass of water to see her tied to the dark-stained, oak chair, next to my stove in the kitchen.

I walked by the guest bedroom in a state of shock and had just enough wits about me to recognize John sitting on the bed.

Wait a minute! How the fuck did he get in here?
Did he do this?
How does he know her?
Did I let him in last night? My mind was running laps inside my skull.
“John, what the fuck is that?” I said, pointing in the direction of the kitchen, panic soaking my forehead with sweat.
“She’s your ex-girlfriend Rachel, isn’t she?” He said it so casually, not bothering to look up from the magazine he was reading.
“Well what the fuck is she doing here?” Now agitation was being added to the panic.
“Isn’t this what you wanted?”
He was kidding, right?
“What I wanted?”
“Did you not tell me that you wished you could sit her down and tell her how you felt about her? How she broke your heart, how you can’t sleep, how you’re nothing without her?”
“I just wanted closure!!”
“So…”
“So you abducted her?!?”
“Not me, George. You.”

What?
“I didn’t do shit, John! I went to bed last night and she wasn’t in my kitchen. Now I wake up in the morning to find her in there against her own will! I
was asleep, I didn’t do anything!”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Yes!”

“I thought you’ve been having trouble sleeping George.” What was he getting at?

“I was. But last night I know I fell asleep because I had a dream about...”

No.

“There is a fine line between dreams and reality. Can you actually tell me that you, someone who hasn’t had a good night’s sleep in months, can distinguish dream from reality?”

My shirt collected an ocean of sweat on my back.

“How did you get in?”

“You let me in, George. You always let me in.”

This couldn’t be happening.

“If you don’t believe me then maybe you should take a look out the window, George.”

I could barely move. My muscles seized and all I could do was inch my body to the shadeless window above my antique dresser in the adjoining bedroom. I saw the bright, yellow Caprice Classic sitting in the space where I normally left my ’94 Honda Civic. I must have forgotten to return my cab to the holding pen. John didn’t say anything. And now that I finally understood what he meant, I was still puzzled as to how he got in, and why he would be here.

I swung back into the kitchen and Rachel was still asleep in the chair, her head leaned against the drab, canary yellow walls. Her neck seemed more uncomfortable than her wrists and ankles that were tied to the legs of the chair. Her mascara and makeup trailed down each side of her cheek from a night of crying and she wore an outfit I was all too familiar with: form flattering jeans, a sheer black shirt over a black tank top, and black high-heeled boots. The boots always made her look a couple of inches taller than her five-foot frame. The duct tape over her lips didn’t exactly match everything else she wore. I didn’t understand what happened to me to do something like this to her. Someone I loved and cared for so much. I didn’t hate her, I was just depressed.

I thought of slicing my wrists with a knife in the drawer near the sink.

I thought of swallowing some pills I had in the medicine cabinet.

I thought of hanging myself with the extension cord in the closet.

Anything to escape this situation.

I’d do anything to not face the consequences. To not be here mentally when she woke up. I didn’t want to deal with the hurt I had imposed on her, and I certainly didn’t want to do anything worse. I spotted a gun sitting on the kitchen counter. I could use the gun. I picked it up off the counter and after quickly checking the barrel—all six bullets enclosed—Rachel woke up.

She saw me standing in front of her with the gun, then closed her eyes tightly and turned her head away. She continued crying and it made things even worse. I needed to try to calm her down, so I put the gun on top of the fridge and told her I wasn’t going to hurt her.

“Rachel, you have to believe me, I had no idea this happened. I don’t know what’s going on here, I thought this was all a dream,” I said trembling, fighting back tears of my own. She turned her attention back to me and then away
again as I brought my hand to her face. “No, please believe me. I’m only going to take off the tape. This may hurt a bit.”

“Ouwwch!” And it did. “What the fuck has happened to you George, this is crazy! This isn’t like you.” Maybe it was better to leave the tape on.

“What are you doing?” said John.
“What does it look like I’m doing? I need to get her out of here,” I said to him.
“What about your idea? What about what you wanted?”
“I didn’t mean it like this John, this isn’t what I wanted.”
“Who’s John?” Rachel asked, as I turned back to look at her. “Who are you talking to?” Her look of fright slightly turned to a look of puzzlement.
“That guy over there on the couch. That’s my friend John.”
“George, there’s no one else here but us. Your couch is empty.”
“What?
“What’s happened to you George, I’m so scared over all this, don’t make it worse.”

“I don’t understand what you’re talking about, I can see him right over there—” but he wasn’t there anymore. I looked back at her and John was standing behind her.
“Don’t listen to her George, she’s just trying to prevent us from being friends,” John said.

I wasn’t prepared to handle this.
“She knows you’re better off now and she’s jealous of your new life. You’re changing and she doesn’t want you to. She recognizes that I am what you wish you were. And she doesn’t like me because I’m a friend to help get you over her. Someone to convince you and push you to do this. Because we both know that you are not one to be all that motivated. You’re a pussy. You wanted to sit her down and talk, I’m just givin’ you the balls to do it.”

A moment later we could hear the police yelling from the other side of the door, barking at me to let Rachel go. She was last seen in my cab, it was parked out front, they know I did it, blah, blah, blah. And the squad leader’s shouting all sorts of things he learned at the academy. We’ll break down the door. You’re outnumbered. This isn’t worth losing your life over. All this I knew. Rachel stopped crying completely. The black trails of mascara glistened with tears.

“Looks like you have a choice to make, George,” John said.
“What?” I replied, angry.
“End this now by capping Rachel and yourself because if you don’t the cops will come in here and ruin your life by taking you to jail. At least through death you won’t have to put up with life in prison.”

And from the door came BAM! BAM! BAM! I couldn’t think straight with the cops trying to break down the door.

“It’s easy, man. Just point at her forehead, close your eyes, and pull the trigger.”

BAM!

How did this happen?

“And when it comes to your turn, stick the barrel in your mouth and blow out the back of your skull. Don’t put it under your chin. You could miss if you’re not pointing close enough to the brain.”

BAM!

I couldn’t handle his bullshit anymore. I couldn’t put up with his stupid suggestions for my happiness and well-being anymore. I raised the snub-nosed
revolver in the air, and as I watched Rachel close her eyes and heard her scream, I pulled the trigger—

BANG! I shot a hole in the wall above her head. She was right. There was no John. I dropped the gun and put my head in my hands. I wept when I should’ve been untying Rachel, but the cops would come soon enough to do that for me.

BAM! BAM! BAM! And with the third blow I looked up to watch my door splinter off its hinges. The first thing through that open door was a small black object the size of a beer can. I didn’t have time to react before—BANG!

The light! This horrible, blinding light mixed with the horribly piercing noise dropped me to my knees. Between the spots, the silhouettes of two guys dressed all in black rush in with large, semi-automatic weapons. I watched my future flash before my eyes. I pictured showers with 75 other naked men. I pictured all those guys in orange vests cleaning up garbage on the highway. I pictured conjugal visits with no one because no one would love me enough to visit. Especially now, after something like this.

One officer went to check up on Rachel while the other kept my face into the dirty linoleum floor of the kitchen. Then more came in: two, four, seven, and soon I had three SWAT members on me; two had a knee into my back while another was applying handcuffs to me. I was exhausted. I was ashamed. I was cooperating.

When they finally picked me up I realized they had taken Rachel out first. The chair was littered with the loose nylon ropes and made me want to vomit because it reminded me of what I had done. She would never want to speak to me again. I would be lucky if anyone would ever speak to me again. Anyone who wasn’t incarcerated, to be exact. There’d be Bubba and Big Joe. Large men with a limited command of intelligence would want to be my friend.

The officers led me to a squad car in the parking lot, its lights coloring the trees by the lot in alternating blues and reds. It made me wonder if it woke anyone up. The lights. And I felt a little bad for the neighbors whose sleep was disrupted because of me. Neighbors I would never see again, yet people whom I never had a problem with. With one hand an officer held my hands at my back and with the other guided my head underneath the roof of the car and pushed me into the backseat. I always wondered why that was. They just had me pinned to the ground, knees in my back, and could have done worse I’m sure. But then when they get outside to the car we got the delicate side of the officers, making sure I didn’t bump my head. For most criminals bumping their head would be the least of their worries during an arrest.

The cage that separated me from the driver made me feel like the animal that I had become. The door slammed inches from my face and we started off for what would be my fate. I didn’t catch a glimpse of Rachel at all. The last memory I would have of her would be sitting in front of me in that chair, scared of me for the first time in her life. And though I spared her life and gave up quietly, I did not deserve to see her walking to the ambulance, getting treatment for her trauma.

After a few nights in jail at the local Police Department and a pointless trial with an unsympathetic judge, I was ready to be shipped off to the maximum-security prison by the interstate. I didn’t fight anything. I pled guilty to charges of kidnapping and assault with a dangerous weapon and was looking at twenty years to
life in jail, though there was a possibility of doing less time with good behavior. My attorney kept talking about a split personality disorder and pleading insanity but I didn’t want to be thrown in a mental hospital, fighting with R.P. McMurphy and some large Indian guy.

I didn’t want people to think I was a nut.

I was ready to take my punishment like a man and mature as a result of all this. They could send a guy to talk to me if they really felt better about it. I didn’t see Rachel there. Apparently the prosecutor had all he needed to put me away with the police finding her tied to a chair, in my kitchen, with a weapon by my surrendered body.

The ride to my new home was a short one. It gave me little time to appreciate the outside world and what I would miss about being a free man. As I saw the leafless trees lining the interstate I felt tears trickling down each side of my face, weaving paths in and out of the stubble there. They reminded me of Rachel, the stronger member of the union we once had. The one who was sturdy and responsible. I was once her leaves, but come spring she will have sprouted new ones, and I will still be in prison. I had not yet been officially incarcerated but I already missed her. I was now being forced into one institution, without her by my side, when I could have willfully joined another with her for the rest of my life.

If only I had not needed this to become more of a man.

The only thing I had to look forward to was that I would never see John again. He would never get a chance to bother me.

Ever.

He couldn’t get at me in here.

Russell Jenkins graduated in January 2004 with a B.A. in English.
I have two dead friends
Though one still lives, wandering in the west.
(Perhaps I should say I have one dead friend.
And one is just dying.
Or perhaps I could write about a hope for resurrection, a Jesus-like stunt
But I never believed that Christ did an encore.
Though I sometimes wish I did.
And I wish I could I turn the other cheek,
and hide that gruesome frown, betray it with a half-smile, directed west.
But perhaps that would force me to walk backwards,
When all I want to do is walk on water.)
I have two dead friends,
though one still lives, wandering in my head.

When You Are Betrayed by a Kiss
a poem by Jared Manley

Jared Manley is a sophomore majoring in English.
Michael Graham is a junior majoring in Art.
Mediocre
a poem by Amber Crowe

Something in the way you said
that together
we were “no less than mediocre”
didn’t make my heart race
or hands shake
in quite the way you did before.
And when you said, “what’s
the point?” I wanted
to say, “Cool.
I can be cavalier too.”
So now when we’re together, I’m not
so sure we are,
can’t really judge how close
or how far.

I’m novelty for you, but unknown lands
are conquered
and left behind.
Let’s find a way
to make it last.
Or maybe you don’t care for that.
Connections are made and then they fade;
we trip
or flip
or fall
into something that feels like love.
You fit me like
a well-worn glove,
but inside, it’s still hollow.

And everything is so bitterly beautiful,
like angel wings
thrown on the floor.
It’s somehow forgotten
who they adorned before.
Or the song that makes me
want to cry
while we’re making love
while you’re there
just above me.
I’ll cry and you can kiss my tears
- just want to hear
  this sweet sad song –
if I could just
  hold on
I’d press repeat
and listen to
  the mournful beat
until it became mediocre.
And I find another
  feeling to favor
  I’ll savor the salt
from your lips when we kissed
I’m still trying to find meaning
  in things
  not meant to be
I still miss you
  singing me
to sleep.
She moves, walks
  Gracefully. Awe.
All motion, one action
Viewed as if through
  intense heat, like
the shimmer of hot pavement.
Pausing to look, one
  expects, like a mirage
a sudden disappearance.
Head on, the horizon narrows
  to pin-prick point
  but still the image burns
In my mind.

Matthew Gordon is a senior majoring in Political Science.
Da Me Um Beijo
John Diehl

Drawing

John Diehl is a junior majoring in Art.
Horse #4
Christina Warsheski

Painting

Christina Warsheski is a senior majoring in Art.
Margeaux Spera is a senior majoring in Art.
Leaf Study #2
Kathleen Nydam

Drawing

Kathleen Nydam is a senior majoring in Art.
Unlock Your Fire
Amy Donnelly

Digital Art

Amy Donnelly is a junior majoring in Art.
Jennifer Stodder is a senior majoring in Art.
Tickled Pink
Kaitlin MacLean

Digital Graphic

Kaitlin MacLean is a senior majoring in Art.
Sam Cioffi is a junior majoring in Art.
Don’t scowl while your feet fly;
The words flicker across her face again.
Her features speak volumes, complete with charts and an index.
Of course, she never actually says anything – but how could anything be said
Over the staccato shriek of metal heels on marble
And the labored breathing of us both?
Her eyes are fierce, keen, focused, and overwhelmingly beautiful,
Watching for the oft-promised but never conceived revelation.
One day, I fear, memorization of motion will not be enough,
And the music will have to either flow, or fade to nothingness.
I dread the moment when my fiasco ends
And her eyes flicker in unrestrained emotion,
For never again will she so attentively watch me,
A man with two left feet fallen helplessly into love.
We trample on burnt-out cigarette butts,
me, with my tan, wood-heeled shoes,
and you, with your flowing cream dress with the red trim.

I feel I’ve been waiting for this dance all my life.
To hold your smooth, delicate hand in mine,
and smell the subtle sweet scent of your hair.

Though the room around us is crowded with cheer,
men yelling and women laughing,
I hear nothing but the soft rhythm of your breath.

I bend my head down to look at your face,
but your eyes are fixed on the dusty floor below.
You have not spoken a word or even glanced at me once.

Sadly it is only I who awaited this reverie,
for you complied only in polite obligation.
And so I end our dance with a kiss on your hand,
thankful for even the shortest of moments.

Tara Johnson is a senior majoring in English.
Evan Harding is a sophomore majoring in Art.
I sat at the kitchen table spitting albino watermelon seeds across the room into the sink. My feet were up on the table and the morning sunlight was only just beginning to creep through the small window.

I became aware that every seed had missed. I watched attentively as one more landed quietly in size-eight-shoe mud tracks. I stretched and yawned and rubbed my dirt-covered face. My eyelids tried to fall over my eyes but I insisted that they wait, Just wait.

Bumps formed on my damp-clothes-covered skin A silent breeze drifted across the room.

I made popcorn for you But the bowl was too small I think. The smell made me think of clowns and elephants and acrobats. I thought maybe you’d think of those things too, Wouldn’t you? The popcorn’s all over the counter, the floor. Too many seeds I think. What a waste.

You walked in with sleep still in your eyes, Your sweet dreams still lingering on your face. You stumbled over my mud-caked boots, You crunched over the popcorn. You walked through the puddles and you kicked those seeds beneath the fridge. You made a cup of coffee, You left.

I staggered out the door The tears felt hot as they moved over my skin I stumbled, I fell: Face first, In the mud.
Katrina Henderson is a senior majoring in Art.
Ragdoll
a poem by Melissa Hassan

Venice, why did you want me that day?
    I was turned into a ragdoll;
    stripped naked and pulled
    into your undertow.
    I fought you with
    all that my body
    could endure;
    kicking and pleading
    for my life.
You took my breath, filling my insides
    with cotton and bursting
    all of my muscles that
    fought you.
    I felt your power,
    and knew that you
    could see that
    I am made of
    water and you wanted
    me home.
Venice, I dreamed of your ocean
    and saw the anger
    that is held in your beauty.
    I survived that day;
    tortured and twisted
    until I was torn,
    stripped of all human existence.
    I could not breath, move, or fight
    any longer.
You created a doll that day-
    empty inside,
    vulnerable to all
    observers and motionless.
Venice, I will live knowing
    it was not time
    to come home
    to you.
    I will throw the
    ragdoll back
    into your waves
    and watch as she
    drowns, into
    the dark blue
    beauty of my
    ocean, my home.

Melissa Hassan graduated in May 2003 with a B.A. in English.
Life with Robert  
a work of nonfiction by Kristina Powers

My life, as I knew it, changed dramatically when my brother was born. I had always wanted a sibling to play with, but Robert, a special needs child, was nowhere near what I wished for. He was born when I was nine years old. Until then, I had been an only child, and the apple of my parents’ eyes. But caring for my brother became a full-time job that shifted most of my parents’ attention away from me. My mother and father rarely had time to spend with just me anymore.

When my parents told me that a baby was on the way I was ecstatic. However, our life quickly began to change. My mother had morning sickness all the time. It seemed like she was sick twenty-four hours a day. It was so bad that she finally had to be hospitalized for two weeks. After that, she spent the rest of her pregnancy in bed. She was bed-ridden for seven long months. This was a very difficult time for me. My parents did try to include me as much as possible. My mother brought me with her to her first ultrasound appointment. I remember seeing an image on the screen and the technician telling us that I was going to have a brother. It was a little disappointing at first, as I was wishing for a sister. But I thought that having a brother was definitely going to be better than being an only child.

When my mom was seven and a half months pregnant my brother could not wait any longer to join the family. I can remember my grandparents picking me up after school that day. I knew something was wrong as soon as I saw their expressions. They explained that my mother had to go into Boston to have the baby and that they were both very sick. We drove to the hospital and found my father there waiting for us. He told me that my brother was just born, and brought us to see my mom, who insisted she was going to be fine. My mom explained that she was suffering from something called HELP Syndrome, which causes a person’s whole body to shut down. To save her life, the doctor had to medically paralyze her and pack her in ice until she was stabilized.

My brother was in a different section of the hospital, the Newborn Intensive Care Unit (NICU). When my dad brought us to see him we could only look at him through the glass. Robert was really tiny and looked sickly. He was in a small glass bassinet with many tubes connected to him. He was surrounded by other helpless little babies all fighting for their lives and I was frightened by the sight. My dad had been the only one allowed in to see him. I told my dad that I wished I could see him up close, to see what he looked like. My dad asked me to wait while he went to ask for permission. He came out a minute later dressed in a sterile blue gown and he was holding a smaller blue outfit. He asked if I was ready to go meet my little brother. I was surprised that I was able to go into the actual room. My grandparents could not even go into that room. I could not believe my ears.

My dad thought it would be good for Robert to hear my voice. My mother and I had spent so many days lying in her bed reading aloud that he knew Robert would recognize me. The doctor consented to this since my mom was too sick to come see my brother. He agreed that it would be good for Robert to hear my dad and me talk to him. I was really scared at first, seeing him so helpless, but
it made me feel so important to be allowed in the NICU.

For the next fourteen days life was touch-and-go for Robert. Both of my parents stayed at the hospital. My grandparents and my aunt brought me to see my little brother every day. I never stopped praying for my mother and Robert to get well and come home.

When my parents finally came home with my brother I thought life would be back to normal. Boy, was I wrong! The days of having my parents’ undivided attention were long gone. Now I was a big sister to a totally needy, extremely sick little brother.

Robert continued being sick and my mother was constantly having to bring him to the doctor. All he ever did was cry, and boy could he cry! Robert never seemed to sleep. If he did cry himself out for a few minutes, we could not even breath heavy, never mind make a noise, because he would start up again. Life with Robert was like walking on eggshells. You never knew what was going to set him off, as just about everything did. Because he never slept we were all very tired all the time, and there were many times when I wanted to go back to being an only child. This adorable little brother was making us all crazy.

My parents were tied up constantly. They tried everything they could think of to calm him. They read every book, took him to doctor after doctor, but he just would not stop crying. They never had any time for me and I began to think this was all my fault. I kept begging them for a sibling and I was sure that this was my punishment.

Robert could not handle sudden noises, bright lights, being held or touched suddenly or any strong smell. Every time my mother tried to bathe him he screamed. He did not like being naked or being placed in water. Every time we went outside during the day he would scream at the brightness of the light. Every time the phone rang, the dog barked, or the microwave beeped he would start to scream. Also, the change of seasons was very hard for my brother. He felt naked in shorts and short sleeves. It would take him at least a month to get used to the changes. When he needed sunblock or bug screen put on him, one would think my mom was pouring acid on his skin. He even thought the crickets chirping outside were really in his room. We all had to assure him that they were actually outside and could not get in. When the heat would noisily come on in the winter Robert would be convinced that there was someone in the house or something living in the walls.

Finally, at eighteen months, there was a diagnosis; Robert had a severe sensory integration disorder. What this meant was that Robert’s sensors were all so acute that every sound, sight, touch, and smell was extremely magnified to him. This explained why all he did was scream day and night. As time went on, Robert was put in therapy and we all went for his sessions. This really helped us. We learned that he needed constant nurturing. Patience and love would be the keys to Robert’s success in life. Furthermore, I stopped resenting him and my parents and I learned to cope with his problems.

Robert was started in a special preschool when he was three years old. My parents have taken him to more specialists, psychiatrists, psychologists, and occupational therapists than most people will ever see in their lifetime. I know first-hand it has not been an easy time for them as Robert has always been a challenging child. But they have never stopped pushing Robert to be the very best he can be.
My brother is now nine years old. He has come a long way from being that screaming baby. He is in a public third grade classroom with his own personal aide and doing very well. He will never be able to do all of the things that the other kids do, such as playing contact sports, or entering somewhere new or crowded without fear of the unexpected. He lives his life in constant anxiety. He still sees a psychiatrist and takes medication and probably always will. My family and I are able to cope, as well. We all try very hard to understand and guide him without sheltering him.

Robert will always perceive the world differently than we do, but that is what makes him so special to me. He is always glad to see me and I know he loves me unconditionally. He is sensitive, warm, affectionate and funny. He may not be the little sister I always wanted, but he is the remarkable little brother that I have. I would not trade life with Robert for anything.

Kristina Powers is a sophomore and has not declared a major.
One Fall
a poem by Wendi Field Murray

My life was once shown
On the back of the rain
The slant and the speed were just right
The dramatic descent
Of my six billion friends
A mist of our births
On the sky.
“There will be no turning back!”
Someone said with a splash
And we lay in the road
And we dried.
Our bodies were gone
And the earth would grow on
Never sure if we lived
Or we died.

Wendi Field Murray is a senior majoring in Anthropology.
Invincibility is defined as the incapability of being conquered, overcome, or subdued; unbeatable, indomitable. I was once utterly convinced that these qualities described me.

I began to feel this way during high school. When I entered Boston Latin Academy, I was a determined thirteen-year-old, eager to prove to my parents that I could do as well academically as my three older siblings had. I had been successful in pleasing my parents during seventh and eighth grade, having received excellent grades and made everyone hopeful for my future. In tenth grade, however, my willingness to succeed faded into the background of my new and destructive social life.

It started in ninth grade when my three best friends and I began hanging out in Dorchester. Looking back on it now, this was the pivotal beginning of a tumultuous three years. We were all from West Roxbury and prior to this had pretty much stayed close to home. But we met some boys in school who lived in Dorchester and we knew it would be fun to hang out with them. At the time we were largely into drinking and the Dorchester boys were too, so that’s what we did together every weekend. This pattern continued for months.

I had a few different boyfriends throughout tenth and eleventh grade, but there was one in particular, Justin, who made a lasting impression. At the time that Justin and I met, my friends and I were starting to grow bored with the party scene, which now seemed typical and hackneyed. We were looking for new ways to satisfy our relentless craving for a good time. Justin had a solution and for the next year and half it kept me content. He introduced us to Ecstasy (a.k.a. “E”).

There are multiple types of E. Some are stronger, which prolongs the high, known as “rolling,” and others have fewer effects. For example, “blue dolphins” are weak pills and “omegas” are powerful. The more repulsive the pills taste, the more intense the effect. The effects of a single pill usually lasted for hours, and sometimes we would roll for nine or ten hours after popping two or three. Once I’d started to roll, ordinary sensations, such as the simple stroke of my arm, would feel amazing. E made any boring night extremely fun and exhilarating. It completely elevated my mood. It made me believe everything was wonderful and gave me more energy than I ever thought possible. I felt invincible.

Even though I was using Ecstasy, I still managed to pass every grade in high school. Still, attendance was a constant issue. I was continuously getting notices sent to my house and phone calls from concerned teachers. During four terms out of five in eleventh grade, my name appeared on the list of people who were supposed to automatically fail because of absenteeism. But somehow, usually by forging a note from my parents or talking to an administrator who I knew would believe bullshit, I avoided this fate.

The ongoing negative effects of E started to get the best of me. It became a heroic challenge to complete a full day of school. My friends and I would, on average, complete two to three entire days of school per week. Later, I would learn
that was E basically devouring my serotonin, making it horribly difficult for me to be happy. It made me lazy, unable to concentrate, and antsy. It made me fiend for more. And that’s what I did. More.

School wasn’t the only victim of my addiction. I literally cared about nothing other than how I was going to get E and what kind I could get. My tolerance built up to the extent that the kind of E I got significantly mattered. The weaker pills weren’t worth settling for; they no longer made me feel invincible. My mother, who worked weekends, saw me the least. This worked in my favor because she was very questioning about what my friends and I did when we went out. She knew I was not coming home at night on weekends and she was very worried.

I fed my parents excuse after excuse. The thought of going home after doing E was unbearable. This was because by midnight, which was my curfew, I was still usually rolling strongly. Going home was just never on the night’s agenda. I would stay at a boyfriend’s or friend’s house whose parents didn’t mind us coming in around four in the morning. Eventually my mother stepped in. She’d had enough. She made the rule that I couldn’t stay out every weekend. But Ecstasy had a way of making me believe that even if I rudely disobeyed my mother, everything would work out fine.

The angry mother I dreaded dealing with was probably the most affected by my actions. I wasn’t her little girl anymore; I was more like a stranger who lived in her house during the week. I was constantly in a horrid, strung-out mindset from the weekend because I hadn’t slept at all. I couldn’t even stand to have a normal conversation. Any questions about school drove me crazy. I would get pissed off and dismiss the fact that she was trying to simply converse with me. My father would deal with it by ignoring me. My siblings, who rarely drank alcohol, looked upon me with shame. My sister, just two years older, attempted to get through to me. She attended college out-of-state but came home to try to talk to me. But I caught on. I knew when she would be home and so I wouldn’t be there. She would leave little notes saying she loved me and to call her. Soon enough, I proved I wasn’t worth the commute and she stopped trying to get through to me. I was relieved to have one less person on my back.

When I was almost seventeen my mother made me see a psychiatrist. Judging by my appearance she figured I was on some sort of drugs. I obviously denied her accusations, and so she thought the problem was psychological. I didn’t want to stop doing E so I figured if I went along with her she would leave me alone. The psychiatrist suggested to my mother that if I continued staying out all night to involve the Department of Youth Services (D.Y.S.). She wanted my mother to enroll me in a program in which if I didn’t follow my mom’s rules, I would be placed in the custody of D.Y.S. This angered me and I refused to see the psychiatrist again. My mother didn’t put up a strong fight; I don’t think she could picture herself actually calling the cops on her own daughter. I was fortunate for this because I could continue on with my lifestyle.

But that lifestyle was destroying me. My head pounded all the time. It felt as if my brain was throbbing constantly. My moods were ridiculously out of control. Each day without E became a battle against depression. Any minor aggravation, such as missing a bus ride to school, enraged me. I still remember the Saturday night that finally forced me to see Ecstasy in a different light. I was with
my boyfriend at the time and we went to a party. As usual, I was on E. He had
smoked a lot of weed, drank and took some pills that I wasn’t into. We stayed out all
night and early in the morning we went back to his house. As always, I didn’t bother
to call my mom to let her know that I wasn’t coming home. I knew she would have
had a problem with it so it wasn’t worth the fight.

The next evening I walked in my house and found my father staring back
at me. He frantically began to describe how my mother was awake all night crying
and then had to attend work for twelve hours. My heart sank and I felt guilty.
Finally I was experiencing an emotion that wasn’t produced by Ecstasy. I felt worse,
though, when he reminded me it was Mother’s Day. The image of my mother
crying on Mother’s Day because of something I did killed me. I went up to my
room and thought about what I was doing. I suddenly realized how I was tearing
my parents apart. I was seventeen years old, too young to be causing so much pain.
I called my mom at work. She cried, and I cried. I knew I had no right to cry for
myself; the tears that drenched my cheeks were for her. And for my father. Due to
my inability to care about anything other than E, I had also missed his retirement
party. It was a big deal. He had worked for the Boston Edison Company for thirty
years to help support us. It was a given that his family would be there along with
multiple guests, including friends and previous co-workers. And yet I never went.
I was his daughter and I didn’t even have enough appreciation to attend. I told my
mom I would change.

Within the following few months I didn’t completely stop doing E. I
did do it a lot less, so much less that the fact that I was doing poorly in school and
no longer had a relationship with anyone in my family really bothered me. These
things finally began to feel essential in my life again.

The last time I did Ecstasy was New Years Eve of 2003. Previous to this
I hadn’t done it in months. However, a few friends and I figured it would be an
exciting way to bring in the New Year. The plan for the night was to take E, go
into Boston and then split up. I was meeting up with my boyfriend Jason at a
party around eleven. It was a really great night. I had fun with my friends and I
was having an even better time with Jason. The party was a perfect atmosphere
for someone on Ecstasy. It was jam-packed with people. Each room pulsed with a
different type of music.

Unfortunately for me, the party died down around three a.m. Since it was
already morning, Jason and I decided to crash there. Eventually everyone else in
the house went to sleep, but I wasn’t ready for sleep; my mind and body were still
super-active and I felt as if I could run a marathon. I attempted lying down, but
that nearly drove me crazy. I had never felt so energetic.

I called my friend, who was spending the night at her boyfriend’s house.
She was having the same difficulty calming down. We talked for a while to make
sure the other one was dealing with it okay. It was aggravating that I was satisfied
with no longer rolling and wanted it to end but my body wanted it to continue. I sat
down next to Jason and tried not to keep him awake. When he was awake, though,
I could focus my attention on him, rather than my visibly shaking, trembling body.
Jason kept falling asleep, and even though my teeth chattered loudly enough to
wake him a couple of times, I was generally left alone with my racing mind. I felt
that if I looked down at my chest I would see my heart pounding out of my shirt.
At one point, I contemplated getting up to leave and meet up with my friend, but I didn’t have the money for a ride even close to where she was. I didn’t sleep at all. I continued rolling for the next fifteen hours. I was up and down the whole time. I would be happy one moment, then extremely sad the next. My friend and I tried to keep each other positive, but it was hopeless. It felt as if there was no reason to be happy. I wasn’t sure I would survive that roll, but somehow I did, and when I spoke to Jason about how horrible it was he made me feel guilty. He told me that I had brought it upon myself. I knew he was right. That day I promised him I would never touch E again. Most importantly, I promised myself.

Since New Year’s Eve it has been surprisingly easy not to crave Ecstasy. It had been a challenge when I tried to completely stop after my first breakthrough with my emotions. But this time I really wanted nothing to do with it. Through all this I learned so much. I learned that having a “good time” isn’t worth it if it’s going to hurt others. I still can’t fully forgive myself for the pain and the multiple sleepless nights I put my parents through. Although I am now able to associate my actions with being young and immature, sometimes feelings of guilt can’t be so neatly excused. So instead of trying to completely rationalize what I did wrong, I am trying to make up for it.

I think of college as a chance to reunite with the eager and determined thirteen-year-old I once was. I love making my parents proud of me. Now I have the best relationship I have ever had with them. I can tell my mom anything. I no longer hide what I do because I am no longer ashamed of my lifestyle. My dad, who couldn’t make me crack a smile during my days with E, is now one of the funniest people I know. I am entirely grateful for having such amazing parents. My sister is another person I can appreciate again. She accepted that I was going through a phase and that the scary person I became on E has been left behind. I am truly blessed to have a forgiving family. I would pick them over invincibility any day.

Caitlin Fennell is a freshman and has not declared a major.
Scratchboard

Fred Gerstenecker is a junior majoring in Art.
Last summer my parish issued a writing contest to college students. The task seemed simple enough. Write an essay defending the dignity of human life in accordance with Catholic truth. Topics were allowed to range greatly, and could have included such things as abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, or chastity. The author of the winning essay was to receive a nifty five hundred dollars.

My mom urged me to participate, but because I had nothing to say about any of these topics that hadn’t already been said a million times, I was reluctant to enter. I was also certain the winning essay would have been a personal account of some sort—a moving story of loss or some other meaningful poignancy, and my life was disgustingly ordinary.

I was also discouraged because I felt like Hansi Kursch, the vocalist of the band Blind Guardian, who, in an interview, described himself as “a faithful but very critical Christian.” I was enveloped in pessimism—not of religion per se, but the futility of explaining or justifying my beliefs to the overwhelming contempt and cynicism of the outside world. Of course, my outlook isn’t as bad as it used to be. I used to think other people’s beliefs bothered me, but not long ago I realized it wasn’t their beliefs that were bothering me so much as their attitudes. Today some of my best friends are atheists, and they are the sort who put me at ease—with whom I can discuss matters of religion without arguing about them (which would be, well, pointless).

I suppose a great deal of my personal faith comes from the fact that I was never faced with the needless conflict of science and religion. I was introduced to such things as dinosaurs and nature at an early age, and I have close ties to my mother, who is both down to earth and has had many spiritual encounters in her lifetime. For me reason is the friend of faith, not the perennial enemy that must be ignored in order to live a blissful life in agreement to a socially obsolete system. Were I not a Christian, I would still have reason to believe in, or at least consider, such concepts as life after death and that an intelligence was responsible for the catalyst that first set our universe into motion. And I consider them every day. But at the time I sure felt like I was the only guy in the world who had both a crucifix on his wall and a National Geographic poster illustrating human evolution.

So I chose to write my essay about how I felt the cynicism of our times, not just toward religion, had a direct effect on the marginalizing of human worth. I particularly criticized the hypocrisy and dehumanization of capital punishment, and spent a while touching upon George Bush’s policies while he governed Texas. I also pointed out how I felt the media indirectly contributed to and reflected our contemptible attitudes, though I did go out of my way to praise the limitless possibility of the arts and entertainment to communicate wonderful things, and how they should be viewed as friends and not enemies. It was the one glimmer of hope in my essay. As fiercely biased, intensely personal, and ferociously political as it was, I wanted to make sure my essay was broad enough to appeal to anyone who wanted to read it, not just another faithful but cynical Christian. The last thing
I wanted to write something that could have been construed as preachy or condescending propaganda.

My essay did not win, but I attended the award ceremony and was eager to hear the winning essay recited. As the author of the winning essay stepped up to the podium, I listened with a keen interest. Man, was I disappointed. His essay was formally written and cohesive, but it was a simple regurgitation of everything the reviewing board wanted to hear. It stated that we shouldn’t forget the inherent dignity of all human life because God says so (and though it mentioned a great number of topics briefly, I find it odd that the author made no mention of capital punishment). There were no insights, no personal accounts, no illustrative examples, nothing. It was general, synoptical. I had always thought the purpose of writing, whether creative, informative, or persuasive, was to take the reader some place else. What is the point of preaching to the converted, I wondered?

During the reception they congratulated everyone who contributed for writing good essays. I talked to some of the committee during this time, and one priest who read my essay liked it (and he even recognized some of the movies I mentioned). When I talked to another member of the committee, a much older woman, I explained to her that I felt the winning essay was generalized and that my intentions were to write something with a broad appeal that anyone could read, whether they agreed with it or not. She then explained that since our faith is the truth, we should write from this perspective; that the winning essay was selected because it was a nice, clean summary. Of course, I felt that we should be able to reflect the truth of our religion elsewhere and not just to ourselves. I tried to explain this, but the woman then added that the outside world was a dark and nasty place that was best to avoid. Her demeanor was still polite, but I could sense a rising tension in her defiance. I did not press my point any further because I knew she would not accept it.

Isn’t the outside world where we have to live? Isn’t it where Jesus lived? How can we meaningfully apply our faith through isolation? I left the reception feeling more alone than I had in a long time. I understood why my peers felt so detached from religion. I suppose many of them have carried a shallow perception of religion because many of the religious people they’ve encountered have seemed shallow in their approach and reasoning. I learned to think for myself and attempt to understand my religion instead of regarding it in the manner through which one regards good grooming. I’m still not sure I truly do. It seems that most of us are on a perennial quest for answers, and many feel distanced from religion.

And now I find myself in the strangest quandary because despite everything I’ve explained here, I haven’t lost my faith. Perhaps it’s because of, not in spite of, the fact that I’ve had to deal with the outside world. It is indeed a dark and nasty place, and it sometimes makes me feel as cautious and hesitant as the humble tortoise. It’s a fair arena, however, because absolute truths are less important than the conviction through which we carry our beliefs to accomplish whatever we may. It will still be there if and when the parish decides to look to it.

David Mitchell is a senior majoring in English.
Corey Atwood is a senior majoring in Criminal Justice.
Where Are You Before?

a poem by Tricia Realbuto

She lies in the bathtub
Rubbing her sore stomach
A baby she didn’t have
But a baby she was

And nothing gets you cleaner quicker
Until you realize the dirt
Tracked through the kitchen
Wasn’t from your sneakers
But from shoes you wish you’d never worn

And that pit in your stomach
Isn’t the feeling you should get at nine
Or almost nineteen

It should be washed away
By the blood of the man
Who ran the bath for you that afternoon
Who ran you to the market
Who ran you to the end of yourself

Tricia Realbuto is a sophomore majoring in Communications.
Cold collision with bodies mumbling, grumbling, tumbling about
at the witching hour side street lamp posts light
the way to where
wind in steps leave, lift, linger, gone
and the night life lives infinitely, a vampire
of the streets, prowling and howling
to, the enraging moon
glowing and glimmering
in the eyes of the zombies below
bodies mumbling, grumbling, tumbling about

subway zooms past the masses, time enough to get off
little time to get on, between stops,
papers flying
in a paper storm on this
prairie of concrete
and the mass of cloud and ash in this crematorium of fear
creates a vision of illusion of day
a vigil held for the sun by spectators of sin
who watch and wait, anticipate
the dance of the dead
the night life
held out of the view of nurseries, so as the children
do not see
this apparition of hell
souls fly from bodies,
dance in clubs, and drink in bars
leave all thoughts of the body behind them
born from flesh of another time, warped into
the night life

whores on the side, walk
hosting this midnight ball
like cats crouching and waiting they, stalk
like lions ready and able to pounce they, stalk
luring in their prey, victims of fishnets and nylon
put to sleep by the lullaby of the city streets
With guitars in hand, night crawlers play melodies
by Hades’ Hands,
Saxophones sing songs
through melted lips against metal vocal cords
Still, in the midst, shadowy statues chant
with no music, just weathered words worn down by the night air

Neon kisses the scene, making it serene, calm and watchful
the eye of the hurricane always is cautious and peaceful
careful not to stir the storm forming within the night life

floating on fire
smokers light up, what was once dark
as the stars above fight hard to break
the barriers of incandescent light

zygotes of this scene, innocence corrupted by born delinquents,
forming fetus of sin and corruption, waits on the side for a drug deal

passers by and fleet, and dance
in the ballet of the streets
taxi cabs or the set for this play
pedestrians in jazz shoes hurriedly await their cue
to dance on the stage of concrete

Cold collision with bodies mumbling, grumbling, tumbling about
at the witching hour side street lamp posts light
the way to where
wind in steps that leave, lift, linger, gone
and the night life lives infinitely, a vampire
of the streets, prowling and howling
to the master of the streets, the enraging moon
 glowing and glimmering
in the eyes of the zombies below
bodies mumbling, grumbling, tumbling about

Colleen Farrell is a freshman majoring in Music Performance and English.
Untitled
Daniel Nozea

Photograph

Daniel Nozea is a sophomore majoring in Communications and Art.
John Butler is a senior majoring in Art.
As she finished another chapter in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Haley glanced at her watch before placing the book on the nightstand next to her bed. It was only 8 o’clock and still fairly light outside. Hesitating momentarily while letting the ceiling fan cool her overheated body, she decided rather apprehensively to get ready to go out. She promised Mike she’d be there. Throwing on a handmade tank top, a short jean skirt and her Birkenstocks, Haley already felt out of place as she glanced one last time in her full-length mirror.

She was about to leave the house when she saw her father coming up the walkway from the garage. He was an old man wearing a tattered Red Sox hat, a dirty white t-shirt that hugged his potbelly, and a pair of green khakis. His skin was pale and his eyes were nearly blind. He had just thrown away the garbage. Haley stepped outside, the screen door snapping shut behind her.

“That you, Haley?” he asked.

“Yeah, it’s me.”

“Where you off to?” he asked genially.

“I’m going to a cookout,” Haley responded halfheartedly.

“What?”

“Caitlin’s,” Haley replied. “You don’t know her. She lives over in North Weymouth, by the Johnson School. She’s having a cookout for Mike since it’s his last night home. He leaves for school tomorrow.”

Haley’s father placed his hands on her bare shoulders. He was sweaty and smelled from being out in the yard all day. “The Johnson School, where your mother used to work?” he asked. “Are you staying over?”

“Hopefully not. It depends on how late Mike stays there. I’ll stay as long as he stays. So I might get in late. I dunno. I already talked to mom about it.”

“All right, well, be careful,” he said while pulling Haley in close for a hug.

She stood rigid and unresponsive in his embrace, which was not unusual, as Haley had always been the least affectionate of his four daughters. In spite of that, or perhaps because of it, he desperately tried to hug her every time she left the house. “Be careful,” he repeated once more. She promised she would.

After parking, Haley checked herself again in the rearview mirror before grabbing her bag and locking the car doors.

She made her way towards the backyard where she heard bad music and rowdy laughter, thinking of how much she did not want to be there. She was not exactly a people person, and she especially disliked her schoolmates. “Mindless gossip queens and pimple-faced Creatine freaks,” was how she often described them. She particularly disliked that the girls offered sex because they felt it gave them an identity, and that the guys accepted it because they felt it was their due. Mike had become one of these people, and she’d come to dislike him, too, because of it. After seven years of being friends, Haley knew they had finally grown irreconcilably apart, and that was okay, since they were both leaving for distant colleges. Now she only
wanted to part on a positive note, not just with him, but with everyone, because even though she felt above her schoolmates, she was never happy about this fact, and their social life was indeed something she’d secretly longed for. And so here she was, on this humid summer night in August, about to be in the company of strangers, wanting to have a good time and fearing she would not. It was surely going to be a long night.

As Haley approached the house, she saw Caitlin emerge from the side door. “Hey, hun!” Caitlin exclaimed in a high-pitched voice. She waved and quickly approached Haley with a cup of beer in her hand. She was moving awkwardly in huge platform flip-flops. Haley imagined them on Frankenstein’s feet, which brought a huge grin to her face. Caitlin grinned in return. “Oh my God,” she said, “you look so good! I haven’t seen you, like, all summer. How have you been?” Caitlin embraced Haley, spilling beer on her arm.

“Swell,” Haley replied dryly. She stepped back and wiped the beer off with the cloth of her bag.

“I’m so glad you could come,” Caitlin said. “Mike has been waiting for you, he’s at the grill.” She pointed past a bunch of half-naked girls near the in-ground swimming pool, towards the back left corner of the yard. It was getting dim and hard to see.

“Cool, thanks,” Haley replied. She headed in that direction. The yard had colorful paper lanterns strung around the chain-link fence perimeter, with Tiki Torches staked here and there to repel mosquitoes. There were probably sixty or so former classmates of Haley’s already there. They all seemed to be surrounding the two kegs and table of food that were near Mike and the grill.

As Haley got closer she watched Mike put pieces of cheese on some hamburgers. He had dark hair, big blue eyes, and an athletic look, which (unfortunately, Haley felt), attracted a following of extremely shallow but pretty girls. Being friends with him since the fifth grade, it was something Haley learned to deal with. She was a few feet away from him when he looked up.

“Hey, I was wondering when you’d get here,” he said warmly. He carelessly threw a cheese wrapper on the ground before hugging Haley. “What took you so long?”

“Oh, you know, had to make sure my hair and make-up were just right.”

“I’m sure,” he said, laughing. “Hey, I’m making burgers. You want a special one?” he asked, flashing her a charming smile and lifting his left eyebrow.

“A special burger, eh? And what do you mean by special?” Haley asked, though she knew it would involve some form of hallucinogen. Lately their time together often involved such things, and Haley welcomed it as an alternative to the trivial conversation and nagging sense of boredom she now experienced whenever they hung out.

“How ‘bout a mushroom cheeseburger?” Mike asked deviously. He pulled out a clear plastic bag from his back pocket. It contained an eighth of dried up ‘shrooms.

Haley laughed at seeing this and felt immediately relieved. Maybe this night wouldn’t be so dreadful after all. “Sounds yummy. And hurry up with it before I have to drown myself in the pool,” Haley replied. She pushed her way through some people and headed for the keg.
As Haley ate her specially made mushroom cheeseburger, she tried hard not to think about the fact that these ‘shrooms did indeed come from cow feces. It simply made it that much harder for her to swallow. Looking around, however, and noticing the circus that was unraveling before her, Haley had enough incentive to finish quickly. Thirty minutes later, sitting in an Adirondack chair in a somewhat remote corner of the yard, her bag slung off the back, Haley was alternately enjoying an intense fixation with lights and colors and spurts of uncontrollable laughter. She stopped laughing for a moment to wipe her eyes, and after she’d regained focus she noticed a girl with whom she used to play soccer, Kara, was crying. She often cried about issues of little or no importance whenever she was drunk. Her mascara was running down her face and she looked like a bad extra in an Alice Cooper video. Haley giggled a little as she scanned the yard. Her gaze settled on Jackie, who was throwing up in the rose bush by the fence. She was a nice girl and real smart. But Haley knew she was bulimic so she didn’t help her.

“So, what’s with the tank top Haley? You make that yourself?”

Haley looked to her left and saw Julie, Mike’s ex-girlfriend, standing next to her. Julie lowered herself on to the grass. Her freakishly flawless face and beautiful red curly hair shined in the moonlight.

“I got it at the Phish concert last week,” Haley replied shortly. She took a sip from her beer, pretending to be unaffected by Julie’s presence.

“Oh, cool,” she replied. “Mike went to that with you, right?”

Her voice was sickeningly phony and made Haley want to scream.

“Yup,” Haley replied, taking another sip, now staring at the red paper lantern in the distance. She could hear the beat of some marginally talented boy band exude from the speakers on the back porch where Mike was standing with others, a bottle of ketchup in his hand. Haley sat and listened and watched. The external stimuli were abundant, including the sound of Julie’s voice, which seemed to be belting out some song horrendously off-key. Haley ignored her and continued to sip her beer and stare fixedly at the lantern. It was bright red and appeared to be throbbing. Everywhere in the backyard people were dancing, drinking, laughing. The music was playing and the lantern was throbbing. Blinking, Haley glanced at Julie and realized she wasn’t singing, but rather talking.

“What did you say?”

“What do you mean what did I say?” Julie snapped. “Weren’t you listening?”

Haley stared at Julie, puzzled.

Rolling her eyes, Julie got up and stormed away. Haley watched as she made her way over to the porch where Mike and the others were standing. Julie lowered her hand to shield her mouth as she spoke. When she finished talking, everyone looked in Haley’s direction and laughed. Haley laughed back. That would be the last thing she remembered about Caitlin Cook’s party.

*  

Haley didn’t know how or why she came to be staggering alone down a desolate side street, but it was happening just the same. Her head down, she stared at the simple, continuous design of the gravel pavement below her as she walked. Occasionally each foot would come into sight, reminding her that they were, in fact, attached to her body. Although she was not far from the party, Haley felt as if
she’d been walking for days and must surely by now be in a neighboring town, or perhaps even another state. And so when an old gray Buick pulled over to the side of the road, and a skinny middle-aged man rolled down the window, Haley hoped he would offer her a ride.

“Hey,” a voice called from the Buick as it pulled over next to her. The car was loud and rumbling when stationary. Under the streetlight, the driver’s face was weathered, with a few days of stubble that accentuated his pronounced cheekbones and defined jaw. He had short, spiked gray hair and eyes that were extremely bloodshot with bags under them.

“You need a ride?” he asked, as he hung out the driver’s side window. He sniffed continuously and wiped his nose with the top of his right hand before motioning Haley towards him. At first Haley didn’t move. She didn’t know where she was, or who he was; just that she was hot and thirsty and tired of walking. She stood there and stared at him blankly for a few long seconds. His nostrils were flaming red.

“Sure,” Haley replied. She walked around the back of the car to the passenger side door. Opening it, she slid onto an ivory leather seat. She looked at him briefly, finding him mildly attractive and oddly familiar. He was easily twice her age.

They drove around for a while without speaking. She was tripping and he was strung out, which naturally made conversation difficult. Haley stared out the window in front of her, watching all the streetlamps melt into one long continuous ray of light along the road. Bruce Springsteen’s raspy voice was vibrating through the speaker next to her seat. The car was hot and the air was thick. She tried to roll down her window but it was stuck. Progressively getting hotter and thirstier, Haley started to mildly freak out.

“I’m hot,” she said bluntly, turning to look at the man driving. Her throat was cracked and dry and her tongue was gluey when she licked her lips.

He looked over at her with little emotion, not saying anything in return. Haley wondered if he’d heard what she had just said. Feeling ignored and alone, she continued to gaze out the window at the street lights again while every inch of her body sweated profusely. Then, the stranger pulled into a deserted parking lot in front of a large brick building. After putting the car in park, he turned off the ignition, but kept the lights and radio on. Bruce Springsteen was still issuing forth.

There was no console to separate the driver and passenger, just a long leather seat. The leather was ripped in numerous places and Haley felt a sharp tear under her left thigh whenever she tried to move. Her bare legs were sweaty and sticking to the material. He was staring at her.

“So, what’s your name?” he asked, his voice deep and quiet. Haley stared back at him. The red lines in his bloodshot eyes were moving like electrical currents. He kept sniffing and wiping his nose. Beads of sweat were sitting on his forehead and upper lip.

“Haley,” she said. But her name didn’t really matter. He didn’t hear it. He was too busy rubbing his rough hand slowly up and down her exposed thigh. Haley watched him without realizing it was her thigh he was touching. His hand seemed abnormally large. She didn’t stop him as he touched her underwear and he looked
at her. He smoothly inched closer on the slippery front leather seat. He had pants on so his legs were not sticking. Haley’s legs were sticking and she was still thirsty.

“I’m thirsty,” Haley said as he started to touch her face and pick pieces of matted down hair off her heavily perspired cheeks and forehead.

“I need water. I’m thirsty. Open my window,” Haley demanded, pulling at the lever.

“The window doesn’t open,” he said, sounding annoyed as he was trying to kiss her and she was talking. He was pressed up against her now; touching her all over, finally resting one hand on her face, while the other one rubbed her knee. His hands were callous and scratchy like the tear under her left thigh.

“I’m getting really hot,” Haley said, starting to breath heavier as her heart started beating more rapidly. She was sweating all over. Drips of sweat were constantly forming on her neck and in her cleavage. He started to touch that sweat. At first gently wiping it away, then roughly kissing it with his stubble. Haley felt like she had been trapped in this car with him for hours and she wondered what time it was. She glanced at the neon green light that displayed the time but could only make out the first digit, a blurry 2. She felt like she was suffocating.

“I don’t feel good,” Haley panted, breathing quickly, heavily. She was looking all around, down at him, out her window, over the dashboard at the two headlights beaming in front of her. He continued to kiss her sweaty body, trying to untie her tank top. Haley felt her stomach begin to churn.

He could see she needed soothing. “Here,” he whispered, taking his hands off Haley as he began to unbutton his pants. He swiftly unzipped his jeans and pulled them and his faded paisley boxers to his knees. She looked at him. Her heart was beating faster and her stomach was feeling more and more nauseous with every second. Her ears were burning. She began to taste acid in her throat.

“I think I’m going to be sick,” Haley said, starring into his bloodshot eyes. He was still sniffing and she was still panting, even heavier than before. Her heart felt as if it would surely beat out of her chest.

“You’re fine,” he said, as he began to put his hands all over her again. He reached under her tank top and found no bra. Haley sat motionless but continued to look all around, her anxiety working up into a fit of frenzy. Then, pushing her head down, he started to gather her hair in his hands, pulling it off her soaking face and neck once again so that he could see what she was about to do. Haley giggled nervously, pathetically, unsure if she was relaxing, or merely resigning. He pushed her head closer and had just closed his eyes when hot liquid engulfed his exposed skin.

He yanked Haley’s head away by her hair. He stared down at the vomit on his lap, then at her in bewilderment, his eyes narrow and frightening. Mumbling, cursing, he slid over to his door, threw it open and hopped out before immediately dropping his pants and boxers to his ankles. All Haley could see was his bare behind through the open driver’s side door. Hesitating briefly, not knowing what else to do, she watched him rip off his t-shirt and begin to wipe himself off. Then, feeling nausea creep back up her throat, Haley opened the passenger side door, let herself fall out onto the cool black pavement, and threw up again. Haley remained bent over on all fours, letting the acidic drool dangle from her bottom lip. Hearing him curse and rant but unable to see him, Haley’s heart started beating rapidly again.
She peered under the car at his feet, with his pants still around his ankles. Suddenly, she was very alert and aware of the horror of her situation. Slowly standing up, bracing herself against the open car door, Haley glanced over at him, meeting his bloodshot eyes once again. Then, turning to look over at the big brick building a short distance away, she took off running, stumbling, towards the dark shadows ahead.

Haley’s stomach ached and her throat burned but she kept running, hearing him call after her. Fortunately, he did not chase her. And after a few minutes, Haley heard the doors slam, the ignition start, and the car speed away. Leaning against the hard brick building in almost total darkness, Haley started weeping silently. In her efforts to escape, Haley had again thrown up all over herself. And as she sat there with her arms limp by her sides and her legs sprawled out before her, she could feel the warm bile soak through her thin tank top and onto a chest that was pounding from fright.

She looked ahead of her at an open field with numerous trees in the distance. The trees were tall and foreboding. The moon was bright enough to illuminate the swing set and two soccer nets that interrupted the landscape. She could hear crickets. It was all very clear to her now. Haley sat there thinking, too afraid to wander the empty streets again, and feeling invisible in the shadows of the large structure behind her.

Haley was scared. Scared about what could’ve happened. Scared about why she went to Caitlin’s in the first place. She was scared, most of all, about her loneliness. Feeling empty and despondent, she started crying. Throwing her head back, her tears shining up at the clear sky above, Haley let out deafening, uncontrollable sobs, choking herself with her own tears like a small child, with no one there to witness or console her.

When the bright morning sun woke Haley a few hours later, it brought flashbacks of a night she’d like to but would never forget. She blinked rapidly to allow her eyes to adjust to the sunlight as she slowly lifted her head off the gravel. Tiny pebbles were stuck to her cheek, which she brushed away as she sat up against the brick building. She ached and a horrible odor radiated off her skin and clothes. Haley sat motionless for a moment, collecting her thoughts and trying to figure out where exactly she was. The pavement below her had foursquare painted in white and hopscotch was to her left. Again, she noticed the swing set and soccer field in the distance. Getting up, Haley turned to face the brick building that appeared to be an elementary school. Walking around the corner to the front of the building while scratching a mosquito bite on her arm, she saw a sign that read Albert F. Johnson School. Realizing she was just a street away, Haley began walking back to Caitlin’s.

As she entered the backyard of Caitlin Cook’s house, Haley walked over empty cups, beer bottles and former classmates. Some were curled up in the fetal position with pool mats under their heads as pillows. Others were laying face down partially naked, covered in mosquito bites and occasionally a beach towel. When she got to the Adirondack chair that she’d sat in last night, she saw Mike sound asleep in it, his arms dangling over the sides. Her bag was still hanging off the back. She quietly removed it, slung it over her shoulder and began to walk away. Stopping, she went back and bent over Mike. She looked at his watch to check the
time. It was barely six o’clock. She chose not to wake him, and drove home.

Haley made sure to be quiet as she closed the front door and tiptoed into
the kitchen to grab a glass of water. She had been thirsty all night and the taste in
her mouth was unbearable. As she stood at the kitchen sink filling her glass, her
father walked up behind her. Placing his gentle hand on the nape of her neck,
he kissed the back of her head. Haley turned to look at him. His white hair was
disheveled and in his face. His eyes were barely open and he didn’t have his glasses
on. He could not see her, and Haley was thankful for this.

“Hello, Haley,” he said quietly so as not to wake his wife.
“Hi, dad,” Haley replied, staring at his tired, wrinkled face.
“You just getting in?”
“Yup.”
“Mike never left?” he asked, sniffing the air and grimacing.
“Nope. He’s still there,” Haley replied. “It was a long night, dad. I’m
gonna go take a shower and go to bed,” she added before he could ask any more
questions. She placed her cup down on the counter. Then, standing on her tiptoes
and wrapping both arms around his neck, she softly kissed him on the cheek.
“G’night,” was all she could say as she let go of him, picked up her glass of water,
and walked down the hall to the bathroom.

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