the bridge, Volume 3, 2006

Bridgewater State College

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To Professor of English,
Dr. Lois Poule,

whose integrity nourishes the soil
in which we grow
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Acknowledgements

In the dark ages of television, long before cable, high-definition, and American Idol, there was a show called The Little Rascals. It was based on the mischievous antics of a half-dozen kids, and there is one episode in particular that comes to mind as we prepare to release thebridge, Volume III. In this episode, the Rascals decided to promote the arts and acquire wealth by having a theatrical performance. The only problem was no one would pay their admission charge of one penny, despite their pleas for support and promises of a good time. In the end, the Rascals decided to focus more on the performance and less on the wealth; they offered free admission and simply left a donations basket by the exit. The Rascals sang, danced and acted to the best of their abilities in front of a packed house, and at the end of a grueling hour, after all of the patrons had gone, they cautiously approached their donation basket. It was overflowing.

The editors of Volumes I & II can appreciate this story, as their commitment to excellence resulted in an overflowing basket that benefited not only themselves, but also the editors of Volume III. Vital financial contributors to this wealth were President Dana Mohler-Faria and the Bridgewater State College Foundation, whose continued support made Volume III possible. Funds were graciously provided by Dr. Kleniewski and Dr. London to send Volume II’s editors and advisors to the College Media Advisors’ Spring Convention, where the Columbia Scholastic Press Association presented thebridge with its second consecutive Crown Award, and its first Gold Crown. Dr. London regularly paid for meals for this year’s editors’ late-night meetings, and he, Dr. Kleniewski, and Mr. Mike Gomes donated generously toward thebridge’s “Annual Festival of Arts” – a three-hour long showcase of student dance, music, theater, visual art, and creative writing.

“Wealth,” of course, can mean so much more than the financial sort, and with that in mind we appreciate the following supporters just as much as the preceding: Dr. Brenda Molife; Dr. Roger Dunn; Professor Mercedes Nuñez; Dr. Evelyn Pezzulich; Dr. Tom Curley; Dr. Arnold Girdharry; Dr. Delija Valiukenas; Dr. Bill Smith; Dr. Jadwiga Smith; Dr. Phil Tabakow; Dr. Ben Carson; Dr. Kathy Evans; Mr. Louis Ricciardi; Dr. Cynthia Ricciardi; Dr. Aeon Skoble; Dr. Francine Quaglio; Dr. Edward James; Dr. Robert Fitzgibbons; Dr. Ron Pitt; Ms. Susan McKombe; Ms. Barbara LaFrance; Ms. Candace Maguire; Mr. Michael Somers; Dr. Anna Jearld-Martin; Ms. Nanette Baines; Dr. Alan Comedy; Ms. Donna Wood; Professor Jean Stonehouse; Dr.
Sandy Faiman-Silva; Ms. Deanne Farino; Mr. David Plante; Ms. Missy White; Mr. Jack Murphy; Ms. Lynne Lennon; Ms. Kris Glavin; Mr. Kevin Manning; Mr. James Ferguson; Mr. Michael Lehane; Mr. Paul Auger; Mr. David Wilson; Ms. Laura Aikey; and Ms. Eileen O’Sullivan. We especially would like to thank the faculty who distributed flyers and encouraged students to submit work.

For participating in the bridge’s “First Annual Festival of Arts,” a special thank you is extended to Dr. Nancy Moses, Dr. Salil Sachdev, Dr. Roger Dunn, and Professor Henry Shaffer; your student performers and artists were truly extraordinary and worthy of the highest praise.

For valuing the arts as much as scholarship, a special thank you is also extended to the Shea Scholar Committee’s Ms. Carol Wilusz Kryzanek, Ms. Margaret Joyce, Ms. Carolyn Van Buskirk Turchon, Ms. Sheila Tunstall McKenna, and Dr. Roger Dunn.

We salute the Department of Art for supporting and aiding us in so many ways, including allowing us to use their facilities as if they were our own.

It is our policy that we bring in a new team of editors for each volume, but it is our hope that previous editors remain part of the family and assist when they can. We are grateful for the outstanding assistance Miss Nicole Roy gave us throughout the year, and we appreciate the push at the end provided by Mrs. Stacy Cohen, Mr. David George, Miss Kimberly Silva, Miss Janine Woodard and Miss Cherylynn Silvia.

For the students who contributed to our record 1073 submissions, as well as the students, faculty and staff who cherish having this journal on campus, we reserve our most humble and heartfelt thanks for you.

Finally, a comment about this year’s editors: simply put, we have never worked with a more bright-eyed, creative, intelligent group of students. The single-minded effort they put into fulfilling their many responsibilities was remarkable, so remarkable, in fact, that it is doubtful they allowed themselves a moment to anticipate the response their efforts will bring. Their focus never veered from singing, dancing and acting, so to speak, to the best of their abilities, and now, after seven grueling months, at the end of their performance, we proudly watch as they approach their donation basket.

They will find it overflowing.

Mary Dondero
Jerald Walker
Advisors
thebridge is produced and managed entirely by students. Our charge is to serve, as we are dedicated to showcasing the artistic talents of the student body while providing internships in both editing and 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.
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Mary Dondero
Jerald Walker
Introduction

While none of us had served as an editor for the bridge before, we were fortunate that Volumes I & II provided us with a detailed blueprint on how to proceed. Had we been content to faithfully follow this blueprint, our success would have been assured. We were not content. We broke new ground on several fronts, and Volume III bears little resemblance to its predecessors. Our shape is new, the layout is new, and we selected more works than ever. We included our first interview, our first portfolio spread, and our first performance poem, complete with a website where you can hear the author bring her amazing words to life. Whether or not these changes make us successful editors is not for us to say, but we can say with complete certainty that we pushed ourselves to new limits, never ceased thinking of how to best honor our college, and had an experience that will rank among the most enriching of our lives.

But the more things change, as the saying goes, the more they remain the same. As with Volumes I & II, the selection process for Volume III was blind. All Bridgewater State College students were eligible to submit, as well as our alumni who had graduated within a year before the deadline.

At the start of the selection process, we had anticipated that finding approximately fifty equally phenomenal works would be our greatest challenge, but the greatest challenge was actually in narrowing our selections. There is no shortage of talent at BSC, and the inevitable downside of this process is that many publishable works had to be omitted simply for lack of space. The space that was available, however, was not taken lightly. Each editor considered the submissions independently and carefully before assigning them point values. Those that received a certain minimum score were deemed finalists and subjected to even closer scrutiny. In due course, 1073 submissions were narrowed to seventy-two, and then an even tougher decision awaited us – selecting the writers and artists who, based on their high caliber of excellence or mastery of their respective disciplines, were deserving of the bridge Award. From start to finish, the entire selection process took four months, including winter break.

Our final selections consist of works that collectively express the scope of talent that thrives within our student body. You’ll find literature that explores the complexities of father-daughter relationships, captures the heartbreaking of losing a child, and satirizes artists who take themselves too seriously. The visual art is as dynamic and cutting-edge as ever, and among the issues addressed are the destructiveness of war, the quest for self-identity, and the sensuality of the human form. Each of the selected works teaches us a great deal about craft, but they also teach us something important about the human condition. There seems to be a deep understanding among these artists and writers that we are all linked to our families, our friends, our communities; we are all connected in our humanity. Volume III reminds us of the importance of recognizing and celebrating these connections.

Once the works were chosen, three months were spent editing prose, re-shooting art, and designing the journal. This required us to work nights, weekends, and all of spring break. In the end we were exhausted, but we were also gratified, and we hope you find this journal as rewarding to read as we found it to assemble. For the last seven months, we worked under the weight of the expectations of not only our peers and advisors, but also ourselves. We cannot help but applaud our advisors for expecting nothing short of professionalism and excellence from each of us, and for pushing us further than we thought we could go. Thanks to their guidance and with the support of our faculty, staff and alumni, we proudly present the bridge, Volume III, a blueprint of our own.

The Editors
April, 2006
Illumination

Shannon Taylor
Sophomore, Art Major
Photography; Infrared
8” x 10”
I dropped my backpack and moved further into the living room where my mother was pleading into the phone, “Please come back, Turo, please.” Turo is my father and something strange must have happened since that nickname was only used in emergencies. My youngest brother Camilo looked drained and my eldest brother Ramón was so silent he terrified me. A soft wind entered the window and lifted the white curtains slowly and delicately from the frame, reminding me of clouds.

“Turo, it’s not worth it. Please come back.” My mother was pacing, her slippers making the scratching sound against the hardwood floor that would wake me up sometimes when she was getting a midnight snack. For some reason that sound irritated me now. I wanted utter silence, some sort of respect for this situation that I was failing to understand. All I knew for certain was that my mother looked like she had aged ten years in ten seconds.

“What’s going on?” I asked, even though I wasn’t sure I wanted to find out. I feared a new coup was underway in Guatemala, where my father was, or that another family member had been murdered. Ramón, with his clean blue polo shirt and proper khaki pants, ignored my question and tried to tell me to go away with his stiff back and defensive body language. Camilo, the rebellious one of us three, looked straight ahead at my mother, revealing gray hair around his temples. He was only twenty-two and already losing his youth. “Death threat,” he blurted out. “Dad is being threatened by people who aren’t happy with his report. He dug a lot of dirt out.”

“You mean people in the government,” I said angrily, and bitter memories began to surface of the first time I’d ever set foot in Guatemala. I recalled the sound of gunfire early one morning, how my body had bolted upright and instinctively run towards the window. There were only mountains and huts in view, but they were decorated with specks of gold light flashing sporadically. It was July, 1993. I was almost ten years old with big brown eyes and a big mouth that was meant to smile, not frown. I remember my eyes burning with tears as my knees trembled. The smoke rising from the mountains was an intoxicating sight and a faint sulfuric smell penetrated my nose. Some powder accumulated in the back of my throat, tickling the fleshy bell I used to love looking at when I wanted to fake illness. I began to cough violently, waking my mother. She rose, closed the window and then placed my frightened body on the small, stiff cot set among seven others. “Tranquila, son solo cuetes,” my mother said, trying to convince me that the noise I heard was firecrackers, but I knew what it was. I had heard that sound before. I had also overheard my dad speak frequently of assassinations and of how, when he was a revolutionary back in 1968, he’d been beaten up by the militares and forced to leave the country. He was warned never to return.

Someone was killing people up there in the mountains in the same fashion that, as my father had explained, his friends had been killed for speaking the truth. I could not, at my age, understand this. After all, my parents had taught me to be honest all of the time. I wanted to ask my mother if it was wrong to speak the truth in Guatemala or if it was just wrong to speak the truth in general. I was really confused. And I desperately wanted to believe that my mother was being truthful that morning and that it was indeed only firecrackers sending flashes of light into the air. But I knew this wasn’t true, otherwise we would not have to turn off the
lights at eight every night and sleep on the floor with two people guarding the living room door. And I knew what guns were. One of them had killed my uncle.

My aunt shifted in her sleep, and with a big sigh she relieved her lungs of the stale air we were all consuming. I looked from my mother to my brothers, and all I could think was that my eyes weren’t supposed to see their nervousness and fear. But I had seen this often, most recently when my parents took us out of our private school in Mexico City to visit Guatemala in order to “relax and take a break from classes.” Being nine years old, I believed this. But now the truth was blazing holes in our apartment walls. The country was at war with itself.

Years later, I’d learned that the real reason why we’d gone to Guatemala was because my father was to serve in a massive memorial service for the return of President Arbenz’s ashes. Arbenz had been the first, and only, democratically elected president in Guatemala’s history. Peasants, indigenous people, high-class society and the middle class had voted to elect him into power after overthrowing a blood-thirsty dictatorship in 1948. But clearly nothing good was ever meant to last long in my country, including the smiles of nine-year-old girls. Arbenz was overthrown in 1952 by the CIA. In his place, Castillo Armas, another dictator, assumed power. Education crumbled and thousands of Mayan Quiches were murdered. Arbenz’s wife took his ashes into El Salvador and refused to give them to Guatemala because the country had turned its back on her husband. It was true. The pictures of him are humiliating. In front of cameras, he was stripped in the airport under suspicion of treason and exiled from his country, and he remained so even after death. Castro criticized him for being “too meek and weak before the terror of the United States.” He was called a coward when, in fact, he was anything but.

Political discussions were never held before me when I was a child. After all, the young daughter of an ex-revolutionary student leader was an easy target for kidnap or, worse, murder. It was not safe for me to learn words that I could speak at the wrong place or time. In Guatemala, you never knew who could be listening or watching. Once, while my mother stood in the kitchen cleaning some dishes with my aunt, I asked if I could play outside. My mom smiled nervously and looked away. I think she saw how desperate I was to get out of that house because I was going insane being cooped up. I was on the verge of tears. When I heard the word “no,” I tried pleading. She slapped me. My heart was broken, but not because of the slap; it was broken by the fear I saw on my mother’s face. You never want to see your mother frightened. You never want to see the people you care the most about crumble. I walked out of the kitchen reluctantly. A moment later, my brother Camilo found me.

“You can’t play outside because of snipers.” He held my shoulders as he looked at me.

“What are snipers?” I asked, confused.

“People that stand on rooftops waiting for innocent targets to shuffle and move. You can get killed. Mom doesn’t want you to get killed and Dad doesn’t either. I’m sure you don’t want to get killed.” He had a bizarre look in his eyes, distorted almost. From the other room, I could hear my mom asking her sister, “Que vamos a hacer con los niños?” (“What are we going to do with the children?”) My aunt replied with a distant tone, “Como vamos a salir de aquí?” (“How are we ever getting out of here?”) I didn’t know, but I wanted out. I never ever wanted to be in Guatemala again. I hated my father for bringing us there.

At the end of three terrible weeks, we at last went back to Mexico City. My father was hired by the United Nations to do work aiding the Guatemalan government. For six years I didn’t hear much about that troubled country unless my father called with reports while on trips there. Both my brothers had moved out, and I was finishing up high school. Life had been normal until I returned from classes that day and found my mother clutching the phone with all her might, my two brothers by her side. For a moment, it didn’t sink in that something terrible was happening. I honestly thought that my mom was being ridiculously dramatic and my brothers were humoring her like they tend to do. I wasn’t close to them, but I was very close to my father because we were both thinkers. We found shelter in books and release in writing. We were, in many ways, like lonely children.

“Sí, Tiera,” my mother said, nodding. She held the phone towards Camilo. Next, I knew, it would go to Ramón, and then to me.
But I didn’t want to talk to my father. I didn’t want to hear about the death threats. I was frightened, and speaking with him would make things worse. I sat there numb, waiting for my brothers to finish and listening to them insist to my father that he should come home and forget about Guatemala, that, as a country, it didn’t deserve him. For the most part, I agreed. Many people referred to my father as “the brilliant man” who planned the first human census ever in Guatemalan history and who “spoke so adamantly about women’s rights.” He was the student leader who had caused revolution in minds and streets with his belief that democracy was the greatest invention in history. He was eloquent and charismatic, deeply religious, and full of virtue. He was as complicated as Guatemala.

Ramón tapped my shoulder with the black phone. I hesitated before taking it. “Bueno?” I said as I cleared my throat.

“Nenita, how are things?” he tried to sound calm, but I knew he wasn’t.

“Pops,” I asked, “how serious are the threats?”

“Serious enough to worry your mother and I, but I can’t take a step back.” There was a long pause and I thought I had lost him.

“Bueno?”

“Nenita, what do you think I should do?”

I knew what was going on there and I knew what he should do. I knew that all of the things I had been picking up for six years weren’t trivial. Overwhelmed, I began to cry. “Do what you need to do, Dad,” I said quietly. “Just know that I have never felt such pride for being who I am and for being part of this family, and for you.”

My mother and brothers looked at me with what appeared to be a mixture of respect, awe, and a bit of anger. They wanted me to ask him to come back because they knew he would do that for me. They knew that my father would turn himself inside out for us all, but mostly for me, his sixteen-year-old baby. And at that moment I wanted more than anything to take advantage of our special relationship. I wanted to tell him, “Daddy, I need you more than that country will ever understand,” and “Daddy, let me get to know you, don’t be a stranger.” I wanted to explode and yell at him for being selfish and putting us all through this, but I didn’t, and I wasn’t sure why.

That night, I stayed up late reading a book about Arbenz and Guatemala’s history. I was ready to go to bed when my mother knocked on the door.

“You’ve become just like your father,” she said, smiling. It was a smile from her heart; I hadn’t seen that in a long time. She sat on my bed and we talked for a while. The conversation eventually flowed into the topic that had been haunting us for so long.

“How does it feel?” she asked aloud, more to herself than to me. “How does it feel to have survived a civil war and have all these things happen to our family?”

I looked at her and for the first time her beautiful age struck me. The fine lines of her face represented life choices. She had once smiled or cried and the emotions were carved into her skin so perfectly. Her age was that of wisdom gathered by both strife and mirth. Her big brown eyes reminded me of mine. She had seen too much and cried enough.

“I just feel bad that I can’t share this with anyone but you guys. No one will ever understand what it was like not being able to go out and play because of snipers and the sound of gunshots in the morning.”

My mother nodded slowly. “Some will,” she said confidently. “You will find these people and you will speak your words with them. Hopefully, you’ll never see another war. I don’t want to see another war. I’m too tired for them. Wars have done enough to this family.”

I contemplated bringing back issues I had wondered about since that last time we were in Guatemala, but it wasn’t worth it. All I cared for now was for my dad to return safely. I just wanted Turo to come home.
I’m outside standing at the door, 
the taste of fear in my mouth, your question 
in my mind.

From inside comes the sound of children laughing, 
probably playing around the kitchen table.

Coming from inside is the smell of supper cooking; 
it smells like pot roast.

I’m outside seeing the yellow light 
pouring out of the windows. 
Out here it is dark, and cold, and peaceful. 
Not even a cricket chirping.

I’m outside touching the cold doorknob, 
And coming from inside there is the sound of dishes clanking, 
probably cleaning off the kitchen table.

Coming from inside there is the smell of chocolate, 
But I’m outside, and even with the push from behind 
I am too scared to come in. 
A few more gentle tugs and maybe I’ll be ready 
To leave this life and step into the new.
February at 13
in the Industrial Complex

Eric Marshall
Senior, English Major
Poetry

I remember the sound
of rock striking fiberglass.
It was always the same, dull thud followed by
horn blaring, tires screeching,
and stifled laughter
as we crouched low against the graveled roof
of the R. Johnson & Corp. building.

We would scatter when we heard the sirens,
our skin squeaking against the weather worn
cold steel of the fire escape,
vapor clouds of gasping breath pulsating rhythmically from under
hoods wrapped tightly about our heads.
Our voices urgently whispering nearly silent commands,
fingers stained orange from rust,
we would disappear.

Into the woods with
twigs snapping under our feet,
muscles burning, adrenaline coursing through our veins.
We knew those paths so well,
could run them without ever looking at the ground,
would have done it blindfolded, just for the thrill.
We flew across the fallen branches, ice, and dead leaves,
We never stumbled, not at 13.

I remember muted shouts,
fading into echoes in the crisp winter dusk.
We would separate and reconvene,
all according to plan,
in ten minutes, in back lot of the 7-11 on Phillips Road.
I remember snow falling softly in the orange glow of streetlights.
Snow falling from clear skies, and stars,
and how we took our time walking home.
I decided to ask Rick for a divorce while cleaning out my sock drawer. The simple and mundane nature of that task brought a certain clarity to a dilemma that had resided inside me, always silent, but pressing against that vow I took on a sunny Saturday morning. I sat in the middle of the king-size bed that I had slept alone in for three years, surrounded by the leftovers of mismatched socks I had poured out of my top dresser drawer. On the bed were black, white, blue, and gray singletons, all of which had spent many years waiting patiently for their mate to find its way out of the dryer, and now they surrounded me like some army sounding a call to action.

I became a spirit in the midst of this debris, mind separate from body, with all of those rational voices from my past silenced. No longer did I hear the admonitions. Be safe. Make the prudent decision. The financially sound decision. The decisions your mother made. On my bed that day, among those old mismatched socks, the fear that my life would always be the same became greater than the fear of what would happen if I left. With that subtle shift, the whisper of a spirit straining to free itself filled the room as a howling gale. I realized that I had allowed myself to shrink to the woman he wanted me to be at an almost indiscernible pace, but there in my room, sitting on a sexless bed, I knew the only hope I had not to become alcoholic or suicidal was to rid myself of the greatest mismatch of all.
Three weeks before I married Rick, I knew it was a mistake. Three days into my honeymoon, I knew I would be divorced. Twelve years, three houses, and two kids later, my marriage ended rather unceremoniously in a courthouse conference room. There was no great climactic courtroom scene in which the injured wife finally saw the controlling husband get his comeuppance from the judge. There was no chastisement from the bench, only a question about whether we were both satisfied with the agreement we had signed in that little room. The marital vows that had held me prisoner for twelve years were dissolved with a series of appendices and articles and a ninety day waiting period. All future communication with my ex-husband would be dictated by this document instead of by us, two people simply trying to be the best parents we knew how to be. Holiday visitation and weekend activities would no longer be something that two parents agreed upon mutually to the benefit of their children, but something dictated by a document written by two lawyers who barely knew us or our children. I walked down those courthouse steps on that warm November day and I realized that my life had no shape that I recognized.

“Relationships take work and will always come with certain challenges, but when you make a commitment well...that’s that.” That was the mantra of my mother during my impressionable teenage years, and it was this mantra that kept my marriage together for a long time. Looking back at how long I stayed in the unhappiest of situations, I wondered how the lessons of childhood had in many ways paralyzed me. In high school, I was old enough to know that the drinking habits in my house were not normal, and I was smart enough to be terrified during my father’s angry outbursts. The smallest infraction, perhaps leaving the light on in the bathroom or maybe arriving home for dinner five minutes late, would send my father into a red hot rage. I could always see it coming. He squinted, and he would stir his drink with the black, plastic Playboy Bunny stirrer, and then he would just look at you with these narrow, dark-brown eyes. My father is not a tall man, but when I was fifteen, I thought he was a giant.

I know that the fundamental things I believe about relationships came from growing up with my parents. When I began dating as an adult, I started to look for the familiar, with the unsafe feeling eerily safe. It is no wonder that I would end up in a marriage that so closely resembled theirs: tumultuous on the best days and pure misery on the others. After a particularly volatile argument with my husband, I sometimes recalled how my parents’ fights could be heard through our neighbors’ windows. Sometimes Mrs. Grady from next door would bring out popsicles to comfort all my friends who had heard the rampage, but there was nothing she could do to comfort me. I spent a large portion of my childhood years alternately holed up
in my room, mentally trying to silence my parents’ yelling, and tucked between two lilac bushes in our backyard. Lilacs became my sanctuary. I’d crouch behind them for hours, convincing myself that I would never make the choice my mother made. But legacies are funny. You can’t hide from them, as hard as you may try. And in your own relationships, there are no lilac bushes.

I look like my mother. I have her fair Irish skin and blue eyes. I’m forty now, and when I look in the mirror after a visit with her, I see her looking back at me. She is younger and wiser in this mirror vision, but this vision is not reality. It’s only how I wish I could really see her. My mother is older now, and no wiser than she was at twenty. The platitudes of advice that I heard as a teen are the same ones I heard when I returned home after Rick and I split up. My mother’s face is littered with lines spawned from her own battles over the years. Her inability to discuss my marital problems or my divorce after twelve years betrays what I always suspected; she could not confront mistakes made by me any more than she could confront the fact of her own unhappy marriage. But it is the confrontation that saves us, and that is the lesson my mother has missed.

The Christmas Eve that my father came home from an office party after he missed dinner is an event etched in my memory. That night, I learned how abusive and humiliating a husband can be to a wife. And, more to the point, how much a wife will tolerate. The arguing started as my father stumbled in the door. I had never seen her quite so angry.

“The children and I went to church and went to dinner. Where the hell were you? It’s Christmas Eve for God sakes!” I had only heard my mother curse two or three times before.

The couch that my brother, Steven, and I sat on gave us a good view of both the kitchen, where my father had gone, and of our mother, who sat in the living room with us. She was in her favorite chair, a red, velvet recliner that fit into the décor only at Christmas time. I watched her hand shaking as she put lotion on, trying to calm herself with this simple task. She was waiting for a response. Silently, but with definite purpose, my father walked right into our canary-yellow kitchen and grabbed two beers from the fridge.

My brother and I braced ourselves as my father walked back into the living room. We had been through this before. We had missed our chance to retreat to our rooms, so we were stuck there on the threadbare couch waiting for what would happen. Mother was trying to gather her strength; I could see it in her eyes, but she was terrified. My brother was very close to me, his hand holding mine in a tight grip, as if he were getting ready for something as well. My mother started to open her mouth, but my father opened the Ballantine beer can first and poured it slowly over her head.

My brother and I stayed on the couch, our eyes now fixed on the television set, unwilling to stray
from the safety of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. We were twelve and ten respectively, and there was nothing we could do but sit there and ignore the fact that this was happening. We pretended that what was on the television was interesting, and that we didn’t notice this moment lurching forward and all that it meant for us. But the moment moved ahead without our acknowledgement, just as Christmas came to Whoville in spite of the fact that the Grinch had taken everything. I saw something in my father’s eyes that day, a narrowing that looked sinister. But there was something else also. It was something I couldn’t identify then, but now I know it was weakness.

My mother sat in her chair as the bubbly liquid drained out of the can and drowned her dignity beyond salvation. The liquid ran along her young face, aging it as it melted together with her salty tears. I try to imagine how she must have felt at that moment, defeated and humiliated as her son and daughter looked on. My brother and I both knew we would never be the same after that night, but neither of us ever spoke about it.

I remember wondering about my mother that night. How could she allow him to do that? Why didn’t she get up out of the chair and walk away? What was it that paralyzed her? That is my mother’s legacy. She was not a strong woman, and when it came to her relationship with my father, she gave no good example for me to follow. In my thirties, after six years of a bad marriage, I realized that the same thing that had paralyzed her was paralyzing me.

I remember a particular Christmas at my house several years ago when my parents came to visit, and the legacy I had been prisoner of became clear to my mother and me. Rick and I had bought a puppy for our children. Or, should I say, I had bought a puppy for our children. I had always been a dog person, and he had not, but he had promised my two daughters that he would let them get a puppy if they left their comfortable home in Atlanta without complaint to move to Boston. Two years after we moved, I kept his promise for him. Of course, puppies are a lot of work, a fact that did not sit well with Rick. The night of my parents’ visit became a constant screaming match between Rick and me. We fought over the dog and how it kept Rick awake and had to go out to the bathroom every five minutes. Rick drank more than he normally did. It became pretty ugly between the two of us. My parents watched in silence on the couch while my husband verbally abused me, just as my brother and I had watched them so many years ago. My mother seemed to age several years, since she must have known, in the wake of Rick’s drunken rage, that she had doomed me to become her. I can still see the pain and resignation on her face as she silently rose to pour herself and my father vodkas on the rocks. She had to assuage the terrible reality of the situation, but she really couldn’t. The legacy was set and she could do nothing to change it.

People often ask me how I could have stayed married for as long as I did since I so clearly knew it was the wrong relationship for me. The simplest
answer lies in Rick’s differences from my father, and while they were subtle, they were critical in my justification. My ex-husband was basically a very good man who simply drank too much. My father was a flawed man who drank too much. The difference may seem insignificant, but it wasn’t at the time. It is the difference between working under the table when you’re laid off from your job to put food on the table, and sitting around watching soap operas and letting your wife pay the way. That made marriage to Rick seem okay. He was enough like my father that I felt comfortable, but looked different enough on paper that I thought it would work. Of course, a simple difference in character did not really make a difference, and over the years a little voice inside me constantly tried to make this clear. I finally listened to it at the most unlikely of times.

My husband and I spent seven difficult years of our marriage living in Atlanta, Georgia, a place I called home and loved, and a place where he never felt at ease. His family was in Boston, so he always wanted to move back, and he never let me forget how unhappy he was being away. He loved Boston and felt most comfortable there, but it was a place I didn’t think could comfort me at all. I was quite happy where I was, and I never wanted to move away.

The firm foothold I had on the life that I loved slipped from me with the ring of a fax machine that brought Rick an outstanding offer from a Boston firm that he could not, or should I say would not, refuse. He would start his new job in September, and I would remain behind and sell our spacious four-bedroom, three-bath home. All but one of the angles was addressed. We decided that moving the children after Christmas break would be better than moving them mid-semester. I would handle contractors that we needed to make repairs on the house we were selling, and we considered how we could make this easier on the girls, ages five and seven. The angle left out was uprooting me, the wife and mother, on whose support the family depended. I thought at the time that there was something wrong, but I silenced that voice as I packed up boxes and instead focused on the girls and the practical matters at hand.

Leaving Atlanta came easily for my husband. He had traveled eighty percent of the time with his roots skimming the surface of the city’s red clay. My roots were embedded deep and strong. My life and identity were tied to a school where I did a tremendous amount of volunteer work and to a job that I dearly loved and would miss. I never realized how much all I had built meant to me until I was in my new home with no outside distractions to keep me from facing a marriage I had known for a long time was not working.

As I prepared to leave Atlanta, I dealt with real estate agents, lawyers, and contractors. The man who bought my house had been divorced and, after working with him and his unreasonable demands for a month, I knew why. Immersed in the details of moving, I put my voice inside a moving box and sealed it tight.

Our new home, smaller by one bedroom and two bathrooms, seemed cramped right from the start. Where would I put everything we had brought? With
pictures on the wall and the feeling of being settled complete, the box I had so neatly and carefully sealed to keep the voice silent demanded my attention.

I had every day to think about what was missing in my life. My marriage was a mess. My husband was happily and firmly ensconced in his job, but my life had become stagnant. In the furor to get everyone and everything else settled and comfortable, I had forgotten myself. And I was pretty sure that Rick had forgotten me as well. The quiet of a phone that never rang filled my house in the hours the children were away. I felt alone. Disconnected. The lifeline of close friends I had in Atlanta for anything that came up was now eleven hundred miles away. I was alone in a new city, with few friends, and a man I no longer wanted to be married to. Two weeks of sadness gripped me like a vise. Then, I heard the voice: You can deal with adversity better than this. I no longer heard the words: Be safe. The prudent decision. The financially sound decision. The decisions your mother made.

It was so unfamiliar. I felt my mother’s legacy begin to dissolve in the miles between Boston and Atlanta. I began jogging again. I knew that I needed to gain a strength my mother never had, and running was the first step. Taking control of my life began with my body and continued with my garden. We had moved in December, and when the spring came, I worked in the yard after a cold New England winter and felt the sun shining down on me. It felt like Georgia. The brown earth here is so much richer than the soil in Atlanta, where red clay and sand are the predominant components of the soil. Between the hot climate and the soil, perennials refused to grow in my southern yard. In Boston, whatever I planted would bloom and come back every year stronger than ever. Gardening and seed planting gave me a new energy as the rich, velvet earth allowed me to manipulate it, and add new life to my new home. I cried as I planted a row of lilacs in my front yard and thought of my mother. I thought of my safe place and wondered if my mother would ever have one. While it may seem silly, sowing the earth to create new life and running twenty-five miles a week to create internal strength gave me the constancy and control needed to complete a journey. The journey brought me back to the self that I was meant to be before maternal legacies intervened, and in those few months, that legacy was undone. And that was why, as I cleaned out my sock drawer and the voice inside me began to speak, I listened.
Cassandra’s lips tasted of ash and stout: strategic, wise, and drunk as they glided against mine. The pale skin of her neck was smooth but pliable, dignifiedly weighted by its thirty-five years. The dense air of a Dublin summer night curled through the front door and into the hotel lobby. I felt it lick the back of my neck as I turned into the kiss. I was engulfed in a pulsing, warm haze of raised neck hairs, tobacco, and perfume. Lilac. It reminded me of the large, purple flowers that had clustered in a corner of my parent’s yard, looming high and fragrant. They always made my mother sneeze, and I would spend minutes at a time enjoying their scent because I knew she could not.

I was twenty, newly single, and in Ireland to study James Joyce at Bloomsday, a national literary holiday held in his honor. On the original Bloomsday, the fictional Leopold Bloom of Joyce’s *Ulysses* took his legendary walk through Dublin. It was at 8:00 a.m. on June 16, 1904. One hundred years later, I was sitting in an academic symposium session, a comfortable and familiar place for my egghead sensibilities. But a century and twelve hours after Bloom stepped out of his front door, I was contemplating my first steps towards a woman who, despite the fifteen years between us, compelled me forward with her ironic humor and her cavalier posture – wrapped in a sleek beige skirt, legs crossed at the knee, an elbow propped on the table, chin in palm, and batting playful, alert eyes. She was kinetic, bold and assertive. Her laughter was unchained but never too much. Most importantly, she was not afraid to let our eye contact from across the table linger to excitingly uncomfortable lengths.

We met just after the Bloomsday street parade. Dublin has a curious way of celebrating the holiday. Imagine shutting down the main avenue and filling it with puppeteers on hallucinogens. After the avant-garde stilt show, out-of-place African drum ensemble, and drunken street performers, came the finale. To the strains of a symphony, a Joyce impersonator, complete with eye patch and fabric wings, was hefted on a crane, assaulted with ten-foot industrial fans and flying bits of paper, and swung recklessly above the cheering crowd. Let’s just say I have never been able to view my heritage quite the same way ever since.

I retreated with newly acquired friends to a pub half a block from Joyce’s statue on O’Connell Street. Cassandra was sitting at the far end of our massive table with an older group, and our groups slowly mixed. While my young Irish acquaintances played up their accents to the wallets of American forty-year-olds, I wrestled my way through a handful of thirty-something competitors and planted myself next to Cassandra. We talked emptily about Bloomsday, Joyce, her photography, my writing, our accents, the shit-hole politics...
of my native Boston and her native London – the conversations you have with almost anyone you meet abroad until someone actually brings out their personality. Thankfully, alcohol was created to do that for you. Once that hurdle was cleared, we fell into a frighteningly earnest confidence that can only happen among strangers who know they will never see each other again.

She was a late-blooming art student, had a strong literature habit, and was just out of a relationship with a rock-star wannabe who couldn’t keep his pants on around his groupies. I was there as an academic, actively seeking misfortune, and two weeks free from a girl I might have married had she not moved a continent away. Cassandra drank stout, walked like a lady, and was not above popping a squat in an alleyway when Nature called. I drank whiskey, spouted high rhetoric, and had been electrified with cocky ecstasy by escaping a mugging the night before. She continually fiddled with and admired my chaotic, dirty-blonde hair, which bent against her touch only to spring back like bamboo seedlings. My fingers traced the developing lines on the back of her hand.

We made an agreement not to ask about our ages until four hours into the night. By then it would be too late to back out. We were already hand-in-hand, manacled to our choice with acceptance and laughter.

It was 3:00 a.m. on June 17, 2004. A century before, Leopold Bloom chased the young Stephen Dedalus through the Dublin slums. In this section of *Ulysses* the narration slips into a hazy absinthe dream in which Bloom’s identity is shattered into the multiplicity of thoughts, expectations, and desires that compose him. Fed by the kerosene of a brothel’s red lamp, Bloom’s burning mind unfurls itself, fancying him a pathetic victim, a benevolent dictator, a cross-dressing submissive, and all the other manifestations of his id. Bloom may escape the breakdown unscathed, but readers do not, having had to come to grips with their own fragments being laid before them by Joyce’s dissecting pen.

It was another bar, after the hotel. After we’d split from the rest of the group and found a dark corner booth and two more rounds. The place was trashy and touristy, painted in a dirty, garish yellow that became more offensive with every drink. Germans, Swedes, Japanese, and the ubiquitous Irish-Americans gave us dirty, intrigued stares when they looked away from the blaring televisions. We didn’t care. We entwined and devoured each other.

“You’re a gorgeous, lovely woman.” I really should have been slurring my words at that point, but I wasn’t. “Truly lovely.”

She blushed and nuzzled her hairspray-laden brunette curls into my hand. “Stop it,” she said. She shook her head at me and I caught a hint of the embarrassed disbelief a fourteen-year-old girl must feel when she is unable to handle her first compliment from a boy. Running her fingers through my springy hair and
giving it a tug, she dug herself into the
crook of my arm and spoke, her breath
clawing into my neck like entrenched
wisteria as she said, “I like you. A lot.”

Her response shocked me in its
youthfulness and simplicity. For all her
experience, stories, and years of dating, she
treated me with honest, open affection,
the kind that usually precedes having one’s
heart truly broken for the first time. I
laughed and tried to say something witty.

She was traveling with a male
roommate. In the pitch black of their
hotel bathroom, every touch and sound
was amplified. Her roommate snored on,
clueless of the warm bodies on the cold tiles
ten feet away. His presence made it exciting,
like the first time you have sex in a car: a
dirty, open secret. But we weren’t having
sex. Neither of us had condoms. This set
us alight with frustration as we decided to
dash to the drugstore. At the hotel door I
laughed; she’d forgotten her shoes. I, the
responsible one, offered to go back and get
them for her, but she grabbed me by the
hand and took off, almost skipping as she
bounced barefoot through the alleyway.

The nosy night porter, who thought we
were laughing just a little too much, threw
off our plan. His dirty looks drove us into
the basement lobby, and – somewhat in
spite – to the ladies’ room. There, against
the stark canvas of white tile and antiseptic
lighting, our inner multiplicities cohered,
divided, reconfigured, and exploded
outward like paint on a Pollock. Our
foreplay was arm wrestling, except that
half the time you were playing to lose. The
scratching nails and gasping breath barely
registered, dwarfed by the head games.
Social roles and power dynamics twirled
like a kaleidoscope. As the elder, she was
given authority. As the man, I was given
dominance. We shredded these social
expectations to tatters, struggling for power
and giving it freely as the mood struck.

We indulged in our selves and our anti-
selves. It was an accomplishment, fancying
myself a man who could convince an
older, intelligent, more demanding
woman to bed him. It validated a young,
insecure manhood. I was not a boy being
preyed upon – I had initiated contact,
out-charmed competitors twice my age,
and followed through in a way that the
awkward, un-dateable seventeen year-old
I once was could never have imagined
possible. Her girlish antics, her blushing,
and her young openness contrasted with
the bold, travel-wizened, cosmopolitan
front she had put up hours earlier. Just
as I was seeking sophistication, I suspect
she wanted to temporarily lose the
responsibility and good sense that comes
with each decade of life. At nineteen,
you can let yourself fall to pieces when
your musician boyfriend fucks a groupie.
At thirty-five, you don’t have that
liberty anymore. I suppose I gave her an
opportunity to be reckless and carefree
one more time.
Her hotel window faced west towards Heuston Station, where a Galway train would depart with me in eight short hours. We’d returned to her room and watched the sky turn from velvet purple to the blue of pre-dawn, wrapped up in each other as her roommate slept. Despite the condoms, we never ended up consummating. Literally at the brink of coition, we hesitated, and, in that instance, the spell was broken and reality brought us back to ourselves. We were no longer in costume, our disguises gone; there was no point in having sex anymore. To do so would have felt forced and artificial.

We were disappointed, but that soon faded as we melted into the experience of each other again. A line had been drawn, but within that line we were free to do as we pleased. We continued to admire our respective entropy and evolution, our respective growth and decay. We whispered intimate details about our thoughts and pasts. Like Leopold Bloom, the fragments of our cohesive selves were laid out before us. We became free to explore the elusive facets of ourselves that we seemed to find in each other: her lost innocence, my unachieved maturity.

It was 8:00 a.m. on June 17, 2004. A century before, Leopold Bloom returned from his all-night odyssey in the slums to his wife Molly. Their marriage was fraught with difficulties, but Molly was still his beloved port of origin. He reclaimed his fractured self at her side. In the tradition of Homer’s *Odyssey*, Leopold’s epic journeys cease when he has at last made his return to himself, his wife, and his home soil.

The sun painted the squat, gray buildings of Dublin with an orange tint. Cassandra looked tired and travel-weary. She wanted to come to Galway with me, but the pieces she’d left in London could not be abandoned any longer. We lingered in a kiss at the front door of her hotel room and I caught a flare of whimsy in her eyes. We shared an intimate smile and I sent her off to her native harbor.

I launched into the streets, heading for my hostel and my westbound train. I headed for my bags, my books, my clothes, my phone cards, my train tickets. I headed west until I hit Galway Bay. It was lush, beautiful, magical, and humming with life. A city made of legends. But I sat on the rocks by my choppy Mother Atlantic, looking towards home. The waves crashed – intermittent, chaotic – the same as they did in Boston Harbor. Like Odysseus on the shores of Circe’s island, I sat in the midst of endless splendor, plenty, and novelty. Like Leopold in the brothel, I sat in a pile of my own fragments that, if explored, could offer me nuanced knowledge like I’d never known. Yet I only sat, staring and shaken, yearning for my Ithaca, my Molly Bloom, myself.
The Avenues

Sean Janson

Senior, English Major
Poetry

The trees are huge here, the lawns—sixty-seven square acres unfurling across lines of miraculous demarcation. The sky is the most obvious of things, 8 a.m. and the wind pumps mist out over the banyans. Blacktop flowing downhill. Rock walls held in chokeholds by silent, parasitic vines.

They’re named after what can be found at their end, the avenues. Hazard, Bass Rock. These paths squashed down, trampled, winding across the hillside like tears on a dirty face, pouring ceaselessly into an ocean that refuses to be filled.

The marshgrass has amnesia, the beach plum forgets its own name. Winter is nothing but a sleight of hand. We are struck dumb by the blitz, the boiling. How can we argue with this riot when it grows all the way up to our chins?

The poles, collapsed, are placed inside the trunk. The streetsigns shout their epitaphs at the sun. Dave has a million stories that drive around with no lights on: the blazing shack, the cormorant, the incandescent jellyfish. But the one I remember the most is about the two lovers, out wave watching, who are swept away and drowned; The woman, he says, is taken first and then the man, trying to save her.

The undercurrents of this story are intended to move through the fleeting grasp and the wax-paper moonlight to the bloating and the crab-infested eyesockets.

But their mouth is found in grey gulls dropping pebbles onto the shore, and the mansions with their widow’s walks that are falling into merciful disrepair.
“So wait,” said my roommate, pausing the DVR recording. “Gabbie was born a boy, but is having surgery to become a girl and is now realizing that he, or rather she, has feelings for other girls, thus identifying herself as a lesbian?”

“I think that sounds right,” I said. I shrugged my shoulders.

“But if she, or he, was born a boy and likes girls, then isn’t he straight?”

“I think we are supposed to refer to him as a ‘her’.”

Jillian and I sat looking at each other. She un-paused the television and we returned to staring intently at the screen. We watched as transgendered students struggled with the decision to take hormones to assume the identity of the opposite gender and to finance surgery to permanently modify their physical appearance.

I was positively confused.

“I just don’t understand,” said Jillian as an installment of the series came to a close. “I can’t imagine feeling so trapped in my own body that I would seriously consider having surgery to change it.”

I shrugged again. I didn’t have any of the answers, but like Jillian, I was determined to find them.

It was a Sunday night when my roommate and I had accidentally stumbled across the Sundance Channel’s documentary series Transgeneration. We were at a loss for entertainment and, flipping through the seemingly endless choices of cable television channels, Sundance’s unorthodox program caught our attention. We had been curious. Being lesbians, we had become accustomed to the gender bending antics of our close female friends who’d altered their physical appearance to the point of pure ambiguity. In dimly-lit, crowded gay bars, some of them could even pass for men. But that is not to say that they wanted to be men. In fact, they were quite content with their inherent femaleness, but they enjoyed the freedom of dressing in clothing from both sections of a department store.
Our friends, however, only gave us insight into society’s ideology concerning the constitution of gender, not an individual urge to actually change sex. Our friends were not transgendered; they still felt confident and comfortable in their own skin. I had actually never known a transgendered individual, and what Transgeneration offered was a glimpse into the lives of college-age students who were not at all content with the sex that they had been born into. I found this troublesome and so did Jillian.

“I am not sure if I will ever get it,” she said sighing, “but I feel like we should at least know a little about this since people seem to think we know all about it anyway.”

I agreed. Like Jillian, I felt obligated to the gay community to explore the diversity of all of its members. After all, I could not expect others to fully accept us if I failed in my own attempts to accept others. While gender confusion often had little to do with sexuality, the transgendered were very much a part of our community. My accidental discovery of Transgeneration was only the beginning of a somewhat overwhelming need to research. I was unaware of the profound effect my curiosity would have on my own life.

The ride home had been brutal. Three hours on the Mass Pike stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic had been my futile attempt at beating the holiday rush. Though I had left early the day before Thanksgiving, the highways were clogged with erratic drivers, and my patience had worn thin. I was irritated by the time I reached my small hometown, but something about the low set sun and the brisk autumn air seeping through the cracked window of my car put my heart at ease. I had a long-standing love/hate relationship with the backwards town of Somers – an awkward mix of high school alienation and an appreciation for the New England countryside. When I pulled into the driveway of my father’s house, I breathed a sigh of relief.

“Oh good, you’re home,” my father said, greeting me at the door. He took the laundry bag that I had slung over my shoulder and carried it into the kitchen, which was overrun with fresh-baked cookies. I scoffed at such an uncommon sight.

“What is this?” I asked.

“I have been baking all morning,” said my father. He moved a chair out from the kitchen table and placed my laundry bag down on it. “I thought I would get a head start on Christmas. Do you want something to drink? I have wine.”

“No, thanks,” I said, picking up a peanut butter cookie, splitting it down the middle and tossing a half into my mouth. “Where’s Johnny?”

“He is out with some friends.”

“Nice of him to spend some time with his sister,” I said dryly.

My father did not respond, but had busied himself moving cookies from one counter to the next. I picked up my bag of laundry and opened the basement door to descend the stairs to the washer and dryer.

“Robin and I got back together,” my father shouted after me.

“That’s nice,” I shouted back over my shoulder. After lugging the heavy bag down the stairs, I stopped and sighed deeply. The basement was cluttered with the remnants of my father’s escape from my former stepmother, Elaine. I had to squeeze awkwardly through untouched moving boxes to get to the washing machine tucked in the corner. I was concerned with my father’s solitary existence. My younger brother was now attending Rutgers, leaving my father in an empty house. Though I disagreed with his interest in dating so soon after his divorce, I felt better knowing that he was not alone.

I emptied my laundry into the open washer, fishing out the socks that were stuck in the bottom of the bag. My father shouted down the stairs that he was about to leave to finish last-minute Thanksgiving errands. I shouted back my acknowledgement and left my laundry to soak. By the time I got back to the top of the basement stairs, he was already gone.

When my father returned, I was sitting on the couch with my laptop open, staring aimlessly at a blank Word document.
It was my fourth attempt at creative writing and I was failing miserably. I had recently been writing sporadically, almost erratically, ultimately writing myself into circles. The unpredictability of it all went against my entire being, which craved control and purpose. My blank page offered none of this, so I slammed the laptop shut.

A moment later, I reopened it and started again.

“What are you working on?” my father asked me as he settled into an armchair with a glass of wine in hand.

“Nothing,” I muttered, tapping the top of the computer keys.

“Are you sure you don’t want something to drink?”

“No, thanks.”

“So…” my father started. My face began to feel warm as I realized that he wanted to have a serious conversation. I never enjoyed the talks that had coincidentally become more frequent after I came out during my first year away at college. We had never been close and our almost forced talks caused me a great deal of anxiety. It always seemed as if my father was desperately trying to fix whatever had broken in our relationship to cause me to be gay. He was never ignorant or offensive. In fact, he was strikingly sincere, which made me more embarrassed because of our history of distance. An impending talk would make me anxious and suddenly everything would somehow turn terribly awkward.

“There is something that I have wanted to tell you,” my father continued. I shifted in my seat to several different positions, none of which proved to be comfortable.

“Okay,” I said, staring at the open laptop in front of me. I began deleting files at random to give the appearance of productivity.

“Do you consider yourself an open-minded person?”

“I don’t know if I want to hear about something that is prefaced with that question,” I said, half-joking. I looked at my father with raised eyebrows, a facial habit that I have when I’m nervous.

“Well, I would think that as a lesbian you would be open-minded,” returned my father. I listened as he sipped wine from the glass in his hand. We sat in silence for a moment until finally he said, “I have an alter ego.”

“And what the hell does that mean?” I asked. My stomach began to tie itself into knots. Though the direction of our conversation was still uncertain, I had a bad feeling.

“I have an alter ego, another persona. Her name is Gina.”

“I don’t understand.”

He sighed. “I am part of the five percent of the male population that cross-dresses.”

My stomach sank. “Okay,” I said, feeling my face begin to warm. I silently tried to control what I knew to be my discolored face, but my cheeks continued to burn.

“How do you feel about that?” my dad asked.

I was enraged. Not by his surprising confession, but by his request for my immediate response. I found it unfair. He had a tradition of exploiting my inability to adequately share my feelings as best exemplified by his command that I complete three years of therapy when I was in high school. All I could feel was embarrassment, which I was not about to share.

“I don’t know, Dad,” I said, stumbling over the words. “I’ve known you for twenty-two years as my father so this is a little bit weird for me.”

“Well, now you know how I felt when you told me you were a lesbian.”

His comment stung. I had no doubt that he meant it innocently, but I received it adversely. It seemed as though he felt that I owed him something. My father’s initial reaction to my homosexuality had been to dismiss it, but soon he became supportive. I suppose he expected me to skip the first phase.
When I was seventeen, he had asked me if I was gay, something almost unheard of in the gay community. It seemed as if most parents would rather not know. He had only asked me out of concern for my long line of failed relationships with men, which he took as some sort of evidence of his poor parenting. Learning that I was a lesbian was detrimental to his ego. “I don’t think that you are mature enough to know whether or not you are lesbian,” he had said. “Because your mother died at such a young age, your sexual maturity may have been stunted. We will revisit this issue when you are older.”

I had been crushed. Not accepting me would have been one thing, but not believing me was something else entirely. Now he was telling me something completely unbelievable, and it would have been morally reprehensible to crush him the way that he had crushed me.

“How long has this been going on for?” I asked.

“It is something I have been suppressing my whole life, but for the past ten years I have been dressing up,” he said matter-of-factly.

“Did Mom know about this?”

“No.”

“What do you think she would have said?” I asked. She had died almost eleven years earlier, but I still felt inclined to seek her approval of a situation that I was struggling to feel comfortable with.

“I think she would have been understanding,” my father said, and I believed him. “I told Robin and she is okay with it.”

“Do you go out places?” I asked, suddenly concerned that I would meet him in Northampton or Provincetown, dressed up as a woman. The hypothetical situation consumed me and I began to imagine how I would explain Dad, or “Gina,” to anyone I happened to be with.

“I only go to cross-dressing support groups or GLBT friendly places,” he said. “Would you be able to understand it more if I were gay?”

“Yes, that I would understand.”

“Well, I’m not,” he said with what sounded like dejection.

“Okay,” I said. “Do you want to be a woman, like through surgery?”

“No, nothing like that.” He took another sip from his glass. “I don’t plan on telling your brothers. They aren’t ready to know about it. I told you because, according to statistics, lesbians are the most accepting of cross-dressers. I am considering advocacy work to give more exposure to cross-dressers. They are not even equally recognized by the GLBT community.”

I suddenly felt as though our family was much too small for so much GLBT representation. The fact that he had actual statistics made the situation all the more real, and I started to feel suffocated. I wanted to be as open-minded as I had thought that I was, but this was my father and I wasn’t ready to accept this new facet of his personality.

“I have pictures,” said my father.

“I don’t want to see pictures, Dad.”

“Okay.”

He clicked on the television and suddenly changed the subject by commenting on whatever flashed across the screen. That was the end of the conversation and, like my reaction to Transgeneration, I was struggling with confusion. I sat quietly, wallowing in my own self-pity, my laptop starting to burn my thigh. I had mixed feelings toward my father’s revelation. Part of me was honored that he felt comfortable sharing his secret; but another part of me was angry that he had left me to carry the burden of it alone. In a way, he had shattered what was left of my seemingly traditional family. Though I would never have a “normal” family of my own, my conservative side had been comforted by my father and brothers.

I had always known my father to be nothing short of average. He worked as an engineer, building things in his spare time. He was extremely religious. In high school he had been so proud when my involvement in the Catholic Church had suddenly increased. He would brag to my Episcopalian stepmother that he was never worried about my after school
activities. I would spend weeknights at Faith Formation reciting passages from the Bible, and weekends on retreat in Litchfield helping two priests maintain their mock Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes. Coincidentally, my involvement in the church faded as my sexuality became apparent. My father had been just as disappointed by my homosexuality as he had with my lack of religious direction. This from the man that dressed up as a woman in his spare time. I felt cheated. I had begun to wonder what God thought about cross-dressers, when I started to feel an overwhelming sense of guilt. Rather than exploring my feelings of resentment, I should have been exploring feelings of understanding. Staring back at the computer, I began to write furiously.

“So I had an interesting Thanksgiving,” I said to Jillian after opening the door to our apartment and dumping my bag of clean laundry on the floor. “My father is a cross-dresser.”

“What!” cried Jillian.

“He dresses up like a woman, Jillian. In fact…” I said looking at my watch, “I think he is dressing up as a woman right now.”

“Hold on a sec. Your father told you this? When? Why?”

I recounted the details of my father’s disclosure, adding humor and laughing to mask my insecurity. Jillian struggled to conceal her laughter at the absurdity of the situation. We hadn’t meant to laugh, but it temporarily replaced the need to say anything, and we both seemed to be at a loss for words.

“Did you freak out?” Jillian asked. “Tell me you didn’t freak out.”

“I didn’t freak out.” I sat on the couch and kicked off my shoes. I started to unpack my laptop. “Transgeneration did not prepare me for this.”

“No kidding. Maybe you should look for a support group for children of cross-dressers,” said Jillian, turning to her computer.

I rose and paced the length of the living room. “And what exactly would I say to a support group? I am a lesbian and I am having trouble dealing with my cross-dressing father? That sounds ridiculous. I feel bad enough. He wanted to show me pictures and I said ‘no’.”

“So? That doesn’t mean anything,” said Jillian. “He accepts you as a lesbian, but that doesn’t mean he wants to walk in on you having sex.”

“I think that is a little different.”

“Is it though?” asked Jillian.

I sighed. “I need to write this down,” I said, walking past her into my bedroom and opening the laptop on my desk.
I won't tell you.
About Paris.
Because it's mine.

I won't tell you
That there are paintings in the Louvre that are a story high
And that they will stop your heart, that they will crush your very being,
Make you doubt your own purpose and contributions to this world.
That they will make you cry.

I won't tell you,
That the streets smell of bread and freshly washed children
That it is unfair that Parisian women are so beautiful yet unaffected.
That with all the Catholicism surrounding its walls, religion is merely a casual idea
Compared to the importance of passion.
That a city made solely of carved stone and self-importance
Could make you want to change everything.

And all that happened there
Wonderful or not, well they are mine too.

When you chose to leave
You lost certain liberties.
So when you finally call and ask,
“How was Paris?”
I will say,
“It was fine, just fine.”
The ducks in the courtyard of the nursing home where I work
duck-walk around in curves, under tables and around again.

A crowd gathers: the ducks become people, they are
Jesus and his followers; a teacher and her class; a mommy and her children. It is Hawaiian Shirt Day. There is a jar full of jellybeans on the director’s desk. On Fridays a man comes and sings golden-oldies, “Across The Sea” and “Cheek To Cheek.” On Sundays a woman comes with her dog. There is a woman who is a hundred and four. She can still walk, we say, isn’t that amazing? There are ice cream socials and the inevitable games of bingo. There is the ever-present smell of shit and disinfectant and despair that teaches you to breathe through your mouth until you forget you’re doing it and then (if you’re like me) you forget to forget and someone dies, very quietly, on Crazy Hat day.

What We Call Compassion

Sean Janson
Senior, English Major
Poetry
Dinner for Three

Victoria Large
Senior, English Major
Nonfiction

My brother hadn’t been away at college for even a full day yet and Mom was already missing him as we sat down to dinner. Earlier that day we had moved Charles into his freshmen dorm at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, about forty-five minutes from home. I was worried for him, fervently hoping that he would adjust and make friends quickly. I was also worried for the rest of us because my little family of four had never been separated for more than a few weeks before this time.

Charles and I are close, even though we don’t appear to have much in common. He’s almost exactly two years older than me, our birthdays are three days apart, and I still remember our joint birthday cake back in grade school – one side with a football and the other with a unicorn, a line of frosting to divide them. In his high school days, my lanky, six-foot-five brother was known for being competitive and athletic, given to doing Mikan drills under the basketball hoop in our driveway and conducting pick-up football games on our front lawn every fall. Charles’ best subject was math, and our Uncle David wanted to see his nephew follow his lead and become a certified public accountant. By contrast, Charles’ strengths seemed to be my weaknesses. The sedentary, meditative younger sister, I scribbled in notebooks and dubbed punk rock mix tapes. Only one thing could instill more dread in me than the chin-up bar in gym class, and that was an upcoming math exam. I used to commission Charles’ help with my algebra or geometry, and it would usually end with both of us frustrated.

Despite all of that, we managed to get along. We had the same sense of humor and an endless supply of inside jokes. I loved movies and the two of us raided the video store for silly horror films and mafia epics (sharing many a Godfather III-induced cringe). Charles loved baseball and I learned to appreciate Pedro Martinez’s fastball. We both appreciated All-You-Can-Eat-Pizza night at Papa Gino’s, and the fine art of getting the most song for your dollar on the pizza place’s jukebox (it’s best to go for the long songs, like The Beatles’ “Hey Jude”).

The summer before Charles went to college, I wondered a lot about what was going to happen come fall. I remember thinking about the future while hanging clothes out to dry on the line in our backyard. It’s a chore that I actually like, mindless work that allows your thoughts to be elsewhere. As I took a breath of summer air carrying the faint fragrance of detergent, I wondered if I would be lonely living with just my parents, and if Charles would survive at school. College was still something that intimidated me. Starting over without your old friends. Living with a roommate. Having the freedom to make the right choices, or the wrong ones. I knew that nothing would ever be the same again for my brother or for my family. I worried that Charles and I wouldn’t have anything to talk about anymore because people change when they go off to college. It sounds ridiculous, but I was glad that I followed the Red Sox. That would be something to talk about, at least until the end of September.

On the night before Charles moved into his dorm, I helped him put together a photo album with pictures of family and friends. My mom, the avid reader, had thumbed through endless “off to college” guidebooks all summer, and they had apparently listed “little photo album” as an essential, so here we were. I slipped a picture of our grandfather about to cut into his birthday cake under the clingy plastic. I picked up another picture from the stack that we’d selected.

“I like this one,” I laughed.
In the photo, Charles and I were standing on our back porch wearing backpacks and noticeably new sneakers. I was smiling nervously (mouth closed to hide my braces). Charles looked a bit sleepy. It was the morning of the day that I started high school, but just another year for my big brother.

“You know what sucks,” I said as I slipped the photo into the album. “I’m totally losing my ride to school.”

My ride was Charles’ 1995 Mercury Sable, which we loaded up the next morning. My brother and I would drive down to Dartmouth with my parents following behind in the Explorer, which was also crammed with stuff. Before we left, I handed Charles a blue-and-white spotted envelope. Inside was a card I’d bought and saved months ago. It had a childlike drawing on the front of a little girl hugging the leg of someone much taller, and the text on the front read: “My Big Brother”. The inside had been blank, so I’d filled it with “good lucks” and “see-you-soons.” Charles wasn’t much for cards and things like that, so maybe it was more for me than for him, but when he finished reading it, he carefully slipped it back into its envelope and tucked it in with the rest of his stuff.

“What CD do you want to listen to?” he asked as he started the car. “You can pick.”

I quickly thumbed through his CDs and chose Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers’ Greatest Hits, which was one of the first albums Charles had ever bought. He had picked it up second hand at the only music store in our town years ago, and we both knew it from the first track to the last.

“I knew you would pick that one,” he said shaking his head as “American Girl” came flooding through the car speakers.

“How did you know?”

“I just did.”

The CD got us all the way to Dartmouth.

“You can stand me up at the gates of hell,” Petty sang as we turned into the main entrance of the college, “but I won’t – back – down.”

Charles and I exchanged a look.

“His roommates seemed all right,” I said to Mom and Dad as we three dug into our salads that night. “Jake was a really nice kid.”

My dad agreed as I remembered seeing one of my brother’s new roommates, Jake, pull out his DVD collection. Movie lover, I had noted. My brother knew how to get along with a movie lover.

I looked across that table at my brother’s empty chair and then over at Mom.

“Are you all right, Mom?”

“Yeah, I’ll be all right. I’m just going to miss your brother.”

“It’s not like he’s in California,” Dad put in. “He’ll come back some weekends.”

“Well, I told him he probably shouldn’t come back next weekend,” Mom said. “All the books say that you should stay over on the first weekend to get used to being on campus.”

We finished our salads, and I got up to get three dinner plates from the cabinet.
Sean Brady
Senior, Art Major
Drawing; Graphite on paper
8” x 10”

Jo-Ann
Ma Coeur

Cheryl Tullis
Junior, Art Major & Psychology Major
Digital Media; Adobe Photoshop
8.5” x 11”
Dripping Teapot

Dipali Patel
Senior, Art Major
Three-Dimensional; Ceramic
5” x 8” x 4.5”
Herding the Blues

Matthew Noiseux
Senior, Art Major
Drawing; Ink on paper
44” x 90” in three segments
Self-Portrait

Catalina Ezcurra
Junior, Art Major
Painting: Acrylic on canvas
18” x 24”
Sacrificing One’s Self

Katie Boettcher

Senior, Art Education Major
Three-Dimensional: Soapstone, wood, bee hive, paper
36” x 12”
Nadia

Anna Gilliam
Senior, Art Major
Painting; Acrylic on paper
28” x 22”
Sleight of Hand

Chris Dempsey

Senior, Art Major
Mixed-Media; Wood, paper, printed images
24” x 24”
Untitled

Christina Kunze Sarkisian

Senior, Art Major
Three-Dimensional; Raku fired ceramic
5” x 6”
Look, It’s Light

Mike Dravis
Freshman, Art Major & Business Major
Photography, Digital
8” x 10”
Black Lung
(ars poetica)

Eric Marshall
Senior, English Major
Poetry

We forge from stone in the shadows,
underground in echoing caverns,
unbreakable things that glow and burn.
We’re given a rusty blunted chisel,
a yellow hat, its creases marred
by cakey black soot,
and maybe it has a small,
flickering light on top,
if we’re one of the lucky ones.
We hack, wheeze, and squint
our lungs blackened and our eyes nearly bloodshot blind.
Our phlegm rattled coughs are a signal to the unbelievers,
from somewhere deep within our chests,
that we are wasting our time, truly.

We chip away in the depths of the mine,
always fearful in the pitch black
of a permanent, daylight eclipsing collapse.
We chip away at the craggy
cave walls and hope to find,
sparkling brilliantly, against
the pitchy black confines,
like February stars in the mid-night sky,
an idea like diamonds.
And when we do, it is always imperfect.
But we show the unbelievers anyway,
hold it up to their eyes with our filthy hands,
while a mixture of soot and ecstasy stains our faces,
and we try to convince them that truth exists.
Your tulip died.
But it went out gloriously
   In a color
That would shame blood.

It had been staring at me
From its prominent throne
   On the kitchen table
As it leaned toward the sun.

For one single moment.
A perfect life stood still.

   Then.
   My hands.

And I rip every petal
   from its frail
shuddering body
choke, and strangle its stem,
   and toss its corpse
To the linoleum.

Sweeter now
   In death
Than in full bloom
On a summer morning.
I walk into the back room, and Jan greets me with a smile.

“How are you today?” She has a way of looking in your eyes so that you feel compelled to be honest when answering.

“Actually, pretty good. I haven’t coughed in weeks.”

I sit in the chair, a gray vinyl recliner, and lean back. Jan brings a tray with supplies: tubes, needles, pads, liquids. Then she rolls over on a low stool.

I unbutton the top two buttons of my shirt. I wear the same one each time because the tubes fit comfortably around it. I peel plastic off a bump below my collarbone. It’s actually a hard rubber nipple below my skin. My veins gave up after two months of medications, and this port has made life much less painful.

Jan rubs brown liquid onto the bump. I barely feel it. It’s odd, pressure with no sensation of touch. Jan’s gloved hands fumble with a plastic wrapper containing a long needle attached to a narrow tube. The needle has a “butterfly” of yellow plastic surrounding it. Jan opens the butterfly with her right hand and taps my port with her left index finger.

“Okay, exhale,” she says. So I do.

As I breathe out, she pushes the long needle hard into the bump. I anticipate pain, but there’s only pressure and a faint snapping. I never ask, but I imagine it’s the sound of the rubber as the needle pierces it. My body relaxes. Jan smiles and we chat. She tapes the butterfly to my chest leaving the tube free. Then she inserts a needle into the tube and flushes it with a clear liquid. Immediately, I am light headed. The rush is stronger than that from a glass of wine, and I enjoy it. Quickly, it fades, and I see that Jan is filling vials with my blood. She tells me again how glad she is that I got the port. I knew she hated hurting me every week digging for a good vein.

After the blood is sent to the lab, Kevin brings over a clear IV bag. It is small and contains anti-nausea medication. He attaches it to my tubes while the lab checks my blood. Generally, the white count is high enough for me to receive the medication, so I’m not concerned.

In a short while, Kevin returns to tell me that my blood is fine. He carries a long IV bag with adriomyecin. When I first had this medication, I was warned to mention any tingling sensation. Apparently, this particular chemical can cause widespread necrosis of tissue if it leaks into flesh. I was nervous at first. Kevin talks to me about his son, a senior, a boy to be proud of. I’ve seen him before, towering over Kevin asking for the car keys. I listen, I answer. I smile and laugh. Again, it’s odd, no sensation. I think I should feel the medication killing cells, but there is nothing. No feeling of peeling or breaking or even of healing. Nothing.

My IV bags are changed twice. Jan returns with a vial of bright, reddish-pink liquid. She inserts a needle into an extra piece of my IV tube and injects the liquid into me. This one makes my urine the most amazing shade of orange.

People come and go. Dad brings a tuna sandwich and a root beer. For some reason, I crave these. Others visit me while I try to read or watch my tiny TV. The only things that seem to be on are Jerry Springer and a number of soaps. I don’t care about these, but it’s hard to do anything else. I walk around, but I get in the way with my rolling pole. It’s hard to maneuver, and I give up and return to my spot. Occasionally, I drift off. Once, I awake to find a latex glove on my root beer making a rude gesture. I laugh, and everyone is quick to squeal on Carm, my doctor’s receptionist.

The day slips away from me. I don’t finish my book or grade my papers. Jan checks my last bag and pronounces me finished for the day. She un-tapes my chest and pulls the butterfly out. The needle slides through my skin, but I still feel nothing. I gather my things and say goodbye. I put on my cap, warm and soft, and wander out into the winter air. I feel strange, lighter and heavier at the same time. I feel nothing, and I wonder why.
Edwin G. Baxter became ecstatic when his coworker, Dan, told him about his music class. As Dan spoke of monosyllabic Gregorian chants, Edwin’s cheeks began to grow sore from the ear-to-ear smile plastered on his face.

There was not much to talk about anymore at his dead end job as a pharmaceutical technician at Rexall Pharmacy. This mention of music, a passion Edwin had since he was a boy, overjoyed him. Dan leaned against the counter, his back to the store. As Edwin supported himself against the water cooler, the light from the ceiling fan above glistened off the top of his hairless head. The bell to the store entrance jingled as someone entered.

“What else did you go over, man? Monophony, polyphony, homophony? You got to love polyphony.” Edwin waved his arms in the air as he spoke.

Dan’s eyebrows furrowed. “I don’t think we’ve gone over any of that.”

“Well, you will,” Edwin assured him. “You will.”

A set of slow footsteps heading towards Dan and Edwin resonated throughout the store. Edwin, remembering he’d forgotten to fill a prescription, walked up a step and entered the pharmaceuticals area. He stood in front of a bottle of pills, emptied it onto a tray and began counting. “Three, four – you see, Dan, what I like – three, four – about music is that it’s – three, four – so precise and yet torrent – three, four, two.” He bottled the pills and put them aside.

He looked up to the store front. A white bearded man wearing a red flannel shirt was sitting down in the waiting area. There were melting snowflakes on his broad shoulders. The chair barely contained his stout frame. He rested his hands on his chest, which heaved up and down with his heavy breathing.

“What do you mean?” Dan asked Edwin.

“What do you mean by ‘precise but torrent’?”

“You have to maintain a rhythm, a beat. There’s an octave scale. It’s all math. Math is exact. Math is precise. But at the same time music can get emotional and out of control. It has to make sense. Method-madness. Precise-torrential.”

“Trash-treasure,” Dan suggested. He ironed out his shirt with his hands.

“Not so much. But—”

“Damn it!” Dan exclaimed. He scrambled for the trash barrel behind him, underneath the register. “I have to do the trash before I leave. Do you mind watching the counter for me, Edwin?”

“I’m not doing anything else, man.” Edwin moved over to the register. His heavy, black shoes thudded on the floor as he walked. He was more than happy to help Dan out. The fact that Dan was in a music class was the greatest news Edwin had heard in weeks, maybe even months.

Dan pulled the trash bag from the green waste bucket. The bag rustled. The bearded man got up from his chair and sauntered
over to the counter. He placed his hands on the red Formica countertop. His fingers tapped rhythmically. He looked back and forth between Dan and Edwin, his sharp, green eyes darting left to right. Dan tied the bag. Edwin rubbed his bald head. The man smiled. His teeth were yellow and stood out because of the whiteness of his beard.

“Can I help you?” asked Edwin. Dan left with the trash bag.

“Sure,” the man replied. He smelled of cigars. His index finger and middle finger of his right hand had a golden brown stain to them. He smiled his yellow grin again. “Name’s Cage.”

“Edwin. Nice to meet you, Mr. Cage.” Edwin extended his hand.

“Likewise, Edwin.” Mr. Cage shook Edwin’s hand. The strength of the old man’s grip surprised Edwin.

“What can I do for you, Mr. Cage?”

“I have a prescription to drop off.” From the breast pocket of his flannel shirt he took out a small piece of paper and handed it to Edwin. Edwin took it. The paper called for a Serevent inhaler.

“Okay. Would you like to wait for this, Mr. Cage?”

Mr. Cage shook his head. “No, and please Edwin, just call me Cage.” His fingers rat-a-tat-tapped on the countertop. His words twanged with a southern accent. He pronounced Edwin “Ehd-whin.” “I heard you and that young man talkin’ ‘bout music. You seem to know your stuff, Edwin. What kind of music are you into?”

Two music lovers in one day. Edwin’s zeal grew. “I like all types. I’ve dabbled in folk, a little rock, and the blues. My main love is bluegrass, though.” He looked down at his shoes.


Edwin could smell his smoky breath. “Actually, Cage, I play the mandolin.”

Cage’s fingers tapped again and Edwin’s foot scraped against the gray carpet. A customer at the far end of the store coughed.

“No shit? I haven’t come across a mandolin player in years,” Cage stated.

Edwin shifted his balance to his right foot and rubbed his bald head again. He cleared his throat. “Me neither.”

“You any good, Edwin?”

“I haven’t played for a while. But I was okay.”

“Okay is good enough for me. Where are you from?”

Edwin felt tempted to say he was from Maine, but he hadn’t been there in maybe twenty years or so. “I actually live here in Rockland. Right down the road.”

“Is that so? I ain’t never seen ya ’round, but I don’t get out much.” Cage’s raspy laugh escaped him again. “Me and a bunch of boys get together every now and then and lay down the bluegrass. You should come by.”

Dan had made his way back to the register. His boots were wet from the snow outside and squeaked against the floor. Cage nodded at him in acknowledgement.

“That sounds nice,” Edwin said and wrote down his number on a piece of scrap paper. “If I’m not home, just call Rexall.”

“All right.” Cage took the paper and headed for the exit. As he walked down the cough and cold aisle, the slow thud of his gait could be heard again.
“Sounds like you got a date,” Dan joked, putting a new bag into the waste basket.

Edwin did not reply. He heard guitars strumming, banjos plucking and bass booming. The smile from earlier had remained on his face.

Thirty years before, when he was ten years old, Edwin had a similar expression. He always smiled when his grandmother played the mandolin outside. The smile was large, toothy and seemed to last the whole summer he spent in Maine at his grandmother’s house. She brought it out in him. The way her long gray hair shimmered in the afternoon sun. The way the front porch creaked underneath her bare feet. When the old, ash rocking chair groaned underneath her aged, lean body, Edwin would smile up at his grandmother from the porch steps. He liked to think that when he smiled it made her fingers strum the strings of her mandolin. She played beautifully. Her fingers moved across the spruce body and taut strings as fast as a hummingbird’s wings. Edwin would walk up the stairs and over to the railing. The golden afternoon sun would shine off Edwin’s Pond. She’d named the body of water after him.

He would lean his ten-year-old frame on the splintered rail and watch and listen. It was as if every chord and note she picked controlled the rays of the sun. She made the sun reflect off the wings of a dragonfly. She caused the sun to expose a group of gnats buzzing over a lily. In Maine, Grandma controlled the universe with her calloused fingers and her sunburst finished mandolin.

That memory still lingered in his mind, and it emerged after his meeting with Cage. Edwin hadn’t played the mandolin since Grandma’s funeral and he wondered if he could play as well as he had in the past. After work, at the home he shared with his mother, Edwin rummaged through the closet of his room. Old shirts, empty CD cases, sheet music, and a cheap keyboard, among other miscellaneous items, were strewn about his bedroom floor. “Where are you?” he muttered to himself. “Where the hell are you?” His arms whipped objects out of the walk-in closet in search of the case. Old Celtic bluegrass ballads provided the soundtrack for his search. The high-pitched tones blared from the speakers of his computer. His grandmother loved the ancient sounds of the Emerald Isle. They all sounded epic to her. “Like a gale blowing across a massive hillside,” she told him once.

Edwin’s cat, Fender, purred on the end of the bed as Edwin tossed a hockey stick, a failed attempt at a different hobby, out of the way. He then moved a box of old Polaroids onto the bed. Fender became interested in the box as Edwin continued his search. Behind the box was an orange blanket. Like a magician performing a magic trick, Edwin whisked the blanket away and exposed the reason for his search. A cloud of dust arose. He coughed into his left hand and waved off the dust with his right. Edwin’s eyes grew large with delight. The dust settled and, alone, in the back of the closet, against a chipped paint backdrop, sat a worn, black leather mandolin case.

“Ah ha!” Edwin exclaimed. He undid the clasps. Excited, he opened the case. The hinges squeaked from years of neglect. There it was with its black to orange sunburst pattern and black neck. The head stock had a chip between the first and second tuners. He lifted it to his face and took in the spruce odor. Then Edwin plucked a string. Plunng. “Needs to be tuned,” he mumbled to himself.

Edwin took the mandolin from the red velvet interior of the case. Instrument in hand, he walked towards his computer chair and sat down. Fender poked his black head from the box of pictures he had gotten into. The back of the chair bumped against the metal computer desk as Edwin adjusted himself and the mandolin. He held the neck in his left hand and placed the body on his right thigh. He placed his right finger and middle finger on the first and fourth
string of the narrow second fret. “This is a D chord,” he told Fender. The cat looked on with its blue eyes, uninterested. Edwin strummed his fingertips across the strings for a moment and looked concernedly at Fender. “This definitely has to be tuned, my man.” Fender’s head ducked back into the picture box. Edwin sighed, strummed the mandolin again and closed his eyes.

His grandmother had taught him all she knew, so it had taken about ten summers for Edwin to become a true mandolin player. As his fingers became stronger and quicker, hers became arthritic and slower. “You get better every year, Edwin,” she told her twenty-year-old grandson.

He looked up at her and told her, “I blame it on the teacher.” He struck a chord on his shabby-looking instrument.

“D, my favorite.” She placed her gnarled fingers on C chord and plucked a waltz. “Give me a melody, boy.”

And he did. And they played on. They played for hours despite the humidity and her arthritis. They played while the sun was setting and they were merely black silhouettes against the red reflecting waters of Edwin’s Pond. Grandmother and grandchild strummed and hummed despite the hungry mosquitoes and their incessant buzzing. They played with the crickets and the bullfrogs, the sparrows and the rocking of their chairs.

As the sun waned into darkness, she stood up. Her knees cracked. She took Edwin’s mandolin, a cheap tool he bought when she offered to teach him. She held both instruments by the neck, and handed Edwin hers.

“Time for me to stop, Edwin.” His grandmother massaged the knuckles of the hand holding Edwin’s mandolin with her free hand. A mosquito buzzed in his ear and Edwin slapped at it. He stared in awe at the mandolin.

“This is yours though.”

“Now it’s yours. You’re going home tomorrow. You should get packing.” A breeze had rustled through, and as Grandma opened the patched screen door, her long gray hair blew with the wind. She went inside and the door swung shut.

Now he sat in his room, embracing the mandolin she had given to him twenty years before. Edwin had fallen asleep in his chair, and consequently a stain of drool spotted his shirt. The ringing of his phone woke him. Startled, he answered.

“Uh, hello?”

“Edwin, how are ya?” Cage’s voice drawled on the other end of the line.

“Good, Cage. Yourself?” Edwin looked around his room for the time. 10:00 p.m. He’d been asleep for two hours.

“I’m just fine, boy.” He paused.

“Okay. That’s good.” Edwin saw that his box of pictures had been tipped over. Polaroids face up and down were scattered on the beige carpet. Fender slept inside the overturned box, purring innocently. “What can I do for you, Cage?” He picked up a picture that had been at his feet.

“I talked to a couple of the fellas an’ they’re interested in hearing you play.” Kssh. A patch of static went through the phone.

Edwin turned the picture around in his fingers. “Oh yeah? You don’t say.”

“I do say. We decided to get together tomorrow night. Test you out. Sound good?”

“Umm, yeah that sounds fine I suppose.” Edwin looked at the picture. It was him and his mom at the
beach. Dad took the photograph. It was their trip last year to Sanibel Island, Florida. He had taken them there for their fortieth anniversary.

“Good. Be prepared to solo. Do you work tomorrow?”

“No,” Edwin replied, staring at his late father’s smile.

“Great. I’ll call tomorrow with more information.” And with that Cage hung up. The mandolin lay in Edwin’s lap. The phone hung from his hand. His mouth was agape. The word, two syllables, made him shudder. The idea of a solo intimidated Edwin. He hung up the phone.

His mouth was dry. A beer would do, so laying his instrument on his bed, he went downstairs. His feet tressed on the once-white, well-worn carpet of the home he’d grown up in. A solo? Was there no other way of being initiated into a band of music lovers? In the hallway, Edwin could see the television’s blue glow from the living room. His mother, waiting for her 11 o’clock pills, sneezed. “Bless you, Ma,” Edwin said walking by the doorway.

“Thanks, Edwin,” she replied tiredly. Her voice was weary. He didn’t like to see his mother get old. It reminded him of the day Grandma passed on her sunburst mandolin to him. His mother would talk of doctors’ appointments, achy joints and missing his father, and he would picture gnarled fingers opening a screen door. In the kitchen, Edwin opened the olive green refrigerator, grabbed a six-pack and went back upstairs to his room.

Fender jumped off the bed when Edwin entered. His paws softly hit the pine planks, and he scooted out the door. Edwin cracked a beer open, took a swig, grabbed his mandolin and began to play. For the first beer he practiced chords. Up and down the octave he went, shaking off his rust. He tuned the mandolin until the sound was perfect. The second beer went to searching for the sheet music his grandmother left behind. He found the musty, yellowed parchment in the small filing cabinet next to his desk. The third beer gave way to melodies. He went over tunes such as “Three Way Boogie” and “The Death of Mary O’Rourke.” Slow ballads and quick little ditties were the fourth beer. With the help of the final two beers, Edwin became less aware of time. He experimented with the stringed tool, attempting to convert Scott Joplin rags to bluegrass. Unsuccessfully, he fooled around with the jazz music of legendary musician, John Coltrane. Just for kicks, Edwin played the song from the movie Deliverance.

He played all through the morning. Edwin lost all sense of time except for the one his fingers kept with the music. It was a slit of light entering through the Venetian blinds that, when reflected off the gold tail piece, blinded Edwin and broke him from his hypnosis. The Baxter family coat-of-arms, etched in the gold plate, glowed. Edwin looked at the digital clock. Its red digits displayed 7:34.

“Damn,” Edwin muttered. He glanced over his room from his bed. The clothes were still strewn about. The sheet music was placed out on the floor next to his bed. The box of pictures was still overturned. Empty silver beer cans were scattered on his desktop. “Damn,” he muttered again.

Edwin stretched his arms and cracked his fingers and began to pick up his room. He straightened out the sheet music and placed a neat pile next to his CD player. He opened the blinds and squinted from the Saturday morning’s bright, winter sun. He cleared off his desk. Then he started to shovel the pictures back into the box.

One picture caught his attention. A brown-eyed woman with short brown hair seemed to stare back at Edwin. She was in a plain yet elegant white wedding dress, standing on a beach holding her shoes. Edwin tore at the picture, but the plastic did not rip. He thought he had burned them all after she left him. Edwin folded up the picture and shoved it into one of the beer cans; then
he crushed the can. He finished cleaning, sprawled out on his firm mattress and fell asleep.

Hours later, the phone woke him. Groggy, Edwin answered “Hello?”

“Edwin. It’s Cage. We’re gettin’ together tonight at my pal Jimmy’s house in Scituate. It’s Pearl Road, off of Route 3A. 149’s the number. Big house. Can’t miss it, boy.” His words rolled off his tongue like notes being plucked off a banjo. “I’ll see ya at 7:00 p.m. sharp.”

“149 Pearl. Got it. Should I bring food or anything?”

Cage had already hung up. What a strange man, Edwin thought.

Edwin rang the doorbell. His foot tapped nervously on the wet brick stoop. Cage was right, it was a big house. The Atlantic Ocean churned in the distance. A stiff, cold sea breeze bit into Edwin. He waited outside holding his mandolin case and a white and blue casserole dish. He had made a bean dip. Water dripped from a gutter to an unseen piece of metal. He heard slow, muffled footsteps before the door was unlocked and opened.


“Thank you. How are you?”

“Just fine, boy. What ya holdin’ there?”

“Oh,” Edwin answered sheepishly. “I made a bean dip, sir.”

Cage tilted his head slightly to the left. “Why’d you bring a bean dip?”

“Well, uh,” Edwin stammered for words.

“Never mind. Come on in. I’ll give you a tour.”

Edwin entered the house and followed Cage. The house was decorated with a country motif. Soft greens, off-whites and wine reds accentuated the ornately carved banisters, tables and chairs. “This is the hallway,” Cage stated. “That’s some room over there. And that’s another room.” Edwin laughed as Cage briskly led him through the house. “This is Jimmy’s music room.”

They entered a large room. The ceiling was high and the furniture was arranged in a circle in the center. Several men busied themselves with their respective instruments. “Allow me to introduce you to all the fellas. This is Bob Long.” A tall man wearing a black suit stood next to a grand-sized standing bass. He waved to Edwin. “This is Jimmy. He cracks corn and he don’t care.” Sitting on a red chaise lounge was a black man in a plaid shirt and jeans. He held a cherry-colored acoustic guitar. In a chair next to him sat a fiddle and its bow with no player. “Over there is Richard. But you can call him Sweet Tooth.” An old man sat next to the fiddle with his hands folded. His hair was gray and thin. Edwin estimated the old man to be around seventy. Sweet Tooth’s pants were pulled high and held up by suspenders. He had no instrument. He merely sat there sucking his lip as the others tuned up. “That’s Timbo at the piano.” A rather large, muscle-bound man sat outside of the circle at the piano. He was smoking a cigar and sporting a black T-shirt with a chicken on it. The T-shirt said, “Rock Out With Your Cock Out.” Cage pointed to a man with a shirt and tie. The tie’s knot was loosened and the top button of his shirt was undone. The man’s hair was slicked back and his face was red. He was plucking on a banjo. “That’s Vin. Hey guys! This here is Edwin, the guy I was talking about.”

With his mandolin case and casserole dish, Edwin stepped forward. “Hello all.” He nodded his head. They all nodded back. Timbo, with a puff of smoke uttered, “Hey.”

“What’s that?” asked Bob Long. He spun the bass on its pivot.
“It’s a bean dip,” Cage answered for Edwin. He patted Edwin on the back.

“Wh-Why did you bring a bean dip? I don’t see any chips.” Vin strummed his banjo and looked around the room. The other guys laughed.

“Awww, leave’m ‘lone,” Cage said. “It’s more than you ever brought, you shit.” The guys laughed again.

Jimmy moved over on the chaise lounge and patted the seat with his free hand. “Take a seat, Edwin. You can put that bean dip on Vin’s head if you want to.”

Edwin smiled, put the dip on a nearby table and walked across the circle and sat down next to Jimmy. “Thanks for having me, Mr. Crackcorn.” Edwin smirked.

“I told you he was good people,” Cage said, lumbering towards the seat with the fiddle. He sat down in the upholstered wing back chair, a king in his court. “All right, boys, ‘nuff crapshootin’, more playin’!” And with that he began playing his fiddle. The bow glided across the strings. For a moment, Cage played the melody alone. His foot tapped lightly on the ceramic tiled floor. Timbo hit a key on the piano, shook his head, hit another one and grinned with the cigar in his mouth. He began to accompany Cage’s fiddle. Edwin looked to his left and saw Jimmy pretending to play his guitar. He looked to his right. Beyond Cage, Sweet Tooth still was sucking on his lip. Edwin thought he might have been asleep. Vin started to play his banjo. Cage softened his volume and gave way to the banjo. Bob Long took the bass line for a walk. Timbo tickled the occasional ivory. Jimmy began to play with the guitar. Edwin watched, amazed at the eclectic bunch.

“Weekend Lover,” a voice began to sing. “It’s another Friday night. You belong to another, but I’ll be your love tonight.” Edwin looked over at the old man, Sweet Tooth, who had stood up, placed his foot on the chair and slapped his thigh in rhythm. “Soon it will be Sunday. You’ll be leavin’ me blue, ooh, ooh, ooh. Weekend Lover, how I’d love to stay with you.”

As the others played and Sweet Tooth’s twangy voice sang, Edwin unclasped his case and took out the mandolin. Jimmy nudged Edwin, looked at the instrument and mouthed, “Nice.”

“One day soon I’ll give out weekly all my time and love to you. No more iffy Monday mornings, with only memories of you.”

Cage stood up, his chin resting on his fiddle, and danced his way to the center of the circle. The others faded out their melodies and Cage took over. He played for about two minutes. Edwin sat there tapping his toe. The others laughed as Cage spun around and hopped, never missing a beat.

Sweet Tooth started singing again and Cage walked back to his seat. The others picked up where he left off. “Let the blushin’ and the yearnin’ consume us night and day hey ay hey. You’ll be my lifetime lover. No one could ever take your place.”

Jimmy stood up and waltzed to the center. Once again the others let the soloist take over. His head bobbed side to side. His speed gradually built up until his hands were a blur. Then he slowed and sat back down.

The others took over again. Timbo “yee-hawed” with his cigar held between his teeth. Edwin picked at the mandolin. Like a child waiting to hop into the jump rope, Edwin anticipated a good measure to start playing with.

“Weekend Lover, it’s another Friday night. You belong to another, but I’ll be your love tonight. SOON it WILL be Sunday, you’ll be leavin’ me blue. Oh, my Weekend Lover, how I’d love to stay with you.” Timbo tickled the ivories.
As he finished, everyone began to play and Edwin strummed along. He was hesitant at first, afraid of not being able to keep up with them. Cage glanced over at Edwin and cocked his elbow towards the circle. Edwin got up and Vin’s banjo faded. Timbo stopped playing and swung his body around on the piano bench. Bob Long kept his rhythm. Edwin slowly walked to the center. Cage stopped and lowered his bow. Edwin’s fingers trembled and stumbled. His fingertips were sweaty. The sound coming from his instrument was dissonant. Edwin’s mind went blank. He held no frets, no chords down. He just picked at the eight strings. His left index finger curled around the neck and pressed. His ring finger did the same. Edwin wasn’t sure what chord he was playing. It was as if his hands, by some natural instinct, took over. He began to pick at the strings. One two three, one two three. Every fourth set he changed the chord. His picking got faster. He smiled. He stooped over and started stomping his feet. “Come on you slow pokes!” he yelled.

“Hey, there ya go, boy!” Sweet Tooth exclaimed. Cage clapped his hands and then began playing. They played, and Edwin did not leave the circle. They played, but they could not keep up with him. They sang songs of death, heartbreak, moonshine, moons hiding behind clouds and men laying down train tracks. Edwin played with a rediscovered passion. The group played until early morning. The bass boomed and the banjo, guitar and mandolin tinked. Timbo’s fingers tapped on the piano. Edwin played for his ex-wife. His fingers nearly tore the strings off the mandolin. He played for his mother. His fingers slowed and the sound softened. And in the softly lit room, protected from the cold, wet outside, under a golden ambience that reminded him of those August afternoons in Maine, Edwin G. Baxter played for his Grandma.
Temptations of Tomatoes

Kimberly DeLisle
Graduate Student, English
Poetry

Little South American wonders. Your flavor, a sunset
Raw, pure and unaltered, my taste buds ache
In want of you. Soft, sweet and succulent.

Silky smooth skin, I slice you open
Your life blood oozes from your flesh. Tangy, tempting,
Tantalizing. Teasing my senses.

An orb of crimson more beautiful
than a ruby in my palm.
I drink you in. Taste and desire.
During the fall semester of 2004, Professor Emeritus of Art, Dr. Stephen Smalley, approached BSC art major Fred Gerstenecker with a heady proposal: paint a mural inside a high security prison. Fred had never painted a mural or been inside a prison before, but he had also never shied away from the opportunity to grow as an artist. He immediately agreed to take on the task. Aware of the project’s potential for excellence, and in need of financial backing, Fred pitched the idea in an application for Bridgewater State College’s Shea Scholar Program. The Shea Scholar Program was established in honor of Dr. Ellen Shea, a 1935 Bridgewater State College graduate who subsequently served as its Dean of Women and, later, Dean of Students. Since 1987, the Shea Scholar program has provided exceptionally gifted students with financial support to conduct intense summer-long research or artistic projects under the guidance of BSC faculty. Shea Scholars receive a stipend of $3600, while faculty mentors receive $1250.

Fred Gerstenecker and the prison mural project were a perfect fit. The outcome was an amazing six-movie-poster mural covering the entire length of a corridor inside the Massachusetts Correctional Institution (MCI). thebridge recently sat down with Fred Gerstenecker to discuss the project, its original concept, and the process it took to bring this unusual endeavor to fruition.

thebridge: Dr. Smalley recently mentioned that though there were a few students interested in the mural, you were the one student that took on a leadership role. Can you tell us a little about the process of this project, why you were interested in it, and how it evolved into what it is now?
FRED: I liked the idea of working outside the classroom. I’d never really done that before. Dr. Smalley approached me first and then we went down and took a look at the site. Actually we were thinking about how it would work, if we could do a directed study in painting. Then the job looked like it would be bigger than we thought, and I saw the opportunity for the Shea Scholarship. Dr. Smalley thought it was a good idea, so we started to talk about a theme. He’s a big movie buff and so am I, and we thought that it was a subject that everyone could relate to, young and old.

FRED: I only seen one of the movies that I picked, but I had a huge list in the beginning, a few dozen movies. I submitted the list to the director, Karen Bergeron, so she could narrow it down because MCI’s rules wouldn’t allow me to paint certain images. Some of the movies that I really liked either didn’t have a great poster or the poster really wasn’t fit for MCI standards.

thebridge: Was there ever a point where you felt you were compromising your artistic integrity or making sacrifices because of MCI’s regulations?

FRED: I didn’t really look at it like that. There were definitely some restraints working within that setting. I took this as a challenge. I knew what I could and couldn’t do and these things were in the back of my head at all times. I probably got close to the line in some cases. I did try to push things that maybe someone else wouldn’t have.

thebridge: What is an example of a suggestion that you gave that they rejected?

FRED: Bruce Lee’s Game of Death. I wanted to represent the kung fu genre, a typical guy kind of movie. They said they don’t allow any pictures of kung fu within MCI because they don’t want the inmates to use it on the guards. Basically, they wouldn’t accept a poster if it was too violent or, like The Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman, too sexual. In that specific case, I offered to put more clothes on her [laughs].

FRED: I altered some of them more so than others. The Vertigo poster is the least altered. It’s basically the same thing as the original poster except the background and the type are a little different. I think I faded yellow into orange in the background rather than use a tie-died pattern or basic orange. All of the other posters were changed either for aesthetic reasons or to conform to MCI standards.

thebridge: Artistically, what was the process like? Did you run into any difficulties actually painting the murals?

FRED: The paint wouldn’t take. Ideally it would have been better to prime the wall with Gesso [a brilliant white pigment mixed with glue that acts as an adhesive for paint], but we weren’t really thinking about that. The walls seemed like good quality because they’d been freshly painted the spring before. Gesso would have saved a lot of time. Certain colors or brands of paint sometimes wouldn’t take and I had to put on two or three coats over one area before seeing good, vibrant color. Actually, the back of Vertigo was pretty tough. If you can imagine, it’s about six feet tall and three and a half feet wide and I had to do multiple coats.

thebridge: After spending the amount of time you did in the prison, did you feel comfortable being there?

FRED: I wasn’t really sure what to expect going in there for the first time. It was a little nerve-racking in the beginning. I’d never been searched like that. They made me take out everything, from my I.D. to my keys, and leave it with the guard at the desk. I got used to the routine, you get used to anything I guess, and the guards got to know me. I was on a first name basis with a lot of them. The inmates, too; I knew them by name. Everyone was really accommodating to me. It could have been a lot worse. The section that I was in, I don’t know how they classify it, but there were security checks twice a day. No one was...
walking around by himself. Everyone was escorted and accounted for at all times.

**thebridge**: Didn’t you work right outside classrooms?

**FRED**: Most of the times I was there the classrooms were empty. Sometimes they weren’t. Sometimes the rooms were being used for an orientation or something that we couldn’t really schedule around because I’d be there the whole weekend. That didn’t really seem to be a problem at those times. There were some problems, though. I had a table in the hall and my supplies would be all around. When the guys filed out of the room, there would be twenty or thirty of them, depending on how many classes were let out. So I was in their way and they were in my way and there was the whole security issue. You would get a guard at the end of the hall yelling, “Keep to the side of the hall!” It was better when no one was there.

**thebridge**: Was it a little intimidating?

**FRED**: Sometimes more than others. I got to know some of the inmates. I don’t know if I was being naïve, but they didn’t seem like bad people. They talked to me about art or they talked to me about school whenever they were passing. Sometimes I’d have conversations with them that lasted several minutes. When they were on work detail, they’d be in the hall with me for almost the whole time that I was there. I was intimidated when someone walked behind me while I was facing the mural. That was a little strange, but usually there was a guard at the desk at the end of the hall, so it never seemed too bad.

**thebridge**: Were they interested in your project? Did they want to know why you were there?

**FRED**: A lot of them wanted to know what the themes were. They had comments, mainly to show their interest in what I was doing rather than to give me criticism. They all wanted to know if I was an artist and I would just point at the wall. They would say, “For real?” [laughs] They wanted to know if I did tattoos. I guess that’s what’s big in there; they give each other tattoos with ballpoint pens.

**thebridge**: You mentioned in your Shea Scholar Program report that you were surprised to find so many young inmates. What was that like and how did it feel being an outsider looking in?

**FRED**: That’s a real tough place to be in. There were a few different times when I could hear inmates having conversations in the counselor’s office. There would be guys, grown men, on the phone bawling, talking about how they ruined their lives. I was there, but I would walk in and out, free as a bird. I got to go home. I got to go see the movies that inspired the posters that I was painting.

**thebridge**: You also mentioned in your report that you were surprised to see so many inmates that were younger than you. Can you elaborate on that?

**FRED**: I don’t know what I was expecting, but it was kind of a shock to see these kids in there. I have younger brothers and sisters and they were probably around their age. I saw a kid that I went to school with who recognized me and who is younger than me. It kind of felt like I was talking to him out on a street corner or passing him at school, but it was different because he was in there. We weren’t really friends in high school, just acquaintances, but he asked me how certain people were doing or if I had talked to certain people recently. It was different.

**thebridge**: Was that at all a conflict of interest for you? In other words, were you allowed to have conversations such as this with the inmates?

**FRED**: They didn’t tell me not to associate with them. Basically, if they were hanging around the hall and they were supposed to be somewhere after class, the guards would break up the crowd around me. I had a lot of encounters with different inmates, especially the work crew, because they were in the hall doing work. They were working right next to me.

**thebridge**: I know that you wrote in your presentation that you asked yourself, “What if I was not fortunate enough to go to college?” Was seeing your acquaintance from high school what sparked that question for you?

**FRED**: I think that anybody in school can either go on to college and get a job or do nothing and get into drugs and alcohol and make that their life. I guess everyone has that choice; it’s one I could have taken or anyone could have taken. I’m glad that I didn’t and that I finished school.

**thebridge**: What was the mentoring process like?

**FRED**: I got a lot of support from Dr. Smalley. He helped me secure my funding, get the right supplies, and solve delays I had in getting paints. Whenever I had a technical question, he was there for me. He made weekly visits. He would come down and go over the murals with me. He also helped me work with MCI. I had never dealt with an organization and there was a lot of bureaucracy.

**thebridge**: Did you feel like you were working under pressure?

**FRED**: For the Shea Scholarship there was a deadline to do a presentation to the committee. I was working right up until the week before, but I finished it right on time. Half of the project was designated as Shea Scholarship, and the other half was a directed study, so there was also a deadline on the directed study portion. I was always
aware that I was working under a deadline. The guards would sometimes joke with me that I wasn’t going to make it [laughs].

THE BRIDGE: You mentioned in your project presentation that you gained “immense satisfaction” from completing this project. How so?

FRED: It felt good to do something that was benefiting someone else. All the art projects I had done were in my own home. I’d never done a project like this before that was for an institution or directly for a group of people. All of the different guards and inmates that would say things to me made me feel like it was worthwhile that I was putting in all of the hours.

And put in the hours he did. But, unquestionably, this was much more than merely a matter of putting in hours. It was an opportunity for a student to reach new intellectual heights while also providing a valuable community service. From all accounts, these are two things Dr. Ellen Shea held very dear, and they are at the heart of the Shea Scholar Program’s mission. Dr. Shea would have been humbled to see the work Fred produced in her name, and she would have been thrilled to know of the doors opened by this particular project. MCI prison, for instance, has expressed an interest in having more BSC students paint murals in its facility, and Fred has been commissioned to paint a mural in his town library. For information about how a Shea Scholarship can help you explore your potential as a scholar or artist, contact Ms. Candice Maguire at 508-531-2695, or write to: cmaguire@bridgew.edu.
Bloom of Ice

Derek T. Hambly
Senior, Art Major
Three-Dimensional; Ceramic
15” x 12.5”

Featured on cover
Untitled

Chris Anderson

Senior, Art Major & Biochemistry Major
Painting; Acrylic on canvas
19” x 22”
Gift of Fire

Kylie Hirl

Junior, English Major
Painting; Acrylic and watercolor on canvas
16" x 28"
Invisible City: Maurilia

Mark Medeiros

Senior, Art Major
Digital Media; Adobe Photoshop
8” x 8”
Combed Vase

Derek T. Hambly
Senior, Art Major
Three-Dimensional; Ceramic
18" x 5.5"

Surface detail
Connected Place 12: WA and Midwest

Mary C. Lee
Graduate Student, Creative Arts M.A.T. Mixed-Media; Photo collage and acrylic on watercolor paper
9” x 11.25”
Realization

Seth Falconer
Senior, Art Major
Painting; Acrylic on wood panel
24” x 46”
Fragile

Keith Mistler

Junior, Art Major
Photography; Black and white
8” x 10”
He’s dead, underneath the agued coffin-lid,  
The static, blackened vault of Wakeby Pond.  
I heard through friends his dog deceived him once,  
Seducing him onto the ice at dawn.

Winter played her part, reassuring him  
The blanket, spun with winter’s threads of frost,  
Was safe. He trusted that maleficence,  
Who conceals in peaceful white, blackened rot.

Now the spring has rules which have not changed,  
The beauty here, the birds, trees, and brisk air  
Disguise the morbid truth of what occurred,  
His bloated, banished body lying still, out there.

The waves of saw-grass chill when thinking how  
He feeds them now, invigorates their growth.  
Dancing on their captive, mocking that they’ve won,  
They drown him once again in muck-draped root.

But wait – perhaps his sleep is not so bad  
On pebbled bed, with rush’s rooted spread.  
And when he wakes he’ll see the mingled sun,  
Distorted sky, and shadowed feet of swans.
I jumped, floating in midair for an instant before splashing into the warmth of the small murky lake. My arms and legs frantically pushed the water downwards as I squirmed my way back to the surface. When my face met the hot summer air, I breathed deeply, refilling my lungs before scrambling onto shore and waiting for words of approval.

“I thought you were gonna do a headfirst dive, you sissy,” cried my brother Jake. He was high above me, standing on the rocks that towered over Wilcott Lake. “You wimped out!”

I had. Rather than diving from thirty feet and risk landing on my back or, worse, doing a belly flop, I’d done a “pencil,” holding my arms and hands straight down against my sides and entering feet first. I did a lot of pencils. “But didn’t you see how straight I was?”

“Oh, give me a break, Dennis! You’re such a little baby. Let me show you how a real man jumps into the water,” scoffed Jake. Seconds later he was falling headfirst, his arms pointed out over his head in a perfect dive position. He cut the water gracefully, producing virtually no splash. I stood at the foot of the lake, envious of my older brother’s bravery and hurt by his barrage of insults. I waited for him to surface, water dripping from my hair as well as the red and blue nylon swimming trunks I wore, leaving dark spots on the dirt. All around me the songs of chirping birds and insects filled the air. I glanced up toward the trees, searching for a cardinal or a blue jay, but when nothing caught my interest I looked back at the now still water. Jake had entered it about fifteen seconds ago. He should have surfaced by now, but all I saw was my shadow, stretching far out in front of me.

“Jake?” I yelled, starting to worry. I took a step forward, allowing the water to wash away the dirt from my feet. I looked around, wondering if he had swum off to another area while planning to sneak up behind me and toss me in, as he had done many times before. As nice and warm as the water usually was, being pushed in against your will somehow took away from the refreshment. “Jake?” I yelled again, much louder this time. I moved further into the water, trying unsuccessfully to see beneath its gloomy surface; God only knew what lurked at the bottom. Sometimes I wished I had goggles to explore its lower levels, but they probably wouldn’t have helped me see too much, since the water was far from clear. But I didn’t need to actually see the dangers to know that they were there. Had our parents known that we were rock jumping at Wilcott, they would have been furious, especially with Jake.
“Jaaake!?” I was starting to get more nervous – I could hear it in my voice. A minute more had passed and he still hadn’t surfaced. I ran a few steps and then dove, heading toward the general area where he’d disappeared. I swam in a frenzy, trying to reach the bottom, but I couldn’t. The pond was rumored to be close to forty feet deep, but that could have been urban legend, as high school kids have a tendency to alter facts in instances where they can make themselves sound braver than they actually are. This was, after all, a place where kids Jake’s age usually hung out. Maybe it was forty feet deep, maybe it wasn’t. It didn’t really matter to me at that exact moment. What mattered was that I couldn’t reach the bottom and I was pretty certain my brother was down there somewhere.

Nearly out of breath, I swam to the surface and looked around once again. “Jaaaaaaake!?” I yelled, hysterical. “Where the hell are you!? I looked up to the rocks, which we had nicknamed “The Mountaintop,” a series of monstrous glacial deposits that had settled on top of each other. There was a dirt trail that ran around the outside of the lake and led up to the summit, but we always opted to climb the rocks. It was much faster than backtracking to the path. As soon as we wriggled out of the lake, we would start climbing. To get to the path, we would have had to cut through high grass and thorns, double back quite a ways and run the risk of being bitten by a tick or some other blood-thirsty insect or animal. I glanced at the path and then back to the mountain, half-expecting Jake to be suddenly sitting at its peak, smoking a cigarette while smirking at me arrogantly. He wasn’t. I dove back into the water.

Jake was three years my senior. I thought he was kind of cool, but I knew he was an asshole. He didn’t have many friends his age, probably because he was so hard to get along with. Following in his footsteps, I didn’t have many friends my age. The difference was that he could take his dejected adolescent angst out on me. Because I was so much smaller than him and had no younger brother to vent my frustrations on, all I could do was take it. Resigned to hang out with each other, we spent a lot of time at Wilcott Lake, which had become a favorite summer spot for both of us. The first time Jake brought me there I was about eleven. We’d ridden our bikes from our small split-level ranch about three-quarters of a mile away, and spent hours in the water that day before Jake taught me how to smoke my first cigarette.

Wilcott Lake was a popular place for a lot of kids from our town. There wasn’t anyone there on this particular day, however, and I was losing my mind trying to find Jake all alone. I forced myself down farther and farther. Over the years we had seen car tires, stray clothing, bicycles, and cases worth of broken beer bottles, all strewn about in the bank’s high grass. Underwater, I was reaching out aimlessly for anything that was anchored, anything that I could use to pull myself lower. My panic was working against me, and I once again ran out of breath. Lightheaded, I clawed my way back up to the surface, gasping for my life as well as my brother’s.

When my head poked through the water, I was met with a terrible hush and the sight of birds flying overhead in a V. “Jaaaaaaake!!” Fear wracked my brain and my muscles were beginning to spasm from their reckless use. It had been almost two minutes. I began to cry in absolute horror, bawling, screaming at the top of my lungs. I flopped in the water like a fish on the shore. I knew there was no way Jake could be playing a joke; even he wasn’t that cruel. My screams were agonizing, and if he was hiding in the trees listening to and watching me break down, I was going to kill him.

I inhaled deeply and dove under, my mind already flooding with guilt. I couldn’t help but think of the awful things that I’d done to Jake over the years, mostly in retaliation. Truth be told, at times he was a bad brother and sometimes I hated
him. A couple of years before, he pushed me off of my bike into the street, where I was barely missed by a gold Toyota Camry. He didn’t do this for any reason – I don’t think he was trying to kill me or anything – but he was just plain mean sometimes. When I got home later that night, I told my mother what had happened, and she relayed the message to my father when he got home from work. After a few cans of Budweiser, my dad had loosened his belt and whipped Jake all over our small house. I could hear Jake’s screams in my bedroom, where I lay on my bed, covering my head with my pillow. Although I was trying to block out my brother’s cries, I kind of felt like justice was being served. My dad got more violent than usual that night. He left permanent evidence of his onslaught on Jake’s back in a long curved scar where the buckle pin had slashed Jake’s young flesh. Whenever we would go jumping at Wilcott, I’d see that scar and feel guilty, even though I was the one who’d almost died that day.

There were times when Jake was protective of me, though. I remember my father taking out his aggression on my mother one particular evening after a long day of working construction because dinner was not on the table. He smelled like booze. He started to slap my mother around, and she squealed in pain. I remember that Jake wrapped an arm around my shoulders and led me back to my room, telling me to “shush” while pressing a finger up to his lips. He left me in my room and the next thing I remember was him yelling at my dad, telling him to leave my mother alone. Jake was an asshole, but Jake was brave. Jake was my brother.

My guilt soon turned to fear as I thought of facing my parents. Going to Wilcott was strictly prohibited. Whenever we went rock jumping there we would have to lie. It had always been a pretty easy thing to get away with, since there were plenty of other places in Drakesbridge where we could tell them we had been swimming. Most often we would say we’d gone to Frazier Pond, which was considered more kid-friendly, complete with docks and picnic areas. Wilcott, on the other hand, was infamous for its dangers. Bodies were rumored to have been found in the water over the years, but we dismissed the hype surrounding these stories as parental propaganda meant to scare us away. When people in neighboring towns were abducted or disappeared, which happened very rarely in our quiet county, our parents always mentioned Wilcott as somewhere the body might possibly turn up. That did not deter us. We suspected Wilcott of being less than safe, but it had big scary rocks to jump off. How could we stay away?

I swam underwater, making my way over to the eastern side of the lake about twenty yards from where Jake had entered. Groping under the water blindly, my hand touched something slimy – a branch! I grabbed hold of it, using it to pull myself further into the abyss, terrified of what I would find. I followed the branch as far as I could before deciding to go up for one last mouthful of air. I caught my breath and prepared to go under again, determined to find my brother. The clock was ticking. If I could find him, there might still be some time to save him. In retrospect, I really don’t think that I could have saved him at that point; he would have been underwater for maybe three minutes by then and I didn’t have any CPR training. There was no one around to help, either. Instead of the voices of passersby, all I heard were the peaceful sounds of nature, oblivious to my terror. With no ability to resuscitate him and no way to get him to a hospital, I would’ve had to carry him three quarters of a mile to our house. By the time I had done this, he would surely have been dead.

I swam down to where I’d found the branch, but this time my hands grabbed something new, and even slimier. It was thicker as well. I wrestled with my new find until one of my shoulders was brushed by something that felt like seaweed. My nervous hands dropped the appendage and seized their new target, discovering
that it wasn’t seaweed that had stroked my shoulder, but human hair, bobbing from a lifeless head.

Instantly my mind filled with images of Jake’s funeral. There was a coffin in a corner of a dark room, inside of which was my brother’s body, his face bloated, plastic, fake. He was wearing a handsome black suit, probably more expensive than any suit either of us had ever worn. My mother was sitting in the first pew, her veiled face wet from crying and red from whiskey. She was wearing a black dress with a bright red rose pinned on her breast, and she dabbed her pale green eyes with a spotless white handkerchief, wiping at an endless stream of tears. Next to her sat my father, who looked so incredibly frightening that, years later, I still get scared when I think about it. My father shook someone’s hand and then lowered his head in genuine sorrow, furrowing his brow to a point where he, my abusive alcoholic father, was himself on the verge of tears. To my father’s right was a boy, also in a suit. Anyone would be able to see the resemblance between the lifeless young man in the box and the younger boy standing by his parents. Despite the black eye (punishment for jumping at Wilcott and for getting my brother killed), I was Jake’s spitting image.

I reached my left arm under the armpit of the limp corpse. I pulled as hard as I could, but at first the body wouldn’t move. I had been underwater for probably close to a minute, but I was not going up for air without Jake. I continued to wrestle the forces bogging the body down, shaking it violently in the dark muddy water, trying to set it free. I let go and followed its legs down to where they were caught in a semi-rusted chain wrapped around its ankles. I grappled with the chain until I finally pulled first one leg loose, and then the other. I swam with the body to the surface.

I pulled the corpse by its arms until it was a few feet from the water’s edge, and then it slipped from my grip and landed face down on the shore. Exhausted, I keeled over, trying to catch my breath, tears flowing steadily from my eyes. My chest heaved in and out, in and out, in and out. I climbed back to my feet and stood over the body, examining it, taking a second glance at the swimming trunks, which looked a darker blue than what I’d remembered them being. The body itself was also blue – I was amazed and horrified at how quickly he’d been transformed.

Heartbroken, I dropped to my knees once more and slipped one hand under the corpse’s right shoulder and my other hand under its belly, working with all my might to flip it onto its back. When I successfully rolled the body over, momentum carried me, and I collapsed on top of it, exhausted and unsure about what to do next. Gathering every memory I could of medical television shows, I jumped off of the body, prepared to beat some life back into its chest. It was then that I got a good look at the corpse’s face, which, unlike my brother’s, was covered with dark brown facial hair.

Terrified, I leapt back, gasping.

I suddenly realized the body’s swimming trunks were not swimming trunks at all, but boxer shorts. The man was about the same size as my brother, but his hair was lighter, with a reddish hue that I had not noticed while pulling him to the shore. His ankles were indented and torn where the chains had held him, and this was what I was staring at when I heard rustling in the nearby brush.

“Boooooo!” Jake yelled, laughing contemptuously while springing out behind me. “I’ve been listening to you cry and whine like a little fairy for the past five minutes. Were you afraid I drowned? When the hell are you finally gonna grow up and be a man, Dennis? You’re such a little puss...whoa!” Jake stopped short. “What the hell is that?” he asked. He had reached a vantage point where he could clearly see what I had pulled out of the water. I could feel him peering over my shoulder. All of my anger, fear, guilt and
Still Life #1

Keith Mistler
Junior, Art Major
Photography; Black and white
8” x 10”
I had never been called a white honky bitch before, and never, ever, had I called anyone a nigger. That all changed in August, 1994.

In the windowless room where it occurred, two gray, metal folding chairs were strategically placed facing each other. Even though it was a blazing hot summer day, the metal chair sent frosty ripples up my spine. Roscoe, my co-worker whom I had only just met, sat on the edge of his seat forcing our knees to touch. All I really wanted to do was sit with my staff friend, Angela, across the room, but we were not allowed to pick our partners. Even though the facilitator stated the pairs were chosen at random, I doubted it was true. Two by two, our diverse staff was broken up into pairs of different races and genders. Soon, we would be pushed far out of our comfort zones and subjected to organized name-calling of the worst kind.

I had recently been hired to work for a new organization called “City Year, Rhode Island.” All staff were required to attend diversity training that promised to enhance job performance. The lofty mission of City Year was to work with young people (ages 17-24) breaking down social barriers, inspiring citizens to civic action, developing new leaders for the common good, and building a better community in low-income urban neighborhoods in Rhode Island through community service. No one warned me that the training would be so emotionally grueling.

The point of this advanced training was to “Empty Your File Folder.” The facilitator stressed that by the verbal action of forcing deep-rooted physical observational barriers to the surface, we would begin to see real people and issues and stop judging people by their color or gender. Centuries of oppression could not be erased in one training session, but perhaps after admitting what could be stored inside and never spoken, we could begin to understand the extent of prejudice. It was time to push uncomfortable dialog forward, delete it from our memory banks, and start the conversations needed to make change in our society. As staff, it was important for us to practice these values if we were going to be good role models working with the young people in our program. These concepts were very new and a little scary. I began to squirm.

“Chair A” would have fifteen seconds to come up with general names or labels to describe the person sitting merely inches across from them in “Chair B.” “Chair B” would encourage the fast un rehearsal tempo by quickly saying the word “Go” in between names to encourage the
subconscious exit of taboo thoughts. After the measured amount of time, the timekeeper would shout, “Stop!” Quickly, the pair would swap seats and reverse the process, sitting with knees touching. The rotations would last three horrific minutes.

In the first rotation, I accessed all the names that I thought were appropriate to say out loud: “Blackie, Dick, Dog, Coon…” Roscoe, a seasoned, older African American youth worker, appeared more comfortable coming up with names that could describe my race and gender: “Honey, Babe, Bitch, Blondie…Whitie, Ho, Sweet Meat, Sugar Momma, Shrew, Whore…” I became angry and fired back names like “Uncle Tom, Sambo, Porch Monkey, and Jigga Bo…” Where were these names that were flying out of my mouth coming from? My struggle to let go of political correctness was making me physically anxious, sick and flushed. My hands were sweaty and shaking. Our bodies created an electrifying tension that felt like we were one elastic band, wound very tightly, ready to snap. After three long minutes, finally surrendering from my lips, with a quick shout, I said the word “Nigger.” It was over. Roscoe was very proud of me and, surprisingly, not offended.

Thankfully, there was plenty of time for reflection with the rest of the staff. Everyone was either crying or hugging. The temperature in the room had risen by thirty degrees. Roscoe and I hugged for what seemed like hours, for previous injustices and for the serious work left to do. I do not recommend trying this at home in an uncontrolled setting without serious time to reflect and debrief. Roscoe admitted that some of the other words like “Jigga Bo” and “Sambo” were more hurtful to him than the dreaded “N” word. He disclosed that he had built up a personal force field years before to protect the fragile side of himself. I felt embarrassed, shameful, evil, vile, and disgusting, but a shade braver for speaking out.

As a child, growing up outside Newark, New Jersey in the 1960’s, I had been taught at an early age by my parents the importance of being “color blind.” “Good girls” did not call people names; that was that. Derogatory comments were silently slinking around corners. There were whispers and murmurs coming from the dinner table, family picnics, the grocery store and even the television. I did not understand what I was hearing, but unfortunately it would loom as a permanent fixture in the darkness of my subconscious thoughts. The rule was this: if you’d thought it, it was not like saying it.

From cradle to grave, everyone absorbs stereotypes from the environment around him or her. Family upbringing, friendships, peer groups, media, and even music have a lasting effect on what we store in our brain or internal file folder. Family values and select role models influence how we use or lose this information. I had just met Roscoe, but he helped me stare down my prejudices. He helped me surrender to the process of becoming a better me.
I hold Jamie in my arms. I carry her as if I am carrying a bag filled with bones, because that’s what she is. She barely fills my arms; her head rests on my shoulder. At her bedside, I pause and deeply inhale. She smells like a baby, freshly washed and powdered. I gently kiss her head and her soft, wispy blond hair sticks to my lip gloss. I lay her down in her bed, but her hair remains on my lips. Pulling it off, I let it go and watch it drift to the floor. I wonder if her body would fall the same way.

The floors are slightly padded, like those in a fun house, and I do not hear the nurse walk up behind me. She inserts a new IV line, checks Jamie’s vital signs, and sighs. As she turns to walk away, our eyes meet. It’s not good, her eyes tell me, and now I sigh. She leaves as quietly as she came.

Sitting at the foot of Jamie’s bed, I stare out into the hall. This wing of the hospital has a circus theme. Elephants, acrobats, tigers, and clowns dance along the walls of the long corridor. The colors are bright and gay, totally unfitting for the intensive care unit of a hospital. There is a large clown on the wall, staring right back at me, smiling. I get up and shut the door.

I hold Jamie’s hand in mine. With my other hand, I gently trace her ice blue veins. They are easy to see, because her skin is transparent. I stare at her fingers and my eyes follow the veins winding through her palm.

I stop at her wrist, momentarily losing sight of her veins under layers of scar tissue and stitches. I pause to reflect upon the intense pain and confusion needed to cause such wounds. I almost smile as I also think of the relief the pain brings. How ironic.

I finish tracing her vein up to her shoulder and stop. Her bones protrude to a point where I cannot bear to touch them. It seems as if even the faintest contact will tear her transparent skin, exposing the bone.

I look at the clock. It’s six-thirty and visiting hours don’t end until ten. Even though I am bored, I stay because I cannot leave. Jamie doesn’t like to be alone. Neither do I.

I get up and pull my laptop out of my bag. I work on my homework during times like these when I’m here and Jamie is asleep. My task is to write an essay about a significant event that has happened in my life. I turn my laptop on and begin to type. Many times I start to write something, only to realize it is a lie. I delete it and stare at an empty screen in frustration. How can I write about something I have spent so many years ignoring? How can I tell the truth about something I have spent so many years lying about? I look at Jamie, her five-foot-seven, eighty-two-pound body alive only because of the machines that are breathing for her, and suddenly I know where to start.

We grew up early. We understood things most kids our age didn’t. We also didn’t understand most of the things kids our age did. There was never a Santa Claus, a Tooth Fairy, or a Peter Pan. We laughed at the stupidity of the other children for believing such things. Drugs, sex, alcohol, money; we knew more about those topics than most adults do. We attended hotel parties where
we’d sit and watch TV while our parents and their friends snorted K-meth, going off into a world that didn’t involve us. We’d spend the summers at my uncle’s beach house, from which he distributed enormous amounts of heroin. He was rich because of it, and would guiltily supply us with anything we wanted: life-size dolls, mansion doll houses, bikes, electronic toys, anything. Anything, that is, but three meals a day, bedtime stories, piggyback rides, kisses and hugs, and all the other things little girls need to feel loved.

Jamie had her first heroin trip the summer of fourth grade while at my uncle’s beach house. We were out near the water, pretending we were ice skaters gliding on ice, sliding our feet along the sand, giggling as we performed amazing twirls and jumps. The air was still, silent and heavy, fully saturated with precipitation. We would look up at the sky, watching the monstrous black clouds and waiting for them to release all the rain they so greedily held back from us. We continued to skate along the sand, imagining ourselves performing in front of a great audience.

“Ouch!” Jamie screamed as she slid her bare foot right into a needle left on the shore. She fell to the ground whimpering. I dropped down beside her, and we held each other, scared, knowing that needles could cause scary things to happen to people. At that very moment the sky opened up and dumped its contents upon us. We sat there drenched, holding each other and crying. I held her until her eyes became as dark as the clouds and her body trembled. Then I laid her down and got up and ran. I ran down the beach, right past my uncle’s place, and up his long dirt road until I came to another house. I went straight up to the door and screamed for help.

Soon after Jamie left the hospital, a lady in a yellow dress came to my house and took us away. Several policemen were with her, and they said that we were going to get new homes, because ours was not safe. I was placed in the care of my two loving grandparents, while Jamie was placed with her alcoholic aunt, one hour away from me. While I went to Disneyland, Jamie stayed at home alone. While I received home-cooked meals every night, she ate peanut butter sandwiches. I learned to love and to trust. Jamie learned to survive by stealing, lying, and hating. I experienced happiness and a solid sense of security while my friend further lost herself.

For the next seven years, we did not see each other. Jamie’s aunt was miserable, and wanted everyone around her to feel the same way. Jamie was not allowed to visit me; we were only permitted to talk once a week by telephone. And we did, every Tuesday for the next few years. However, over time the phone calls dwindled and eventually stopped. We drifted apart as I became more interested in sports and school while Jamie became more interested in her gang.

When I was in my junior year of high school, Jamie’s aunt went to jail. Jamie was placed with a foster family in my town and began attending the same school as me. Occasionally I saw her and said, “Hi,” but she never replied. I was the captain of my field hockey team, president of the math club, dating the varsity football captain, and in fierce competition for the rank of valedictorian of my class. I thought I was everything she hated. Later, she told me I was everything she wanted to be.

One day after lunch, I had gone to the bathroom to clean a stain off my new shirt. As
I walked in, I heard someone puking. I froze. I silently stood there while the toilet flushed. The toilet paper dispenser ratted, and then I heard a nose being blown. The door opened and Jamie walked out. She glared at me as she washed her hands. As she coldly turned her back to me and stepped into the hall, my heart broke.

I skipped the rest of my classes that day and sat on the ground against the driver's side of Jamie's 1987 Toyota. Mentally, I rehearsed the things I wanted to say. I'd had an eating disorder throughout junior high, and I knew the pain involved. I wanted to say something to her, but I also knew that it was impossible to lecture anyone with an eating disorder about healthy eating habits. My mind went numb from hurt, and my body went numb from the cold March winds.

"Bitch," Jamie grunted as she crouched down to my level, "are you gonna move so I can leave this hellhole, or am I gonna have to move you?"

I looked at her, startled, and began to cry. I put my head down on my knees and sobbed. I cried harder than I ever had before, for us as children and for us now.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" she asked as she sat down and lit up another cigarette. I just kept crying and crying as she sat there looking at me and smoking cigarette after cigarette.

"Let's go," I sniffled as I suddenly lifted up my head.

"Where?"

"To my house."

"Why the hell would I go there with you?"

"Dinner. Turkey. Potatoes...carrots..." I sniffled.

"I'll meet you there. I need to get cigarettes."

"Sure," I replied, not expecting her to show up.

At home, I washed up and sat down for a wonderful grandma-style turkey dinner with the works.

"How was your day, Pumpkin?" my grandfather asked as he tweaked my nose.

"Hey!" I playfully and ritually replied, "It was great!"

After dinner and warm strawberry tarts, I headed upstairs to my bedroom. I collapsed on my bed, emotionally exhausted from the day's events, and fell into a restless sleep.

I woke up at eleven to the delicious smell of turkey. I was unable to go back to sleep, so I slipped into my slippers and shuffled my way downstairs. I walked into the kitchen and stopped dead in my tracks. There sat Jamie, pink highlighted hair, black trench coat, short miniskirt, gothic makeup and all, sitting at the kitchen table, bent over her plate, stuffing her face with food. My grandmother stood at the stove warming up gravy with her back to the door. Neither of them seemed to notice me until I pretended to cough.

"Dear, do you want some tea?" my grandmother asked me, still facing the stove. I ignored the question and sat down at the table.

"Why are you here?" I rudely asked Jamie.

Stuffing a biscuit into her mouth, Jamie replied, "You invited me for dinner, didn't you?"
Jamie moved in the next week. Now that she was seventeen, she declared herself as an independent and was able to live with us, something she so desperately wanted to do seven years ago after that scary heroin trip. My grandparents took her in, acting as if she had been there all along. Over the next few years, we slowly regained our friendship, becoming inseparable once again.

To this day, I am still amazed at the patience my grandmother had with us, especially Jamie. Jamie crashed her car while driving drunk on the first day she moved in with us. Two weeks later, she crashed my grandfather’s Volvo. She cut and burnt herself, drank several cups of bleach as a suicide attempt, shoplifted, stole money from my grandfather, and dropped out of school. Worst of all, she suffered from anorexia. She would not eat for days. She’d starve herself until she passed out and wound up in the hospital. There they would pump her body full of fluids containing the nutrients essential to her survival. I’d sit by her bedside, watching the fluids travel through the IV lines into her chest and arms. I would watch as her gray skin turned pink again over the course of the day. The pinker her skin got, the warmer it felt, and the more hope I had for her to recover.

Seventeen times, she ended up in the hospital due to starvation. Seventeen times, she promised to admit herself to an eating disorder recovery clinic. Seventeen times, she relapsed. Sixteen times, I had faith in her to improve. This time I know better. Jamie is here to die. This is what she wanted all along, and she will finally get her way.

Her organs have shut down. She is on life support; she has machines living and breathing for her. Her skin is a grayish white, the color of cement. She has lost most of the hair on her head, yet her body has grown a thin layer of hair all over as a last feeble chance to save itself. It’s been a ten-year battle between Jamie and herself, a fight between her mind and body. Mentally, she won. Physically, she lost.

As I’m typing, I am debating over whether or not I should stop to go gather Jamie up in my arms and hold her like I always do, or finish my paper. When I hold her, I whisper words of encouragement into her ear. I tell her how she will get better, how everything will get better. I also whisper my dreams to her, about how I wish our futures will be: we will be each other’s maids of honor, we will get pregnant at the same time, and our children will play with each other all the time, just like we did. At this very moment, as I’m typing this sentence, I realize these things will never happen.

Jamie’s aunt, my grandparents, and the doctors are discussing the possibility of taking Jamie off of life support. My grandparents want to wait another week, with high hopes that Jamie might improve. She won’t though. She is already gone. I know that for a fact, because a month ago, when she was first placed on the life support system, a part of me died with her. I stop typing and close my laptop before rising to kiss Jamie on the top of her head. One last time, I will inhale deeply and smell the sweet smell of baby powder and oils, and then I will walk out of Jamie’s room, out of the hospital, and right to the T station. I will not come back here again. There is no need to.
Not One Of Us

Diana Gallo
Senior, English Major
Nonfiction

“I’ve got friends in low places…” Garth Brooks sang every Thursday night at Julio’s Cafe. As the song played, I looked around the crowded, sweltering room. I found my friends, the same group of girls with whom I’d been attending this bar in Bridgewater for four years. We all grasped arms and swayed back and forth, singing along like always. The DJ, an extended part of our little family, bobbed along to the music as well. How much fun we all have, I thought as I looked at each face. We loved each other so much; I could feel it as we stood there.

My hair was down and matted to my forehead. I wanted to put it up badly. About halfway through the song, I began to look for my jacket and, more specifically, my hair elastic. I checked my pants pockets, my pocketbook, and my jacket pockets once I found my jacket. No luck. I was frustrated. I was asking the DJ if he’d seen “my hair thing” when I heard a scream. Someone asked me what had happened. “It’s probably another drunken fight,” I responded, and walked outside.

It was not a drunken fight. There was chaos to my right and left, people screaming everywhere. Someone was lying in front of me crying.

“The car just swiped me; I can’t feel my legs.” This girl’s words echoed in my ears. I wondered where the car was that she was talking about. A crowd of people formed. My best friend appeared at my side. I looked back at the girl. My hands started shaking first, then my whole body, then the tears started. My hands flew over my mouth and all I could utter was, “Oh my God.”

There she lay, helpless and still. My whole body shook harder. “Who is it?” I asked.

A friend of mine took my arm and replied, “It’s not one of us.”
And there I stood, staring at this stranger.

The cops flew down the street and onto the scene. Ambulances followed quickly after. The EMTs ran out and stood over her, assessing the situation, looking at one another. “Why aren’t they doing anything?” I asked no one in particular. An EMT began CPR as we all looked on. My best friend, Casey, held onto my arm, screaming. I hugged her, and kept repeating, “Don’t look.” It was weird how I did; I didn’t want to, but I couldn’t help it. I just wanted to see the slightest movement or breath, but there was nothing. The EMTs stopped the CPR. The cries of the crowd grew louder. I held onto Casey tighter, crying. “I love you,” I said to her. A car drove up and my friends and I piled in, still crying. We arrived back at our apartment and sat in silence. Finally, someone said, “I just hope she’s okay.” We knew she wasn’t.

The next morning it all seemed like a dream. I was still shaking, maybe from what I had witnessed. I’m still not sure. I thought about that little hair elastic that had made me so mad the night before, something so trivial. I turned on the television. The accident was on the news; I cringed at every word. I had to turn it off. “It was true,” I said to myself. “It did happen.” I looked at my friends. I wanted to apologize for what they had just seen, for what I had witnessed. I looked at them and thought about how much I loved them. I would not be able to live with any of them gone from my life. How lucky we were that it was not one of us. But then I thought about it some more. Our college lost a student. Co-eds lost a roommate, their best friend. Parents lost their child. She was one of us.

Dedicated to the memory of Jacqueline Nilsson.
I don’t want to get out of bed.
The covers are heavy and warm.
My nose is cool; the floor will be colder.
But I roll out grumbling to myself.
  Whose idea was this hockey, anyway?
My bare feet curl on cold wood.
Around the corner, I squint at the night light.
I poke the bump under the red quilt.
  “Time for hockey. Get up.”
Little hands poke out, arms stretch.
Above, a blue bump sits right up, ready to go.
Stepping down stairs one by one, we hold the railing.
More stretching, then we drag out heavy bags. Loosen the
drawstrings.
A faint odor of boy rises.
We sort the equipment in the dark.
Each piece in place.
Shin guards, cup, shoulder pads, straps, struggling,
Yank a sweatshirt over all.
On top, red jerseys. Number 7, then 9.
Time to leave.
Bags and sticks.
Grab apples, go.
We step onto the dark deck
  And there he is.
Orion.
I’m brought up short
I bump into the child
in front of me, he into the next
We tilt up and gaze
at the hunter
the belt bright – three across
bow and quiver proud
The stars like holes to a great light
We stand close, not touching
the air between us vibrates
  What matters in the world?
We stop and breathe frost
into our private show.
Puzzled

Sean Leary

Senior, Art Education Major & Secondary Education Major
Drawing: Charcoal, white chalk, newsprint paper, foam core board
20 pieces totalling 48.5” x 35”
Misled

Daniel Coyne
Junior, Art Major
Photography; Digital
8” x 10”
Cold shocked my body as I entered the front door; the frigid January air was slowly seeping into our old, poorly insulated house that, according to our neighbor, once served as a chicken coop. I juggled my backpack and my twenty-one-month-old son, Jacob, as I walked down the hallway into my darkened bedroom. As I turned on the light, I walked over to the king-sized bed and placed both my son and my backpack onto it. I unzipped Jacob’s bulky, blue jacket and then put him on the floor, where he proceeded to stagger off down the hallway and into his Sesame Street playroom. It had taken quite a bit of time, but he loved the larger-than-life characters I had painted on the walls. He was often mesmerized by the primary colors and the letters and numbers that served as a border above Elmo and Cookie Monster. I turned on the DVD player and before long he was absorbed in one of his Baby Einstein movies, captivated by the classical music and the accompanying pictures. Once he was settled, I took a moment to return to my bedroom and change into some relaxing clothes. I looked down at my bulging stomach and knew that the time for maternity garments had truly arrived. I rubbed my belly, anticipating the news of the next day. It was finally that time; we would be learning if we were having a girl or a boy. I sat on the edge of my bed, staring at the beige wall and smiling as I tried to picture the face of my child growing inside of me.

After changing into my soft, black velour jogging pants and my husband’s oversized gray Nike sweatshirt, I noticed the red light rapidly flashing on my answering machine. I walked to the small wooden nightstand on the right of my bed and reached down to press the play button.

“This message is for Amy Hill. This is Melissa from Dr. Kotch’s office. Could you please give Dr. Kotch a call when you get home this evening? Thank you.”

For a brief moment, my body was wracked with nervousness, but I quickly brushed this feeling aside, realizing that she must be calling about the ultrasound I had scheduled for the next day. Besides, my first pregnancy had progressed quite normally, so there was no need to worry. I picked up the cordless telephone and walked back down the hallway, boards creaking with every step, and plopped down on the black futon that was in Jacob’s playroom. While he sat playing on the floor, I dialed the number to Dr. Kotch’s office. I reached her answering service and was informed that she was with a patient and would get back to me when she was finished. I hung up the telephone and sat motionless on the couch in utter exhaustion, watching my
lively boy playing with his wooden blocks. I remember thinking how much easier my first pregnancy was. I was always able to come home and lay down in bed and rest. Now I had a child to care for and that took precedence over my lethargy.

It was not long before I heard the squeaking of the back door that led into the kitchen and knew that my husband was home from work. I heard the stamping of his feet as he removed excess snow from his shoes, followed by a loud thud as he tossed his briefcase into the hall closet. He yelled, “I’m home,” as if we had missed the racket. A moment passed and his imposing 6’2” frame appeared in the doorway, leaning against the doorjamb, holding a can of Diet Coke. Jacob looked up from his blocks and his face burst into a grin. He stumbled onto his chubby feet and quickly toddled over to his father. Mark scooped him up into his arms, hugged him, and then they began their ritual tickle fight. It was not long before they were both rolling around on the floor, hysterically laughing. It was always a great moment – our special family time that we shared with our son and the first chance we had to sit down and discuss the events of the day.

After I finished hearing about the minor tragedies that Mark avoided at work, the telephone rang. I had been so caught up with listening to Mark’s story that I had not had a chance to tell him about the phone call from Dr. Kotch.

“Hello,” I happily answered.

“Hi, Amy, it’s Dr. Kotch,” she stated in an unusually monotone voice. I had been seeing Dr. Kotch for the past five months, and in that time I had always found her to be quite jovial.

“Hi, Dr. Kotch. What can I do for you?”

“Amy, I just received the results of your AFB test.” I had taken an alpha-fetoprotein screening test at my last monthly check-up when I hit my sixteenth week of pregnancy. This test measures the mother’s blood and calculates the risks of genetic defects in unborn children. “I am concerned because the test results indicate that the baby is not developing properly. It appears that the fetus has developed only to about the tenth week. I don’t want to alarm you, but we won’t know for sure until you undergo a level two ultrasound that will give us a more accurate picture.”

With my eyes immediately welling up with tears and my throat quivering, I looked at my husband. I was trying with all of my effort to remain calm and avoid a sobbing outburst, but he could tell by my facial expression that something was wrong. He stopped wrestling with Jacob and sat motionless, a statue in the middle of the playroom.

“Dr. Kotch, please be honest with me,” I was able to quietly utter as I stood up and walked out of the playroom.

“The test results reveal a one in two chance that your child has a genetic disorder known as Trisomy 18. If this is confirmed, it is most likely that you will not be able to carry to term.”

Trisomy 18, as I later found out, is a chromosomal abnormality which affects 1 in 3,000 babies. Affected babies are born with “an extra copy of chromosome 18,” which results in mental retardation, grave heart problems, and severe birth defects, including fused extremities, abnormal facial features, and cleft palates. Ninety-five percent of the fetuses diagnosed die while in the embryonic or fetal stage and only five to ten percent survive beyond the first year of life.

I don’t remember much of the remaining conversation, except that I wrote down that I was expected at South Shore Hospital the next morning for further testing. As I hung up the phone, my body began to shake under the weight of my sobbing. Mark, who had followed me out to the kitchen, grabbed me in fear that I would fall to the ground. I tried to explain, but all he could do was hold me as my tears began to soak his shirt. I was utterly devastated, but feeling his collapse into sorrow was even more unbearable. He had always been a source of strength, the type of person
you imagine as too tough to cry. But now, with the life-altering news, he was reduced to tears. We stood in the middle of the kitchen clutching each other for some type of hope. Because of our commotion, Jacob came scampering to us out of his playroom. We bent down and held him, crying hysterically under the shadow of our impending loss. Our lives had been completely turned upside down through the course of one relatively short telephone call.

I tried to pull myself together because I could see that my erratic behavior was frightening my young son. But I just could not regain control. We decided that it would be best if Jacob stayed with my parents for the night, so I quickly threw some clothes in his Thomas the Tank Engine backpack and Mark whisked him out the door. As he was pulling out of the driveway, I called my mother to let her know they were on the way. The news was so fresh that I could not even begin discussing it with her. Perhaps if I didn't talk about it, it would not be real. Either way, Mark was left with the difficult task of breaking the news to my parents.

When I hung up the telephone, I ran to my room, curled up on the bed, and began sobbing again. I could not stop. I was choking on the tears as Dr. Kotch's words replayed in my mind. I felt helpless; the only thing that I could do to stop the tears was to find out more information about Trisomy 18. I got out of bed, went into the office and turned on the computer. I began researching the disorder and, to my surprise, found many websites. Most of the information could be summarized in one statement: the fetus was not compatible with life. I somberly logged off and returned to my room, feeling even worse than before. I fell back into bed and, as I pulled the comforter over my head, the flow of tears erupted once again. I laid there in the dark, oblivious to the world and the time that passed. When Mark returned, I did not have the strength to get out of bed; my crying had left me physically exhausted. We ended up just laying there, hardly speaking about the thoughts that were weighing heavily on our minds. I recited many prayers during that long, sleepless night, often rubbing my belly and promising God I would be a better Catholic as long as my baby was okay. At some point I must have drifted off because I woke up around 3:00 a.m. and, when I turned over, I noticed that Mark was missing. I stumbled out of bed and walked toward the dimly lit kitchen. There he was, bent over the tile floor, scraping out the old grout.

"Hey, what are you doing up?" Mark questioned as he saw me approaching.

"I couldn't sleep."

"Me either. My mind kept racing, so I had to do something to keep myself busy. I just needed to stop thinking."

We had been planning to re-grout the kitchen floor because the light color we had originally chosen was becoming stained. I guess we never thought that the baby would be what propelled us into taking action. I picked up a small instrument and joined in the mind-numbing work. For the moment, it seemed to help.

The gloomy night was replaced by a bitter, melancholy morning. We prepared to leave for the appointment with very few words. The ride to the hospital was not much better. I sat in the passenger seat, staring out the frosted window at the passing buildings and the dirty snow-banks along Route 18. After about twenty minutes, we arrived at the main entrance to South Shore Hospital and quickly parked the car. We entered the hospital and headed up to the ultrasound imaging unit on the second floor. We checked in at the front desk and were instructed to sit in the sparsely decorated waiting room. I stared ahead at the white wall and concentrated on the ticking hands of the clock.

Before we were taken in for the ultrasound, we had to meet with a genetic counselor. We were brought into a small office and seated on a sofa. We ended up speaking with the counselor for at least twenty minutes, but the only thing I remember was that she
said, “This is very rare” and “You will be able to have other children.” I know she gave us more information, but I just sat there trying to keep myself composed. It seemed as if she was already sure that there was something wrong with the baby. I could not contain my emotions, so I bowed my head and tried to brush the tears away with my left hand. In that same moment, Mark took my right hand and, with the slightest squeeze, I felt safe. I turned to look at him; his face was streaked with tears. I laid my head down on his left shoulder.

The counselor left us alone while we waited to be called for the ultrasound. We sat in silence until the nurse returned to retrieve us. My hope was diminishing with every tick of the clock. We walked down the hall into a darkened room and noticed that it had just one hospital bed and an ultrasound machine with a large monitor and a computer-like keyboard. The nurse asked me to lie down on the bed and pull up my shirt to expose my belly. She placed a warm gel on my stomach and then began to move a small microphone-like device around to capture a picture. We were able to see a small image, and for the first time in about twenty-four hours, I was able to smile.

The nurse finished up after just a few minutes and abruptly left to get a doctor. It was not long before Dr. Achilles, a stout man with a full head of dark brown hair and a slightly graying beard, entered the room. As he began to speak, his thick Greek accent echoed around the room. Even though it was the first time we had met him, he made us feel as if we had known him forever. He moved over to the computer, and as he sat down he explained that he had to take a look at the films the technician had captured, as well as take a peek at my belly for himself. I figured that this was normal considering he was the head of the department. However, as he prepared to take a look, he turned the monitor toward himself, so I could no longer see the baby. I began to get nervous while I waited for him to speak.

“Well,” he said in his husky voice, “I’m afraid that the news is not good.”

He proceeded to explain that the baby appeared to have stopped developing at the week-nine mark, and there were noticeable problems with the facial formation. He also revealed that the legs were not developing properly and for some reason the bones appeared to be broken. As he pointed these things out, I began to cry again. I didn’t know how much longer my body could physically deal with all of the emotional breakdowns. He did tell us that the only way to be 100% sure was to undergo an amniocentesis. This test is done in conjunction with an ultrasound. Using the ultrasound as a guide, a hollow needle is inserted into the mother’s abdomen and retrieves a small amount of amniotic fluid that surrounds the baby. During this procedure, there is a chance of injury to the baby and miscarriage, but in this instance we knew that it was a risk we needed to take.

The test, although unpleasant, was over quickly. Dr. Achilles told us that he firmly believed that the results would, unfortunately, confirm the Trisomy 18 diagnosis. We left the hospital with little hope and headed toward my parents’ house to pick up Jacob. When we arrived, Mark took my hand as we walked up the steep, snow-covered driveway. I took a deep breath as I approached my anxious parents, who were waiting at the back door. We just shook our heads as we entered the kitchen, and they knew that the news was not what we had hoped for. We all stood there hugging one another until Mark and I filled them in on the information that had been given to us. But the burning question of “What happens next?” loomed in the air.

The doctors had told me that I would most likely not be able to carry to term and, if I did, the baby would not survive. Although they were not allowed to tell me what to do, I sensed the direction that they thought was best. Having been raised Catholic, abortion was something that I have always been strongly against. But here I was, faced with this decision and questioning all of my beliefs. Mark,
my mother, and my father all said that I should not put myself through months of agony and the pains of childbirth, but I still was not convinced that I could go through with it.

The next couple of days passed slowly as I waited for the test results. I tried to keep my mind off the situation by preparing lesson plans for my students and grading papers. During this time, I was feeling very crampy, but according to the doctor, this was a common side effect of the amniocentesis. I was lost in thought and could not communicate with the outside world. Mark was the only person I could let in. He understood my pain. I avoided phone calls, especially from my sister, who was also pregnant at the time. Kerri was my best friend, and I was happy for her, but I just could not talk to her about this. I knew in her mind she would be questioning her own pregnancy, and I honestly did not have the strength to reassure her that she and her baby would be fine.

About three days after the test, we finally heard back from Dr. Kotch. I was resting on the couch in the living room and Mark was feeding Jacob when the phone rang. Dr. Kotch explained that the results of the amniocentesis confirmed the diagnosis of Trisomy 18. She discussed a few of the options with me, including abortion, and then gave me the number of a specialist for high-risk pregnancies. Dr. Ralston, a perinatologist at New England Medical Center in Boston, would now be taking over my case. After I hung up with Dr. Kotch, I called Dr. Ralston. He was very kind on the telephone and reassured me that in the future my husband and I would be able to have a healthy child. He said this was not a hereditary disease; unfortunately, it just happens sometimes. His very down-to-earth style made him easy to confide in, even when he discussed natural birth versus abortion. Maybe it was because he was a stranger but, either way, he was the only person besides Mark that I felt comfortable talking to. He told me that it was my decision, but he wanted me to know that if the baby were to survive in utero for nine months, it was likely that he or she would die during labor. I was truly devastated after the telephone call. It was final; there was no hope.

With the stress of the last couple of days, I was not surprised when the cramping intensified. That night, after we had put Jacob to bed, I went to the bathroom and discovered that I was bleeding. The doctors had all warned me that this could happen, so I was not completely shocked. I told Mark that we needed to drop Jacob off at my parents and head back to South Shore Hospital. It seemed as if this was becoming an all-too-familiar routine.

Although we knew the maternity ward was on the second floor, we still stopped at the emergency desk to make sure we should head up there. Once we were upstairs, we had to check in with the receptionist before proceeding to a room. As we walked down the hallway, it was difficult listening to new mothers as they joyously talked about their newborns. Even hearing the painful screams emitted by the women in labor made me yearn for my child. The young nurse tried to usher us quickly into a room that was a bit more secluded. She left a johnnie for me to change into while she went back to the nurses' station to get my chart. When she returned, she began asking some typical questions about my medical history. But after only briefly looking at my chart she asked, “Do you want to know the sex of your child?”

“What?” Mark responded with his eyes widening in shock.

“I have the sex written down in your chart and wondered if you would like to know,” she asked again.

“Are you kidding? No, we do not want to know!” Mark emphatically stated. As if this wasn’t bad enough, her next question nearly put him over the edge. He was already giving me the look that occurs when he was about to lose his temper. I knew exactly how he was feeling. We could not believe her insensitivity.

“Would you like to hold the baby when it is born?”
“No we would not. Now, would you mind leaving us alone for awhile please?” he asked curtly.

I was proud of his response. I knew it took a lot for him to hold back. I’m sure she did not intend to offend us, but the way she asked the questions, smiling as if we should be happy, just really did not sit right. Needless to say, Mark asked to have a different nurse for the remainder of the evening.

Even though I was only one centimeter dilated, I ended up staying in the hospital that night because I was leaking amniotic fluid. I assumed that they were keeping me because of our situation and that it was policy to keep a woman in the hospital if there was any chance of infection. Mark stayed by my bedside all night. He made the necessary phone calls to family members to let them know that I was okay, but more importantly he checked on Jacob. We made it through the dismal night, but my labor really had not progressed. The on-call doctor decided that the best thing would be for us to be transferred to New England Medical because Dr. Ralston was familiar with our case and, if we decided to go through with an abortion, they were equipped to handle the procedure. I was discharged from South Shore, and we were soon on our way to Boston.

New England Medical was a much larger facility, and as we walked through the sliding doors I looked around in amazement. At the centrally located receptionist desk, you could look up and see the many floors above. Although this hospital’s structure was different from the other hospital, I noticed that the inner appearance was quite similar. Both facilities had the same stark white walls and typical hospital furniture housed in each tiny room, but it was the smell of rubbing alcohol and sickness wafting through the air that really seemed familiar. Upon our arrival, all of the necessary paperwork was completed, and a hospital volunteer directed us to the fetal medicine department. After a short wait, we were taken to an exam room and given yet another johnnie. The time had come; we had to decide if I should wait and allow

for a natural birth, which they said could happen anytime over the next day or so, or be anesthetized and have the doctors take the baby.

My husband truly did not want to experience the childbirth; he knew the pain involved and could not handle watching me go through that. Plus, the idea of delivering a child that would not survive was literally too much for him to endure. He said that it was my choice, but he hoped that I would allow the doctors to do the procedure. When Dr. Ralston came in to perform an internal exam, he excused himself, which gave me some time alone to make peace with the decision. I knew what I had to do, but I was still unsure. Was I taking the cowardly way out? I just wanted it to all be over.

Later that afternoon, I was wheeled away into surgery.

I am still coping with the decision I made and the feelings of sadness that accompany it. My only solace regarding this heartbreaking situation is that I now have another beautiful, healthy baby boy. He must have a strong purpose because, without the tragedy surrounding his sibling, he would not be here.
Dragonfly on Tenmoku Pot

Kristina Stafford

Senior, Art Major
Three-Dimensional; Wheel thrown porcelain with copper and brass lid
6” x 3”

Detail of lid
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 our 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 an unselfish giver of his time, wisdom and expertise. This portfolio is dedicated to his memory.
Stick Continued

Blue and Sterling Covered Jar

Green & Gold Sugar and Creamer with Tray
Altazor

Cheryl Tullis

Junior, Art Major & Psychology Major
Digital Media; Adobe Photoshop
8” x 8”

Detail of folds

the sinister sound of closed chests
Untitled

Corey Ritch

Junior, Art Major
Painting; Acrylic on canvas
30” x 35”
The Flight

Katie Boettcher
Senior, Art Education Major
Painting: Acrylic and wax on canvas
31.5” x 30.7”
Chance Spoke

Derek T. Hambly
Senior, Art Major
Three-Dimensional; Ceramic
22” x 9”
Scott Francoeur
Senior, Art Major
Painting; Acrylic on canvas
34” x 46”
No-Mad

Joseph Kolczewski Jr.

Junior, Art Major

Drawing; Correction fluid, medical tape, electrical tape, spray paint

8" x 20"
Addict

Keith Mistler
Junior, Art Major
Photography; Black and white
8" x 10"
Ruck and Maul

Elizabeth Davenport
Senior, Art Major
Drawing; Charcoal on paper
18” x 24”
This place is made of
rubbish piles and hopes laid to waste.
All that’s left is a deserted wasteland,
an echoing empty soundscape,
like a wind-tunnel whoosh and whine.
Scattered in the dust and dirt are
rust flaking frames of charred
automobiles, picked apart by vultures, with
flattened tires and shattered glass panes.
Garbage overflows the boundaries of this heap.
A broken drum lies in the dust,
the setting sun lies sterilized by haze,
propped against the horizon,
and in the rise of the almost invisible pale moon,
even the sky looks rusted.
With a spurt of remaining battery acid a
robotic tin figure portraying Uncle Sam, with formerly
flashing star-spangled eyes, chomping-action consumerism jaw
and
fists that launch like rockets,
spasms its last whirr and pop. It’s all garbage.
Broken toys, rotten food, piles and piles
of beat up junk, all garbage.
All shit and industry.
Money with the consistency
of sand.

In the twilight a figure trudges through the dusty rows
between the piled high burnt out cars,
the dead traffic jam, and picks and plucks.
He rummages through the garbage,
Finds a steel cadaver worth explaining,
and picks its scabs to see if it will bleed black for him.
If it does he cradles its limp head in his lap,
studies its wasteland skinscape and oxidized lips pressed
in an emotionless smirk, and records his findings.
He drags a heavy sack with him, and in it
he places anything for which he might find use.
He feels nothing like pity for this place
and its impotent inhabitants. Like them, he’s trapped there.
But between spaces of great time and contemplation, the city
leaves behind for him some worthwhile corpse to dissect
and when the wind utters its moaning echoes through hollowed
out
shells of skyscrapers and parking garages,
railroad depots, gutted factories, and abandoned condominiums,
when the moon glints pale on the surface of the
oil slick harbor, he can hear the metropolis
grinding its gears, on and on,
bulldozing a new place to lay its waste
as he wades through the shit it leaves in its wake
and picks its scabs for a worthwhile story to tell.
Bleak

Mike Dravis
Freshman, Art Major & Business Major
Photography, Digital
8” x 10”
Dancing Circles

Rosa Alemán
Senior, Communication Studies Major
Performance Poem

(We can hear the sound of children laughing and playing in the background. There is a soft, haunting lullaby playing. The actor steps in. The lullaby fades out. The children’s voices fade away. The performance begins.)

When I was six years old, I ran with boys. Climbing trees and roof tops with sling-shots, sticks and rocks for toys.

I had dirty knees and finger nails, and I cut my hair short because I hated pony tails.

I hated pink lace, ribbons and girly things.

I wanted to be Robocop for Halloween while my sisters were princesses and angels with wings.

I had two left feet and couldn’t sing. So while they sang their songs and danced around, I rolled up my sleeves and dug holes in the ground.

I would play with Barbie just for show, and would steal my cousin’s G.I. Joes – stuffing them in my overalls, so as not to be seen.

I learned my world was in between.

(Slight pause)

I started hiding the blue toys behind the pink bin of the gender role they put me in.

I wore dresses like straight jackets cutting through my skin.

And I learned about punishment before I understood sin.

I grew up to see the world divided like sections in clothing stores and signs on bathroom doors.

The boys and girls who came before carried out gender chores like homework.

A knee-jerk reaction for society’s satisfaction.

We aren’t conceived in categories but we’re born and taught to play a role.

It really doesn’t matter if you’ve got a different kind of soul.

You stay on your side and walk a straight line!

A goal so different from mine.
I was born outside of the nation’s color scheme.
A purple picket fence in the American Dream.

I tried to tell my mother, but before I could speak, she put her hand to my cheek and said,

“Tell me about the boys you like. Because honestly, I’d rather have a SLUT for a daughter than a DYKE.”

And I swear this must be what it feels like to swallow broken glass.

It’s hard to brace yourself and let it all pass.

Her words were tear gas in my eyes. And I lost myself inside the lies.

I said, “Mom, my heart cries for Joe so and so…” some made-up boy I didn’t know.

I’ve spent so much of my youth dancing circles around truth.

I practiced answers to the questions I was afraid they’d ask.

I took big gulps from a flask while molding my face into the mask.

My greatest task was to invent a way to bow and not stay bent.

A way to walk, a way to talk, a way to deal with torment.

I was sure that people meant those nasty things they said. Their words swam through my mind like fish inside my head.

Those hateful tongues became the monsters underneath my bed and I was scared.

(Slight pause)

I grew more conscious of the status quo and got caught beneath the undertow.

So, I changed my hair and chose to wear store-bought femininity.

I tried to mask my sexuality with make-up and a sweet perfume. Hoping that the smell would sway those who could tell from far away, that I was hiding something.

My mind became a prison and my thoughts its prisoners.

It was a form of self-mutilation.

This long conversation where I managed to convince myself that it all came down to mental health.

I kept making note to self again, and again, and again as if truth would come of it and make this life a better fit.

I can’t believe the crazy shit I have put myself through and all of the damage I now have to undo to stop hurting myself the way that I do.

This society would rather see the crazy version of me.

Wide-eyed and hazy, poking holes into my brain, while running my heart against the grain, before it would ever let me be.

And they ask me why I’m angry.

(The performer’s voice intensifies and the piece speeds up.)

Well, I feel stupid and cheated, jaded and heated, thinking of everything that I have lost in this struggle.

Thinking of how close I came to being free.

You see, something happened to me on a warm night in July, underneath a sapphire sky. I found the Labrys in a kiss. And I could have used its power to release me from all of this. But instead I went back to that place.

The hollow space where I thought I saw God’s face.

And I heard a voice projected from the highest kingdom. The voice was speaking of some holy wisdom.
It told me that two Eves can never make an Adam and that the happiness I fathomed was only in my dreams.

Of all the stupid things that we are taught to believe, I allowed myself to be deceived by the notion of a spirit dead and gone.

I kept myself locked in and threw the axe away as if it held a curse to make me gay.

As if I could rid myself of all that I am, by becoming some sacrificial lamb and bowing down to the spirit of a man who claimed to be my father.

(Long pause)

I’ve never had a father. So I gave in.

I tried to withdraw from what he called sin.

I tried to be “normal” for him, but I just lost myself again.

I drowned my fear in alcohol to practice walking straight.

And when I stumbled, it was a little too late.

It had cost me EVERYTHING.

I’m dancing circles around the person that I was.

And all because I can.

Because I will.

I’m going to dance and I won’t stay still.

Because I am, the way I am. And that is all my truth!

It had cost me my soul mate. If I sound a little bitter, then maybe I should practice.

Because I want to sound A LOT!

I want these words to go far beyond ear-shot.

I want to scream with all I’ve got.

I want to let the whole world know that I’m tired of the bullshit.

Mom, I can’t keep up the façade. And Grandma, you can take back your God.

I don’t want him.

This is where my life begins. I refuse to cloak myself in all the pretty little things.

I’m cutting every-single-string.

Unlearning the teachings of this “great” society.

I am now a new born baby at the age of twenty-three.

I’m back to the innocence of the time when I was six.

And I’m picking up my rocks.

And I’m picking up my sticks.

Visit http://www.thebridgejournal.com to download an MP3 file of the author giving a spoken word performance of this work.
Clarity

Sarah Smith

Senior, Art Major & Early Education Major
Photography; Black and white
8” x 10”
“So, Jeremy, what do you think you’re going to do?”

I put down my plate, picked up a blue napkin with the words “CONGRATS GRADUATE!” and wiped away the frosting that dripped from my lips. I stared at my Aunt Sandra, who was giving me a big toothy grin, and gave her ten seconds of awkward silence before answering.

“What am I going to do?” I asked her absentmindedly, even though I knew what she meant.

“Yes, Jeremy. What are you going to do? You know, now that you’ve graduated from college?” Her toothy grin had faded slightly.

I let my eyes wander around the dining room, staring at the emotionless brown walls adorned with random pictures, one of which read “Colonial America: 1700” and showed a small brick school with children pouring out the front doors. I didn’t understand my mom’s choice of artwork; I guess she was going for the historical, museum-like vibe.

I thought a minute before replying to Aunt Sandra. Was I supposed to give her the answer she wanted to hear, the answer that probably everyone wanted to hear? The complete bullshit response that meant nothing to me, but that they could repeat to others? After all, if I told her what she wanted to hear, she could tell her friends that her nephew was going to be something really great. Something impressive. And good old Aunt Sandra looked so well-meaning and hopeful standing there, looking up at me. Sure, her brownish-gray hair was sticking up at awkward angles, her skirt looked like the same material, and pattern, as my couch, and her glasses were falling off her face in a crazy way. But she was still my aunt. I smiled and gave her the cop-out response.

“I’m going to work this summer, you know, save up some money. That way I’ll have a little time off from schoolwork before I go to graduate school, which I really hope to start this fall.”
Aunt Sandra smiled at me. She didn’t say anything right away, but her face said, Good answer.

“Great, Jeremy. You know, you’ve always been a smart kid, an honors student. I knew no one had to worry about you. Graduate school sounds like a good plan. After all, what are you going to do with a degree in English?” Aunt Sandra gave a loud hyena-like chuckle and moved on to her next victim. “Dick! DICK! Don’t pretend you don’t see me, you big goof, get over here! DICK!” Aunt Sandra was scurrying over to my uncle, who was unsuccessfully trying to blend in with the table of onion dip.

What was I going to do with a degree in English? Maybe I’d given Aunt Sandra too much credit. Or maybe she had a legitimate concern. I didn’t know what I wanted to do with a degree in English, but it didn’t bother me much. At least if I didn’t think about it.

The next day, I went for a drive to get some food and maybe even that job I told Aunt Sandra I’d be working. I cruised down Route 35 in my decidedly uncool 1992 Toyota Camry, which featured wood paneling to complement the rusty green exterior. Route 35 was the route in my hometown; it was the quintessential street that every small, dying, suburban New England community has – a strip mall, a couple of shopping centers, and approximately seventy-two Dunkin’ Donuts shops.

At a stop light, I ended up behind an old Buick. It was one of those run-down cars on which the driver slaps about 860 bumper stickers, all with ridiculous sayings. One of their stickers read, “Live each day like it’s your last.” I’ve heard that a million times, but I thought about it for a minute longer than usual because it occurred to me I didn’t know how to live every day as if it was my last. Even if I tried, I knew I’d screw it up. I’d go backpacking across Europe for a month, maybe try skydiving, and tell every last person in my life what they really mean to me – and then on the actual last day of my life, I’d probably sleep until 4:00 in the afternoon, get up and watch a Saved by The Bell marathon for the rest of the day.

I took a right into the East Handover Shopping Plaza, which was a long row of stores, including a Radio Shack, Papa Gino’s, Marshall’s, and a new fast food joint called Bucky’s Burgers. I was hungry, and I had never had Bucky’s Burgers before, so I thought I’d try it. To be honest, I couldn’t have not tried this place. It was absolutely humongous, and there was a large beaver suspended from the glowing yellow “Bucky’s Burgers” sign – and he was actually waving. Apparently, the brilliant minds of Bucky thought that beavers should not only be selling burgers, but should also be suspended from cheesy glowing signs, waving.

I parked in front of Bucky’s and cautiously entered the front doors. I walked through the lobby and stared in bafflement at the
bright red banners that read “BUCKY’S BURGERS: GRAND OPENING!!” They hung haphazardly from the tiled, beige wall. I made my way across the tiled, gray floor and approached the maze that was set up to show the patrons how to form a line. Bucky’s was actually a little busy, so I perused the menu above the counter. The “Bucky Bacon Burger” sounded kind of appetizing. But nothing could bring more joy than the “Bucky Fun Basket.” I was overwhelmed by the selection of cleverly named treats.

“Can I help you?”

My menu-browsing was interrupted by a young spiky-haired blond kid, probably sixteen, who was wearing a black Bucky’s visor, a button-up yellow shirt and a green button that provocatively read “Get Lucky at Bucky’s!”

“Oh, yeah. Hey. Umm, I’m gonna get the…” I trailed off. Why did they have to make a Fun Basket and a Lucky Bucky Platter? Decisions can be hard.

“Yeah, I’ll go with the Bucky Fun Basket,” I told the cashier.

“Okay, one Bucky Fun Basket. Do you want to Buckify that?”

“Uhh…I’m sorry. Do I want to what?”

“You can Buckify your meal for an extra $.79. Your fries and drink are bigger.”

“Absolutely,” I replied. “Buckify the basket.”

“Okay,” he said. “That’ll be $5.87.”

“Bucking fantastic,” I said and handed him a $10.00 bill, from which he proceeded to give me change. I stepped to the side and waited for my basket of fun to arrive. While waiting, I noticed a “Now Hiring” sign taped to the side of the wall. Now, I knew this was Bucky’s Burgers and that there were a lot of other jobs I could find, which would pay better and never require me to say the phrase “Do you want to Buckify that?” But at the same time, weren’t all of those reasons why I should get a job there? This was probably the last summer where I could self-respectably be employed at Bucky’s. All right, so I wouldn’t have any self-respect about it, but it was my only chance to be paid to use the word “Buckify,” and I thought that was pretty significant.

“ONE BUCKFIED BUCKY FUN BASKET!!” A man in his thirties shouted that impressive, B-laden phrase and delivered it with a quickness that awed me.
“Right here,” I answered. The balding, portly man presenting me with my basket looked somewhat authoritative, so I decided I’d inquire about employment.

“Thanks,” I said as I took the basket. “And, I noticed you guys are hiring. Would I be able to have an application?”

“Yes, we are hiring,” he replied in the same fast-talking manner he’d delivered his opening line. “What position are you interested in?”

“Umm…I’m not quite sure, whatever position that is available,” I responded.

“Well,” he began, “there are cashier positions available, and supervisor positions as well, depending on your experience. And, well, we’re still looking for a beaver.”

“Umm…I’m sorry, did you say you were looking for a beaver?”

“Yes, yes I did. It’s a special position,” he said, getting really serious for someone talking about a “beaver” job. “We need someone to be our mascot, Bucky the Beaver.”

I thought about this for a second. I couldn’t imagine another job where they would pay me to wave at people in a beaver suit.

“Actually, that sounds pretty interesting,” I said. “I’d like to apply for that, I think.”

“Really, you would? Sounds excellent. I am Sam, by the way. Maybe we could sit down and talk about this.”

“Nice to meet you, Sam. I’m Jeremy. That sounds good.”

I started at Bucky’s the following week. On my drive over, I was completely decked out in the beaver-suit, because I thought that would make more of an entrance. I don’t think they recommend driving in the suit; I think they prefer you to change in the bathroom, but I thought it would be fun to step out of my Camry in the Bucky ensemble. And it was, sort of.

I walked in the front door and made my way past the over-enthused banners, toward a door that read EMPLOYEES ONLY at the back of place, past Bucky’s Fun Place – one of those crazy rubber-ball filled pits that kids jump in after eating chicken nuggets – and beyond the eating tables. Sam was pretty nice, and he seemed happy to see me. He informed me that I’d be going out to stand in the front of Bucky’s, close to the main road so I could get drivers’ attention, and he gave me a big bushel of balloons to
hold. Basically, I was to stand in front of this beaver shack for about eight hours, waving and looking like an ass. I put on my furry beaver head and walked out into the seventy-five-degree sun.

It was pretty amusing at first. I stood on the grassy knoll right next to the opening of the main parking lot of the plaza. Route 35 was pretty busy; a good amount of people were driving by. I waved, gave extra thumbs-ups to families in minivans and, if they drove slowly enough, I was lucky enough to see their astonished and scared faces reacting to a friendly giant beaver. I tried to yell things out – happy, cheerful, come-get-some-burgers-from-a-beaver sayings – but my beaver mask was so restricting that only mumbles were audible. That made it even funnier, I think. One forty-something-year-old man drove into the lot in his Dodge Stratus and looked decidedly frightened as I attempted to yell “EVERYBODY GETS LUCKY AT BUCKY’S!” He rolled up his window.

I had no problem with the work-force, thirty-plus age group. They were pretty nice. When 2:30 rolled around, and all the high school buffoons started peeling in and out of the plaza in their crappy, beat-up Ford Mustangs and souped-up Neons, that’s when I knew I was in for something else.

Four kids, each probably around seventeen, walked out of Papa Gino’s and headed towards their black Mustang. I looked at them, waved, and did a make-shift beaver dance, reminiscent of the robot. One of the model citizens had his long brown hair braided into cornrows with a do-rag tied sloppily in the front, brushing across his pimply forehead. He looked me straight in the eye and flipped me off.

I knew I should be polite. I wasn’t seventeen anymore and, to be honest, I really didn’t care that much. But I figured I should say something in return as they slowed down next to me, waiting for traffic to free so they could peel out. I could barely hear my own voice above the 50 Cent jam blasting from the speakers.

“You’re not such a good beaver, huh? But here’s Bucky, saying have a bucking fantas–”

My farewell was interrupted by a large Dr. Pepper rocketing towards my beaver face. I saw it coming, careening through the air, thrown by one of those terrible assholes, and I heard him laugh too, a high-pitched girly giggle that echoed in my ears as I tried to catch the soft drink. My beaver mitts were not made for catching though, just for waving politely to small children and handing out balloons. I stood in misery as the Dr. Pepper dripped down my beaver head and onto my beaver chest.

I took off my beaver head and tried to wipe off the sticky residue. I was distracted when I thought someone was calling my name. I hoped it was time for a break.
“Jeremy…? Yes, that is you!”

I turned and squinted towards the sun, trying to make out who was calling my name. It was Mr. Hopkins, my high school English teacher. He started to hurriedly make his way over to me holding a Bucky Fun Basket for Busy Beavers. I put down my beaver head and tried to compose myself the best possible way I could in my beaver suit.

“Jeremy, it’s good to see you. How are you doing?” he asked, looking genuinely pleased to see me.

“I’m pretty good. I’m doing all right.”

“Yeah? How’s everything going? Are you still in school?”

“No,” I started. “I just graduated last week, from Bridgewater University.”

“That’s great. That’s really great. Did you major in English like we talked about in high school?”

“Yeah, I did. I enjoyed myself, too.”

“Great. Good to hear.”

I’m glad it was good to hear to someone. I still didn’t know how I felt about it. I liked a lot of things, and I even liked English quite a bit – I just didn’t know how I was supposed to have my entire life planned out when I was twenty-two.

“Well, I am glad I ran into you, Jeremy,” he said. “Do you have any plans for the future?”

I looked at him for a minute. I wanted to say a lot of things, a simple “no” being one of them. I wanted to say that there was no need for anyone to worry about me, including me. Not yet anyway. But I liked Mr. Hopkins, and I didn’t want him to think of me as a disappointment. I looked down at the beaver head on the ground, feeling awkward, and then looked at him again. “The thing is…” I stammered, and I looked to the beaver head once more.

“Jeremy,” he started, “I think that whatever you are going to do, you’ll probably find it. You’ve always been a hard worker. When I went to college, I got a degree in finance. I essentially went to school to become an accountant. I didn’t have a clue. And if it was other kids, and I came here and saw them here, I’d be more worried.” He paused and glanced at his watch. “Listen,” he said, “unfortunately, I have to run, but it really was good seeing you, and don’t worry. Try and understand yourself and, when you have an inkling, try and do all those things you really want to.”

I stood silently as Mr. Hopkins climbed into his Ford Taurus. He honked “goodbye” before merging into traffic, and I waved gratefully after him, wishing him a bucking brilliant day.
Children

Derrick J. Zellmann

Junior, Art Major
Photography; Black and white
5” x 7”
Laurie glanced furtively around, hoping the aisle would remain empty as she stared at the items in front of her. She had chosen a chain pharmacy in Boston on purpose. It may have taken forty minutes to get there on the subway, and she may have had to lie to her parents, but at least she wouldn’t run into anyone she knew as she would have risked doing at the local drugstore in her small suburban town. Her town wasn’t so tiny that she knew every cashier in every store on Main Street, but it wouldn’t be unlikely for someone like her portly math teacher to walk past on his way to the antacid aisle, as she reached for the box.

Now that she was here, though, she found that it wasn’t only the possibility of someone who would report back to her parents that worried her. She just plain didn’t want anyone to see what she was buying. That was why she hadn’t asked her friends Mallory or Ashley to come along. She didn’t want them or anyone in the store or anyone in the world to think of her like – like she was dirty and wrong. It was almost like the first time she had bought tampons without her mother; she had been terrified everyone in the store would see that box as a sign across her forehead stating outright that perfect Laurie Hartright was unclean.

Danny had bought the condoms. She didn’t know from where. But she doubted he had been this scared. The cashier who sold them to him had probably winked, had probably said, “Good for you, man,” or some other male nonsense. She wished Danny was here now. Maybe she wouldn’t be so scared, wouldn’t be so ashamed.

A middle-aged woman in a long black wool coat pushed past Laurie and stopped at the end of the aisle. The woman looked harried as she selected three tubes of hemorrhoid cream, hardly looking at them, and rushed back toward the front of the store. Laurie was sure that even though the woman had barely noticed what she was buying, she had seen Laurie standing there. Instantly she panicked and wondered if the woman knew what she was looking at. She was sure anyone who saw her even gazing at the boxes would look pityingly at her, instead of winking like they did toward Danny. Another statistic at age sixteen, how sad, people would think, because even here in the city, where her situation wasn’t exactly unusual, it was still sad. Laurie was supposed to be better than those girls anyway. She had a good background and her parents loved her and she was taking Advanced Placement Biology – that should have meant something and she couldn’t figure out why it hadn’t. She felt like she was a different person now than she had been then, a changed person, and she hated that.

Laurie kept standing there, glancing around for more bystanders in between staring at the wall. She was trying to decide which brand to buy, which would give her the most accuracy for the least money and least confusion – because lines and pluses and different colors were all really scary but that digital readout seemed like an awful waste of cash. There were too many choices.

Once again her mind flashed to Danny; there were tons of choices for condoms, too, but they’d always used the same brand, since they’d first – had a need for them – three months earlier. Was Danny better at decision making? Did he not like to try new things – this was certainly a new thing he wouldn’t like to try – or had he just stolen the condoms from his older brother and that was the brand Alex used? Laurie didn’t like to try new things either but she hadn’t minded trying sex, though she guessed now that that was unfortunate.

She wished she had an older sister who could recommend a brand, or who could have told her in a stronger voice than her parents or the school nurse that it did happen to anyone and it could happen to her. She wished that she had listened to her friend, Ashley, it she had endured through a gynecological exam to get on the pill instead of trusting that condoms would be enough. Or that she had realized something had gone wrong in time to go
to the doctor and ask for the morning-after pill. And while she was wishing impossible wishes, she also threw the thought out there that if this whole thing could just go away and never come back and if her life would go back to normal, before it had gotten so grown-up and scary, well, that would be okay, too.

Another person came into the aisle, this time an older gentleman with two children, both girls with matching pink bows in their hair, trailing behind him. The man said only, “Excuse me,” and then, “Single file, girls,” but Laurie felt his accusatory glare. After he passed, she grabbed the closest box and started toward the cash register, still glancing around for witnesses.

It occurred to her that she had been obsessing over this simple decision because she could foresee another one in her future, one that was much harder, much more permanent, much more excruciating...so very different than the decisions she was used to making. She’d heard all the lectures in health class and the after-school specials; she knew she had options. But adoption...abortion...keeping the baby...each one seemed more horrifying than the next and she wanted it all to go away. As she paid for her pregnancy test, she closed her eyes and thought about what might be growing inside her, if not a child yet then the potential of one, and she knew what she did not want to do.

A highchair, plastic in bright primary colors, covered with Cheerios and spilled milk not worth crying over because it happened so frequently. It was the only image in Laurie’s head as she ignored the conversation around her and chewed mindlessly on her meatloaf, nauseated by the taste but not wanting to make her parents or Danny suspicious by refusing to eat. Meatloaf used to be Laurie’s favorite meal, but now all she could do was try to restrain the bile building in her throat as she realized exactly how different her life was going to become if she was really pregnant and decided not to give the baby up for adoption.

Change. It had terrified Laurie when she was younger, when the playground had turned into a parking lot, when she had to go to the middle school instead of her safe elementary school, when her parents had decided to redecorate their basement and gotten rid of her favorite old armchair. Maybe the new armchair was better than the old, but it was different and for that she hated it.

For a moment it was all too much to keep to herself. The words bubbled up inside of her until she wanted to burst; she wanted to scream it out in the middle of her mother’s story about a family she had shown a house to that morning. “I think I’m pregnant!” Laurie wanted to shout, just kill three birds with one stone by telling her parents and Danny all at the same time. It would shatter their idyllic family dinner, the one her father had suggested in such a kind tone – “Why don’t you invite Danny to dinner Friday night, Laur? I’ll make my special mashed potatoes.” – but there was never going to be a good time to tell them, was there, no matter what she decided to do?

“When I showed her the window seat she pulled the checkbook right out and started signing; you should have seen the look on her husband’s face!” Laurie’s mom finished with a laugh, and Danny, of course, chuckled politely across the table from her because he was sweet like that. Laurie’s mom was well-meaning but found her job at Hammond Real Estate much more fascinating than anyone else did, save Laurie’s father.

No one seemed to notice that Laurie was distracted. The conversation turned to Danny’s basketball game last night and, having watched the game from the front row of the bleachers with Mallory, Laurie allowed herself to tune her family out completely and forced herself, once again,
to imagine the addition of a baby at their dinner table.

These past three days, as the pregnancy test sat untouched in her top drawer, where she hid everything she was secretly afraid of, like her two pairs of thong underwear and the pack of cigarettes that she’d bought on the sly and never smoked, she kept going back and forth trying to figure out what to do. Because while keeping the baby seemed like such an overwhelming idea, so did adoption. Could she really give birth to a tiny squirming life and stare at its perfect little toes and fingers with their microscopic nails and then just let some other woman, however more responsible and deserving she was, take that baby away?

When she wasn’t thinking about what she should do, she was trying to decide how to share the news with Danny and with her parents. She was sure that her parents were never going to forgive her; they’d hate her instantly the minute she told them, whatever decision she made. Could she really give birth to a tiny squirming life and stare at its perfect little toes and fingers with their microscopic nails and then just let some other woman, however more responsible and deserving she was, take that baby away?

Her dad was so goofy and loving, always attempting to be hip by asking Danny things like, “What’s the happs?” Dad still called her “Bunny” sometimes, when she was really tired and was wearing her hair in pigtails and felt and looked young. She tried to imagine him calling her that as she rested on her hospital bed in between contractions, but the image didn’t work. He was going to have to drop the name and even if it became the baby’s nickname, it wouldn’t be hers anymore and she hated that, too.

She also tried to imagine her mother quitting her job, the one she loved so damn much, to watch the baby while Laurie and Danny went off to community college classes between working as they tried to salvage some future for themselves. It worked, she could imagine it happening, she could imagine that sacrifice even if her parents needed that income for themselves. But it hurt too much when she imagined the wearied look her mother would grow without being able to help families buy houses and create homes everyday, and Laurie closed her eyes tightly and tried to rid herself of the picture.

“You okay?” Danny asked suddenly from the seat next to her, or maybe he’d been looking at her for awhile like he was worried, but she hadn’t noticed. He touched her hand, gently, like he cared about her so much, and she didn’t want to tell him anymore. She felt like it was all her fault for wanting to have sex as much as he did, when it was the guy who was supposed to be a horn dog and the girl who was supposed to be smart and in control. She felt like even though he loved her, he loved basketball and high school and his future more, and maybe he’d leave her. All the baby would know of his or her daddy would be the child support checks in the mail each month.

She nodded and smiled at Danny and then her parents, who also seemed concerned that she had stopped eating and had been staring into her plate. “I’m fine,” she assured them. She hadn’t taken the test yet, and she was only a little over a week late. Maybe there wasn’t a baby, so maybe she didn’t have to ruin Danny’s life and take away the trust her parents had ever had in her. Maybe things could go back to normal.

Please, God. Please let it be negative.

Laurie was now more than two weeks overdue for her period and hardly needed a test to tell her what she’d become increasingly sure of each passing day, as the possibility that she was late just because of stress became smaller and smaller. And yet she was still there in the library, studying
ancient Egypt for a completely different kind of test, her textbook flipped open to a page filled with hieroglyphics and her pen flying over her paper as she took notes.

It was actually nice and peaceful in the library during lunchtime, since most students were crowded into the stale-smelling cafeteria. Laurie sat at one of the study tables that the administration had placed in the back of the library for this purpose, one of only three students taking advantage of the quiet space, and she was able to hear herself think for the first time in days. She knew the other two students by face only, a freshman girl who had headphones on and was bobbing her head up and down as she read *A Tale of Two Cities* and a junior male, who Laurie was pretty sure was in the Debate Club, doing rapid calculations on a graphing calculator. They were both quiet and ignored Laurie as she ignored them while she studied and thought about how stupid it was for her to worry about grades when they’d completely cease to matter in eight months, or however they calculated due dates.

Laurie knew there were plenty of girls in the country who had babies in high school and still graduated, whether or not they had the help of the father and whether or not they did anything with their diploma. While she had been a freshman, there had been a senior girl who gave birth a few weeks after everyone else in her class took the SATs in the fall. Laurie didn’t remember the girl’s name, only that she had looked tired all of the time and chuckled when asked where she was applying to college. Laurie sometimes saw the girl still, working at the laundromat, but the girl could probably do more with her high school education, take a few classes at the community school and get an associate degree and a better job, if she could find the time and the money.

Intellectually, Laurie knew this, but at the same time, she felt that it was a little stupid, studying when she should probably be in the bathroom peeing on a stick. Stupid that she wanted to hold on to high school: hold on to the pep rallies; and Tuesday nights at Friendly’s Restaurant with Danny and his teammates; and rushing to make homeroom before the second bell. Stupid that she was thinking about her outfit for tomorrow night’s movie date with her boyfriend, and wanting to look nice for him, when in a few months she’d be roughly the size of a whale. Stupid that she hadn’t taken the test yet, but she knew that once she took it, it would become real and she’d have to tell her parents and Danny, too, and nothing would ever be the same for her.

Laurie felt someone approach her from behind even though they hadn’t said anything. She was surprised, because everyone she knew spent their lunch period in the cafeteria trying not to gag on the taste of processed meat. When she turned and saw both Mallory and Ashley standing there, Mallory’s normally bright smile absent from her pale freckled face and Ashley looking serious even under her liberally applied blue eye shadow and pink lip gloss, she prepared herself mentally to lie to them if they asked her what was wrong. The same way she had been lying to Danny and to everyone, really, even to herself, all week.

But Ashley was in the Drama Club and her passion for it had extended into her everyday life. She made every situation more dramatic than necessary, even negative ones. Instead of a normal introductory question, she sat down next to Laurie and demanded, “Are you cheating on Danny?” in her most scandal-filled tone. It was a concept so absurd that Laurie let out a surprised gasp of laughter. The junior looked over briefly before returning to his calculator, and Laurie lowered her voice to a whisper.

“Of course not!” she hissed vehemently. “That’s completely insane.”

Mallory, on Laurie’s other side, looked relieved. “Thank God,” she said. “I told you not to tell people she was cheating,”
she told Ashley smugly, then looked back to Laurie, becoming more serious. “We know something is going on, though, and it’s time to spill. You’ve been really distracted lately and we’re worried something really big is going on.”

The understatement was big enough that it made Laurie want to laugh again, but her friends would probably just think that she was laughing at them and would get upset. Since she felt guilty enough already for keeping such a huge secret from them and from Danny, the knowledge that they were concerned about her made her feel even worse. She didn’t want to hurt them even more. She didn’t want to lie anymore. She didn’t want to take the test alone.

Laurie knew her mind had been wandering a lot lately, as she stared into space most of each day and saw only possible bleak futures instead of the present. She couldn’t help that. But not only had Mallory and Ashley noticed she was distracted lately and become worried, Danny had done so as well and had been asking her what was wrong. And if Ashley was telling people she thought Laurie was cheating on Danny, it wouldn’t be long before Danny heard the same rumor…and no matter what his reaction would be when she told him the truth, she finally realized that he deserved to know what that truth was. They all did.

So instead of answering her friends verbally, Laurie made eye contact with both of them for a few seconds each, and then, without looking around in shame this time, without caring what anyone else thought, she slowly pulled a box out of her backpack, where she had placed it that morning in an attempt to spur herself into action.

Ten question-filled minutes later, Ashley led Mallory and Laurie out of the library and down the still-empty hall to the ladies’ room on the first floor, the one far from where the crowds would soon be emptying out of the cafeteria.

The indignity of it scared Laurie. The stall itself was not unpleasant, with only a small amount of graffiti – “I <3 you, Tony!” “Girls’ Hockey Kicks Ass,” “Kimmi Wuz Here ’02,” “Megan + Joseph 4Eva,” and, amusingly enough, “Ashley DeCantata Is A Boyfriend-Stealing Bitch!” – and the light smell of recently-used lemon cleanser. It was the mechanics of the act, the actual holding the stick and, well, aiming, that was stopping her. It was unsanitary, that’s what it was, and she was not about to…chicken out. She was not about to chicken out.

“You okay in there?” Mallory whispered, with a tone like she was at a funeral and afraid to interrupt a family in their mourning with the news that the service was starting. Laurie had tuned out both of her friends with their surprised and sometimes trying-to-be-reassuring chatter as she stood in the stall and stared at the stick in her hand, trying to force herself into acting. She had obviously been silent for too long, though, and she supposed Mallory was worried about her. Either that or Mallory thought she was as capable of chickening out as she obviously actually was.

Mallory had reacted to the news with much more horror than Ashley, going through a list of pieces of Laurie’s life that would be affected by pregnancy, starting with college and ending at her relationship with Danny. It had sounded to Laurie more like a list of all the ways in which her life was ruined, though. Ashley had seemed surprised that she would be so irresponsible, but didn’t think it was irreparable, as she’d already decided on Laurie’s best course of action and seemed to think it would cost her a trip to a clinic, four hundred dollars, and nothing more emotionally. Mallory had been almost speechless at that very suggestion, and Laurie wouldn’t have been surprised if she had started preaching at them both and handing out “pro-life” flyers. She had calmed when Laurie told her that in no way was the decision already made, but hadn’t taken back her fears for Laurie’s future.
Now Laurie hesitantly asked, “Do you think my life and my future are over?” She hated that her voice sounded so shaky, and missed her old confidence, the strength she’d had when she’d whispered to Danny, *Yeah, I’m sure; I want to*, that first time, which now felt like it had happened so long ago instead of only a few months ago. “I mean, no matter what I do, my parents will find out.”

“Your parents don’t have to know if I lend you the money from my savings, which I’ve already said I’ll do,” Ashley said bluntly, sounding frustrated. Laurie wanted to yell at her for thinking it was all so easy, when there were so many questions rushing around in Laurie’s own head – what life meant, and what a future meant, and what trust meant, and what being a parent meant, and what old enough meant, and what sex and love and life all meant together.

Laurie could tell by the anger in Mallory’s voice that she too was annoyed by Ashley’s overconfidence in her solution. “Shut up, Ashley,” she said, even though Mallory didn’t usually make such forceful orders.

In response Laurie heard only silence, so she had to assume that Ashley was either rolling her eyes or giving Mallory the finger, both actions very common to Ashley DeCantata. After a moment more of quiet, Mallory continued in a softer voice, like she’d been thinking before she spoke, mentally writing a speech designed to make a real impact. “I don’t think it stops at your parents, Laur. No matter what you do… if that test is positive, it changes things for you. You’re going to have some huge decisions and each one will make things different, forever and ever. I wasn’t saying that your career and future and relationship with Danny and everything are all ruined. But they will be different…this changes things.”

Change. It had terrified Laurie when she was little, and she realized now that it terrified her still. She’d been so afraid to take this test because the result could change her whole life, make it so very different than what was familiar, normal, and safe. But as Mallory spoke, Laurie realized that the test wasn’t going to change anything. Either she was pregnant or she wasn’t and it was too late now to change that.

The type of test she had chosen to buy, when she told her family and her friends and her boyfriend… none of that mattered. Either she was pregnant or she wasn’t and that changed things. This whole experience changed things; she wouldn’t be able to go back to what she’d been. Nothing would just be normal again. Either she was pregnant or she wasn’t and not knowing wasn’t helping her make a decision. She was changed, whether she was pregnant or not, and not taking the test was only avoiding the inevitable.

So Laurie aimed and sort of felt like she was finally taking control. Like she was changing things for herself, not letting changes happen, and, like, that sort of made it better.
Contemplation

Sarah Smith
Senior, Art Major & Early Education Major
Photography; Black and white
8” x 10”
Under the Arbor

Chris Dempsey

Senior, Art Major
Photography; Infrared film, fiber paper
8” x 10”
Monday

Katelyn White

Junior, Art Major & Early Education Major
Painting; Acrylic on canvas
18” x 20”
Wave

Chris Dempsey

Senior, Art Major
Three-Dimensional; Wood
8" x 10" x 18"
Anthony Aguilar
Senior, Art Major
Mixed-Media; Acrylics, ashes, paper
10.5” x 14”

Incomplete #2
Linear Conversion

Matthew Noiseux
Senior, Art Major
Three-Dimensional; Aluminum
50” x 30” x 32”
Creative Power

Anna Gilliam
Senior, Art Major
Three-Dimensional; Stained glass
13” x 11”
Orange Feast

Anna Gilliam
Senior, Art Major
Photography, Digital
3” x 4”
Connected Place 11: Midwest Highway

Mary C. Lee
Graduate Student, Creative Arts M.A.T.
Mixed-Media; Photo collage and acrylic on watercolor paper
9” x 11.25”
A warm breeze carried the scent of lilacs to Alicia Crowley’s nostrils as she trod upon the cracked pathway to school. Her red hair swayed back and forth across her shoulders while she bounced along towards the small brick building ahead. Alicia’s feet ached slightly because she had decided to wear Chinese slippers that day, not entirely anticipating the arduous walk from the east end of campus. Yet this slight discomfort did not diminish the young woman’s ebullient mood.

Along the path, Alicia beheld a variety of college students laughing and speaking to each other. One particularly hirsute man tossed an orange Frisbee to his tall, gawky friend. Those with scholarly inclinations studied their sundry notebooks on the expanse of verdant grass alongside the pathway. Alicia smiled at every one of them, which elicited an unpleasant sneer from one girl. This particular college student had little use for Alicia. She felt the redhead’s indigo dress clashed with the scenery. The girl turned to her L.L. Bean-clad friends and whispered, “Look. It’s that freaky chick with purple eyes.”

One of her friends added, “She’s all smilin’ like she’s rethahded or somethin’.”

Alicia paid them little mind, for she knew a magnificent experience awaited her. Her damp palm clenched the rolled up tube of computer paper she carried.

“I can’t believe they are finally discussing my story today,” Alicia thought to herself. She was unabashedly happy over the prospect of this upcoming class discussion.

Despite a warning from her husband, Merle, that she did not take criticism very well, Alicia decided to challenge herself by enrolling in the English department’s ever-popular Fiction Writing Seminar. Thus far, she had enjoyed the class a great deal.
Alicia was extremely excited about her story. She worked on the piece for nearly a month. Every night, she tinkered with the tale and crafted numerous plot details. Alicia decided to base the piece on her own life, for she believed writing outside her experience was somewhat beyond her grasp. This personal tale offered Alicia the opportunity to explore valued feelings and ideas. She anticipated the class would enjoy the piece. After all, she poured all of her energies and passions into the story.

Alicia approached the entrance to the faded brick building and grasped the brass door handle. When she pulled on the antiquated door, it creaked with a faintly audible moan. As Alicia ascended the stairway to her classroom, she noted the musty odor which permeated the building. The decades-old mildew on the walls added to the structure’s disagreeable aroma. Alicia Crowley ignored the smell, for the anxious joys of anticipation clouded her mind.

“Here we are,” she thought to herself as she waltzed into the classroom. A number of her fellow students were already seated in a circular pattern. The professor, Dr. Henry Hull, enjoyed this seating arrangement because it offered an excellent opportunity for lively group discussions. A dim buzz of conversation filled the room as assorted scholars discussed their latest endeavors.

Alicia sat in her usual seat and was greeted with a smile from Grace Kelburn. Grace, a pleasant person, was always happy to offer insightful comments during her classmates’ story reviews.

“How are you feeling?” asked Grace.

“Great. I’m excited,” Alicia answered with a grin. Her violet eyes twinkled in the harsh fluorescent lighting.

“Really? I’d think you’d be a little scared,” Grace whispered. A look of vague concern crossed Grace’s countenance.

“No way!!! I look forward to getting some feedback on this story!” Alicia beamed with an excited, and somewhat disconcerting, fervor.

She had inherited these eccentric displays of excitement from her great-grandfather, Aleister Crowley. Aleister, the infamous nineteenth-century occultist and mystic, had passed several intriguing behaviors on to Alicia. The Crowley Fervor overtook her and, forthwith, Alicia dropped her unstapled story onto the dusty floor. Ten separate pages were strewn in ten separate directions. A few classmates smirked and glanced at Alicia as the anxious woman gathered her sheets of paper.

“I’m really clumsy in case you haven’t noticed,” Alicia joked while she collected the smudged sheets which comprised her copy of the story. No one responded to this self-deprecating comment, but instead, returned to their various discussions.

Mitch Vondavies, a brown-haired student with small eyes and a rather odd-shaped head, was particularly vociferous in his claims to have read, “the best damn story ever!” Alicia smiled. She hoped Mitch referred to her own personal tale of heartbreak and woe.

At length, Dr. Hull entered the room and quieted the class. Alicia had heard much about Dr. Hull during her studies and found his demeanor enjoyable. Professor Hull’s blonde slicked pompadour, bushy sideburns, and pristine black leather jacket suggested a strong interest in rockabilly music. However, the sanctity of his academic surroundings prohibited him from ever mentioning such sordid pursuits.

Dr. Hull removed his leather jacket, straightened his tie, and rolled up the sleeves of his sky-blue button-down shirt. He smiled.

“Well, class, it seems we have some very interesting stories to tackle this week,” Dr. Hull said.

A quiet undercurrent of mirth ran through the room while Dr. Hull smiled and exclaimed, “Let us begin with ‘The Sinking Ship of a Lifetime’ by Nikita Rattaro.”
Nuria Torrence, however, provided a lukewarm response. “It was ok, you know.” Nuria, an intelligent woman with a graying pageboy haircut and a scar over her left eyebrow, had seven Master’s degrees in disparate fields of study.

A full third of the class, including Dr. Hull, chuckled over this comment and continued to praise the story. Professor Hull led a round of applause following the critique.

Alicia’s heartbeat raced as Dr. Hull chose the next piece for review. He smiled and announced the next story. “Next up we have ‘Big Bad MoFo’ by Mitch Vondavies.”

Alicia felt very mild disappointment because her story wasn’t chosen next. She looked down at her story and was startled by the sudden explosion of noise in the room.

Before the critique began, the class gave Mitch Vondavies a loud round of applause. One after another, Teri, Nikita, Nuria, and Randy heaped praise upon Mitch’s story. The piece dealt with the travails of an abused and obsessive man who, like his father, became a professional clown in an effort to cope with the depression brought on by the death of his baby. The story concluded with the obsessive clown receiving his own television series, which in turn allowed him to gain redemption in the eyes of children everywhere.

It was rather unclear to Alicia, within the context of “Big Bad MoFo,” why the clown required redemption. Nevertheless, Mitch used the word (which he creatively chose to spell “redempshin”) several times throughout the piece. He also managed to include eight swear-words on each page of his story.

The praise for “Big Bad MoFo” went on for exactly one hour and thirty-two minutes, following which Dr. Hull led the classroom in a standing ovation. While the class clapped and whistled, Alicia glanced out the window and noticed that evening was approaching. The sky was dull gray and soon the sun would set. Alicia looked back at the class and stifled a giggle when she
She wondered how Nikita could say such a thoughtless thing. This story was based entirely on Alicia's life.

Teri Riguelette’s upturned nostrils flared when she caught the scent of fresh blood in the air. Teri grimaced with utter loathing, looked at Dr. Hull and spat, “What the heck was up with the love story? It made me puke! Literally.”

The classroom critics cackled over this comment and apparently shared Teri’s unfortunate reaction to Alicia’s love story.

A single tear formed at the corner of Alicia’s right eye. The solitary, burning droplet slid across her pale cheek and fell upon her dusty copy of “In a Pasture of Dreams.” Alicia’s lips were pursed very tightly to prevent any sound from escaping her mouth. Nevertheless, a tiny whimper managed to squeeze through her teeth.

Dr. Hull glared at Alicia and exclaimed, “Such sounds are forbidden, Ms. Crowley! Maintain silence!”

At this remark, an almost imperceptible violet luminosity manifested itself in Alicia’s eyes. The sadness Alicia had hitherto felt quickly melted away and was replaced by other, more ominous, feelings. Dr. Hull’s remark had quite effectively invoked the infamous Crowley rage.

Outside, a lone dog howled.

Dr. Hull was startled by the mournful sound, but promptly regained his composure. He smiled at the class and said, “Carry on.”

Randy Lemmingson, his craterous visage scarlet with anger, screeched an epithet before starting his critique. “Goddamn the writer of this story! Goddamn her!!! I am offended and shocked by the title of this…this…feces! ‘In a Pasture of Dreams’?!”

Alicia stared with a vacant expression at the young man as he spat bilious venom onto her story.
Randy continued his tirade, “Excuse me, Dr. Hull…but I must share this. You see, I once…lived near a pasture. I…I know exactly what a pasture looks like. This pasture…it…it was very personal to me. It was so beautiful with its wonderful sheep and goats. And this writer does not portray a pasture accurately. Not even remotely!”

Randy spat out the last word with great anger. He also sounded as though he were crying, although Alicia could not discern any tears upon his blemished countenance. Nuria leaned over and offered Randy a sympathetic pat on the back.

Dark fires burned in Alicia’s heart. Yet she did not speak. A strong gust of wind rattled the windowpanes in the room. The place took on a perceptible chill, and several students donned their coats and jackets.

The muffled sound of inhaled mucous preceded the next comment. Alicia watched the oblong head of Mitch Vondavies open and close its grotesque maw as he cleared his throat. Mitch proceeded to parrot, with somewhat less eloquence, sentiments expressed by Dr. Hull in an earlier class discussion. He looked at Dr. Hull and bellowed, “Fantasy never works for shit. I mean, come on. A freakin’ zombie? Gimme a break!”

The class roared with laughter.

Teri cocked her eyebrow and sneered, “But I thought the guy was alive?!”

Mitch chortled, “No! He was a friggin’ zombie!!”

“Oh my God! That is so dumb!” Teri groaned.

Dr. Hull piped in, “Yes, yes. We mustn’t forget the zombie. Why a zombie? Can’t we cut the zombie out?! If, God forbid, we must have a zombie, why doesn’t it interact with the characters more? For that matter, why doesn’t the zombie interact with us?! I want a zombie I can love and care for; otherwise, this story is far beneath us. We shouldn’t have to read this drivel at our level.”

The class chuckled and grunted its agreement.

“Um…I liked something in this story,” Grace thoughtfully murmured.

The class became silent. Angry looks crossed several faces in the room. Before Grace could complete her thought, Nikita interrupted her and said, “Yeah, I liked something, too.”

Everyone looked at Nikita in disbelief. She smiled and revealed greenish teeth, then added, “I liked that it was only ten pages long instead of fifteen!”

The classroom erupted with laughter over Nikita’s enormously witty remark. Alicia stared at them. Her eyes became brighter as she watched the pack of snickering hyenas devour the carcass she had entitled, “In a Pasture of Dreams.”

Nuria scratched her scar thoughtfully and directly addressed Alicia. “Hey Alicia, you know, when I was a really little kid I liked some zombie stories. But before you write things like this, maybe you should read Lovecraft and Mary Shelley sometime. You might actually learn something, you know. I know a lot about writers, kiddo. Let me tell you something…” Nuria spoke at great length about her intimate knowledge of the various great terror writers.

While Nuria spoke, Alicia thought of the times she made searing, passionate love to Howard Phillips Lovecraft. The man, thought of in some academic circles as asexual, was the epitome of snarling carnal desire when touched in the correct manner. Alicia remembered reading “Pickman’s Model” as pillow talk after one particularly Lovecraftian experience.

Nuria continued babbling and was now discussing Shirley Jackson. Alicia blinked once or twice and thought of the various
Randy added a final comment. "Oh, and Dr. Hull, one more thing! Even though nothing could save this story, I think a dead baby would at least add something interesting to the piece."

"Enough!" Alicia screamed. She stood up and threw her copy of the story onto the floor.

The class gasped in shock.

"Alicia!! You have broken the Silent Agonized Despair in Story Time policy!! How dare you??!!" Dr. Hull roared.

Alicia ignored Dr. Hull. She snarled, "Criticism is the practice of analyzing and evaluating another person's work! It is not an excuse to act like brutal, vicious assho…"

A scandalized Dr. Hull cut her off and gasped, "Ah-Licia!!" He anxiously ran his hand over his slick blonde hair and started berating Alicia, "This is a disgrace! You are not to speak!! We are criticizing your story! What did you expect when you decided to write this fantasy drivel!!?"

"Fantasy?! This is about my life!!" Alicia hissed.

"Your life?! Your story has a zombie in it for crying out loud!" Dr. Hull exclaimed. As he shouted, greasy strands of hair slid down the middle of his forehead.

"Of course there's a zombie in it! He does most of the gardening at our house and leads my legions of mindless Undead! What's wrong with that?!!" Alicia responded as her pale hands clenched and unclenched.

Several people in the classroom giggled out loud. Even Grace looked away in doubtful embarrassment. Mitch yelled, "I just lost my belief suspenshin."

Dr. Hull held out a stack of papers and walked toward Alicia.

horror writers she knew. Several of these individuals, through some arcane and perhaps infernal means, continued to live on in secrecy.

Alicia's thoughts then turned to Poe. The memory of his gloriously pallid body still made her body tingle with desire. She smiled inwardly at the thought of Poe's little-known ability to maintain a perfect erection for thirteen hours straight. Alicia had never, in all her years before or since, seen such a flawless snow-white penis as Edgar Allan Poe's.

"…and so, as you can plainly tell, I know a lot about these writers," Nuria concluded. Alicia, despite her inner torment, bore Nuria no ill will. Perhaps she too would someday feel the sweet, cold touch of Bram Stoker.

"Those writers are shitty. Only kids and stupid fucks like that stuff. Those lame old twist endings suck, man! I don't know about you guys, but my story of redemption was the best one I read this week!" Mitch bellowed.

Seething rage coursed through Alicia's body, and she fixed her uncanny gaze upon Mitch's square head. Mitch did not notice Alicia's purple stare. However, he winced and rubbed his temples when a sudden headache overtook him.

Dr. Hull looked at the clock and said, "Well, I suppose we should move on to the next story. Are there any further remarks?"

Teri raised her hand. She looked perplexed.

Beads of sweat formed on Alicia's upper lip, and her red bangs clung to her dampened brow. She silently awaited Teri's closing pronouncement.

"I really hated the part where the rabbit jumps over the fence," Teri said, although there had been no rabbit in the story. Still, the class agreed with Teri's remark.

Alicia's mouth twitched.
“Get out of my classroom. You spoke out during your quiet time and now you must go. Take your critiques. Your classmates worked very hard on these and I am not going to waste their time. Take them and learn from them. I also suggest counseling regarding your delusions of zombies. Now please get out of here, Ms. Crowley,” Dr. Hull said in a solemn tone of voice.

Alicia silently took the critiques from Dr. Hull then looked out the window and said, “We should all be glad you found your cure, Dr. Hull.” She turned back to him and smiled. “The moon is full tonight.”

A startled expression crossed Dr. Hull’s features and he glanced at the window. He quickly regained his composure and motioned to the door so that Alicia would leave.

Alicia continued to smile and murmured, “All those poor, mangled, dead Mods down by the docks. The Rockers had an unfair advantage didn’t they? Still, that painful, uncontrollable change was a nasty business, eh? Even for the famous ‘Rock ‘n’ Roll Werewolf’.”

“Alicia! You have serious problems! Get out! NOW!” Dr. Hull screamed, and nervously scratched his left sideburn.

“That came from way out of left field,” Nikita mumbled to Teri, who shook her head in confused disgust.

“Very well. I’ll go,” Alicia smirked. She turned, winked at the class, and walked out with her critiques.

She heard the class burst into laughter when she left the room. Alicia took a few steps down the hallway and laughed along with them as she looked through the critiques. She crumpled up each one individually and threw them into the trashcan.

Alicia thought of her husband Merle. He had warned her about enrolling in the Writing Workshop class and reminded her that she never dealt well with criticism.

“You were right, my darling,” Alicia said aloud. “Guess I should have listened to you. Now, alas, I am pissed off.” A small freshman boy crossed to the other side of the hallway when he saw the purple-eyed girl talking to herself.

On the way out of the building, Alicia stopped by the soda machine and bought a cold root beer. She pulled open the tab on the soda can, took a sip of the fizzing beverage, and proceeded to exit the building.

The crisp night air felt wonderful against her damp cheeks and forehead. A broad smile crossed Alicia’s face. She walked down the cracked pathway until she reached a lonely old cemetery which was located several yards away from the school.

The fragrant tree branches overhead swayed in the breeze as Alicia entered the sacred burial ground. She walked to the center of the moonlit graveyard and looked at the barely discernable stone wall at very the back of the cemetery.

“Graham!” she hissed.

At first, only silence greeted her. Soon, however, a faint rustle emanated from a shadowy area near the old wall. A dark form approached Alicia, and, before long, a tall slender man stood before her. The man’s clothes, hair and face were covered in dried gray mud. His white, unblinking eyes stared straight ahead. He said nothing.

“See! You don’t even say ‘hi.’ This is the problem with you, Graham. You don’t say anything! How can anyone like you or care about you?!” Alicia grumbled.

Graham persisted in his blank stare.

“Interact with me,” Alicia demanded.

Graham continued to stare.
“Interact with me, damn it!!! I command you!! Say ‘hi’ at least!” Alicia shouted.

Graham moved his filthy gray lips and a hollow sound came from his mouth.

“…H..hh.hhh…ii..e…” Graham intoned.

Alicia smiled and took a sip of her root beer. “Very good!” she said. “Would you like some root beer, Graham?” she inquired.

Graham stared with dull eyes and said nothing.

“Augh! So that’s it, huh? You’ve got nothing else for me? Interact with me! Interact with me! You must engage me in conversation to be interesting and vital! Interact! Interact!” Alicia shouted in exasperation before throwing her soda can at Graham’s head.

A hollow smack echoed throughout the graveyard as root beer burst out of the can and splashed across Graham’s vacant face. Graham showed no reaction and stared straight ahead with dull, uncaring eyes. Alicia felt a slight pang of remorse over throwing her soda can at Graham and approached the silent man.

“What am I doing? You’re a zombie! You can’t really interact at all! I can’t believe I let some of those goons in the class get to me. I’m sorry, Grammie,” Alicia purred and hugged the unresponsive living cadaver.

“I made you wait out here for half the class period and this is how I treat you, by throwing root beer at your head. I’m sorry… Not that you care,” Alicia added.

“H…h…i…” Graham gurgled.

“Never mind that,” Alicia sighed. She shook her head, wished Graham goodnight, and then began her long walk home.
Robot

Jessica Mollon
Senior, Biology Major
Photography; Black and white
5” x 7”
Sometimes my parents tell me I’m crazy. My friends do too. It is probably because I tell him he is my favorite, even if he does have to share the tank now. I hope that he can understand. I love my goldfish. He’s helped me through more than I thought a slimy, silent creature could. It embarrasses me, but it’s true.

In the spring of 2004, I was having a tough time dealing with life. Every moment that I wasn’t working, doing schoolwork, or picking up the pieces for my irresponsible family, I felt obligated to be at my then boyfriend’s side. I felt like I was unnecessary and falling apart. The stress was leaving me in tears, and some mornings I just couldn’t seem to find the point of getting up.

Backstroking Hitler

Shaylin Walsh
Senior, English Major
Nonfiction

My therapist suggested that part of the reason I was sad was because I missed my dog, who had died the year before. The reasoning was that my pup had made me feel needed. Without any responsibility beyond making money, which I was failing at anyway, I felt useless. I was feeling bad for myself one night when someone instant messaged me online and informed me that there were goldfish for twenty-five cents at a nearby store. This thrilled me, and it became my personal goal to seek out these wonderful little creatures.

I found an old fish bowl packed away in the basement and cleaned it. Just before bed, I cleared a spot in my room for the bowl, and later went to bed dreaming that soon I would have something to attend to. The next day I counted my pennies (literally) and off to the store I went. It became evident, as I looked at the tank full of feeder fish, that these were not healthy animals. Some were already dead. The swimming ones were discolored and, in some cases, growing fungus. I realized that this particular store was stocking low quality, sickly fish. I wondered if the turtles
bound to eat them would catch whatever death the fish carried. With a broken heart, I left empty-handed. I only had thirty cents, and knew I was not capable of saving all of those poor animals from dying a slow fungal death.

A few days later, a Saturday, I needed shampoo. It was really a matter of our household needing shampoo, and my mother and older sister felt that I should be the one to take care of it. After all, they both “had a lot of things to do.” I drove to work, picked up my paycheck, and cashed it. On my way from the gas station to the store, I spotted a little pet store set back in a strip mall. I had a pocket full of cash destined for other things (like bills), but I couldn’t help myself.

This store also had a tank full of little feeder fish. These feeders, however, were some different breed of fish. They were in a tank with a “tropical climate.” In other words, these feeders were meant to feed bigger, fancier fish. I looked around the aquatic section of the store and one particular fish caught my eye. He was labeled a standard goldfish, but nothing about him seemed standard. He was white and had a fancy tail. Strangest of all were his blue eyes. How could I leave him there? I thought such an elegant fish needed an elegant place to live, so I looked at the tanks. Five gallons for a one inch fish seemed a fine fit. As I paid over twenty dollars for my purchase, I admonished myself for spending part of my insurance money on a pet, but reassured myself that the insurance company could wait another week.

I brought the fish and his accommodations, along with pH treatment and food, to my house. I filled his tank and arranged it in my room, spilling water everywhere in the process.

I wondered aloud to my boyfriend and sister what I should name the fish. “Adolph” one of them said. I pondered this, putting aside the fact that it was an odd name to come up with at random. What if I named this fish Hitler? He was a fine Aryan fish after all. Then how could I possibly be upset if he died? “So what if Hitler is dead? He was evil after all.” I promised my sister, who could tell I was already getting attached to a cold-blooded animal, that I wouldn’t cry if Hitler died.

When I came home from work that night, my little white fish swam around happily. Or maybe he wasn’t happy – who I am to know if a fish even has emotions? I found it a therapeutic scene anyhow. When my mother saw him the next day, she declared that he needed a toy or something to hide behind so he wouldn’t get stressed out. I told her I thought he really needed a friend. Off to the pet store once again. At this, my third pet store, there were actually healthy looking twenty-five cent feeder fish. I picked out the littlest orange fish they could get out of the tank. I named him Henry and let him meet Hitler while I found a rock to put into their tank. Less than twelve hours later, Henry was dead.

I wasn’t sure why Henry had died. I searched online to make sure I had done everything correctly. Some places said a gallon of water for every inch of fish was plenty. Some more fanatical groups suggested ten gallons per fish. My sister insisted that I had purchased a bunk fish. I decided that she was probably right. I went to the store again and purchased another feeder. This one was white with an orange spot on his forehead. I considered names for him, and settled on Stalin. I figured an evil fish had a better chance with Hitler than a good fish.

After two days, my fish tank was cloudy and Hitler was beginning to be sluggish. I realized I was missing a filtration system. I didn’t have time to change the water every two days, but I didn’t want to see Hitler and Stalin dead. I went to the pet store Hitler came from and looked at filters. There was nothing that I could afford to buy. Then I went to Stalin’s place of origin, where I found things were even more expensive.

My solution was at the gas station on the way home: the WantAdvertiser, a yard sale in print. That’s how I viewed it anyway. The first week, there were only a few filters listed that I could afford. Every number I tried had the same response anyway; “Sorry, we already sold it.” In the meantime, my fish were growing.
Stalin had doubled in size since he had left the overcrowded store tank. Hitler was getting bigger too. I needed a better strategy. I had to be aggressive if I was going to get a filter for an affordable price.

The following Tuesday I went to Cumberland Farms convenience store at six a.m. and purchased the new WantAdvertiser essentially right off the truck. I drove to school with it on my passenger’s seat. In the days leading up to that day, I had managed to avoid eating out and drove very little, which helped me save nearly thirty dollars. It was the first money I had saved in over a year. I was so excited about this accomplishment that I completely forgot about finding a new filter for that much money, even though it would have been easy. I was on a new quest. I was going to provide my fish with a healthier place to live, and it was going to be an adventure. Safely in my parking spot, I used my pink highlighter and circled every single filter or fish tank and filter combination I could find. I narrowed everything down a little at a time, and finally found a ten gallon tank, a filter, some nets, and a box of accessories for twenty-five dollars. What a deal!

I saved the number into my cell phone and decided that I would call when my second class was done for the day. I didn’t want to call at seven thirty in the morning and sound too desperate, even though I realized that I clearly was. The hours passed so slowly. I was so excited thinking about how much happier my fish were going to be. At ten gallons, I figured I could even add to the number of friendly fish I had.

I paced with excitement as I made the call. When the filter lady told me she still had everything, I was thrilled. We made plans for me to drive north of Boston on a Friday. I called my dad, who knows how to get to and from everywhere I’ve ever heard of, to verify that the town I was to drive to did, in fact, exist.

I made a point of telling my mother where I would be, though she forgot and repeatedly asked me why I wouldn’t be home to help clean the house that day. I invited my sister along; I was dealing with a complete stranger after all. My sister couldn’t come, and neither could my boyfriend. It would be a solo adventure.

The day finally came. I filled my gas tank and, armed with fifty dollars, two sets of directions, and a map book, off I went. I made it all the way into Boston without a problem. It was as though this entire trip was meant to be. As I sang along with the radio, I schemed about location in my room, wondering where to put the tank. Earlier, I had filled a bucket with water, its pH and temperature perfect, and all I needed now was my goldfish’s new home.

I thought of my fish until I reached One Post Office Square, at which time I realized I was off course. My immediate thought was, “Dad works here a lot. He’ll know what to do.” I drove in a circle looking for a place to stop so I could call him. Imagine my surprise when I drove by his truck en route to a place to parallel park. I eased my little Saturn in between two SUVs next to the curb, and jumped out. I strolled briskly down the sidewalk and saw my dad walking right towards me with two of his coworkers.

“Hey, Dad!” I beamed as I swiveled to walk next to him.

“What are you doing here?”

The confusion on his smiling face made me laugh. “I’m trying to get to a fish tank, but the Big Dig has led me here.” Thankfully, my father not only knows his way around the mapped portions of the world, but also the ever-changing parts, too. As a matter of fact, he even knew a shortcut, so on my way home I wouldn’t have to pay the tolls or languish in traffic during rush hour.

Back in my car, this time with mental directions, I wove my way through the city traffic. The obstacle course of Boston will forever amaze me. Between the left-turn-only, right-turn-only, we-know-we-said-stay-to-the-right-but-we-built-a-sidewalk-there lanes, combined with the horns and the steam coming up from sewer covers, and the
pedestrians and bicyclists, I felt like I was playing a video game.

An hour later, I was back in hot pursuit of my fish tank. Up the highway, over the bridge, two lights, a left turn, and then the directions said, "Look for the house that looks like Fort Knox." A vision of a large reinforced building seemed silly to me, especially on this road lined with lawn gnomes and decorative flags. Then I realized I had no idea what Fort Knox looks like. I drove slowly down the suburban road, pondering the options.

Finally, I saw it. A white raised ranch. A tall, chain-link fence surrounded the premises and had "Beware of Dog" signs all along it. In the front window of the house, one of these signs glared down at me in bright orange letters. I parked just off the road. After struggling with the gate, I made it into the yard. I approached slowly, for fear of armed military personnel thinking I was a threat. The door opened before I had made it up the steps. "I'm here about the fish tank," I stated preemptively, afraid that a German shepherd would come out of the house instead of the woman.

"Of course you are." She smiled at me. "I put it in the car. I didn't want the dog to make you uncomfortable." I sighed with relief and walked back down the steps to the driveway, with the woman in tow. She had a set of keys that rivaled any custodian I've ever met. Her brownish-blond hair was pulled back in a braid, and I imagined that she had once admired the lives of the hippies. She had on a neckerchief and a heavy sweater with her jeans. Her eyes were smiling as much as her mouth. "I'm not sure if you're interested, but I also found a twenty gallon tank when I pulled out the decorations. You probably won't want the ten gallon one if we do that though, right?"

"How much would you want for all of it?" I asked meekly, wondering if I could possibly afford all of this bounty before me.

"Thirty?" she asked. I reached in my pocket, paid her, and then loaded the pieces into the trunk of my car. "Thanks a lot! My fish are going to be very happy!"

As I watched this woman go back into her house, I wondered what she could possibly be protecting in this cute little neighborhood, especially with so many keys. For a moment I worried that she had robbed a neighboring home of their fish tank and accessories. I pushed it out of my mind though, because I knew I was headed home, and that my fish were going to be growing and feeling much better by the next morning.

The drive home went by in a blur. I was surprised I didn't get a ticket at any point along the way. I was so excited with the outcome of my day that my foot had become leaden and I couldn't bring myself to shift below fifth gear, even on the back roads. I contemplated how much good this giant hunk of glass was going to do for me. It would give me a reason to climb out of bed in the morning, that was for sure.

Around five-thirty that night, I ran into my house excited and immediately started washing out my new twenty gallon tank with boiled water. (We had run out of oil and weren't expecting heated water from the boiler until morning.) I didn't want my fish to become diseased because I was careless. I covered my bureau with a yard of some fun animal fabric, and then I placed the tank on top. I had learned my lesson with the five gallon tank and knew better than to fill the tank on top. I had set up the filter, and began to arrange decorations as I waited.
Nearly two hours passed. It became too much for me to wait any longer. I had done all I could to distract myself with books and television. The fish were about to move. I marveled at how diligently these two fish were able to escape my net. A five gallon tank doesn’t have much room in it. Ten minutes later, ten whole minutes after I had started fishing with the big green net I had purchased that day, Hitler and Stalin were in their new home. I watched them for a long time. At first they were apprehensive about the new décor. Hitler kept swimming towards the filter, and the current would sweep him back away. He kept at it for some time. After I felt rested from all the lifting, I took the now uninhabited little tank to the bathroom.

Soon, the only evidence that any change had taken place was the still slightly soggy carpet, and the small fish tank in the basement. I sat down on my bed and didn’t realize how tired I had become until I woke up the next morning, still in my jeans. I looked over at my fish tank to admire it. The water trickled gently and Stalin gracefully swam under Hitler’s floating body.

I sat upright in bed. Hitler was floating belly up on top of the water. I was a failure. I had killed my favorite fish. “I should’ve waited to put him in the tank,” I thought. Why had I been so impatient? I couldn’t pull my eyes away from the sight of my little scaled friend that had kept me so occupied and provided me with so much entertainment.

I didn’t want to flush him, but I knew his body would eventually poison Stalin if I left him. I got up, and I walked slowly to the tank. I couldn’t cry because I had promised I wouldn’t. I wanted to cry. The failsafe name of Hitler had apparently not been so clever after all. I stepped in a damp spot on the rug while I reached for the net that I had used the night before. This time, though, it was not for the happy purpose of a new home. This time it was for a funeral.

I dipped the net into the tank, but jumped back. Something had moved. Then I looked. Hitler had flipped himself over and was swimming away from the net. I was confused for a moment before I laughed. Hitler was not in fact dead. I fed both the fish, and walked downstairs. I jumped online and started looking up information about backstroking fish.

The only two diagnoses I could find were swim bladder, or fatigue. Apparently when fish are overtired, they have to find alternative ways to rest and conserve energy. A swim bladder disorder was complicated, but wasn’t the diagnosis. I told my family that he was feeling neglected because I gave Stalin too much attention the night before. Regardless of the cause, he was fine, and I was happy.

It wasn’t just the companionship I was afraid of losing, it was the excuse to take time for myself to relax, and to realize that I was worth something, even if it was only to supply a couple of feeder fish with sustenance.

Now, well over a year later, Hitler and I are both doing really well. Hitler and Stalin have both moved into a fifty-five gallon tank, and have five friends. Sadly, a few friends have been flushed to their final resting place, but that’s how life is. My psychologist and I decided I was no longer in need of his services. When I come home and Hitler is belly up I still get worried, but every time he flips back over, I tell him he’s still my favorite.
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