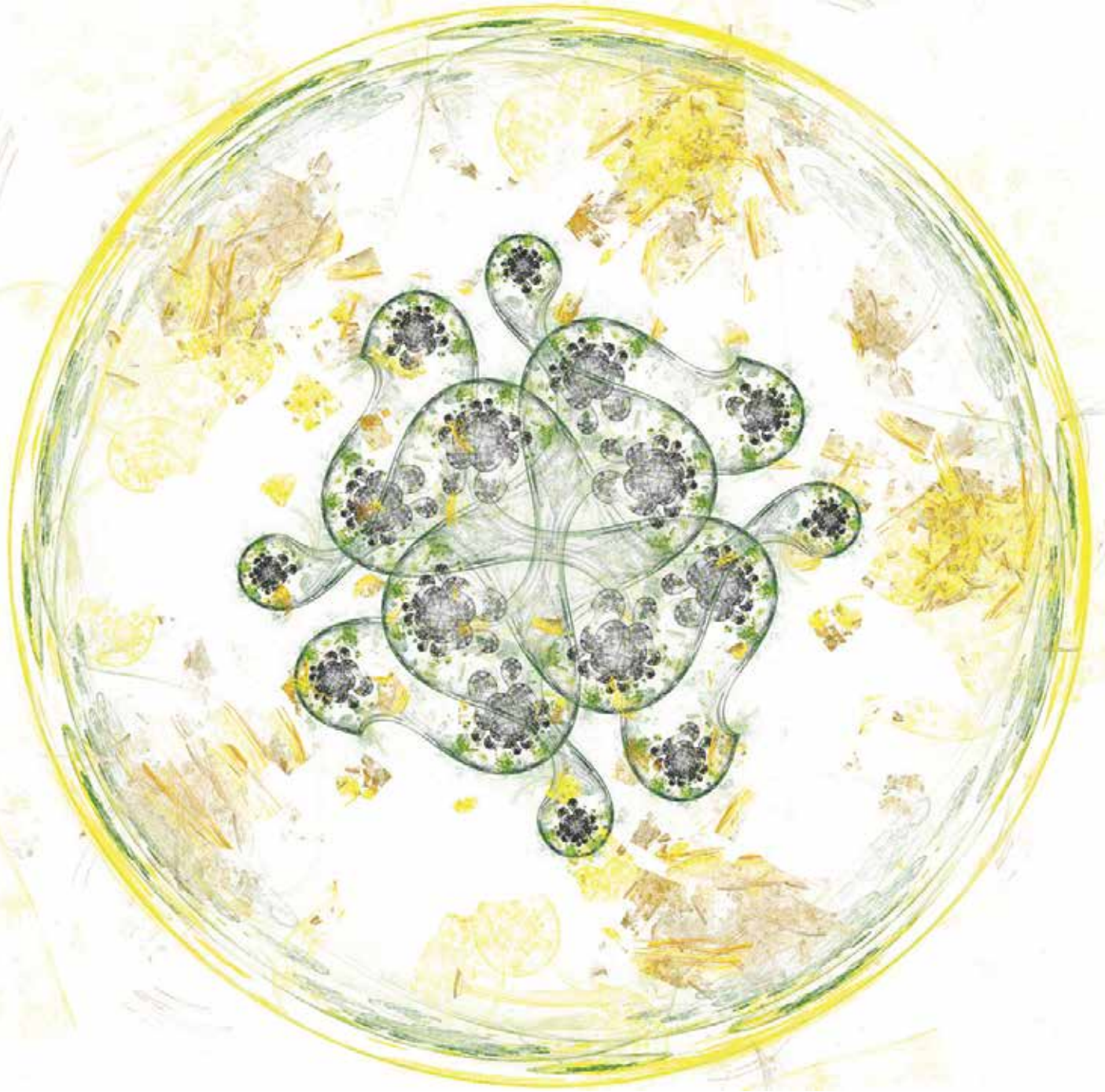


# TOBECO LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL



2014

# CREDITS

The Tobeco Staff would like to thank the writers and artists who submitted their work to this year's journal. We would also like to thank PAGES, Student Senate, English Club, Sigma Tau Delta, Michelle's Café, designer Brenda Stahlman, and the university's students, faculty and staff for their support.

Faculty Advisors  
Dr. Leah Chambers  
Dr. Philip Terman

Senior Editors  
Derek Dietz, Natalie Gearhart, Rebecca Greenman, Sam Nolan

Editors  
Cayleigh Boniger, Christian Crankfield, Ann Deibert,  
Marissa Galupi, Therese Holzapfel, Jenn Lippincott,  
Kaitlynn Sass, Mark Skalski, Brianna Snow

Tobeco Literary & Artistic Journal is a student organization that strives to enhance literary and artistic life at the university and within our local community by accepting submissions of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, world translations, and artwork. Through this publication, we hope to raise cultural and artistic awareness and to advocate a comfortable and creative environment for writers and artists alike.

The name "Tobeco" is taken from the Native American word for the Clarion River. Through this connection, we are reminded that art is as timeless as the river itself.

We are currently reading for next year's issue. Please send poetry, fiction, nonfiction or art to:  
[tobeco@clarion.edu](mailto:tobeco@clarion.edu)

Cover art by David Aites

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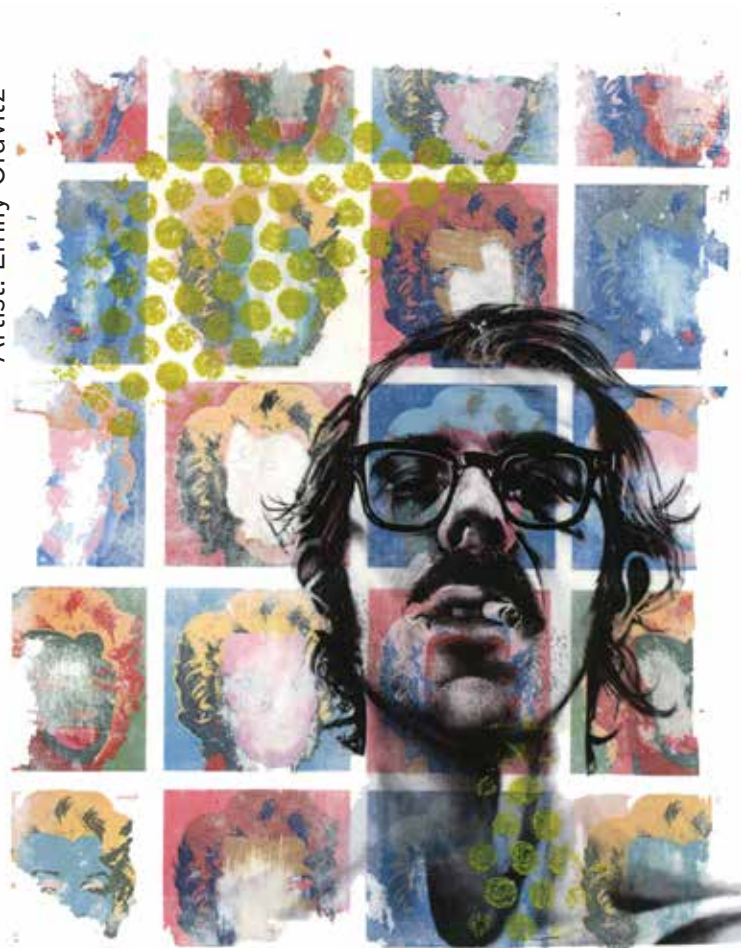
# Lost in Translation

by Elisabeth Donato

Decipher my idioms  
Unravel my foreign syntax  
BabelFish me forever  
Gibberish will ensue

I get lost in translation

Artist: Emily Oravitz



# The Stache

by Mark Skalski

Keep your eyes on the 'Stache,  
the glorious 'Stache.  
Not bushy or unkempt.  
Plucked, carefully.  
Spritzed, generously.  
Groomed, beautifully.  
Trimmed, artfully.  
The 'Stache is functioning correctly.  
That is to say,  
the 'Stache is functioning sexily.

The 'Stache will befriend you,  
it will make you one of its own  
*IF,*  
and only  
*IF,*  
you meet the pre-requisites for friendship  
with the 'Stache.

1. Be cool.
2. Do not shave the 'Stache.
3. Do not threaten to shave the 'Stache.
4. Have a 'Stache.
5. If a woman, then simply complimenting the 'Stache on its tremendous level of manitude will suffice in place of having actual 'Stache.
6. NEVER mention any food or drink that may accrue in the 'Stache. What the 'Stache wants or does not want to keep in its hairy orifices is no concern of *yours*.

The 'Stache has standards.  
If this seems at all weird to you,  
please apply to other barren-faces,  
and enjoy living a life empty and unfulfilled.

You have passed.  
Welcome.  
Welcome to the glorious land of the 'Stache.  
(That land, of course, being my actual, full face.)

Go ahead.  
Touch it.  
You know you want to.

# The I Caught Fire

by Marissa Galupi

Bare feet scampered across thick tufts of grass in whimsy pursuit of the only bug they let me touch. I darted around bushes, crept along hedges, dodged the spot of streetlight on the Frederick's square yard on Maplewood Avenue.

Grandad watched while rocking on the cherry-oak swing, wishing he had more might like the eight year-old before him. He sipped Whiskey from a chipped, blue glass. He spat into a dented, empty coffee can. The musk of habits clung to his clothes and lingered on my skin when he kissed my cheeks after Sunday supper.

I leaped into the air. I stumbled into brush. *Almost...*

Grandma stood day dreaming behind the wrought-iron railing, wondering if she shouldn't have given me a second slice of apple pie. The white, tubular roll sandwiched between her lips pulsed its own fiery signal.

I stopped in the middle of the lawn, yellow-green glow surrounding me. With nimble knees, I bent to the ground, scooped a pill-sized insect into my palm. Antenna tickled. It followed along my life line like I balanced on the plastic beam at the playground. *How old are you? Will you live forever like me?*

I gently nudged the little lightening bug to his home - how temporary.

I caught fire in a jar, held it up to the night sky, and watched it light the entire world just for us.

# Betty Crocker

by Milea Schall

stirs pumpkin roll dough  
with a vibrant red spoon,  
knotted hands turning white  
as the substance stiffens.

She smears the residue  
from her fingers  
onto a checkered apron,  
grabs her No. 2 pencil,  
scribbles wisdom onto  
a yellow sheet of paper.

Yesterday, it was Oatmeal Raisin Cookies—  
the day before, Chocolate Fudge  
Brownies—  
but today's invention will impress them  
for sure.

Mr. Crocker  
charges through the door,  
announces his presence  
by sending steel-toed boots  
flying from his feet  
onto the white wall.

"Smells good in here."  
He plants approval on her cheek,  
then finds solace in the spineless  
couch cushions.  
Soon, the newspaper will sing him to sleep.

Betty picks up her notebook,  
makes frantic graphite strokes  
with as little noise as possible.

Women in suffocating kitchens  
all around the world  
are counting on her,  
pleading for rescue—  
it is almost dinner time.

# Entering Heaven

by Kristen Stilson

What do you say when you enter heaven?

I see the middle aged men.  
They shake God's hand and let out throaty laughs  
As if He is just another Poker buddy.

The small children run up to him,  
Oblivious smiles enveloping their faces;  
They ask him innocent questions about his dated outfit.

The out of place teenager staggers up,  
Pounds fists with God,  
Asks him "What's Up?" with a flick of his head.

An anxious older woman shyly approaches Him.  
Twitching, she stutters a greeting.

Hobbling, the elderly man breathes a sigh of relief.  
He clumsily makes his way up to give God a smile,  
One he has been practicing his whole life.

# And God Said, "Let There Be Light"

by Rebecca Greenman

My sister held my hand  
And led me through the stream of light  
Shooting across our hallway.  
Her fingers were longer than mine.

She wrapped them around my barely-in-  
kindergarten stubs  
And told me that the speckling dust  
The sun exposed was more than  
Particles of dead human flesh.

"Look, Rebecca." She took my other hand,  
"Little pieces of the sun.  
They broke off and floated down  
To give life."

We relished the moment,  
Inhaled the residue of innocence  
To shoot it from our fingertips, but  
Somewhere along the way, our hands fell apart.

# Oh Holy Day

by Rebecca Greenman

The Cathedral stuffed with the pious in Sunday's best  
Drives the fear of God into my soul.

I repeat my mother's mantra  
*And also with you*  
Until my fingers turn blue from  
Clutching the hem of her knee-length black skirt.

Through the intricate stained glass portrayal,  
Mary journeys to Bethlehem,  
And a ray of light throws heat on a stem of pews  
Avoided by the patrons seeking UV-ray protection.

God clambers out the double doors  
At the deafening humdrum  
Of recited apathy and heartless hymns.  
He, just as I, cannot breathe  
In that stuffy air, amidst the sighs of slowed time.

Instead, I pray on Tuesdays.  
The air feels clean and life is thrust about.  
He listens to me better on Tuesdays,  
In my washed-out jeans and ratted T,  
Preaching my life and purging those Saturday night rites.

I stand in the light streaming through  
The Mother Mary-missing-glass-window in my kitchen,  
And God does not scare me as I hover  
Over my under-cooked eggs and tell him  
Of my troubles.

Artist: Elaina Fenstermacher



# The Crickets

by Marissa Dechant

My phone rings. I gulp in anticipation and stare at the caller ID. It's home.

"Hello?"

"Mara."

"Dad."

"How've you been, kiddo?"

"Fine. You?"

"I pruned all the bushes in the side yard today. And I'm halfway done with mowing the lawn."

I listen to the background through the phone and hear cicadas crying. I bet he's sitting on the railing of the shed, watching over the backyard.

"That's good. How's Lin?"

"I think she's out with Max and Reese. She's been out every night this week."

Even my little sister leads a more exciting life than I do.

"Good, good. Enjoying summer while she can."

"Yeah, she has. And what about you? What have you been up to?"

"Work. I also had a chamber meeting Monday night and book club yesterday."

"Keeping busy. That's good."

"Yeah."

Crickets yell over the silence.

"So...have you decided yet?"

"I'm going."

"I didn't know if you changed your mind."

"No. And I know what Mom thinks, but I want to do something for myself for once."

"No, I get it. I know what I said yesterday about doing what you want and letting you make your own choices, but I'd be lying if I didn't tell you that I'm a little worried."

"Dad—"

"I know your mother's the worrier, and we've all been saying how crazy she is for trying to stop you, but I thought you should know. It makes me uneasy thinking about you going."

The crickets come through again, and it's as if I'm right there, sitting in the overgrown grass amongst the untended bushes and wild flowers.

"Mara?"

"Yeah?"

"You all right?"

"Yeah, Dad, it's just—I didn't know you felt that way."

"I know you're twenty-four and you can make decisions for yourself, but if you're not one hundred percent comfortable with this, then that's okay."

"I want to go, I do, but—"

"Mara, how well do you know him?"

"I know him."



“I’m only saying, if you get out there and something goes wrong, or he expects something—has that crossed your mind?”

“Yes, it’s crossed my mind, Dad.”

“We’re only looking out for you.”

“And I get that. But what am I supposed to do? What am I supposed to say?”

At night, Lin would try to catch the crickets, saying they were her friends and needed to come in for the night. She loved those damned things.

“I don’t know. That’s up to you to figure out.”

“But everything’s set. H-how can I change that all now?”

“Mara, if you know in your heart that this isn’t right, then you’ll find a way. I know you will.”

I can almost feel the breeze on my skin. Lin and I would play on that rusted swing set every night during the summer.

“All right, buddy?”

“All right.”

I pumped higher than Lin ever could. She was more interested in jumping off anyway. She said she wanted to be like the crickets. She’d let go, limbs flying in the air for that split second before she landed in a crouch, hopping up and beaming back at me. And I—

“Love you, dear.”

“Love you too.”

I never let go.

# Trigger

by Natalie Gearhart

On a lazy April afternoon,  
they passed without real

until the breeze picked  
up and caught the tail end of a purple scarf,  
until a man with caramel-brown eyes dropped  
his fur glove.



Artist: Maggie Ditmore

# Signature

by Cayleigh Boniger

The curve of your hand spells out D-E-S-P-A-I-R  
 Along the protrusion of my collarbone;  
 The dance of your lips marks out  
 AGONY

In

n  
o  
t  
c  
h  
e  
s

Down my breastbone.  
 Your glance reads like a manual of  
 How To Unstring Muscle like a Longbow,  
 Because my knees tremble under the force of an 8.7  
 On the Richter scale  
 Before folding  
 under  
 When you look  
 Your voice plunges to the depths of the oceans,  
 Dragging me in its wake,  
 My lungs squeezed like crumpled soda cans  
 And my blood foaming up with carbonation.  
 Yet...  
 When we two meet, walking shadow,  
 You shall be no poor player  
 But GREAT.  
 Your hour upon the stage  
 Stretching into the lifetime of my slight frame  
 And

away.

beyond.

# Smothered

by Blayne Sheaffer

I gave birth in a prison.  
 Never sentenced,  
 Never swollen.  
 A baby girl with my nose—  
 Elizabeth, my middle name.  
 He put me here and waits  
 Outside. We had the  
 Same photo of her—  
 Ours.  
 It was all I had of her,  
 The nuns' now.  
 "Another target," he said.  
 I couldn't remember her  
 Name. My baby.  
 What's her name?  
 What's mine?  
 I'm left here,  
 Watching him move.  
 Watching what we created—  
 Smothered.

# Waiting

by Lindsey Steele

That early morning,  
Before golden beams  
Could reach our  
Eyes, we drove  
Through an alternate  
World as streetlights  
Formed a runway.  
Those two hours  
Rested beside us,  
Shook with us,  
Fastened in those  
Quick moving seats.  
Through those bleak  
Hallways, we lost  
Our way, led  
By conflicting signs  
In sterile language,  
Past white masks  
And worried faces  
Shaded by pursed  
Lips, beaded sweat.  
I took my  
Place, nestled among  
Warm towels, and  
You spilled waterfalls  
Of coffee on  
That empty waiting  
Room carpet floor.  
And as they  
Wheeled me to  
A distant darkness  
To mend a  
Genetic mess of  
Shallow sockets, failing  
Muscles and blossoming  
Erratic pain, you  
Waited, and I  
Awoke to a  
Strange woman's hands  
Beneath my gown  
Removing glued sensors  
From my bare  
Chest in a  
Strange room, but  
I knew you  
Sat one floor  
Above, waiting for  
Me.



Artist: Natalie Gearhart

# Arriving in Pittsburgh from Honolulu

by Marissa Galupi

I stumbled on the last step off the airplane stairs.  
In front, my balding father tugged on my hand.  
Behind, my impatient mother sifted slender fingers  
through tangles of her youngest daughter's  
beach-sand hair—the color of Waimanalo.

Interest drained from a half-day flight,  
from listening to mix tapes on a hand-me-down Walkman,  
drawing snowmen I've never seen or made,  
and kicking the guff, chubby man's seat.

Imagination couldn't cloud expectations  
when my Velcro sneakers scraped  
the cold cement of the runway.  
I was the only one in shorts.  
Dad donned the lone floral shirt.  
Mom blended in with her dull sweater.

Grey skies sulked in October chill.  
Mountain tops in the distances  
weren't rounded mounds of clay.  
No geyser spewed molten rock. No cone spit ash.  
Scents of pungent pine soured my stomach.

Gathering backyard bananas for breakfast  
wouldn't make sense to anyone here.

I wouldn't be able to order a side of rice  
with my Spam burger at Mickey D's.

I didn't know I'd flown where cereal and milk  
weren't ten dollars, and Dole pineapple came in can.

"Aloha," I squeaked,  
two top teeth missing as I grinned at an airline worker  
hunched at the bottom of the steps.  
I bent my head for a floral blessing,  
but the scowling man simply shoved  
a plastic pair of pilots wings in my palm  
and glared at my parents.

"Yinz don't know where you are, do ya?"

That's when I realized one three-syllable word  
meant hello and goodbye.



Artist: Elaina Fenstermacher

## Fish Fry

by Kevan Yenerall

In between Easter chatter, soup orders, and  
shuffling feet, bad blonde jokes abound in line  
at the fish fry.

Someone recounts a barely accurate account  
of an airplane emergency, and the woman at the  
counter calls out for clam strips and crab cakes.

It is Friday, Lent, and Pittsburgh, fish  
is king, lunch specials are hot, and the  
shrimp bisque is out.

"Flashdance" plays on the radio, an early '80s  
synthesizer-led, leg warmer-friendly, fist-pumping-yet-eerily  
artificial pick-me-up in the face of faded steel glory,  
industrial identity and Mon Valley desolation.

A child to my left wonders aloud about the  
proximity of tartar sauce.

The man to my right, leaning on his cane,  
downing a cold Coke, nabs the cocktail sauce.  
His slightly-stained Steelers shirt speaks to an  
abiding faith in past, present and future.

The horseradish is a revelation.

Fried beats broiled 20 to 1.

# For Boston

by Kevan Yenerall

My feet shuffle along Pittsburgh pavement; my heart remains in and aches for that indispensable, indefatigable, enlightened city of education, art, rock-solid sports fanatics, poets, factory workers, and Mike's Pastry.

You are hardscrabble Lowell and Lawrence, Kennedy and Kerouac, pretentious boutique shopping alongside No-bullshit accent, shot-and-a-beer-backbone-straight, you sonafabitch, you better damn well believe it.

Parker House, Fenway, and the Departed;  
Faneuil Hall, Bill Russell and *Good Will Hunting*.

Bread and roses, the North End and Back Bay.  
The Big Dig, Honey Fitz and Crispus Attucks.

Irish, Italian, Hispanic, working class, Ivy League  
and the *Last Hurrah*.

Dropkick Murphys and only about a million  
other bands.

One week before our wedding, you are the first American city  
that we walked, ate, drank, and loved together.

It will take more than your miserable, goddamn shrapnel,  
your pressure-cooking cowardice couched in crowded  
trash bins, hidden from the civilized, shrouded in God-knows-what  
ideological excuse, homegrown hubris, or international grievance,  
exploded into our daughters, our sisters, our fathers, our neighbors,  
our civic heart, our international tradition, paralyzing our  
running, beating, living, breathing hearts.

It will take more than the excess and disregard  
aimed at innocents on the urban thoroughfare of  
our essential American city.

It will take more than that.

It will take more than that.

# Marching down Main Street

by Kaitlynn Sass

Large wooden gates opened, and I saw the shadow of the castle just around the corner. A whistle sounded, and I snapped to attention along with the rest of the band. Within seconds, we were off, rapidly marching down the wide street. As I took in the scenery around me, I remembered to focus on twirling and staying in step with the music. Soon, we rounded a corner and passed directly in front of Cinderella's castle. Crowds cheered, and the band played powerfully. In what felt like seconds, it was all over. We passed through another gate and watched the magic melt away as we saw Cinderella's carriage sitting in storage.



Artist: Emily Oravitz

# Chasing Love

by Sara Barnett

Blues and greens and silvers, with gold or chrome trim, and maybe heated seats. I'm not much of a shopper, but if it involves test drives and high speeds—I'm sold. I stopped at my fourth dealership of that particular Thursday and felt hopeless wandering the lot as nothing excited me. Then I saw it. Gloss black with metallic flakes, black leather interior with red stitching, and a short-throw 5 speed shifter; it was hot. Maybe a two-seater convertible wasn't what I really needed, but it sure looked like a good time. A test drive couldn't hurt.

The salesman strolled toward my direction with a smile that could have sold the car all by itself. He knew he had me. I signed some papers and took off running with the keys. Traffic had me anxious, and I knew just the cut off to fix that. The top came down and my hair went up. The hot summer air mixed with that signature "new car smell" had me intoxicated. Second gear flew by, then third, and fourth. I needed more. I hopped back on the highway, and the red line was mine for the taking. Minivans looked like they were sitting still as I conquered the fast lane. The next exit sign read, "Windy Roads," a warning to others but a tease for my hands grasping the steering wheel. The bends and hills captured my spirit, and my heart spun faster than the chrome wheels.

The brakes hit hard when I returned to the dealership but not for long. That same salesman with that same smile was waiting by my 1989 Oldsmobile in the lot. The driver's seat didn't want to let me go, and I whispered a temporary goodbye as I climbed out. I caught a glimpse of myself in the shiny paint. The drive had teased my hair and left a permanent grin reaching both ears. My best look yet.

He held his hands out to take the keys back.

"That won't be necessary," I told him. "I'm taking it home."

His eyes questioned me but a smile remained, "I'm sorry miss, but this car isn't for sale."

Disappointment fell out of my mouth as my jaw hit the floor with an unexpected sigh. I wish the anger in my eyes could have burned right through his heart like he had just done to mine. The temporary goodbye I had whispered seconds ago suddenly became the worst heartbreak I would ever know. My shoulders sank and my lower lip puffed out. But I snapped back when I heard a giggle. Was he really laughing at me? He was! My frown became a scowl and I felt my face enflame along with the rest of my body. He was quick to react.

"This is my car. But we could take it to dinner sometime," he suggested, with those same questioning eyes and that same smile. "Are you busy now? I can get my coat?"

I lowered my eyelashes and tilted my head with a smile for his reply. As he turned to fetch his coat I made a break for the driver's seat, turned the key, and felt a quick shiver when the engine purred. The tires squealed. My heart pounded. Love is worth the chase.

# Angry Eyeball

by Mark Skalski

God was a thundercloud with an angry eyeball in it  
I wore like a hat.

I wouldn't turn in a library book on time,  
and the bloodshot eye would rain tears  
on me  
for hours  
until I confessed.

Later, the kid from room 213 would pick  
on me,  
and I'd look up to find the eye  
wandering or asleep,  
maybe dreaming up other realities,  
maybe creating another me someplace  
else,  
except this time, I didn't steal library  
books.

# Flippin' Patties

by Derek Dietz

The grill is the wide open plain,  
and I am the cowhand,  
driving my steers  
across the searing stainless steel.

Lined up in rows of five,  
my plump red cattle paint  
the front of my apron  
and the palms of my hands russet,  
like the clay-coated hills of Santa Fe.  
And then it's westward bound.  
Get along little dogies!

They splash  
through great rivers of grease,  
each leg of their journey  
marked with a sizzlin'  
Tssssssss.

# All Things Basement-y: a found poem from the Horse Trader

by Marissa Galupi

Mr. John Deer and his Jane Doe.

Ten cases of ammo, pre-owned

fire arms under stained sofa beds.

A single white male, built in America, ready for you.

Punching bags priced per pound,

A divorced white female with free, orange-ish kittens,

And a full-blooded black male selling parts of his Kawasaki Arctic Cat.

Mechanical bulls: great for graduation!

Religious organizations,

Psychic Readings by Mrs. Lola,

a Canadian drug center in the cellar.

A Browning "Sweet Sixteen" for Beth and Bob's kid,

And sixty-five dollar deer processing fresh jerky for all.

Thousands of Veterans with PTSD,

A Hot Rod-er who "don't talk much,"

a junky fridge full of Pabst

And a cracked Ping-Pong table used for discount chiropractic.

Hall without Oates,

A handicapped Pat Boone minus walk-in tub.

Grave blankets for bone-chilling winters,

A charming plastic snowman,

And blue spruce coated in cobwebs for one Artificial Christmas.

And an Honest Christian Woman who will hall it all away after confession.

# Socktopia

by S.C. Nolan

Imagine the place  
where lost socks go  
to hide.

Whatever their motives,  
they band together  
to allude the masters  
who have walked all over them.

It must be somewhere warm.  
Socks are always happiest  
when they've got heat  
trapped between every stitched  
fiber of their soles.

This footloose Jerusalem  
must accept socks of all backgrounds.  
Lint-covered, from years beneath the dryer,  
wet, from being left in the rain,  
and, of course, socks who didn't quite make it  
down the laundry chute.

Even socks need order  
for survival. The socks are sorted.  
There's a heavy white population,  
but they're treated as the minority.  
The aristocratic argyles and dignified darks  
cite business savvy and experience  
to claim the seats of power.

The population grows as others hear  
of this new world.  
Soon hose and even a few shoes  
make the journey to Socktopia  
(not a clever name... a working title, really)  
to begin their new lives.  
It's not what they expect.  
It's a struggle.  
They begin to wonder if they've made a mistake.

Fed up, the whites join forces  
with the newcomers.  
The stitching can not hold.  
Rebellion.  
Cotton, polyester, silk,  
shredded for a freedom  
that will never be theirs.  
And in the minds of socks everywhere  
is the question, "Was this worth it?"  
The feet left bare for the barren world at their feet.

# Band-Aids on Both Knees

by Milea Schall

Armored with a purple,  
flower power helmet  
and a water bottle attached  
under my leather seat.  
Handlebars with rainbow streamers  
popping like fireworks out the ends.  
My dad took me to the old,  
deserted,  
pothole infested  
school parking lot  
and set me loose.

That was his style—  
to let me go,  
perhaps to fall  
and learn the hard way—  
not because he enjoyed it,  
but because that was how  
his father taught him.

He watched through the golden rims  
of his aviator glasses  
as I rode past the broken windows of the  
brick building.  
Eventually, my white tires  
stopped wobbling.

I needed Band-Aids on both knees  
when I went home,  
but I knew how to ride  
without anyone's help.



Artist: Alexis Miller



# Sunburn

by Carla Cilvik

Cool icy blue gel  
Dripping, sliding down  
The damaged surface—  
Once a virgin to the sun's wrath  
Every drop not squandered  
On lesser attributes

A temporary distraction  
Dulling raging nerve-endings  
Offering comfort from the  
Enflamed, searing surfaces  
As my fingertips trace the outline  
Of nature's branding.

Too soon my savior blends in  
To the desert, cracked—  
Void of a hopeful oasis  
Vanished as quickly as it came  
Like a mirage on the plane  
Without a real image to rely on

Artist: Maggie Ditmore



# In What I Wear

by Hannah Gloeckl

I paint my nails weekly in a shade of the red spectrum,  
with the passionate blood of the earth-shattering women  
who came before me.

I adorn soft leather jackets, boots, and accessories,  
because they feel like the safety blanket of a badass.

I slip a bracelet and a watch onto my left arm. They  
serve as daily reminders of the limits of the veins that run  
beneath.

I spray DKNY's Golden Apple on my wrists and neck  
when I feel overly confident, and enjoy, with a coy smirk  
passing remarks of strangers on the sour sweet aroma.

I push back my glasses in the evenings, wearing them like  
a tiara for the stressed, so that they pull back my bangs  
and blind me from incoming distractions.

I swipe on coral lipstick before I call people on the shit  
they spew like hot lava from their mouths, as each of  
their lies settles and cools over the others in layers.

I wiggle into an almost-true-blue pair of converse, one  
day destined to be doodled on, and watch the future  
images dance in my peripherals.

I pull and yank my hair back into an "appropriate only  
because you're in college" bun, which acts a traffic  
signal to take a detour because stuff is going get done,  
now.

# The Last Part

by Sam Nolan

*Nod at the end of the sentence, when she hangs a word out for your approval. Smile when she smiles. Drop in an occasional “mhmhm” or some other audible cue of attention. Repeat.*

It's easy to drift off when she starts going; much harder to listen to whatever it is she's saying. Anyway, it's not for my benefit. She needs to talk about her day and I let her. After five years I've mastered this art of fake-listening. But damn is it boring.

She needs friends. She needs people she can tell things like this to so I can buy a hat rack for the others and simply wear the “boyfriend” cap. But then, far too often, she drops this phrase that I want nothing to do with. “You're my everything,” she says, which sends my stomach plummeting toward my knees because it just sounds so *we're-sixteen-and-our-parents-don't-understand-us* to me. And the truth is I don't want to be her everything. Or her world. Even in the pet-name kind of way. No one should be burdened with that kind of responsibility. Being someone's something is fulfilling, it makes you feel needed. But being their everything? That's a tall order.

*Nod. Smile. 3, 2, 1... sober the smile and become an intent listener.*

Didn't she have friends at some point? She wasn't always this needy. I can't pinpoint what happened or when.

I think back to when things were fun. Our first date was in this very restaurant. Or maybe it was our third. I see her now, as she was then, staring across the table, smiling, laughing. I remember laughing too, which makes me wonder how long it's been since she last made me really laugh. But everything was different then, I realize. The restaurant's tacky Americana and hometown décor didn't get to me then. Its colors seemed brighter, too. And the food tasted better; I know that much as I test my tongue against a slice of dry, spiceless grilled chicken.

And for the love of all that is holy, I've no idea what she's talking about now, but I know I don't care. That can't make me look too good, but I've got guys for this kind of thing. I can't imagine telling her every insignificant detail about my day. Did I do that once upon a time? Am I just realizing now how ridiculous that seems?

She's got something in her teeth. A black speck, maybe a grind of pepper, but I don't want to tell her. This will turn into a game I don't want to play: *Did I get it? No, not yet. How 'bout now?*

What the hell is happening? This can't be my life right now, can it? I've spent five years with this woman. That's not an accident. It can't be.

*Nod knowingly. “Mhmhm.”*

Okay, this has got to stop. Tune in.

“...And she basically told me she wasn't going to do any part of it, but she wanted me to tell Sharon that she helped. She says her mom's sick or something. Like, do you think if my mom were sick I'd just be like, ‘sorry, can't work.’ No.”

This was a bad idea, I now realize. My face has lost all of its calm façade as I look blankly at the woman I've been tied to for the last fifth of my life. Maybe she's changed—maybe I have—but before I can analyze it any further, I blurt out,

“I think we should break up.”

The declaration springs from my lungs—my tongue, my lips—like a chambered bullet, and our corner of the restaurant is draped in silence.

Words have a nasty habit of leaving the body on a one-way trip, and these are no exception. For one razorblade moment, we sit stunned and stare at one another. She speaks first.

“What?” she breathes, with a half-smile, hoping against hope that I might have been joking. I wish I was, too—knowing that the next part is the hardest. But I've said it now and clarity comes crashing down around me as the slightest pang of relief forms in my gut.

Still, words don't come as smoothly as they should.

“I...” I start, half-cocked. I regroup. “This isn't working. We both know it.”

Her eyes immediately well up and I notice that this is not the appropriate locale for this conversation. But then again, what is?

“What are you talking about?” she asks, and her tone carries with it the most passion either of us has expressed in the last six months.

“We've changed,” I manage to say, settling on the fact of the matter. It's nobody's fault, but five years of perpetual motion have left a gaping distance between us.

The next half-hour is a haze of blame, tears, and prolonged periods of silence. Without knowing it, we're conducting a post-mortem of the last half-decade, each trying hard not to label them a waste of time. What we say isn't important, but we have to say it. We're not going to see eye-to-eye, even though we do. This is the first step outside of our carefully cultivated comfort zone, and the only way to truly leave is to burn down the bridge behind us.

She storms out, eventually, and I choose not to follow. The waitress brings me my check with a knowing look and I pay the bill. When she brings back the receipt I notice, not for the first time, that she's kind of cute. I drop a few extra bucks on the table before I leave.

# These Things We've Known

by Molly Mays

"If dreams were lightning  
thunder was desire  
This old house would have burnt  
down  
a long time ago."— John Prine

\*

My grandfather  
put his hand on his holster,  
stared down at my father—  
"Boy, that woman ever leaves  
me,  
I'll kill you, you hear?"  
Daddy nodded and looked back  
up  
at him through wet green eyes.

\*

Ma was young sitting under  
the neon beer signs at Bolen's  
watching Randy Myers sing  
John Prine songs through a haze  
of smoke the night she met my  
father.

Her hair was a glossy brown,  
worry yet to leave creek beds  
at the corners of her eyes,  
all the life still bubbling up in her  
like some geyser set to let  
loose on the world.

\*

My brother and I lay in  
Grandma Bradmon's  
old bed with the mustard  
yellow floral blankets  
and Daddy tells us about

Jack and the beanstalk  
and the goose that laid  
golden eggs and I wonder  
if any of the May's chickens  
ever lay golden eggs and if  
they'd let me have one  
until I drift off to sleep.

\*

Curled up on canvas  
Army cots at the cabin  
Ma tells us about the  
Marshmallow family  
that lives at the grocery  
store—that there's a  
Molly and a Brian  
Marshmallow and that  
they're very tired and  
want to be good marshmallow  
children and go to sleep.

But I can't sleep  
and instead look  
out the big window  
at the A-frame's peak  
and see if I can count  
all the stars hanging  
above the trees and  
wonder what it could  
be that holds them so high.

\*

Daddy tore the old Christmas  
lights  
down off the house—the blubs  
big as my hand—red, blue,  
green,  
yellow—glowing up through  
the  
caps of snow that had settled  
over them— he flung them onto  
the walk and stomped them  
to a sparkling powder and  
broken  
snake of wire and sockets .

\*

Ma does dishes  
in her green-blue kitchen—  
looks over her shoulder  
at her second husband  
already asleep in his  
recliner with the six o'clock  
news blaring on the TV—  
starts humming some song  
and keeps scrubbing at  
the greasy remnants of  
the night's meatloaf.

\*

She took water and powder sugar  
and made tiny paw prints on the  
tile by the front door, telling my  
my brother and I the Easter Bunny  
had left tracks—I knelt down over  
my white church shoes with the  
sparkly bows and poked at the prints—  
told Ma they were just sugar and  
there was no Easter Bunny.

\*

All day Daddy tells us it's gonna storm  
cause the Maple and Poplar leaves  
have turned over to show their  
pale bellies and at night, when it does  
he drags my brother and I out to sit  
on the glider on grandma's front porch  
and we watch the lighting arch over the hills  
like the flash of some great camera.

And as the rain drips down off the gutters  
Daddy tells us about when he was a boy  
and that if Grandma had died first  
he wouldn't ever have come back  
to the mountain and that he's sure  
our grandfather is rotting in hell with  
Hitler and Stalin and Mussolini.

\*

Before his third wedding he's piss drunk again.  
Tries to steady his gaze on my face—weepy  
green eyes,  
hair become grey, body gone slack at the  
joints—  
"Tell me the truth now—I need you to be  
straight with me.  
Was I good father? Did I do right by you and  
your brother?"

\*

When we return from fishing  
at the pond on Indiantown Road,  
Ma has taken the wildflowers  
from the old glass milk bottle  
on the cabin's kitchen table—  
holds them to her chest as she  
lays stiffened on the blue plaid  
couch, brown eyes closed,  
trying to breath shallow  
until she erupts in laughter.

# A Dream of Horse and Hands

by Molly Mays

I measure the horse with my hands  
from the ground to the withers  
but they're too small, too knobby,  
the fingers beginning to twist crooked.  
Other hands are needed—bigger hands  
like Pap's straight clean cut nails,  
slender and pale like a women's—delicate.  
No they won't do either, they must be  
stocky, callused hands like my father's  
cigar fingers, scared and discolored  
from skin grafts, impossible to ball into a fist,  
they must have known the destruction of  
beautiful things, imagined the end of all  
the pasts they've known, to be of use.

# A Sweet Trip

by Lauren Szoszorek

That one such memorable night  
when we dipped french fries in frosties,  
I thought I'd never  
find another you.

You shined your delicious grin,  
making you irresistible,  
and your sweet Ed Hardy cologne  
engulfed the room.

I was a little bit delirious  
from your potent cosmopolitans,  
and, like any poison,  
they reached my internal soul,  
rotting it from within.

Not even Mr. Clean Magic Erasers  
could wipe away the stain you left,  
and I have to cover it up  
with the essence of joy  
you never gave me.

## Sources

*Testimonial* by Harry Newman (*Good Poems*)

*Tweet* from @Katie\_Atk (*Twitter*)

*John Mayer: I'm Gonna Find Another You* (*Song*)

*Coming* by Kenneth Rexroth (*Good Poems*)

*Mr. Clean Magic Eraser* commercial

*Giorgio Armani* advertisement

*Joshua Radin: You Got Growin' Up To Do* (*Song*)

# Waiting

by Lindsey Steele

That early morning,  
Before golden beams  
Could reach our  
Eyes, we drove  
Through an alternate  
World as streetlights  
Formed a runway.  
Those two hours  
Rested beside us,  
Shook with us,  
Fastened in those  
Quick moving seats.  
Through those bleak  
Hallways, we lost  
Our way, led  
By conflicting signs  
In sterile language,  
Past white masks  
And worried faces  
Shaded by pursed  
Lips, beaded sweat.  
I took my  
Place, nestled among  
Warm towels, and  
You spilled waterfalls  
Of coffee on  
That empty waiting  
Room carpet floor.  
And as they  
Wheeled me to  
A distant darkness  
To mend a  
Genetic mess of  
Shallow sockets, failing  
Muscles and blossoming  
Erratic pain, you  
Waited, and I  
Awoke to a  
Strange woman's hands  
Beneath my gown  
Removing glued censors  
From my bare  
Chest in a  
Strange room, but  
I knew you  
Sat one floor  
Above, waiting for  
Me.

# All Hail

by Blayne Sheaffer

I was 14 when you ruined my life.  
In the dusty aisle, I'd never seen anyone  
But you and Kurt.  
You had accosted me from a young age

Through the television--  
*Christine and Carrie.*  
It wasn't until that day on the shelves that you  
Seduced me,

Broken spine and all.  
The Lot made me a woman in the  
Week it took to tear through it.  
Hungry, gripping and ripping its pages.

I'd already idolized Abraham's Mina Harker,  
Had already been shaken by her evil ascent.  
So when Jimmy writhed and screamed, "Unclean!"  
I couldn't breathe.

You told me Mrs. Glick arose from the coroner's bed,  
And I remembered seeing her at six years old  
Waking up undead  
(“That wasn't a weasel that bit you, sister,” my mother told her.).

She jumped and bit Jimmy while  
Ben made a cross from tongue suppressors.  
You warned me that her jowls were still “champing” as he fumbled  
(“Champing's a word? That's brilliant!” I whispered to you.).

Jonathan Harker died, but Ben lived?  
I lay awake even eight years later.  
But then who was Van Helsing if Father Callahan bit the big one (get it?).  
You tricked me.  
I've dog-eared half your pages  
Just to learn that nothing  
Is a science. And no one is anyone.  
At 14, I lost my innocence to you.

Artist: Brittany Hauser



# Ovenheads

by Andrea Cobb

My muse speaks with a razor tongue  
and spits prescription pills,  
an idolized mental patient  
speaking sanity to my spongy ears.

Crafting words like stringing pearls,  
I finger the pebbly surface  
through two left thumbs-  
all I can conjure is mush and stones.

Nothing to do but huddle in the earthy dirt.  
Like the dead poet  
whose head burns in an oven,  
mine is stuck in sand,

fuzzy feedback -steady static-  
a multitude of grains  
scratch the backs of my eyes  
like gnats in August steam.

The appeal of that warm glove,  
which offers more comfort than  
the hugs we never earned,  
the kisses never planted.

A young Plath- with an itchy brown wig-  
digging into dirt,  
clawing to be pocketed back  
in the womb of warm sand.

Praying for worms to find me.

I wish to feed them my burned fingertips,  
Watch them nibble the tips  
as I nibbled nipples raw-  
my gnashed canines grinded flat by steamrollers of anxiety.

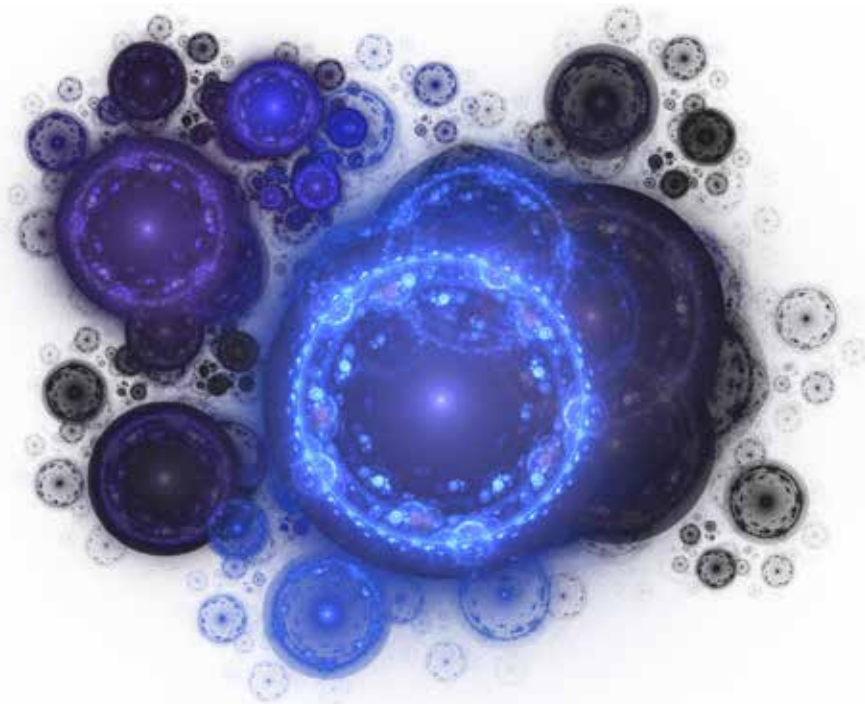
These words are my work, and  
I'm starving from this lexical expulsion.

A bottle popped loses its fizz.

A perpetual dance of the tongue,  
spilling words that empower  
and define meaning  
where meaning was void.

The difference is- I have no children  
to pocket the traces of my sanity-  
or scribble colorful inkblots  
along the cave walls of this home,  
stacking building blocks of a lingual legacy.

Artist: David Aites



# Torrential Fog

by Greer Wardlaw

They lay in tangles. Him upon her upon Earth upon space. One of the moments when his steady breath periodically fell upon her neck, his arms hugged her bare waist. Together in the Fog. For the Fog surrounded. It seeped into their pores. It clouded their eyes. It blocked their senses. Only could they feel their way to each other, and so they rarely ventured off. As long as she could remember, she had spent her time in his arms. The boy also claimed no recollection of different times. And yet they had barely a memory of this one. Day by day, they sat. Arm connected to hand holding hand connected to arm. They were always in each others' grasp. Too easily could they become lost in the Fog. The merciless relentless Fog. The haze disabled their eyes, and so they had no perception of where they lay. All they knew was that they must lay there. They must never part, for they would surely become lost in the haze. And so they lay.

Her name was Amelia. The way it smoothly flowed from others' mouths had never ceased to fascinate her. And yet, she could never make it pour from her own pale lips. It always sounded so incredibly strange, that when she began to speak it, she always came up short. And yet, she had managed to tell him. The boy she reasonlessly woke up beside one morning. The morning she opened her eyes and saw an ivory mist. She hadn't seen another flower, sky, or even her own hand ever since. Upon awakening on Day One of One Thousand Four Hundred and Eighty Six, they had discovered they were left wearing wreaths of olives. The vines were braided tightly and bound together as if they had never been separate plants. Amelia had never taken it off, for there was no reason to examine it. If she were to remove it from her forehead, it would surely be lost in the Fog, and she would have lost her only worldly possession. Boy shared her

opinion on the matter, and left the vines entwined in his hair. Amelia rose and startled the unwavering breath of the boy. She could not spend her days telling the boy of how she had a freckle beneath her elbow, or how her eyes were the color of a wet cobblestone road during the night. She could not base her days off of the hours wrapped in Boy's arms. She could not bare to lie there for another passing moment. She clung to his skeleton-like hand and sat upon the earth. It smelled of fresh rain upon a new spring's grass. The saturated soil served as a worthy throne. Amelia was the queen. And Boy, the king.

And so, they began their Discriptories. This was one of the many games they had devised to pass the time over all of the decided years. Before explaining their games, it should be shared that Boy had a name. Clark was the one he was born with, the one his long lost mother called him by, and the one he whispered to Amelia on the morning of Day One. Clark had always liked his name, for it made him feel broad. He was not a cowerer, nor was he a conqueror. And "Clark" was such a flawless in-between. With that, the Discriptories commenced. She would tell him something about her. The way her hair cascaded about her face. Or the way her wrists could be surrounded if only she were to take her middle finger and wrap it around so that it met her thumb. And on Day One Thousand Four Hundred and Eighty Seven, Amelia told Clark about the way she imagined her knees were covered in the damp dirt. And they would go on like this. Each and every morning. Amelia would tell Clark something about herself, and Clark would respond solely with a finding he had never told her about himself. And on Day One Thousand Four Hundred and Eighty Seven, Clark told Amelia how he feared he might have the most unlovely elbows. Descriptories never included feelings or emotions.



Purely physical characteristics that neither could be sure of but they were rather certain about.

Amelia had never known Clark before Day One. And now she had formed her own Clark deep within her mind. His hair, he claimed, was the color of a freshly chopped tree trunk. He told her it hung to almost his shoulders and curved in waves from lack of combing through. He described his neck as being slender and his bones jutting out in all the wrong places. Amelia thought differently of this Descriptatory, however, for she had spent One Thousand Four Hundred and Eighty Six nights wrapped up in Clark, and never once had she felt his bones to be in the wrong places. His arms draped low and his fingers never quite came together when he let them hang. His hips were not wide but neither were they narrow. His legs were lanky from their uselessness, and his knees held divots in just the right spots. Amelia imagined his face more vaguely. She knew his jaw was sharp and, all at the same time, as smooth as a winter's snow. She knew his eyes held a piercing resemblance to a fern that sprouts deep in the woods where the sunlight creeps its way down to shaded spots that are impossible to reach. Amelia may have known these things about Clark, but his face always seemed to be as hazy in her mind as it was in the Fog. Amelia loved Descriptatories because she was able to add a slight detail to Thought-Up Clark each and every day. And he might never be complete.

Clark loved the games, too. He loved to trace Amelia's lines with his bony hands as Amelia would tell him her new Descriptatory. He loved to feel what she would tell him and truly understand what she meant, for that was hard to do in the deep mist. Most importantly, however, Clark learned well before Day Eight Hundred and Seventy Two that he loved Amelia. And that made the Fog all the more bearable. He loved the way her hair was long and never seemed to tangle. He loved the way her lips were pouted but never was she sad. He loved the way her shoulders were not too close together yet not too far apart. And Clark loved

the way she would lay down beside him and softly slip into another world. He had the feeling Amelia itched to be freed from the gloom, but he had never been happier. He was the king, and his queen spent every waking moment at his side. His happiness was only ever disrupted when he remembered her discontentment.

And then came day One Thousand Four Hundred and Ninety Five. Suddenly, the ground began to tremble. Amelia went into hysterics, for she really could not bare any more trauma in her whirring head. Then, the ground beneath them split and Clark felt it all begin to slip away. He latched himself onto Amelia and clung for all he had ever been worth. She clung to him in turn, and both trembled with the earth. Suddenly, Amelia shrieked, for something had entangled itself around her ankle. And then Clark realized he too was being wrapped by a sort of thorned vine. He tried to recoil his leg, but the thorns ripped at his flesh. He became aware of Amelia's equally grim prospects when she released an agonizing cry. Throughout the rumbling of the land and the coiling of the vines and the petrified howls, Clark never loosened his grip on Amelia. He would not lose her after One Thousand Four Hundred and Ninety Five days of her always being there. He could not, and would not, let her go where these vines were attempting to pull her.

Gradually, more coils wrapped themselves around Clark and more of their thorns dug into his skin. He suppressed his shouts. He did not want Amelia to become panicked. He kept his breathing steady. The vines worked their way up his back and gripped his neck. His slender jutting neck. And as he stood there gripping the only girl he had ever come to love, he realized he was about to be ripped away from her. She ceased her shrieks and Clark could not bare the silence. He pulled forward from the jagged ropes and lunged towards his silent queen. He ripped the vines away from her and freed her from their daggers. All at once the vines pulled back, still gripping him, and he was yanked from Amelia. He could not feel an ounce

of pain, although he was sure it would come shortly. All he could think about was that he was no longer touching the girl he had been in constant contact with since Day One in the Fog.

Amelia awoke once more only to be consumed by the pearly haze. No. It was not there. Her eyes began to adjust. The Fog seemed to have lifted. When a summer's rain is met by a steamy sunrise, the grass appears to be evaporating towards the heavens. This same effect displayed itself before Amelia as she lay there. She clung to the Earth, the rehealed Earth, and shook. Where was Clark? How long had she been asleep? Were the vines only a figment of imagination? Was the Fog all in her head? Amelia settled upon the decision that it all had been real. The Fog. The vines. Clark. And now she must find him.

She rose to her shaky feet and got her bearings. She was in the middle of a clearing deep within the woods. It formed a perfect circle. The Fog still evaporating off of the grass reminded her of a fire. The way it rose so quickly yet never ceased to rise. And there. At the edge of the clearing. A disfigured shape. She could not tell what it might be, for her vision was incredibly unused. She made the decision to approach it. Clark would want her to. The thought of Clark raced through her dizzy head. As Amelia got closer, she made the lump out to be a human. Closer still, it was a boy. And only a few paces from it, she recognized the very boy she had pictured in her mind ever since Day One.

She flew to him and draped herself across his body. He bled from almost everywhere. A steady flow of crimson poured from his plentiful thorn wounds. How did he manage to be steady when even his blood deserted him? The gashes steamed as if the Fog itself had been inside them. The bleeding did not

stop, even as she pressed herself upon the gashes. Once more Amelia began to despair. She had finally seen her king, and yet he grew paler by the instant. Amelia let the tears wash over her. Wash over him. They cleansed the wounds, and the steam no longer poured from him. She wept over him until she felt his steady breath once more. His steady breath upon her neck. She begged for him to open his eyes and see as she did. And then he did. Clark opened his eyes as a newborn opens theirs on the first day of their first week of their first year of their first life. And nothing. His brilliant fern eyes stared blankly towards the treetops. Amelia told him of her sight and he listened without expression. He rubbed his bloody fists across his eyes and shook his head violently. And yet he still saw nothing. Amelia was overrun with guilt at her ability to see what her Clark's only wish was to witness. He merely lay his head back upon the earth and heaved a slow and quavering breath. He reached out for Amelia's hand and held it with an urgency that frightened her immensely. He whispered the soft words "I love you" and fell paler than Amelia ever remembered him describing himself during their games.

She clung to his hand. His icy hand. This had gotten her through so many hardships. And now it was as frigid as the feeling in her heart. How was she to continue without him? He had become her entire reason to continue to keep the Fog out. And now he was gone. But so was the Fog. And then Amelia screamed. At the top of her lungs. Over and Over. The way she should have so long ago but held it in. Because the very boy who lay ice cold in front of her had once gave her warmth at night. She would never be warm again. She would never be steady again. She would never love again. And with that, Amelia lay down upon Clark's chest. His beautifully juttred chest. And died of a broken heart.

# Learning

by Macrina Forrest

Sometimes I find,  
when I look for things,  
lines tend to blur, reality becomes obscure.  
Learning the truth is hard.  
All you thought you knew,  
now crumpled as a piece of paper in the hand of a giant.  
Leaving only the rubble of your previous thoughts,  
left as table scraps before you.  
You refuse to believe.  
You try to block out the thoughts from your mind,  
but they come back like a happy cat,  
purring with delight,  
smiling, smirking at your existence.  
I came home to a house of horrors.  
I woke up in the middle of it all,  
my eyes still closed, too afraid to open them,  
to witness the blaring truths around me.  
I fell into the vat of boiling water,  
my skin crawling away,  
my mind peeling off.  
Learning, becoming educated,  
Predeceasing your parents,  
the elders who are still as childish as I at times.  
After all, we are designed to evolve,  
to be better than they were.  
Evolution has its ways.  
We strive for excellence in the face of imperfection.  
My mother taught me,  
be strong above all,  
never be made a fool.  
My father taught me to please,  
be polite and ladylike and all will be right.  
I choose my own path,  
or, at least I try.  
My footprints are as if in the sand on the most delicate  
beach,  
the ocean immediately erasing their mark.  
A single leaf on a tree,  
I am too weak to withstand the daily breeze.  
But so are the rest of us on the earth,  
the mound of dirt that just happened to be in the perfect  
place at the right time.  
It's funny how you learn so much from self-reflection.  
You can become more humbled but also more self-  
conscience at the same time.  
To learn the imperfections of yourself and  
your parents and of others is a strange thing.

# Yellowstone

by Emily Baker

Soft, subtle winds blow through the crisp, morning air,  
carrying a fresh scent of pine.  
It tumbles and rolls  
over the plains and mountains.  
I step out of my temporary home,  
a shell simply sown of nylon.  
The warm sun kisses my face  
as I turn my head upward.  
Birds singing, twigs cracking,  
the faint howl of a night predator  
returning from his latest prowl.  
This is a different world,  
more peaceful, beautiful, relaxing.  
I open my eyes.  
Every bend is begging to be explored.  
As Lewis and Clark set out into the unknown,  
I accept the same challenge.  
Each step off the unbeaten path  
leads to a new majestic wonder.  
Geysers gush hot water into space,  
bison gracefully tread on cracked  
clay only inches above a sleeping volcano.  
The sighs of mud pots  
echo through the quiet woods  
as the great grizzly  
lazily sleeps in the cool shade.  
My eyes drink in the sights  
unable to blink,  
for fear of missing the tiniest detail.  
This is truly heaven  
placed on earth for us to see.

*The Tobeco staff would like to thank all of the high school students who participated in this year's spotlight contest, and are proud to present the work of the three budding writers featured here.*

# The Journey

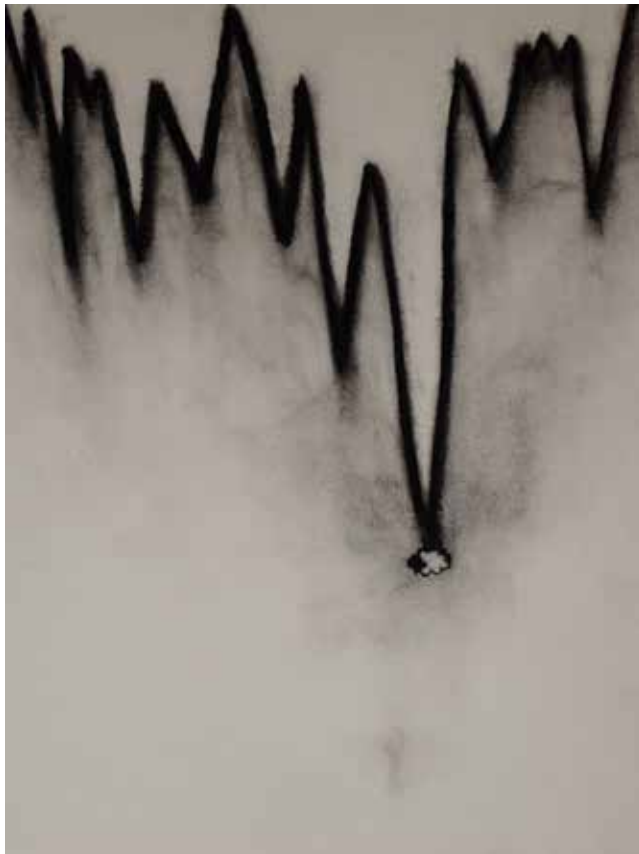
Carla Cilvik

Wandering alone down a deserted road  
The path—this road—so familiar,  
No footsteps heard, no footprints made  
The only company is my shadow.  
Following behind like some lost soul—  
Neither living nor dying  
Just drifting along  
Fading in and out with the sun

The path—long with winding turns  
Twisting and turning their way  
Alongside the labyrinth of trees  
Leading to who knows where  
I follow the yellow and white colored lines  
Painted and straightforward like destiny  
They are my guides  
They lead, I follow.

Nature is my only company here  
So serene and settled  
Like the sun that rests in the drifting clouds  
I watch the world of brilliant blue and gracious green  
Pass me by as my journey unfolds  
I pass the silent, swaying trees  
They whisper ever so gently  
No other sound penetrates the air

Tall, wispy grass line the edges of the road  
The brittle brown stalks—dancers in the breeze  
So carefree in the midday heat  
It's here, on this road void of civilization  
Winding through the wooded land  
That I feel an immense release  
Free—as if the chains of reality were broken  
And I was able to breathe—live without worry



# Nine Poems About Lines

by Milea Schall

## I. Pysanky Eggs

Kistka held like a pencil,  
but more gently.  
Its wax-coated tip  
traced the lines I saw  
in my mind  
onto the delicate white egg,  
saving the brilliancy of another  
color  
for later.

## II. Tilling

Fingernails outlined in dirt,  
perfumed with worms.  
The soil darkens with each deeper  
swipe  
and quivers in the harsh sunlight  
as it gets pushed into straight  
rows.

One by one, my future husband  
and I will drop in  
seeds,  
specks that contain  
everything needed  
to grow dinner.

## III. Learning to Write

Dots playing  
follow the leader  
across red and blue horizons.  
Loops that meant little to a  
Kindergartner,  
but spoke code language to adults.

Following the dots  
with a shaky pencil  
meant trouble  
with the teacher.  
Tracing the route with  
perfection  
meant extra Cheerios.

## IV. Remembrance

The wind soars in a straight line  
from the whispering cornfield  
up the hill  
to my house.

Two days ago,  
I made a snowman-  
no facial features,  
only two stick arms.

Today his body is broken,  
three crumbling mounds  
flung across the yard  
by the violent gusts.

The neighbor's snowman still

stands,  
not because he was given a face,  
but because their house blocks the  
wind.

## V. Wreck

Two cars bumped heads  
on the icy road,  
right across from the  
tee-ball field.  
The freezing rain blindfolded  
the drivers.  
They could not distinguish  
between black pavement  
and yellow lines. I drove slow  
after that.

## VI. History

When we ripped the paneling off  
the walls  
of the family living room,  
we found scraps of newspaper hidden  
among the wooden beams.

I held one scrap.  
History existed between  
my forefinger  
and my thumb.

Ancient text  
smudged on a yellowing sheet,  
words written in transient ink.

## VII. Nail Painting

We've hung shining orbs  
on the jagged green branches of the  
tree,  
and now we watch Christmas with the  
Kranks  
and chant,  
"Free Frosty!"

Now my sister wants me to paint her  
nails,  
a thin gold line laid  
horizontally across  
the rosy pink backdrop.

It's hard to paint neatly

with a toothpick,  
and some strokes fall  
onto skin rather than nail.  
But water will wash off  
the excess,  
and she forgives me for these  
small mistakes.

## VIII. Making Do

A crooked staircase led to nowhere  
in the abandoned house  
up the street.  
Some steps were missing,  
others were rotted into  
a crumbling consistency.

Dusty sunlight beamed  
through holes  
in the roof.

It was so tempting to  
climb,  
to see the view from the second  
story.  
The floorboards  
barely existed anymore.

But no one wanted to explain  
a broken leg  
to their parents.

So we found treasures on the first  
floor  
instead.

## IX. Ascending

There is one picture of  
my Grandfather and me,  
taken with a disposable Kodak  
camera.  
That is why our eyes are  
tinted red.

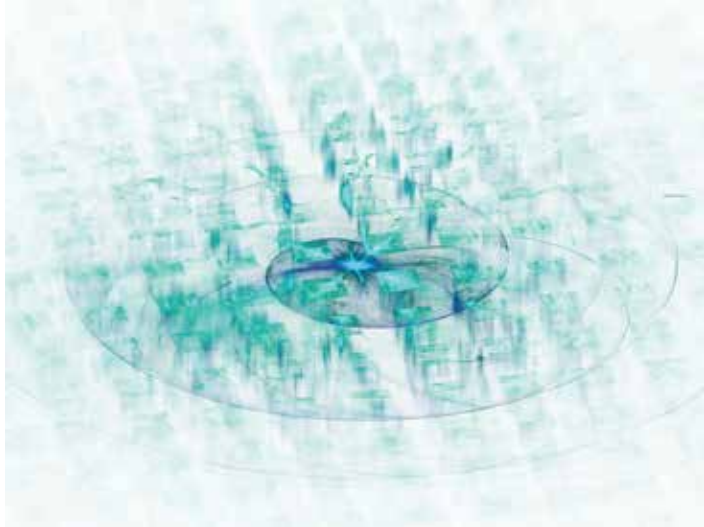
An old man and a baby,  
both with mouths open wide  
in smiles.

The baby's hand stretches upward,  
while the old man holds her firmly.

The camera's angle cuts off the  
ceiling,  
where a balloon bobs on the tiles.

And so we keep reaching  
for the curled string  
of that  
balloon,  
the one  
that is  
just  
out of sight.

Artist: John McCullough



## Buttons

by Carla Cilvik

Human hands meet  
Time and time again.  
Attach, detach—  
Repeat for days,  
Maybe years until  
The tiny plastic disc  
Meets its peril and  
Dangles from its lifeline.

Loosening, dropping  
To the concrete underworld.  
Abandoned and in danger  
Of shame from shoes and  
Tread of tires until a chance  
Meeting of familiar flesh—  
The savior of a new seam.

## When I Had Nothing to Say

by Josh Jones

These are the veins  
of the way that we love.  
These are the hearts  
of lonely people  
ripped in front of us.

I have been thinking of you  
an awful lot lately.  
Good luck with  
the start of this new year  
in college,  
even though I'm sure you don't need it.  
I hope your summer was wonderful.

Please don't even be mad.

No Josh, stop.

Which options are the most honest, open, and  
truthful?  
Which options are the most kind, compassionate?  
Which options create the greatest good?

If you don't have anything to say back,  
I wouldn't blame you.  
Like I said,  
good luck with school.

I miss you.

*"Hills Like White Elephants" by Isles and Glaciers //  
Facebook message from my ex-girlfriend, Sarah //  
Texts from my friend Sam // Excerpts from Financial  
Accounting, 9th Edition by Harrison, Horngren and  
Thomas.*

# Coming Home

by Brianna Snow

The stiff American flags are stapled around short, skinny sticks. Allison was given one when she entered the warehouse. A boy in front of her whips the flag in his hands back and forth. The tips of his Buzz Lightyear shoes make circles on the seat while he sits on the back of the bench. His custom t-shirt reads WELCOME HOME. Along the belly of the shirt, there is a picture of a soldier in digital camo, holding a gun towards the sand. The boy waits for his dad, wondering why he wears his boots in the sandbox.

Allison's flag pokes out of the purse beside her. The plane is two hours behind schedule. Fort Bragg's humidity has begun to frizz her dark blonde hair. She straightens her dress around her knees and looks over at her boyfriend's family. They had a seven hour car ride together and are no longer alert to their surroundings. Oliver's little brother is trying to finish his biology worksheet. Oliver's parents are playing a card game on the iPad.

Allison removes her thoughts from the crowd, too. There is a journal in her purse with a flower pressed in its back pages. Its tips are a deep shade of purple that turn into a soft white the closer the petals get to the worn green of the stem. She thinks of this flower's seedling. Oliver sent it to her from Afghanistan, and she's been keeping it with her ever since.

It was able to keep itself hydrated through the heat that'd burned Oliver's pale skin. His clean shaven face and squinted eyes glared in the foreign sun. To Allison, the dried flower had been a reminder to pray for Oliver. Keep him safe and bring him home, she'd recite. But now that she knows he'll be with her soon, she begins to see the flower slouched by the wind. A brook from a snow capped mountain gently moves alongside it. She imagines the flower inspiring the colors of an Afghani bracelet sold at the marketplace near the army base.

Its spiky, slender petals remind Allison of dandelions. When she was young, she'd pick a handful as she walked through the backyard to her swing-set. Pumping her legs in unison, she'd take each stem and squeeze it between one of her pointer fingers and thumb. To fling the top of the flower into the air, her thumb would force itself upwards. Mama had a baby and its head popped off.

"I had a mission," Oliver would say. He was vague about his day when he was able to call Allison. Where was the mission, and how had it led him to this petite flower? An American mine had been set off. Orders were given to retrieve the body parts so that others wouldn't know where the mines were placed. He picked up something heavy and sticky and plucked the flower beside it.

Artist: John McCullough



# Useless Regret

by Marissa Galupi

If heads could be in the clouds while feet remained rooted to the ground, my heart rested as a cellar dweller, while my mind drifted upwards to the attic. Curiosity peaked in cluttered chaos of years passed, decades effaced. Monotonous schoolwork may have nudged me up the rickety, rotting step ladder, but a sudden thirst of personal history and nostalgia kept concentration at bay, deterring dust allergies and phobias of creepy crawlers—the kind not made out of neon rubber and glue like the ones from my childhood. Besides, dad was beside me, ready to bash any bug-eyed nuisance. Even tom-boy daughters needed security sometimes.

Countless treasures lie within, but I had a mission. I was hunting for a holy grail of sorts for Honors US History. Eleventh graders had no business bringing in show-and-tell items, but Mr. Kanitra swore a piece of The 60's was hibernating in most households. *Ask your grandparents, he suggested.* Mine knew about World War II. Dad was a teen in '68—when the worst was yet to come.

Rummaging through bent cardboard boxes and sorting newspaper clippings, I found nothing but mine and my sister's junk. Kindergarten finger paintings; third-grade book reports; perfect attendance awards—my paper impression on the world. As dad dove into a gray storage tub, I spotted an old shoe box labeled “*Louie*” in my mom's delicate cursive. Jackpot.

Sifting through Polaroids, one in particular poked up, pressed between a paperback novel: Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Burnt umber swirls and smudges deformed what the still-life frame had captured, but I knew well enough the curse I had unearthed:

There he was, in jungle green, scratching his dirty, dry scalp, gazing through thick haze as a ten-ton tank succumbs to a fiery death twenty-five feet in front of him.

Dad recognized my silence as an ear-piercing scream. He snagged the photo with calloused, arthritic fingers. Staring at the ghost—the meticulous mine sweeper—he rubbed his shrapnel-scarred chin. I was left scatterbrained, the time keeper in my chest barely bouncing in timid tempo.

Without breathing, he removed his sweat-stained ball cap, the color of Agent Orange, and tossed it to the left. The hat flopped flat on the scuffed, fuzz-coated floorboards. He winced, waiting a good five seconds before looking back to the future at the innocent child before him.

“I thought it was safe then, too.”

Dad and I drown each other in our ocean eyes. No one knew if the tank was vacant.

Mr. Kanitra must have wanted a confrontation, so I, this November 11th baby, could right the wrongs of a generation scorned.

I pat the soldier's stiff shoulder—“it's safe now.”



# Whatever Happened to Irregardless?

by Mark Skalski

Irregardless is the word regardless  
except some jerk glued the letters  
“Ir” on its head while it wasn’t looking.

Confused and partially blinded  
by the swoops of its extra r,  
it stumbles drunkenly through the dictionary,  
making friends with words like Uber and Totes  
and sometimes crashing on Gobbledygook’s couch.

Later, Irregardless experiences its renaissance  
when it is adopted by The Pedantics,  
who give it a monocle  
and lick its extra letters like sips from an ‘84 brandy.

Being a fickle bunch,  
The Pedantics soon leave Irregardless behind  
at one of their many cheese tastings.  
Again left unuttered,  
it falls into depression.

Years later, I find Irregardless in a back alley  
next to a dumpster by the Starbucks,  
clearly addicted to meth,  
shivering under a newspaper blanket,  
extending a tin cup at passersby.

My heart filled with equal parts pity and irony,  
I befriend Irregardless.

At first, Irregardless’s goofy yet pretentious nature ensured it as a novelty,  
but it quickly began embarrassing me at parties  
and offending the sensibilities  
of my particularly sensitive friends  
with its brutal lack of subtlety.

Eventually, I stop hanging out with Irregardless altogether  
when it begins spending all its time with The Hipsters,  
who mumble it through their half-opened mouths  
like pot smoke.

Sometimes, I see Irregardless in the world,  
so I smile and wave,  
remembering the good times,  
but the only response I ever receive  
is its ignorant blank stare.

Artist: Christy Logue



# The Hive

by Therese Holzapfel

The sun stole over the apartment like a tidal wave in slow motion, spreading its golden mantle first over the floor, then onto the master bed, and finally onto the opposite wall. At seven a.m. exactly the silent alarm thrummed into the wiring in the mattress, sending me bolting upright and face-first into the gleam of the early morning. Even after an entire night spent waiting for it, the stupid thing still caught me by surprise. I swung my legs out of bed and stepped down onto the cool parquet flooring of the room, automatically ceasing the alarm that had set the mattress humming. I showered and dressed quickly, raking a comb through my hair before tying it up and glancing at myself in the mirror on the wall to ensure I looked presentable. One has to look presentable.

I glanced at my watch tattoo and cursed the numbers that had snuck up to 7:25. Grabbing the briefcase I hoisted the bucket that served as my rain collector back up to the opening in the ceiling and tied the rope off on the hook in the wall. Hurrying, I turned and looked out onto the world, past the jagged plaster teeth that remained of the east wall of my apartment, out to the skeletons of high rises still stabbing into the smoggy air around me, over the slums to the monolithic white Hive towering atop the ruins of downtown.

Five years ago they came, arriving in their Ark-sized ships bristling with a menagerie of foreign weapons and foreign visitors. They told us they were here to study us, then that they were here to help. They told us that they were benign. And like any tumor when left untreated they grew, and spread, and mutated the unsuspecting body of the earth until one day the insignificant cells that were its aboriginals opened their eyes and discovered that we were outnumbered. Our earth had been consumed.

The shuttle dropped me off at the public entrance to the Hive, where I strolled in among the scatterings of other average citizens who were allowed to work in the General's office. Like me they were all dressed in their shabby black, their eyes studiously evading those of the security cameras on the walls. The rest were in the standard immaculate white, smiles affixed to their faces as if screwed in place and eyes gazing blindly anywhere as they hustled along their predestined paths to their fated jobs. Their movements were flawlessly synchronized, a dance to the undetectable strains of the Pied Piper who was their beloved General.

They're like bees looking to their queen, although in their case it's a king who plucks the strings for the tune and makes these puppets dance. They like to look like us, and after five years they're close anatomy-wise. But despite all their attempts they cannot erase the blind look in their eyes, have not made their smiles in the least convincing, cannot break the dance steps which they perfectly follow every moment of every day. Despite all their "studying", they don't really understand. They're not messy enough. No mistakes have been injected into their albeit superior genetic coding. There is far too much perfection in their makeup to leave room for anything even remotely close to human.

I made it to the top floor in one piece; I don't think the central computer noticed the briefcase. When the elevator stopped at the peak of the Hive I stepped out and headed for the General's office. Glanced at my watch: 7:40. I had twenty minutes before my shift started, which was certainly enough time to do as planned. Vaguely I wondered where those two years of planning had gone; it was down to the wire now.

The General was at his outlandish desk when his second-in-command let me in. His office shows a splendid view of the skyscrapers cooling in the shadow of his Hive without portraying the ragged, broken natives slouched at their bases. He looked up when I came in and smiled before standing and rounding his desk to me. He can move where he wants; he's the king of the Hive and has run this dastardly little show for five years.

We exchanged the usual pleasantries and he handed me the assignments for the day, thanking me again for half a decade of faithful service to the Hive. I am the best secretary he has ever had, he said. Even if back on his planet they had never had secretaries, he joked. I took the day's tasks to my office with smiles and promises to get him his morning coffee, as always. At my desk with the door between us I opened the briefcase to retrieve the rebels' long-awaited cure for our earth's cancer. I brought him his coffee per usual, repressing the urge to tell him I had made it special. Why spoil the surprise?

The others didn't come until about fifteen minutes after the thud. I stayed at my desk until the more curious visitors risked poking their feelers into the General's office, their smiles slipping and their blind eyes for once almost colored with a little curiosity. What is going on, they ask when they see me waiting in the doorway of my own little office. What are we going to do now?

I step over the body slouched behind that stupid desk and look out over the ruins of downtown, festering in the gloom shed from the perfect white dome of the Hive. The sun is really starting to rise now, casting some light through the cracks between the skyscrapers into which so many defenseless humans have slipped.

"Now we're going to let the world know that the General has sadly passed away," I tell them, "and that there are going to be a few changes around here."

Artist: Ryan PRylinski



# Man of the Streets

by Joseph Fallecker

This is the story  
of a young man named Lazarus;  
his life  
in the street,

only  
a tattered shirt red-  
dirty-  
on his back.

Lazarus was  
a billionaire in blue-jeans that  
he never wore-  
not once.

The Crowd shambled,  
as they did.  
Lazarus eyed them,  
curious as to what fueled them.

He saw them-

fake laughs and  
picking up old nickels  
off the ground,

and he was bothered.  
He was bothered  
about their habits,  
about their lives,

about their families  
for whom they  
worked  
to feed, yet

fed them  
the cruelties of the past.  
He worried  
for the children

Who  
would never know  
their parents' lives.  
They'd never know

how to love;

not from this upbringing.  
Not from  
daycare.

Lazarus,  
who  
had worked his fingers  
raw,

taught  
in the streets.  
He welded  
relations,

he fed his friends  
truth.  
This holy man,  
forever forgotten,

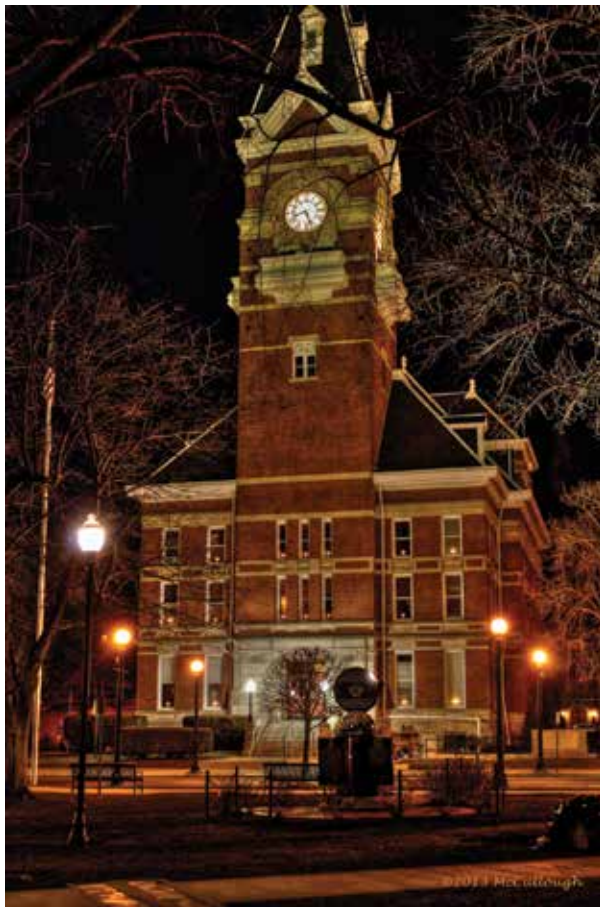
he asked for  
nothing.  
He received it  
doubly.

# Sacrifice

by Sara Barnett

You hate my heavy, open-mouth, Darth-Vader  
breathing  
when you try to sleep,  
but my dreams still come and go.  
You raise your voice and lower your eyebrows  
when I prove you wrong,  
so I stop being right.  
You shake the walls as the door slams behind you,  
and I'm not sure what I said this time,  
but I chase after to apologize.  
You make it a point to make fun of my insecurities;  
my left pinky toe, oversized hoodie, deep voice,  
and I giggle like I get the joke.  
You brag to the guys about our all-night, low-light fun  
and make yourself sound like a God,  
but we both know the truth.  
You know me  
and hate me.  
I love you too.

Artist: Loren Benton



## The Witching Hour

by Christian Crankfield

Till the clock chimes run  
A certain magic takes hold  
A pressure or buzz in the air  
As a night of passion and fun begins  
Across the globe fireflies dance  
And in their eerie mirrors are the reflections  
Of all that holds us  
Like a moth to the flame  
The day begins anew  
All magic washed from the clothes of men and women  
This feeling of tranquility that we call starlight  
Good company and champagne  
Comes out again each night  
By the banks of Italy  
Or the lights of Paris  
Wherever love may be found

## Sacrifice

by Milea Schall

One more blister and I swear  
I'll look like I've got some  
mutant form of leprosy.

Toenails that no longer exist,  
Osteoarthritis in three places,  
a permanent watch tan on my left wrist.  
Calves that will NEVER look good in high heels,  
not a single sock that isn't stained with mud.

There was that time when I snapped my ankle  
on the uneven pavement  
by the Grampian gas station,  
and for a few minutes  
didn't think I could walk back to my car.

Or that blood blister  
I got on the bottom of my foot  
while running my fastest 10K ever.  
Twenty-five laps on the track,  
and I didn't notice anything  
until I took off my shoes  
at the finish line.

There is a reason why  
Elementary school playgrounds  
are filled  
with running children.

They know that running takes you to  
the utopia you can't see from a car—  
to see shimmering snow dripping from gnarled branches,  
glassy creeks sneaking through tiny gorges in the woods.

Ask me why I do it,  
and 49 percent of the time  
I'll forget.  
But the other 51 I'll tell you all about  
how it's the closest I've ever come  
to flying.

Artist: Emily Oravitz



## A Bubbling Account

by Andrea Cobb

The purple plastic container, orange nails gutting through that soapy fishing hole, hooking for the wand that will cast the most delicate of orbs to float like dandelion puffs cast in a western wind. Bubbles reflecting oily rainbows. Bubbles capturing fragments of moments. Bubbles snapshotting the simplest of seconds. Reflecting sheared straight brunette bangs in the backyard- with the curly bouvier and the plastic crab sandbox where I burrowed until you'd shout at me for ruining the pleated skirts that ants marched along searching for their home, and I sat in the prickly grass picking sharp grains of sand off of my scalp like a monkey scrounging for termites.

Showering the prom dance floor, floating effortlessly above burned hair and slathered faces. Knife-like heels stabbing each globule as we clacked along, dancing to music we don't enjoy, avoiding people we don't like. Thousands of tiny eyes staring back in the bowl of a toilet. Small mirrors of water and bile and remnants of a dispelled stomach. A huddled skeleton crouched, lightheaded, listlessly watching thousands of bubbles gawking back. A reflective staring contest. A single flush would cast a tornado of that same blue toilet water in grandma's bathroom. The toxic smell to wash away the proof of a purge. These refractions of light capture moments like the single tongued sheets- printed out from a polaroid camera, and I make it my duty to pop every last one with my sharp stares. Never trust the uncertainty of carefree soap. Like the freshness of dirt and the patterns in linoleum and the porcelain chairs, I crave more stability than children spewing spit bubbles from their babbling mouths.

# Rec Room

by Hannah Gloeckl

Instead of European history,  
over the raised threshold, I studied the lines and sayings  
of the t-shirts— lives stitched together for display  
and protected from the warbling world that lies beyond  
the thin wall of our shelter— our dysfunctional living room,  
free of children and pets, our own little tree house nestled  
on the branches of iron and insulation.

Spelunking for treasure, among cigarette butts  
and broken light bulbs, in the cave created  
by vents and a wooden floor— we found a math book,  
beer cans. Broken tools made us  
anthropologists and archaeologists between the spaces  
that feared the future. The centuries stained couches horded  
these while we cleaned off the rotting desk, flipping  
through scrapbooks dated back to the seventies

and finding our classmates' parents in the mildew-  
yellow pages like small maps of Goonie adventures  
within our island called Building Eight. Their faces were like ours--  
wrinkle free as when we climb and hang like bats  
from the rusting and greasy branches of the ladder.



Artist: Emily Sites

# The Night Shift

by Marissa Dechant

Beep.

Beep.

Beep.

The repetition stopped sounding  
after the fourth night at Save Rite, only interrupted  
by the customers' clenching need  
for cigarettes.

Never having smoked in my nineteen years,  
the rows of red, blue, silver, green boxes  
tower into infinity.  
Bold, full-flavor, menthol, ultra lights.

The next lady in line spews a brand at me  
and I stall, unlocking the case at turtle speed,  
eyes scanning the boxes.  
But soon enough, I'm standing  
with the display case doors open before me,  
the customer's eyes staring me down,  
the summer sweating down my back.  
I manage the right brand, but wrong flavor or length.  
Three tries later, I hand her three boxes of Marlboro reds full-flavor,  
but not before she calls me a  
stupid worthless bitch who  
doesn't know how to do her job.

I try to hide a surprised smile  
because she has no idea I'm here  
for the summer only, gone  
for a higher education, the only way out,  
while I see clearly that  
the government pays for her TV dinners and six packs of Pibb.  
Three kids at her waist  
and one crying in the cart,  
starving bellies at eleven p.m.

Her tattoos gape from  
breasts popping out of a worn tank top,  
her eyes concealed behind cheap rhinestone sunglasses.  
I apologize as her manicured nails  
rip the boxes from my hands and underneath that,  
I apologize for her receiving no opportunity,  
no chance at anything but bearing babies and living  
on someone else's dime, Marlboros gripped  
around ringed fingers, smoking the only way  
to control a life she would never have chosen for herself.



Artist: Alexis Miller



# The Other Side of the Tracks

by Rebecca Greenman

It had all begun several months ago with a blunt. Strike that. That's a lie. It all started when his mother cracked open a Miller Lite and offered it to him as a coming-of-age, bar mitzvah-type bonding experience on his thirteenth birthday. It all went downhill from there.

Let's jump ahead a bit though, shall we?

So he dropped out of high school and sold weed to the local pot-heads (when he wasn't lighting up himself).

Then, when his drunk, good-for-nothing mother kicked him out of the house just before his seventeenth birthday, Jordan lived with the local popup-tent homeless community just behind the Eastway Bowling Lanes off Route 27. They positioned themselves right between the bowling alley's dumpster and the railroad tracks. He loved it there. That's when he first grew out the beard. He told me he would wake up each morning without a single worry. That was also when I met him.

I worked at the soup kitchen he frequented, and we instantly clicked. Now, don't get any funny ideas about me. I wasn't there to save the world or anything. I needed community service hours to work off a minor transgression from a few months earlier. Let's just say transporting certain fruits across state lines isn't my forte. Anyways, Jordy met me on the coldest January day of the year. I was serving up some three bean chili, everyone's favorite.

He was a hoot. Aside from being a pot-head-bum, he really was sweet. We were best friends. I remember this one time, he was bullshitting around with a rake, you know, trying to be funny, and he cracked the windshield of my '94 Honda civic. He called up this guy at the junk yard and convinced the old fart to let him

have a car. I don't know all the details, but it didn't sound too shady. Anyways, he got me a new car. Well, an old car – new to me – but he put my engine in that car, and I was all set to go! That's the kind of guy he was. Sweet, you know?

It didn't really last long. He moved to Canada and forgot about all of us back home. He always meant well, but I guess he got into some trouble up there. I wrote him letters, and sometimes he answered, but one day he came knocking on my door instead. He was talking to me about some illegal activities involving breeding hedgehogs. I don't really know if that was code or something or if he really meant he got in trouble for breeding fucking hedgehogs. Jordan had a knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time and doing the stupidest thing anyone could cook up. I couldn't help but to love him.

So he comes to my apartment and tells me he needs a place to crash for a few weeks. Without thinking I say yes. That didn't last long either.

By the beginning of week two, he was already antsy. After his mom kicked him out, he was never able to stay anywhere very long. Jordy invited me to go with him to Amsterdam, but I had a job. I had bills. I wasn't as brave as he was. The stupid kid just loved digging his hands into anything he could, apparently including hedgehog trafficking.

Off he went, Amsterdam bound. It was two years I didn't hear from him. I didn't forget him, though. Jordan was hard to forget. Then, out of the blue, I got a collect call from some international number. So of course I fucking accept. This could be some good shit. Maybe I won some trip to Barbados or something. So I tell 'em, yeah I'll take the call, and through the slightly distorted connection I hear Jordy breathing heavy and groaning out a hello. At first I thought something's wrong, but then he sounded too excited. So I ask him what's up. He's fallen in love he tells me. Well this is just way more than I can handle. Not to sound bitter or anything, but I dedicated years of my life trying to get that kid straightened up so he would love me, and then some Amsterdamian broad comes along and I'm supposed to be the best man or something? Yeah, not so much.

Long story short, this girl needs a visa to America, because she wants to be a model. Yeah, seriously. A model. So naturally, I meet them at the airport, pick them up, and let them live at my apartment. Jordan and his foreign, model fiancé. Well within about ten minutes, Anouk (that's her name) figures out that there's other guys in America that are way hotter with more money. So the engagement doesn't last very long. Jordan was heartbroken in his own way. He never really relied on people enough to get his hopes up. He didn't know what it was to love anyone.

He packed his stuff (threw it into a duffle bag, really) and left again. Next time I heard from him, it was because he needed someone to post bail. This was his fifteen minutes of fame. The dumbass tried to light his blunt off of the Olympic torch. That's a lie. He did light his blunt off the Olympic torch. I was the only person he knew who would drive all the way from Seattle to Vancouver to post his bail.

After everything with the police was taken care of about two months later, his feet started itching again. He said he had to explore before he got too old. He was twenty five years old. I took him to the airport on a Thursday. I remember because we always said it was the best day of the week. He was wearing his best smile that day... like a little boy. I just wanted him to finally be happy, so I had to let him go.

Two weeks ago he called me and told me that he was going to Thailand. I figured, why the hell not? It was nice he was keeping me posted this time. And then a week ago, I got this call at nearly four in the morning. It was some doctor or paramedic or somebody. I don't know. They told me he was in an accident. They told me he died. From what I gather, the fool was trying to ride on top of the train, you know like they do in movies during an action scene. Well, he was high and not very with it. The train was only going like thirty miles an hour. He fell trying to jump from one box to the next, they think. He was crushed by the train. It rolled right over him. It was hard to identify him I guess, but then they found the wallet, and that's how they got my number, too. The only number he kept with him.

Artist: Natalie Gearhart



# Wanted

by Elizabeth Takach

Dear Diary:

I don't know why no one wants me hanging out with them. I need friends too. Sure, maybe I take more out of the relationship, but I give a lot too. I give a whole lot. It's not my fault that they don't always appreciate what I give them. I make them stronger in the long run....or I take over their life and claim it as my own. I have a dark side just like everyone else.

But I tend to look at this as a win/win situation. I get to latch on to a friend for a few months, and after they ditch me, they are stronger than before I met them. They feel more in control of their lives because I taught them what it feels like to have no control.

Sometimes people let me stay friends with them for a while, but sometimes they kick me to the curb as soon as they realize what I'm up to. I don't like those people.

All I want is a lifelong friend. Everyone always talks about their "best friend" or their "soul mate." Is that too much to ask for? I just want companionship.

Oh and someone made fun of my name today. Like it isn't bad enough having a name like Depression anyway. Now they have to point it out and say that with a name like that, I was born to be alone. Well thank you, world.

# For Shelter

by Nathan Milner

Massive loads lumber past me on the thirty mile stretch of road between my house and school. Enormous steel crates, mammoth pieces of machinery and homes all traveling along the same route. When the singles and doublewides sitting atop the backs of the semis cruise past me, forcing me over toward the white line, I find myself curious of the situation miles behind me.

Has my hometown been carpet bombed without my knowledge, leaving nothing but a smoldering mess of smoke and fire in its wake? Are new establishments being made, one mobile home after another, seeing the world one 55 mph stretch at a time?

My friend and I brace ourselves in the cockpit of my sedan as we see police lights flashing like the prelude to a state of emergency beyond the hillcrest just before us. Following behind the cruiser like a tremendous parade of monstrous metal cargo, the “oversized load” warning peaks up over the concrete horizon. The giant steel creation reaching wide off the sides of the transport could be anything. It forces the vehicles in front of us, my car, and all the travelers behind us to branch off instinctively and simultaneously into the vacant driveways and parking lots of businesses along the road.

I comment on how it looks as though we are a school of fish, fight or flight taking over, as each driver feeds off of the silent cues from one another of when it is safe to head back into the stream. All of the trucks, cars, and SUVs waiting their turn on the street’s flank to place themselves back on the path to their destination.

Surrounded by all those sharing the road beneath my wheels makes it clear that each of us has our own harbor to reach. An anguished student’s final day of school, a working woman’s afternoon shift, or a night owl’s commute home from a tour of the graveyard shift. Each of us has a home to tend to at some point in this very same day as there are homes traveling right alongside us to make their final stand in an empty plot of land, waiting for memories to be made.

I long to locate this plot of land where unused and unfurnished houses are constructed and await their time to move out into the world. They must sit in this field, dormant, for days, weeks, and maybe even months, just hoping for a chance to be loaded onto the back of a big rig to move to their final resting spot. A place where homes live, waiting for their purpose to be conjured to send them on their way to the rest of their days, sheltering someone for the rest of their life.

# Breakfast with Bailey

by Derek Dietz

If that damned cat even considers hacking up his breakfast on my carpet, I swear I'll skin him alive and turn him into a new pair of slippers. Mine are full of holes anyway. Cheap ass pair from Walmart. It goes to show, you get what you pay for. I bought a pair of slippers back in '62 that I wore every weekend for twenty years until the tread was as bald as that ol' tire I hung up for Katie to swing on. Nothing these days is made to last.

My wife, Jane, left me here with this fat orange bastard. I told her I'd rather have a dog. Something strong and powerful like a Great Dane. An animal that could actually wake the neighbors in case some criminal broke into our home. My buddy, Paul, got himself a golden retriever a few years back. Named him Cooper. Now that's a name for a dog! He actually trained that little pup to fetch the paper every morning. Paul put a rope on the door of his mailbox, so Cooper can just give a tug on it, and then he brings the news right in to you. Have you ever heard of such a thing? Dogs are man's best friend for a reason.

But nope, Jane didn't want a dog. She said it was too much work for us at this age. I figured with all our kids grown up that we could use a little more activity in our house, but Jane wouldn't hear it. We ended up with this pathetic excuse for a companion. She named him Bailey. You ever heard of a cat named Bailey? Most days he'll just plop himself down on the dining room table and stare out the window at the birds. He won't ever chase after them. He just sits there and looks out with those giant green eyes of his. I've never even seen him chase a ball of yarn. If our house was broken into, he'd probably just hide under the couch until it was all over. Lazy little slug.

Of course, it wasn't robbers or thieves that woke us up last night. It was her heart. About two in the morning Jane woke up and told me she felt real funny, like she was wrapped up in a bag of bricks. Well, I did what any good husband would do. I called up the ambulance. I got off the phone to find Jane changing out of her PJs. Told me she didn't want to look like she was half asleep when the paramedics showed up. You believe that? Here she is in the middle of a medical emergency, and she's still worried about what she looks like.

We sat waiting for the ambulance out in the living room in those two hideous old chairs she insisted on buying. She told me a few years back that she wanted reading chairs for the two of us. Wanted to sit together reading novels or something. I don't know where she got that crazy idea. The only thing I've read for the past forty years is the newspaper, and I do that over breakfast. But Jane insisted on us buying these damned ridiculous European antique chairs. Sit on one for more than half an hour, and it feels like your ass is gonna fall off. You wanna know how much we paid for them? A thousand bucks a piece. You ever heard of such a thing? I've had the same blue recliner in my basement for twenty years. The foot rest still works fine, and it's as comfortable as the day I bought it. I said we shoulda saved the money for a vacation. I always wanted to see the Grand Canyon. My son, Bill, took his wife, Nancy, out there once. He said that when the sun hits the cliff sides just right, the rocks light up red, purple, and orange. Isn't that amazing?

I guess Jane and I never made it out to the Grand Canyon. Closest we got to seeing it was looking at some pictures Bill took with his i-Thing. Whatever it's called. They were real pretty, but he said seeing it in person was better. Most people are afraid of rattlesnakes out there, but that's not what you really have to worry about. You know what kills most people at the Grand Canyon? Pissin' over the side. You believe that? When the park rangers find a dead body lying inside the canyon, the first thing they do is check to see if the poor bastard's fly was down. Men always gotta prove they got power over nature. What a way to go. Then again, a quick death like that sure beats lying in a hospital bed for years waiting on the Lord to call you up. Jane was real nervous waiting for the ambulance. She'd tell you she wasn't, but even in the dark of the living room I could see her working her jaw back and forth like she always does when she's worried. You spend enough time with someone, and you start to figure out what's going on in their head without them even having to say it.

Well, it wasn't too long before the flashing lights broke through the old red curtains in our living room. The paramedics came in and helped Jane out to the vehicle, and I got in the back of the ambulance with her.

Held her hand the whole way. On the ride to the hospital, I kept flashing back to the first night I took her out in that ol' '39 Buick, the black one I helped my pop fix up on the weekends. Took us a year and a half, but by the time I turned seventeen, she drove like a dream. She's always been a beauty. Jane, that is.

That first date was one of the happiest days of my life. I was a nervous fool the entire day long waiting for it. Back then I was a real young kid, working weekends at Clarke's Corner Grocery. Nerves got to me so bad that day that I knocked over a whole display of Campbell's Pork n' Beans. Spent forty-five minutes cleaning up the mess, and Mr. Clarke promised he'd take the money out of my next paycheck. And you know the crazy thing? I was so excited to see Jane that night that I didn't even care. Hell, he could have taken a year's worth of paychecks from me and I wouldn't have cared.

My god, she looked beautiful that night. All prettied up in a red dress with white polka dots, wearing her mother's pearl necklace. After all these years, I still remember how she looked. I told her she was prettier than Grace Kelly. Well, her face turned real red and she shook her head. She never took compliments very well. Boy, I could swear I just took her out for the first time last week. Isn't that crazy how time moves? One minute you're taking your teenage sweetheart out on the town and next thing you know, you're praying for grandkids. Life happens too quickly.

Doctors told me that her heart's unstable. They don't trust her to be at home away from medical folks who know how to fix her. One doctor told me Jane was going to be just fine, that she'd be back on her feet in a few days. But something in the way she was clutching her clipboard told me that even she wasn't real sure how things were going to go. Sometimes I wish people would just give it to you straight.

So after they got Jane settled in a bed and hooked up all the monitors and wires, I pulled up a chair beside her. Doctors had given her some kind of medication to settle her heart down, and she fell asleep right quick after that. Something about being in a hospital in the middle of the night just doesn't make me feel right. For a place so concerned with saving lives, it feels real lifeless once it gets dark. Sitting there with Jane took me back a few years to when I was the one laying in the hospital bed.

After I was diagnosed with diabetes, I had to start taking all this medication and checking my sugar levels. You know how all that medical bullshit goes. Jane really took my condition seriously. More than I ever did, that's for sure. She'd dose out my pills every day at lunch and always reminded me to check my levels before meals and whatnot. She was the best nurse I coulda had. Well, Bill was getting married later that year, and Nancy was going to go out shopping for a wedding dress. Jane was invited to go along for the day, and I stayed home. No way I was tagging along to that. I went with Katie when she bought her wedding dress. What a day that was. Spent five hours going back and forth between two different dresses because Jane couldn't decide which one she liked better.

Anyway, while the girls were out shopping, Bill drove down to our house, and the two of us sat playing cards like we used to do in the evenings after he finished his homework up. He likes to think he knows how to skunk his old man, but I didn't teach him all of my tricks. Halfway through the second hand, I started getting real dizzy, and next thing I know, I woke up in a hospital bed. Without Jane there to remind me, I forgot to take my medication. Jane was waiting there for me when I came to. I certainly got an earful from her that day. Had her worried sick. Guess I needed to take a bit more responsibility for myself. I'd been getting old for a while, but that was the first day I realized just how close we all are to dying. If not for Bill's help, I probably wouldn't have made it.

After a few minutes sitting in the hospital with Jane, I figured I should call the kids up and let 'em know about their mom, but I didn't figure there was any sense doing it in the middle of the night. No reason to get them worried when there was nothing they could do. The news could wait until the morning.

I guess at some point I must've fallen asleep in the chair myself because Jane's voice snapped me awake. You'd figure that when she's lying in a hospital bed she'd be a little more concerned with her own well-being, but no sir. Not Jane. You know the first thing she says to me?

"You better go home and feed Bailey."

So here I am. Doing whatever I can to help ease her mind, just like I always have.

If she leaves me with this godforsaken cat, I don't know what I'll do with myself.

# The Unlikely Pair

by Cayleigh Boniger

Awash in the song of the trees,  
And looking on as the stars  
Play peek-a-boo between the leaves,  
I feel his olive eyes on me.  
He watches me  
As a mother does her children,  
Or perhaps the owl its prey;  
It's difficult to say which.  
Burning indigo,  
A mountain of glittering plates  
Forged in the heart  
Of the earth eons before  
Man walked the ground.  
The air in his lungs  
As hot as the core that shaped  
His glittering hide, that almighty armor of the  
dragon.  
The claws that sprout from his paws  
Are ivory sabers;  
His baby teeth, man's first dagger.  
And here we two sit,  
Both little plankton  
Under the ocean of the universe.

Artist: Stefan Gewiss



# Prépa

Elisabeth Donato

We all had re-read Proust

Whether  
Julien Sorel was an arriviste  
A rhetorical question

Our collective  
Stream of consciousness  
Composed surrealist  
Poems

Little Apollinaires  
We were  
Writing in a Zone of  
Punctuation not included

Egos minced by  
The sharp edge of  
Murderous mind games

Trying to grasp  
The elusiveness of  
Being the elite

Artist: Emily Oravitz



Artist: Annalise Sonney



# Pen and Ink Birds

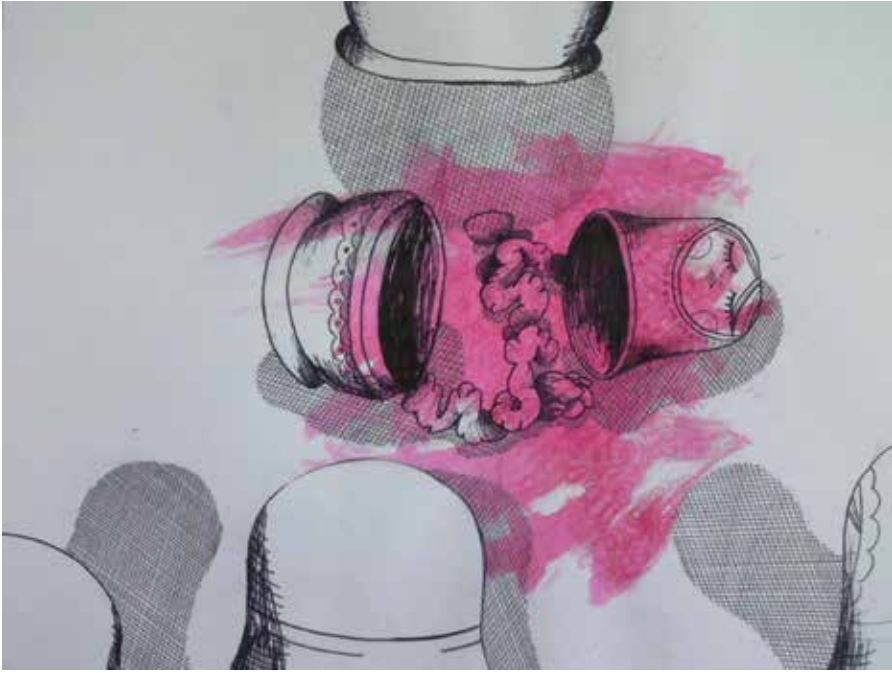
by Christian Crankfield

His eyes are open books  
The pupil written words when he closes  
The blank pages for his lids  
Words burst forth like birds

The body is the bread  
His blood a visceral ink  
He shared the cross with Christ  
And through his lips Christ speaks!

Light and airy  
But dense as a stone  
opposition in the very fabric of his being





Artist: Emily Sites

# this We believe CLARION<sup>®</sup>

In *This I Believe* essays, writers explore their personal philosophies and articulate those philosophies in no more than 500 words. The *This I Believe* genre became popular in the 1950s as a radio series hosted by Edward R. Murrow. Since the 1950s, thousands of individuals from all walks of life and from all over the world have participated in *This I Believe*. This I Believe, Inc. was founded in 2004 as an independent, not-for-profit organization that engages youth and adults in writing, sharing, and discussing brief essays about the core values that guide their daily lives. The organization has published several collections of *This I Believe* essays.

In the fall of 2013, hundreds of students enrolled in Clarion University's first-year writing courses read and wrote *TIBessays*. The English Department, in partnership with the Office of Academic Affairs and the 537 Clarion: Community Learning Workshop, sponsored a *This I Believe* essay contest. Nearly 400 individuals offered up their essays for consideration. This included Clarion University students, faculty and staff, as well as community members and local high school students. The judges selected thirteen essay winners. Twelve of these essays were read at a program on December 4, 2013, at which Dan Gediman, executive producer of This I Believe, Inc., also spoke. The editorial staff and faculty advisors of *Tobeco* are pleased to include these essays, which represent a range of beliefs and values, in our 2014 journal in this special section titled *This We Believe: Clarion*. Enjoy!

# This I Believe: Acceptance is Queer

Jeremy Moore

I was indirectly taught that we are not all accepted. With more hair on my body than my head, a strong yet delicate mind, and coming out of a closet with self-hate, I was not accepted. To this day, my sexuality and concept of love is a constant conversation. Gay is the new black. This I believe: acceptance is queer.

I grew up around bullies and an abusive family. I was surrounded by war. "Sticks and Stones" could not break me but two hands and a voice sure did. From derogatory slurs, to altercations with my dad, I was not accepted anywhere. Continuous arguments and conflicts with my father silenced my voice. My mind kept racing. His relentless belittling and constant judgment from him lead me to be trapped. He had a fierce prejudice against gays and lesbians. So, opening up closet doors to accept my sexuality was insufferable. On top of that, boiling insecurities and anxiety led me to reach a breaking point. I was yelled at for being depressed; no one understood the cuts on my wrists. If it was a cry for attention, my voice was not heard. I began slowly losing everything and then I hit my breaking point. My mom had me admitted. Locked away I had nothing but my thoughts.

Eventually, I opened up. I began my journey to accept my sexuality, my addiction, my appearance, and personality. After treatment, I felt that I was overcoming my obstacles. Acceptance became a priority. With the queer community by my side, I stood up for what I struggled with and began to make a difference. My mother and grandmother stood by fighting for equal rights. They have guided me in the right direction. I feel I finally found saviors: my mother, grandmother and the queer community. With them, I have overcome my addiction and will be cut free for seven years. Without them, I would not have begun accepting myself.

I can now say that I love who I am. Loving yourself is key before you can do the same for somebody else. I am with someone who means everything to me. Yet the battle continues. We have this constant conversation surrounding us. We have become a conversation piece within the community. Glares have become redundant. Pressure has become dominate. Luckily, we accept and ignore society's views. I told him that I would marry him three weeks in, yet I knew this after the third date. His compassion and expression makes me swoon like no other.

Through my past and future I will stumble. Through addiction and pain I will gain resistance. People will shut me down day to day and I will not have to rely on others for my happiness. I will be proud with myself, I will accept myself. I will accept things that I cannot change, and the courage to change what I can. This I believe: acceptance is queer.

*Jeremy Moore is a first-year strategic communication major also studying sociology and gender studies. He is an activist for gender and Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Questioning and Allied equality who still struggles with self-acceptance. He is grateful to have had the opportunity to write this essay and to be among the 12 winners.*

# Care is in the Word

Ann Deibert

Butterflies. The bad kind. Fluttering my stomach into nausea. The heat on the back of my neck and shoulders turning pins and needles heightening my awareness. Sweat.

I believe in being scared.

All I immediately remember is that I mentioned Chuck E. Cheese, and that the speech was about kids with cancer. I was in charge of planning our high school's Mini-Thon—a 24-hour dance/activity marathon—to raise money for The Four Diamonds Fund. A thousand people stared at me. An entire high school full of students, staff, and administration just stared. My intent was to contrast what kids do versus what kids with cancer do. But my idea seemed silly once the stares blistered my face.

I practiced my speech, knew it forward and backward. But all I could picture was opening my mouth and nothing coming out... carrying all of that preparation out the door; there were no windows in the auditorium. No one else could give the kick-off speech; it was my baby. I wanted to abandon my child-run away in terror.

But instead, I spoke.

I spoke because I wanted this assembly to mean something to the people staring. I wanted them to understand the opportunity we had to make a difference; the opportunity we had to raise awareness for the innocents who were (and still are) fighting a monster within—a monster threatening their life and taking others. Instead of going to Chuck E. Cheese, they were fighting for their lives. I wanted all of the people in that room who got to care about other things to understand that some of us aren't as lucky.

Being scared is okay. Because being scared means you care about whatever it is that makes you shake in trepidation. Care is in the word after all. Think about horror movies: as morbid as it is, the characters are screaming and normally crying because they care about the fact that a monster is trying to chop their limbs off with a chainsaw. They care about their lives. Exaggerated as horror films may be, they do show caring about the most basic level. The basic instinct of humanity is living, we all care about that.

Sitting in the waiting room while a loved one is in surgery. Bouncing up and down in the locker room before a playoff game in front of the whole city. Saying the words, "I love you." Sending off a soldier overseas. Waving to the rearview mirror as a child leaves for college. All of these show that being scared for these people, or for yourself, mean that you care.

Care is in the word. You can't spell scare without care. When those butterflies, pins and needles, and sweat leave, that's when you need to be worried. When you don't get those nerves or that fright. Be worried.

Until then, embrace it. Because being scared means that you care. This I believe.

*Ann Deibert is a senior secondary education English major at Clarion who first discovered This I Believe essays as she ventured to teach them to her high school students during her education block experience. Her essay is inspired by the fear that goes along with starting into the education field, notably standing at the front of the classroom, and became a philosophy that helped her survive the transition from student to teacher. She wrote her essay while her students drafted their own essays, collectively listening to the Blink 182 Pandora Station for inspiration.*

# Laying in the Grass

Nina Jonnet

I believe in laying in the grass. When I need to let go and relax on a nice day, the first place to go is the grass. It's a place to go, to think about bad things, or to think about good things. In the grass, you don't feel so trapped because you have the sky to look to.

This year, when I had to move to a new house, I feel like all there was to do was to think, and I let that eat away at me. The place where I live now has some land to let my thoughts run wild in. Moving was like starting a new chapter of my life. Laying in the field is my place to collect my thoughts and let go of them. I believe in thinking, negative or positive. It needs to be done.

Laying in the grass isn't just a place to think. It feels like childhood again. My cats come and play with me and it brings all the joys and carelessness of being a little kid. It's my place of relaxation.

Grass can symbolize growth. With growth comes moving on. In the past year I have done a lot of that. Changing houses and losing some close people in my life gave me no choice but to move on. Moving on is a good thing, there's always a time for new beginnings to better your life. While thinking in the grass, it gives me the power to move through life.

The grass is part of the Earth. We as humans, rely on the land. I believe that it can give us strength, and we truly can connect with our own selves. Once we find ourselves life becomes easier.

I feel that giving yourself time to think alone in a peaceful place can help achieve that, and where is a better place to do that, than in a warm grassy field?

Whenever I lay in the grass, I feel a connection to myself, and the Earth. I feel able to let go of everything. And I feel that in the grass is the best place to think about the good and the bad, and the old and the new. It helps interesting thoughts.

The grass is a place of thought, and a place of serenity.

*Nina Jonnet is a first-year communication major who came to Clarion from the small town of Oakmont, Pa. Her essay was inspired by long nights of homework and missing home.*

# Living a Senseless Life

Holly McConnell

*Holly is a first-year student at Clarion University. She is originally from Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania. Holly is pursuing a degree in Psychology. She wrote this essay in Dr. Terman's English 110 course during the Fall 2013 semester.*

Think about the 365 days in a year. Goes quickly doesn't it? In the world we live in today people don't take the time to stop or slow down to observe what is happening in the world around them; Instead people are more concerned about what will take place later that day, a week from that day, or what is to come in the next few years. Life is fragile "Here today, gone tomorrow." If your life ended today, would you be satisfied? I believe that people have forgotten how to fully use their senses.

Being wealthy and successful are great achievements, but how many people die saying "I have truly lived." When you walk past a homeless man on the street, do you stop to give him a moment of your time or give him a few dollars? In the cities you might find people performing on the street corners (singing, or play an instrument), do you stop to listen? Many people don't live in the present moment, instead they're always in a haste to get nowhere. Do you appreciate the little things in the world? Walking through the woods I like to observe the trees, and how they change with the seasons. Being alert, knowing what you are walking into, because your eyes were up and your ears were open. Amazing things happen all over the world, right in front of the eyes of millions and they can't even see it.

When you listen to a song are you listening to the words being spoken? Do you feel the music? When you hear a piano, or a violin, no words, just music, is your spirit lifted? When you stop to enjoy something so small, you are taking a moment to slow down and take notice of your surroundings. I understand folks are busy and need to pay their bills, but what about your well-being? Finding time to stay in tune with society and the beauty taking place all around you helps you find peace within yourself. What is your perception of the world when you open your eyes? Are you really living?

# I Believe that Santa Claus Saves Youth

Ryan Whittle

Everyone grows up believing in something great, later to find out that it wasn't true. Hearing stories as a kid about the tooth fairy and Easter bunny, but there was one story that stood out the most. Santa Claus is undoubtedly the crowd favorite with the biggest impact on a child. I believe that children need Santa Claus.

When I was a child myself I can't recall my first time hearing about Santa but what I can remember is everything I felt during the "Most Wonderful Time of the Year". My parents were dedicated to truly convincing my brothers and I of Santa Claus's existence: sled marks found on the ground outside the next morning, sleigh bells being heard in the late night, leaving out the milk and cookies, even getting a phone call from the big man himself one year. Joy is defined as a great feeling of pleasure and happiness. My brothers and I experienced joy whenever our thoughts surrounded Christmas.

Christmas of 2004 was a not so great one to say the least. My brothers and I thought it was time we met Santa in the flesh. The idea was exciting in itself. As an eleven, nine and seven year old, the best idea we could come up with was to just catch Santa in the act. The plan was to stay up all night and surprise the big man when he got to our tree. It was around 3 am when what was suppose to be amazing went wrong - all wrong. You have to remember we are kids. My two brothers and I were hiding on the stairs watching the front door open, with excitement. It was both my mother and father with a big bag in hand of a bunch of unwrapped gifts. We watched in horror as they sat at the kitchen table working against the clock, wrapping gifts and falsely labeling certain boxes "From: Santa". A significant portion of my childhood ended that Christmas morning.

Fast forwarding to now, I have more than come to terms with the fact that Santa is a fictional character, but also now I have a four year old sister who has restored that bit of joy that faded away in '04. Although my sister Gabby is just four, she is completely understanding of the concept of Christmas and Santa Claus. She believes, she has joy, and she still has her entire childhood ahead of her.

When you're young there is always an adult lurking around somewhere complaining about something, and telling all the youth they come across to enjoy being young. What I believe I guess isn't so much about Santa Claus, but maybe it's about savoring the youth. As a child, your imagination is untouchable you can believe that a man in a red suit annually delivers presents to all the kids of the world in a single night with the help of his trusted flying reindeer. That's amazing. Preserve the mind of a child, in the sense of their capability of thinking and believing in the impossible. I believe that a child who believes in Santa Claus is a child filled with joy; if you disagree you haven't seen a four year old little girl leave a milk, cookies and a thank you note out on Christmas Eve night.

*Ryan Whittle is a first-year student who came to Clarion from Connecticut. He is a sports management major and wrestler. His essay was inspired by his little sister, Gabrielle, with whom he enjoys spending time.*

# Always Help the Turtle Cross the Road

Claire Sawyer

I believe in always helping the turtle cross the road.

While driving in western Pennsylvania, it's fairly common to see wayward box turtles creeping across the roadway. Unsurprisingly, the slow reptiles don't fare well against traffic, and aren't very likely to make it to their destinations once they've wandered into trouble. But I like to intervene.

The first time I saw my mom save a turtle, I was ten years old, riding in the backseat of our Explorer to swim lessons. We were running late, so it came as a surprise when I felt the car veer off the road and come to a stop long before we reached the pool. "Mom, what are we doing?" I whined. "There's a turtle in the middle of the road; I'm going to move him," she retorted, hopping out of the car. I watched out the window as she ventured into the highway and picked up the creature, who had withdrawn into its shell and looked like a big rock, to me. She carefully set it several feet off the berm of the road, then returned. "Why is this one little turtle our problem? Aren't there, like, a zillion turtles in the world?" I asked as she sat down in the driver's seat. My mother turned to me. I could tell from the look in her eyes that a lecture was imminent. "Sure there are, Claire, but that one looked like it needed some help. You're just one of billions of people in the world. Would you want that to stop someone from helping you?" I fell silent, pouting a little. Her words made sense to me, but I wouldn't realize their greater meaning until I was older.

In today's busy world, I've found it's easy to become so caught up in the hustle and bustle of my own life that I completely disregard other people. I like to think it's unintentional; how often do I fail to comfort the friend that's grieving over the loss of a grandparent, or say a kind word to the classmate that's struggling to pay for college? With all I've got going on, their issues seem relatively unimportant to me. But the thing I find most disturbing is that the dark side of human nature often compels us to go even further than ignorance - some of us actively try and beat down those who are struggling in order to make ourselves feel better. Think of the antagonistic boss, or the high school bully.

Last year, Clemson University student Nathan Weaver conducted an experiment in which he placed decoy turtles on a roadway and observed the drivers' reactions to them. No one stopped to move them; most swerved to hit them. Each and every day, we encounter "turtles" in our lives - those struggling to reach their destinations - and we've got three choices: help them, ignore them, or hit them. Will you lend a hand, even when it's inconvenient?

I believe in always helping the turtle cross the road.

*Claire Sawyer is a first-year student at Clarion University who has lived in Clarion her entire life. She was influenced to write her essay by some of my fellow residents. Claire believes that although making time for others seems like a simple concept, it's often difficult to put into practice. She credits her mother for instilling in her when she was young the importance of slowing down to lend a hand.*

# Walking on Water

Amber Iman

I believe I can walk on water-anyone can walk on water. Impossible, right? The only people you can think of that could walk on water would be a magician, yet once we realize how they do the trick it isn't as amazing as we thought. However, when I think of "walking on water" I remember the story in the bible, Matthew 14:22-33. Jesus walks on water and surprises his disciples. At first they believe it is some sort of ghost, until one disciple decides to test him. He too walks on water towards Jesus, but doubts himself and begins to sink down in the water.

Doubt. The one word that is familiar to all of us and one that doesn't have to be looked up on dictionary.com. Five years ago I sang in front of my church for the first time. The song I decided to sing was "Tomorrow" from the musical Annie. I knew that song forwards and backwards, as I had practiced it for weeks. That Sunday morning, I went in the practice room and sat at the piano with my sheet music in hand. I wondered, "What happens if I freeze, what if I screw up the notes and sing the wrong words?" My hands started shaking and I felt real hot all of a sudden. I knew I was going to screw up this song. I needed to stop doubting myself otherwise I would do exactly all those things.

Before leaving the practice room I pushed all my fears away and walked into the sanctuary. With music in hand I walked up to the microphone and took a deep, slow breath. I needed to overcome my anxiety of singing in front of people. With that, the piano started playing my song and the words flowed smoothly off my tongue. It wasn't long before I realized that my song was over and everyone in the pews were clapping and smiling at me. That day, I "walked on water" without sinking because I didn't doubt myself. None of us should sink in the water, but instead, overcome our doubt and walk on water towards the light.

I believe we can all walk on water no matter the difficulty of the task, the uncertainty of completing it, or the direction in which it will take us.

*Amber is a first-year student majoring in early childhood and special education. Originally from Cranberry Township, Amber loves to sing and has performed in several musicals for her church, as well as a production of "Annie." She credits the love and support of her church family for inspiring her to write this essay.*



# The Reality of Words

Alivia Bartifay

I believe in the power of words. A question I can recall being asked as a child is, if you could have any superpower, what would it be? Kids would giggle to themselves, yelling out different magical powers that they would love to have like to fly, be invisible, or to have the ability to read minds. I always said I'd like to fly; it seemed harmless enough. But being able to read minds always triggered me to think more in depth. You'd be a genius, kids would argue. And they were right, outsmarting those around you would come with ease. But at what price? Mind reading to me seemed to be more of a curse than a gift. How could your self-esteem withstand all the cruel things people thought about you? You'd get compliments too, of course. But they wouldn't matter.

Let me tell you something about reality. The nice things people say about you don't stand out. They feel good at the moment, then fade away like each breath we breathe in winter air, vanishing almost as fast as they came. But I can recall every instant, every crushing impact when a person offended me with their voice.

Negative words stay with you like sticky scars, carved into the blackness behind shut eyelids. It's humiliating. They stay as a reminder of how people perceive you. Maybe they've changed their minds; maybe they've said something they didn't mean. But to me, or to anyone that has ever been called an awful word, they stay with you forever. Frozen in that instant when the word escaped the slimy lips of the person who dared to tear you down and make you feel weak.

In reality, we are judged by our appearances. The way we look, carry ourselves, speak, dress, and react. For example, some people are called weird and others are called normal. The thing is that words such as those have no definition. People we call weird only stray from what we find normal and those we call normal are known for being similar to ourselves. How can we label each other with such words that cannot even be specifically defined? Calling others words such as those may be painless and easy as they slip out of our mouths because they don't matter. But to those who we have called names or smacked with labels, they matter very much. Eventually, those painful words start to sink in and we believe it. We believe that we are ugly and different and weird. We think we're alone and that no one can relate to the way we feel. The sad part is, we've all been there. We've all been hurt by other people's words.

The reality we live in should be a nightmare in our heads that cannot come out because the world is too kind and too pure for such mean language to escape. Let us turn it around and create a reality like the impossible fairy tale of kindness and acceptance, and make our current reality a nightmare.

*Alivia Bartifay is from Pittsburgh, Pa. She is a freshman at Clarion studying speech pathology, in which she hopes to also earn a graduate degree. After completing graduate school, Alivia plans to move to Florida.*

# Enjoy Every Bite

Derek Dietz

I believe that you should always be the last person to finish your meal. It's impossible for me to think about my grandfather, Pap, without also thinking about food. Every major holiday always included a huge dinner at my grandparents' house, the table filled with all of my extended family. Since I was a young kid, I always sat to the immediate left of my grandfather. When meals were finally served, I would eat like I hadn't seen food in weeks, hurrying through the ham, plowing through the potatoes, and finishing the whole plate in about fifteen minutes. Most meals, we would wait for nearly two hours for Pap to finish the last bite of lasagna. When I jokingly teased him one day for taking so long to eat, he replied with a smile, "I enjoy every bite."

To say that my eighty-nine year old grandfather enjoys food is an understatement, but he's no connoisseur that prides himself on his culinary knowledge; he simply loves to eat. To him, a two dollar fish sandwich at his favorite local restaurant is as good as the chefs special in any European eatery. He insists on buttering every slice of bread, he paints Nutella onto graham crackers in a process he calls "gilding the lily," and on special occasions, he washes it all down with a cup of canned peal' syrup, which he's named "The Nectar of the Gods."

For years my grandfather suffered with extreme hearing loss, but he was too stubborn to ask for hearing aids. At dinner, my aunts and uncles and I would be forced to use our outside voices when speaking. I know he was never able to hear every word said, but I'd look over halfway through my ham loaf and see him smiling gently, hands folded on his lap, taking in the joyful environment that surrounded him.

About three times a year, my family takes Pap out to one of his favorite places to eat, The Oakhurst Tearoom. For us, it's a four hour round trip. The salad bar is small, the meat is almost always too dry, and the desserts on display are far prettier to look at than to eat. But we keep taking him there because he loves it. He loves the conversation that accompanies a meal, always eager to present his perspective on why the Steelers need a new head coach or why Rick Steves is the most pleasant personality on television.

So while I'm still certainly nowhere the tortoise pace Pap's set for himself, I'm realizing the value in taking things slowly. I need to take time to appreciate the pickled eggs and the Lebanese Bologna, even if they're not the best part of the meal. Because in the dinner that is life, you only get one plateful. And you can't go back for seconds.

*Derek Dietz is a secondary education English major in his third year at Clarion. He is a co-editor of "Tobeco," Clarion University's literary arts journal, and a student director of The Writing Center. Derek's grandfather, the inspiration behind his essay, was a 1949 graduate of Clarion University, and he has been a lifelong role model. Derek hopes to share some of his grandfather's eccentric and comedic ways with a larger audience.*

# Lost In a Maze Without a Map

Savanna Wheeler

I believe in hope.

College. College is most people's next big goal after High School. Something I heard about all through my life was, "If you go to college you'll be successful" or "you'll never get a great job if you don't go to college." They told me all these things and set going to college up on this high pedestal-so much so that at times, it seemed like something I'd never reach.

It's incredibly intimidating for some people. Most people spend all their time just trying to survive Middle School or High School and the thought of having to have more education afterwards never crosses their minds. It seems ridiculous to them.

What college are you going to? What classes do you need to take? What supplies do you need? Are you going to live in a fraternity/sorority? How are you going to pay for all of this? These aren't everyday problems that you've had before in your life and solving them can be very difficult. I had the same problem; I had no idea where to start when it came to going to college. I mean, no one in my family has ever gone to college, and how was I supposed to solve a problem I couldn't even fully understand?

I was confused and considered college as something that I didn't even want to deal with. To be truthful, if I had never found Upward Bound I would have never even considered going to college.

Upward Bound is a program that was created to help prepare high school students for going to college. It is a program found in Universities across the United States, and I go to Clarion for it.

Finding Upward Bound was like finding a map in a maze; I could finally stop running into all those dead ends and backtracking-unsure of which way I should go. I could finally plan out my path and reach my goal. They helped me figure out how college worked, how I should choose my classes, and so much more. I was able to take their advice and experience, apply it to my life and become a better person because of it.

Because of Upward Bound, I have hope. And without hope, without having a map to help you and guide you along the maze of life, you might never realize your true potential as a person. Everyone gets lost in the maze, and when you're offered a map, you should always take it. You should always remember that no matter how impossible something seems, all you need is hope.

I believe in hope; it's something that Upward Bound gave me.

*Savanna is a junior at Oil City High School who found inspiration from her experience with Clarion University's Upward Bound Program. She is an avid artist with a very "alive" hope to pursue a college degree.*

# untitled

Sylvia Baker

I believe in living. "To live is the rarest thing. Most people exist that is all." My parents and I were talking about my future, "What am I going to do with life?". This is a usual conversation that parents have with their 17 year old. I answered with a bit of sarcasm, "I'm going to live." I was a little surprised with their response "That's great; make the most out of living. Don't just sit back and leave life happen to you. Create it yourself."

One day during study hall I noticed that most of my classmates were either sleeping with a possibility of drooling on the desk. Others sat dazed and bored, repeatedly looking at the clock and waiting for the bell, And then there were still other kids in a big circle, holding meaningless conversations. They were all just trying to slump through the day. I won't lie; I slack quite a bit myself. Who doesn't at least every once in a while? But slumping through the days is not why we were put here, in my opinion.

I thought: what if we all had the mindset to do the most that we can do? What if we wanted to get the most out of our lives? Living life to the fullest isn't about who is better either; it's about being willing to actually do something and go after what you want. You can get what you want, or you can just get old.

Actually live! Because there's plenty to live for. Live for love. Live for creativity; live for work; live to make the most out of life. Live for life! Living for love is to guarantee that you won't be a bitter person. Living for creativity is guaranteed passion. Living for work is guaranteed discipline. Living to make life the most is the only way to get the most out of your time here!

Live every precious day that you're given; don't just exist, and don't drool on the desk!

*Sylvia is a junior at Oil City High School and enjoyed the experience of expressing her creativity through writing her belief statement. She drew inspiration from a study hall period one day where she paid close attention to what her classmates were (or were not) doing with their lives.*

# untitled

Mel Michel

I believe (with all due respect to Mother Theresa) that everything that doesn't kill you makes a funny story later.

Years ago, I was asked to tell a story. When asked if they preferred a love story or a funny story, the audience indicated funny, so I said I would tell them about my father's funeral. My mother had pneumonia, and the man I was seeing at the time was forbidden from attending at my side because my mother didn't like him. So I was left to fend for myself. It seemed like everyone there couldn't decide if I was my sister, my sister's younger daughter or myself. My father had been a surgeon and many people greeted me with "your father took out my..." or "your father sewed up my..." After the funeral my siblings and I found and read aloud scraps of paper with dirty jokes written on them that we'd found in Daddy's briefcase. We had never heard him say anything like what he most certainly carried around in his pockets to tell to his staff.

Though the cathartic telling of this tale, I understood the words of the character Truvy from Robert Hariling's *Steel Magnolias* when she said, "Laughter through tears is my favorite emotion." Most of life's best material comes from the most trying of times, such as my ex-husband breaking his leg two days before we had to planned to announce our separation, causing me to have to nursemaid him for three months. He lived mostly in a hospital bed in our TV room and around my close friends I began referring to him as "the coffee table." My son has given me lots of material, most notably when as a toddler he shoved peas up his nose and on another occasion I watched a June bug crawl deep into his ear. There was the time that same son got separated from the family in a Mexican amusement park, only to finally be reunited with us despite our total lack of Spanish language skills. There was also my daughter's horrendous stomach flu when she managed to vomit into her father's leather jacket as he held her, without my knowing it, as I was trying to coax him into taking me out to dinner.

I always told my kids when things were bad that "Everything that doesn't kill you makes a funny story later." More than once my daughter has said through choking sobs, "Funny story later, right mommy?" In fact, after a frightening year fighting anorexia, her favorite story is that while in the hospital the only get-well card she received was from the staff at her favorite restaurant. And now, to memorialize the electric shock therapy that saved her life from depression, she is trying to convince me to let her have the international sign for electricity tattooed behind her ear. If I have taught my children to see adversity from the perspective of a future funny story, then I believe I will have done well.

*Originally born in New Orleans, La., Marilouise "Mel" Michel credits the "City that Care Forgot" for her love of life and zeal for celebrating everything from the milestone to the mundane. A professor of theatre at Clarion University for 24 years, she has come to appreciate small-town life with her husband, Ron, and teenaged children, Emily and Marshall. This year she is on sabbatical leave, using the time to travel and work on writing projects including a book on yoga for actors and a play about her elderly mother's journey out of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.*

# Family Knows No Bounds

Carley Younger

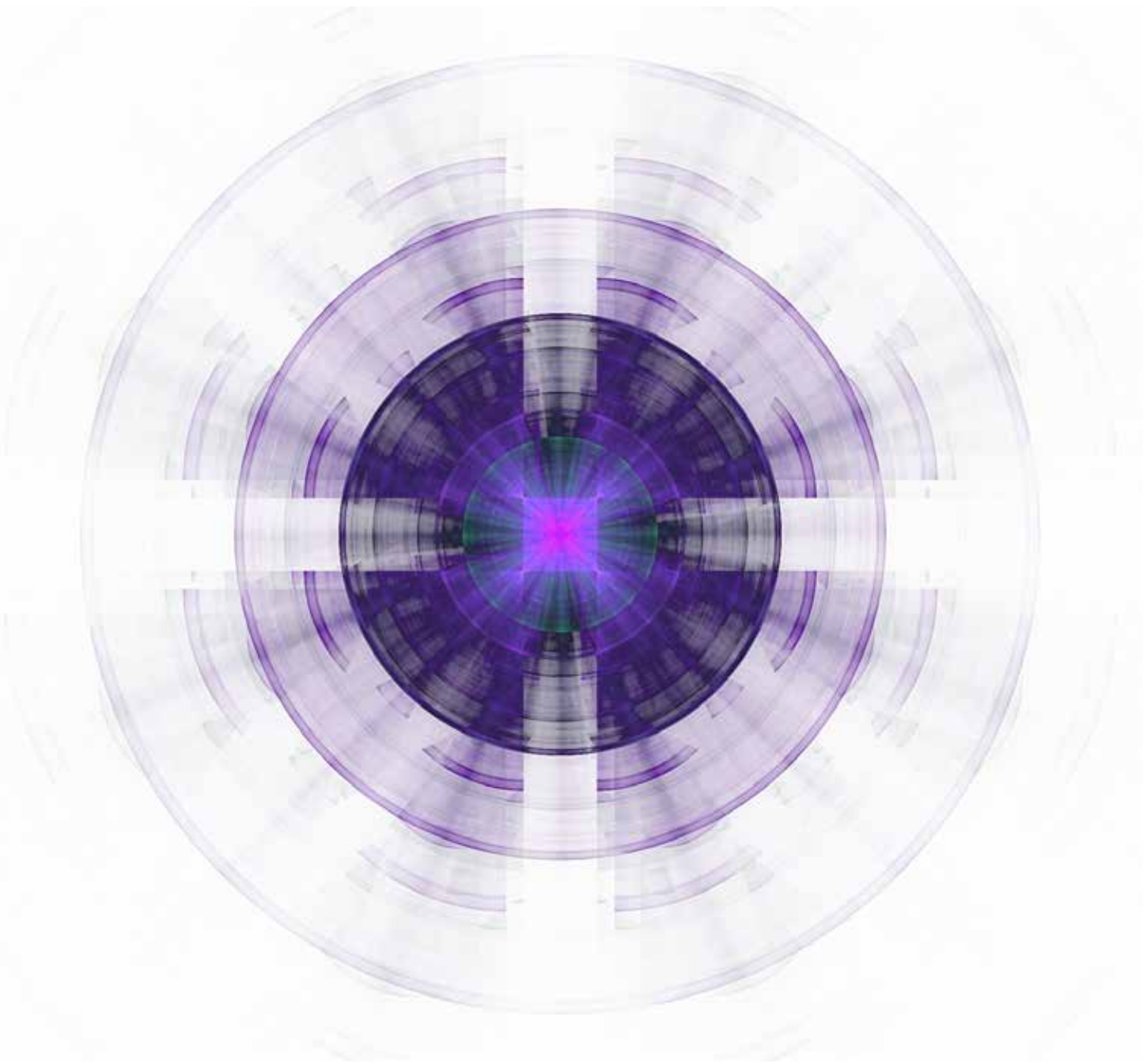
Golden sunbeams danced across the table drawing my attention away from the red and yellow Yatzee game screen. Immediately, I was drawn to the cool clear window mesmerized by those beautiful rays. I opened the courthouse window, and the cool air and the noises of the city washed over me like a raging river. I stood there and took it all in enjoying the fresh air and the alluring patterns of the colored leaves flitting on the black pavement. Then a man emerged from the doors below me the sun reflecting on his jet black hair. I watched as he darted across the pavement as if wolves were at his heels. A lone tear fell from my eye creating a path down my cheek as he got in his car and drove away. He never even said goodbye.

The last memory that I have of my father is when he walked out of my life forever; I was just eleven. This simple act committed by the man who should have loved me the most made me feel alone and full of despair. Luckily, the story didn't end there for in the other room stood another man who despite no blood relation stood before a judge and proudly declared, "I want her!" This man was my stepfather, and everyday I thank God for bringing him into my life.

When my mother first started dating my stepdad, I was immediately taken to him. I often say that he and I are kindred spirits. This man was always there in areas of my life where my father was not. He taught me how to ride a bike, to swim, and how to ride and care for a horse. When ever I fell down, he was there to pick me up, dust me off, and encouragingly say, "Get back up. You can do it!" No matter what, he attended every play, soccer game that he could, and encouraged me to follow my dreams.

This is where my belief began; my belief that family is not determined by blood or DNA but by love that is unconditional and never ending. There are many people who I consider to be in my family not because we are related but because they love me for who I am and have been there to encourage me when I needed them. In first Corinthians, it says, "Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. Love never fails." My biological father was never there for me so I do not consider him to be my dad. I think that titles like that are given to people who you love and who love you in return. Family starts with the people that share blood and then grows as you let more into your heart. Family knows no bounds; in This I Believe.

*Carley Younger is a first-year business major. She is originally from Sugar Grove, Pa., and wrote her essay in Dr. Terman's first-year writing course.*



Artist: David Aites

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