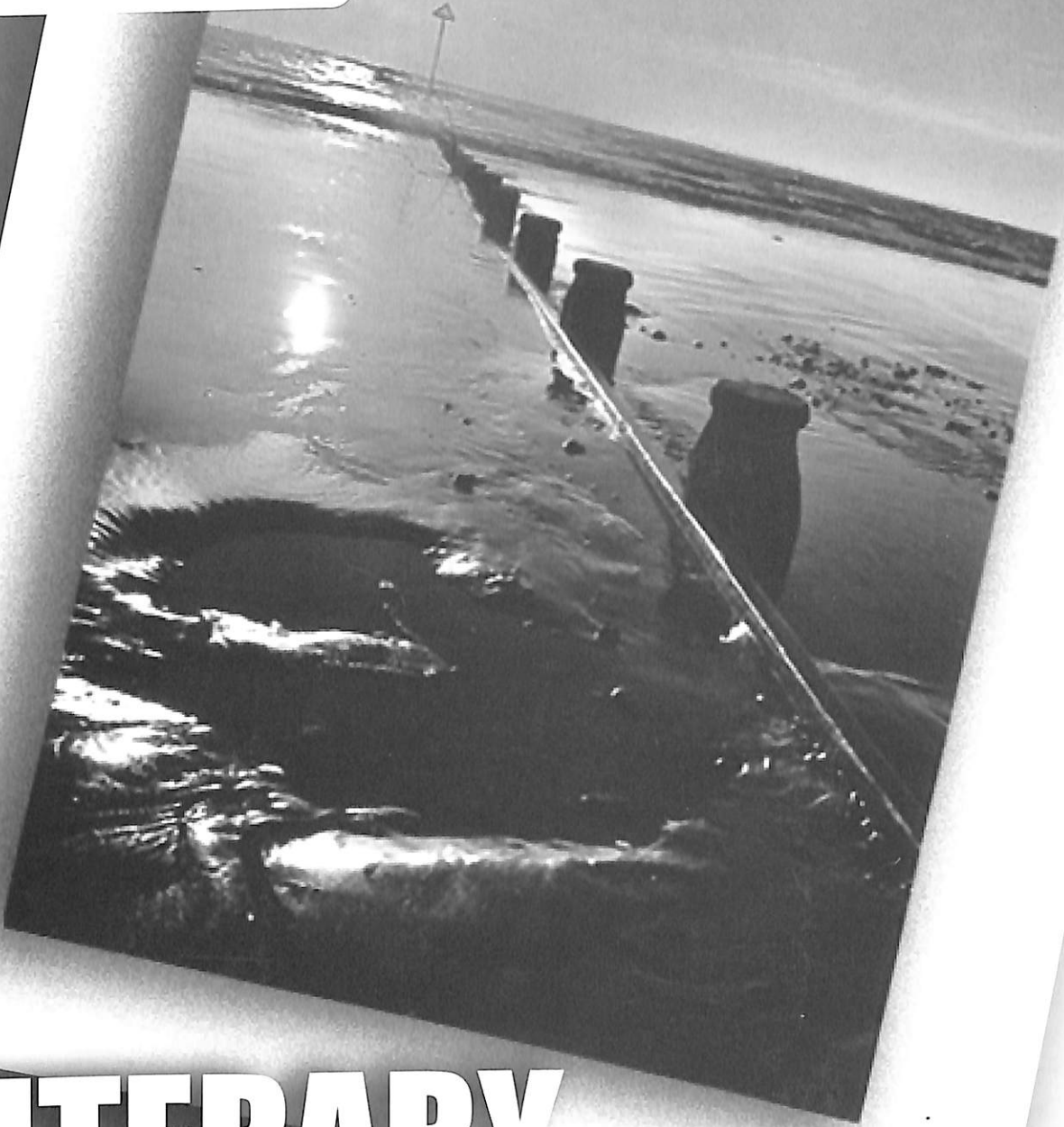


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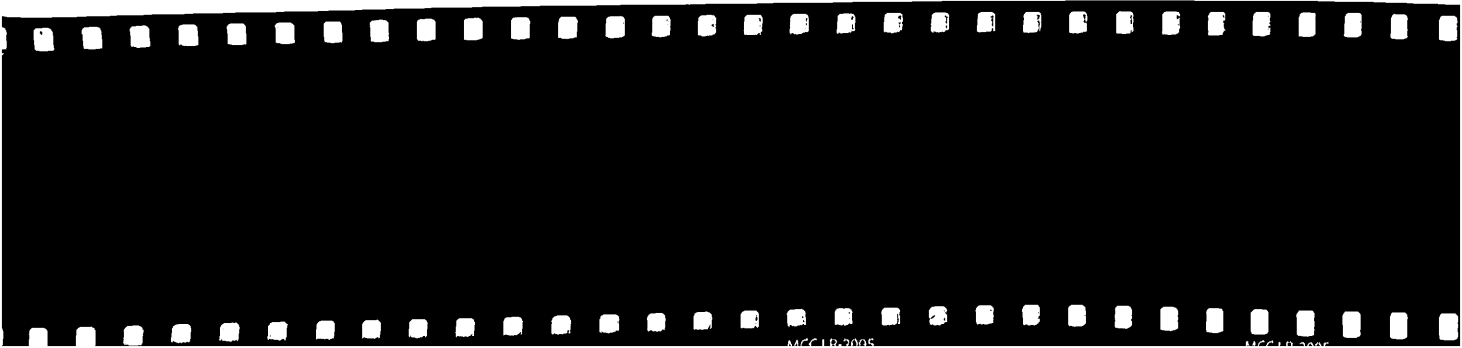
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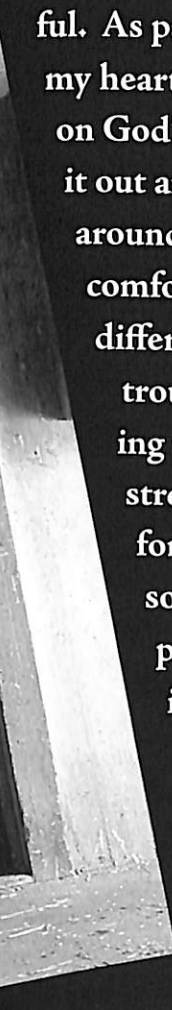
Death, My One True Fear

Sometimes I lay awake at night with a fear to go to sleep and never wake again. Sleep now is my grandmother. And now one of her sons has joined her in the precious sky that we pray to every night. I lay awake at night thinking who would be next to fall to a slumberous sleep. To look, breathe, and smell for the last time on this earth. Will I be next? Or will it be someone else dear to me? Sometimes I feel like I am alone in this world now with no one to talk to about my problems. In a crowded room or house full of family and friends, but somehow still feel alone. In my room, looking out my window at the pitch blackness of the night I think. I hide my tears behind a smile for the people who may have or may never know how I truly feel. Them never to ask and me never to tell. I talk to many people I know because of a fear of being alone. To be alone in this world would be like a homeless person dying in the street thinking no one in this world loved them at all. To me, not being loved would hurt more than being in hell for

all eternity. Sometimes when I walk down a street or sit in my room staring at the



ceiling I think. I think of how the madness flows out of me when someone says something to me I think is wrong. I think of how an apology would maybe help the situation, but not knowing how to



apologize for my actions is painful. As painful as a knife stuck in my heart knowing that no one on God's green earth could pull it out and save me. I may smile around friends or family to comfort them, but inside is a different story. Inside sits a troubled young teen walking the pitch black concrete streets looking, searching for someone, the right person to talk to about all my problems. But, all I get is nothing. Like a box containing nothing but space and air. The very same air that seems to have been taken out my body and put in this box. The box to

be sent to the point of no return. Could I find this box again? Is my box, full of the air I breathe, up in the heavens with my loved ones? Or in hell with the people I never knew and them never to know me. My heart seems as if it was beat-

ing as the elderly people walked, slowly. As slowly as I look up at the clock in my room hoping that tomorrow comes as soon as possible. That's how I felt when I was at the two burials that changed my life. It was as if I was the one getting dirt thrown over my slightly chilled body. It would seem as if someone, in their mind, was thinking "just another person dead and gone." Never to see tomorrow and never to hug your family members again. Never to feel the warmth of the sun as you are running down the street without a care in this world. If you care to know how I feel again, read this over and you shall know. You shall know about the young teen that has become a young man, feeling nothing, but fearing death.

The Pond

Reminiscing on childhood always leads me to one place, my grandfather's pond. It was not a fancy or a big pond, but it was the pond that dreams were made of, where children played all day, summers in the water and winters on the banks. The day the men came to the farm to build this childhood dream would be the day that changed my life. The pond was not only a favorite swimming hole in the summer, but a source for entertainment the whole year and a final resting place for my childhood.

My sister and I, along with my mother, moved to my grandfather's farm after my parent's ugly divorce. We lived in a tiny camping trailer for awhile, just parked a few feet from my grandparent's house. There was no bathroom in the trailer, and in the cold Indiana winters, we became great sprinters. Let me be clear, this was not a luxury trailer or camper but a 1972, 10 foot by 14 foot, at the most, silver metal box. We threw sleeping bags on the floor and table to have a place to sleep. We had no television, radio or even food in this camper. A bright orange extension cord, stretched from the corner of my grandparent's house, powered a single light bulb and a portable 1500 watt space heater that often blew a fuse in the house.

Then, the big day arrived. Men in bulldozers and huge trucks worked to make a place for our very own trailer, a new, more spacious home of our own. My grandfather must have been the foreman for the job because I watched him point and shout instructions for hours that morning. The men began digging, and digging, and digging. Were they putting my new house underground? Hours later, I gained courage to approach my sometimes gruff grandfather and ask why our home had to be in a hole. With a chuckle and a quick hug he told me the hole was not for our home, they were building a new pond so that we, mom, my sister, all my cousins and I, would have something to do. The site for our new home overlooked the waterless hole. In hindsight, grandfather built the pond not only for us to have something to do, but grandfather liked to fish. Each fall, when he restocked that pond, he reminded us of how he built that pond for our entertainment.

In the early spring of 1973, our new home overlooked the pond just as grandfather had promised. We were so close, in fact, that when storms came through late at night, I would lie in my bed imagining the wind would topple the trailer right into that pond. I forced myself to

stay awake, so that I would be able to swim to the top of the pond when the trailer turned upside down. It was still cold in May, but all the children within bicycle distance knew there was now a swimming hole and would visit every day. "Can we swim yet?" were the words I am certain my grandfather despised up to the day he died. Finally, one still cold May day, he gave in, and we all ran to the pond and jumped in. It didn't matter that the water was colder than the water we drank from the tap, we were swimming. We were going to swim all day. I don't think a day passed that summer that we did not swim in the pond.

Sometimes there would only be the three cousins. Other times, we would have fifteen or twenty kids splashing in the water. Grandfather was right, we had something to do. After all, we lived 35 minutes from the closest town which boasted a single gas station and a small grocery. Talk about Mayberry.

As springs and summers faded into falls and winters, the pond continued to be our place. A place of entertainment, of make believe and the place where many dreams of the future were born. The years that the pond was the center of my universe flew by as if a bird swooped down and grabbed my childhood with its feet and carried it off. My childhood was gone in an instant. It was six years exactly that spring when we received the bad news. There would be no more swimming in the pond. It was contaminated. Every year my grandfather ran tests on the pond water to make sure it was not tainted. We often made fun of him as he put chlorine and other powders in the mud hole he had built. Now we were no longer laughing. We were not laughing at him and not laughing with him like we used to when he watched us play in the pond. Grandfather's face looked as if he had lost his best friend as he told us that we would never be in the pond again. There was no treatment, no fix and nothing he could do. The pond was dead, and I felt as if I were leaving my childhood right there with it for eternity.

It may seem silly to think you can sum up your childhood with a pond. The pond was a source of escape and hope for me my entire childhood. It was there for play, and it was there to listen without judging. It was a place of solitude and multitude. The pond would wrap its waters around me like a security blanket, and hold me safe. My grandfather died before I told him that pond changed my life. That old pond is still there, and still unusable. I visit that pond when I return to Indiana and remember all the childhood memories and hope that my children have found their "pond" somewhere.

Free At Last

I am free in this democracy
To bear arms and bare legs
Bare hips even for money
To shake my bootie in this democracy.

I am free to worship God as I please
To worship the devil on my knees
To bow down to money, fast cars, house and bars
To engage in blasphemy.

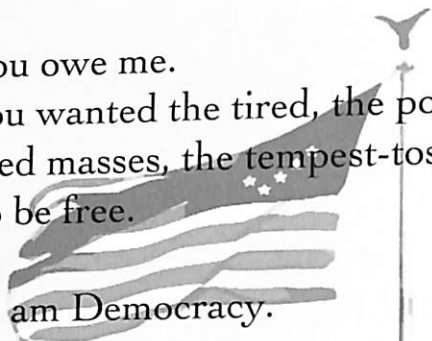
This is the land of the free
No responsibility
Free to kill my unborn baby
Free to disrespect authority
Free to rob and steal and kill with my pill
To take money out without putting any in
To doctor the books and protect the crooks.

08

Not my fault you see.
I am woman, black, gay, handicapped, Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Jew
I am Asian, Chicano, African and Native you see
As hyphenated as I can be.

America, you owe me.
You said you wanted the tired, the poor, the huddled masses,
The wretched masses, the tempest-tost
Yearning to be free.

Well, here I am Democracy.
Sock it to me.





Dreaming

Winter days and summer nights
are all a part of life.

Ups and downs are all in process
of becoming real, natural.

Love is becoming nonexistent.

Hate real. Real to the soul.

Fake in the mind.

Life is a decision and to live is a
struggle. Only the mind can put

together the pieces that are missing.

Often even the mind isn't strong for
a puzzle as big as life itself. Illusions

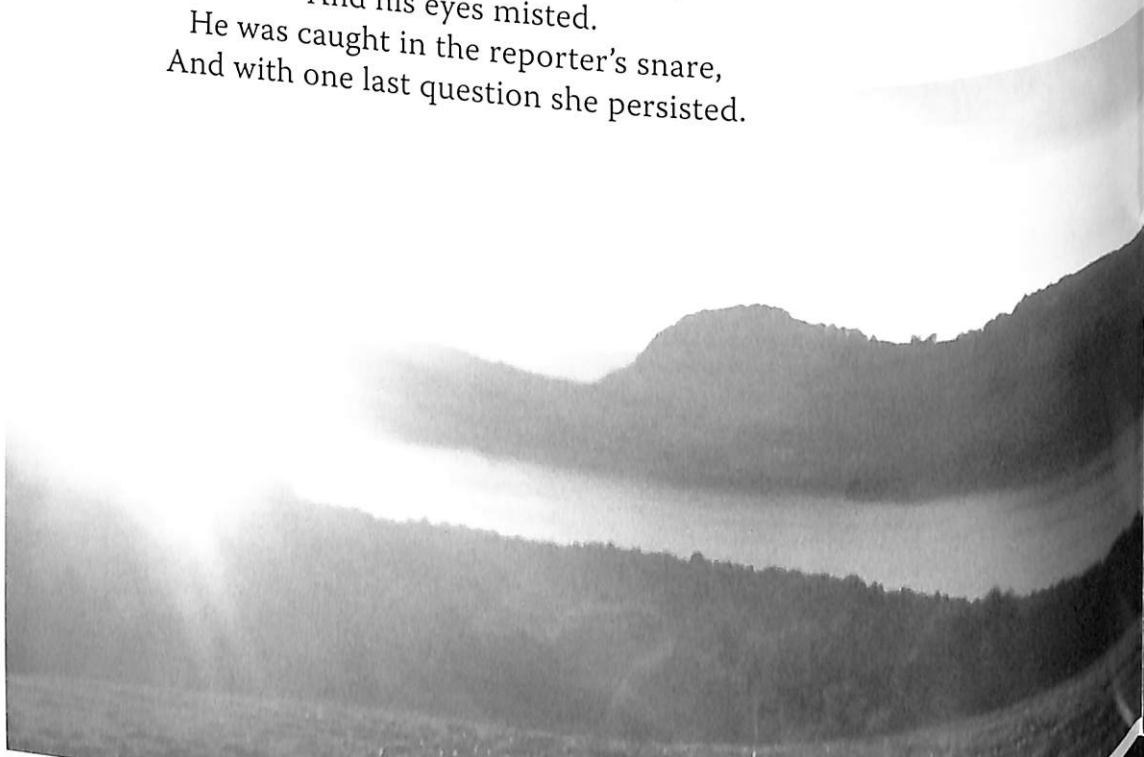
of what can only make up a fantasy of what
is wanted. Dreaming a dream

that can only be a dream.

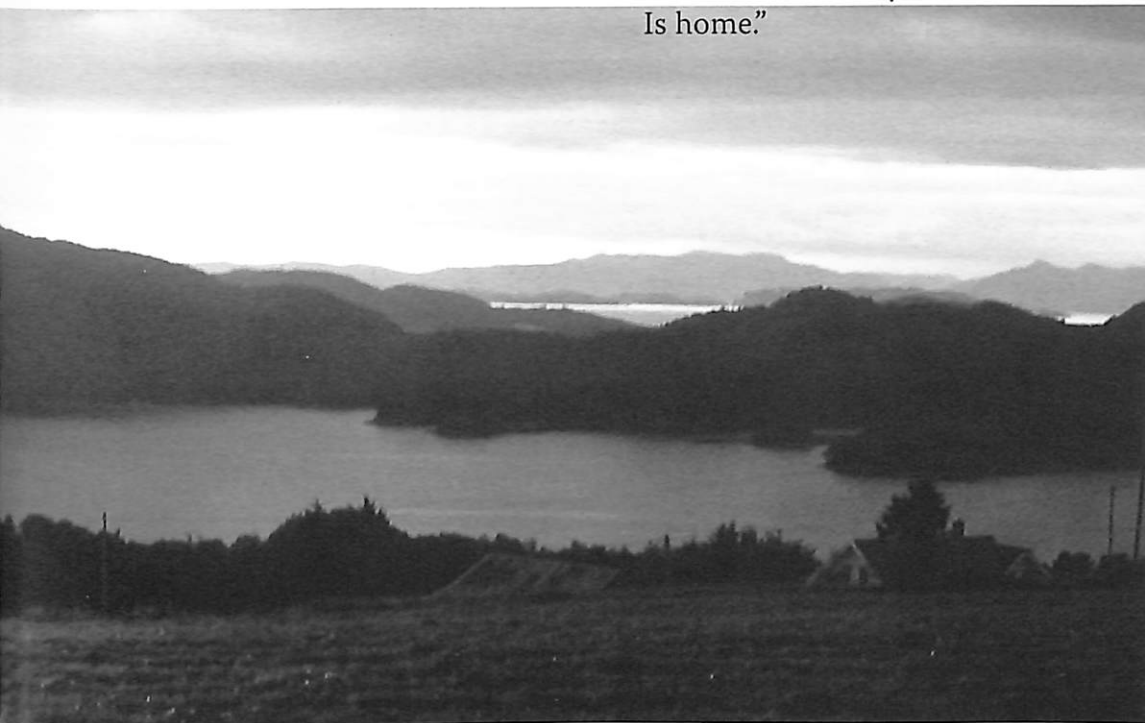
What Soldiers Miss Most

She was a reporter, with long flowing hair,
Moving amongst the soldiers,
Going here and there.
Finally a soldier did ask,
"For whom do you seek?"
The lady simply answered,
"A soldier with whom I can speak."
"I will speak with you,
As long as your questions do not intrude
Upon my actions
In servitude."

The reporter flashed a smile,
Reached into her pack and said,
"This might take a while,
But people will love it once it's been read."
She asked him the usual questions,
Of name, office, and rank.
And even asked about,
Hummers, RVs, and tanks.
But then the subject turned,
To questions about home.
The soldier's voice changed,
His eyes began to roam.
He answered with a small smile,
And his eyes misted.
He was caught in the reporter's snare,
And with one last question she persisted.



The reporter asked gently,
"What do you miss most?"
To which the soldier replied,
"I miss waffles and toast.
Home-cooked meals,
And seeing my wife,
In her dressy high-heels.
I miss my daughter and son,
My house and my car.
I miss my dog and my cat,
My favorite bar.
I miss watching cartoons,
And mowing the lawn.
I miss going to the grocery store,
And buying some Dawn.
I miss driving downtown,
And the smell of trees.
But what I miss most,
Is none of these."
The reporter was spellbound,
And leaned in intently,
Wanting to hear,
What he missed so greatly.
He said softly,
As his eyes shone,
"What I miss most, dear lady,
Is home."



Blues of Mississippi

Sitting on the front porch swing watching
The cornstalks sit and not sway.

There are young children running around
The house; the older ones chop wood or crochet.

Mama sits and waits for her cornbread
And peas to cook.

She sees a dirt road for miles and though knowing
Papa ain't coming home, she can't help but look.

He's probably at the bar or at the diner that makes
The best peach cobbler around.

Or he could've grabbed a southern belle and
Abruptly skipped town.

It takes two days to get to town.
He's been gone two weeks or more.
As mama looks down that dusty road,
The rain starts to pour.

All the children run inside
To wash up, eat, and sleep.
Outside, looking down that long, lonesome road,
Mama begins to weep.

Tranquility

Liquid shadow cat, lying hind-foot tucked
front-paw folded
eyes slits of gold, banked fires,
perfect Buddha-like tranquility
except for the tip of the tail--
Metronome of the soul
keeping the beat until action is required,
vent to all those dangerous passions
that well up inside
like a bottle of strawberry soda dropped
on the white linoleum tile
of the grocery store

I train myself
to conscious stillness with little grace
My hands always betray me
like quail flushed from cover
They fly away and I cannot control them,
all pretense of calm gone

I try to copy you liquid shadow cat,
but I am a poor student
only a kitten
and every wind-blown dead leaf
seems to require a reaction



Ants

Terry sat waiting in the hectic and sticky Louisiana airport. From all the heat and time that had passed he could barely remember what day it was. All he knew was he wanted on 513. Just call flight 513 already, he thought to himself.

Terry had carefully stuck his plane ticket in the pocket of his blazer. He had memorized his flight and was tired of Louisiana. All day he had people watched. As each flight had been called the passengers would swarm to the gates like ants scurrying to a piece of candy that has been dropped. His business trip had been less than routine and he longed to be home where the cool air of Montana would relax him. In between people watching, he had imagined the fishing trips and mountain biking he would do once he got home. The small things that would help him forget this trip. To top off the heat and waiting, a woman with a screaming baby had sat next to him and for the past fifteen minutes she had been unable to console the child. Terry laughed to himself, he felt exactly as the child was acting.

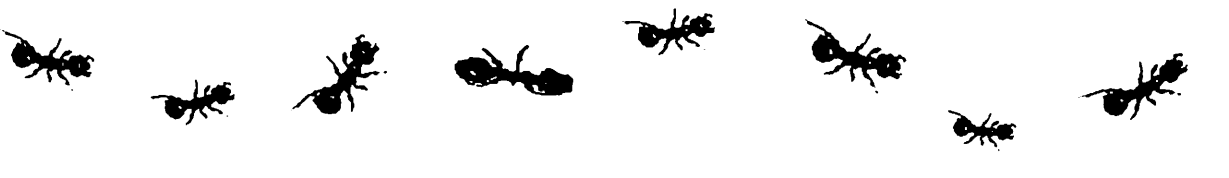
14 513. The numbers played in Terry's mind like a winning lotto ticket. He had grown frustrated with how slow the time was ticking by. Already he had sat for four hours. This trip would be one for the record books. He had called his wife to tell her goodnight and another man had answered the phone. Terry had been so startled he hadn't even spoken. He just hung up the phone, praying, but knowing he had not dialed the wrong number. His laptop had crashed before he was able to give his proposal and upon leaving the conference, his wallet had been stolen. Some where between the hotel and the airport he had lost his plane ticket and was forced to buy a new one with the company credit card he kept in his briefcase. Buying the new one with the company card had been a trip in itself since Terry had lost his wallet; he had no proof to verify who he was. This had forced him to play a game of merry-go-round with the airline attendant and his secretary back home. He recollected all the things that had gone wrong and decided his mind couldn't handle anything else. All that mattered was 513. He knew once he got home his bad trip wouldn't be over, but at least he would still be home.

As the crying child began to find comfort, another tantrum was being thrown. Terry watched as a fellow ant and the airline attendant overseeing gate 25 began to argue. Terry was not close enough to hear, but could tell both parties involved were at their boiling points.

"513 now boarding at gate 25," a barely understandable, heavily accented voice said over the intercom. "Finally," Terry said out loud as he gathered his belongings and joined the rest of the ants.

The attendant at gate 25 paid no attention as Terry and the other ants boarded the plane. Arguing over a cat carrier, the attendant had barely given him a moments notice. So much for 9-11, Terry thought to himself. Six more hours and he would be home. As the plane began to take off an airline attendant greeted the passengers.

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for flying Delta. Your flight will take approximately 13 hours and we should land in London around 3 a.m. Enjoy your flight."





My Self

How do I show you the way of me
The many diverse roads?
The workings of a woman's mind
And the shadows of her soul.

Do I take you on the path,
The one that leads to pain?
For that is just a part of her
Where sunshine bows to rain.

Then there's the path of darkness
Pines anchor flowing mists.
Ebon secrets mask the way
And anger balls its fists.

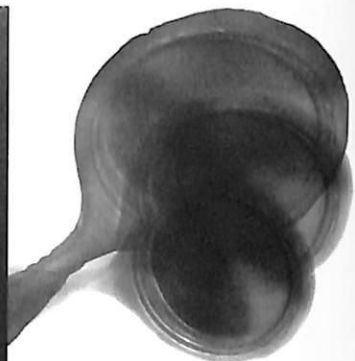
Or do I show you just the good
The untouched little child?
To leave the darkness for the wood:
The pavement for the wild.

The path here's brightly luminous
New flowers all around,
Where ferns of love are shelter
And merriment abounds.

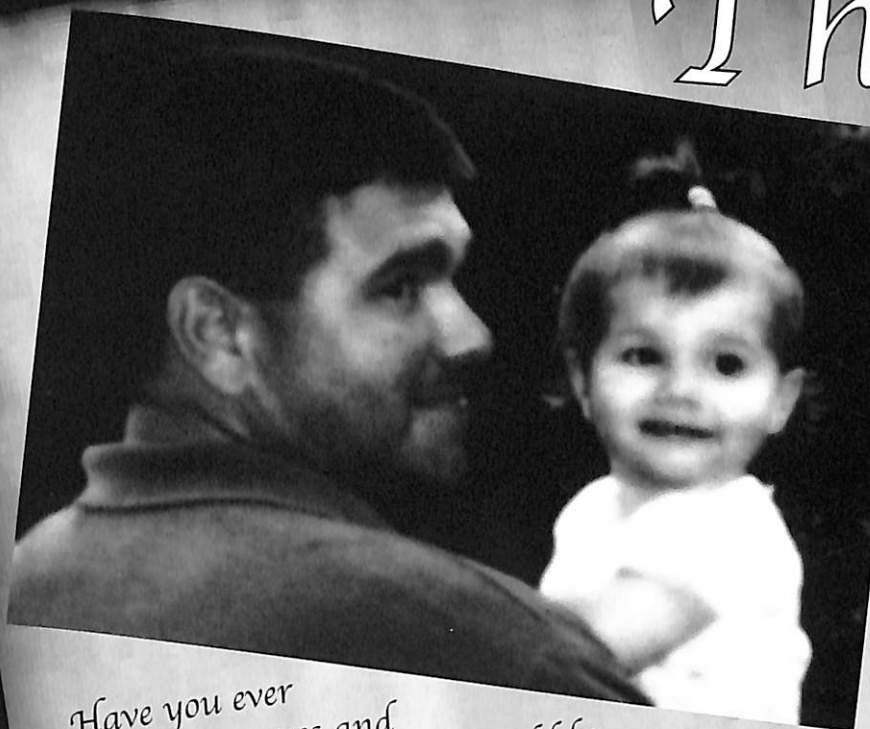
Perhaps I'll show you womanhood
A grown, adult being,
Calm, independent sorceress
Who juggles everything.

This wintry path seems ragged,
It's suffered much abuse.
Straight, stable, true and sturdy,
Yet hardened from much use.

How do I show you the way of me?
The myriad, varied roads?
And all the twists and turns they take
Within this human soul.



Thank You



Have you ever closed your eyes and wondered what your life would be like if you were one of those families who had a father? I used to think this way all of the time because my father was not there for me. Instead of being mad at him I would like to thank him for not being in my life. I know people are probably thinking, "Why is she thanking someone who was never there for her?" So let me explain it to you. I would like to thank him for my past, my present, and with many blessings from God I would also like to thank him for my future.

I want to thank him for my past because I want to thank him for where I have been. I want to thank him for those years that I blamed myself because I thought his leaving me was my fault. The blame that I had for him made me a wiser person, and that same blame also made me a stronger person. The nights that I cried and waited on him to come back, I thank him. I thank him because his not being there for me brought me pain.

Along with that pain he brought me tears. Along with pain and tears he brought my life guilt. Along with tears, pain, and guilt he helped a five year old mature into a beautiful young lady. Since he was not around he caused my mom, my brother, and I to create a bond that can never be separated. I have been through those times where I watched my mom work nearly twenty-four hours a day to make sure my brother and I had the things that we needed for our everyday survival. I have been down that road where I did not want to ask my mom for five dollars to buy a locker because I thought it might interfere with her bills. I want to thank him because each time I cried I prayed, and the harder I cried the harder I prayed. I want to thank him for helping me find the Lord. I have been through those times where I have learned to not dread the times we did not have, but to feel blessed for the five years that we did have. I want to thank him because I have been through times where I would cry alone in my room

because I thought my mom was going to leave me too. Lord, I thank him.

I want to thank him for my present because it shows where I have come from. I have come from that young five year old little girl who made mud cakes, to a twenty year old college student. I have come from years of pain to now where I believe there is a future out there for my family and myself. To be able to think back on the day when I fell to my knees and said, "Lord, please just take away my pain because I do not want to hurt anymore." He allowed me to gain the knowledge needed to place my battle in the Lord's hands which caused me to be a better per-



son. When I let go of my battle, I noticed how quickly my life began to turn around. I noticed that I could talk about him and not get angry. I noticed that I could think about him and not cry. I recognized my blessings when I quit blaming myself. I received a blessing when I

quit having to watch my mom cry with me because she would have given anything just to take away my pain. My dad allowed me to be able to write this and not cry or feel sorry for myself because he has not been a father to me. He allowed me to realize that I do not want the Lord to take away my stumbling blocks, but to show me a way around them. He allowed me to realize and understand that it is the little things that matter, not the big things that never happened.

Through many blessings from God I will live to see my future, and I want to thank my dad for that too. I graduated high school without him, I am attending my second year of college without him, and I hope to succeed in my major and have a family without him. There were times when I had lost my motivation, my strength, my courage, and the backbone that I needed to carry on. Those were times that I looked back on dad, and I want to thank him for teaching me not to be a quitter. I owe him my whole future because I am who I am without him, and I am going to continue to better myself without him. I learned to move on because I remembered that the Lord does not place anything on anyone that he knows they can

not handle. I prayed for guidance and wisdom, and that wisdom allowed me to place my emotions into an essay. I thank him for not coming back, and allowing me the chance to find my way without him.

I am sure that those people who were raised in single parent households feel the same way that I do. I am who I am because of my dad, but I would not have come this far without my mother. I could have the rest of my life and that still would not be enough time to give her thanks for all she has done. I have given thanks for my past, my present, and with many blessings from God I have also given thanks for my future. So I would like to leave this, all it takes is one good parent to mark a child's life forever. So I would like to say, "Thank you for not being there" because he helped a young girl mature, and look toward a better life.



GLUE



There is a very good thing called glue,

It always knows what to do,

It holds things together,

Like a belt made of leather,

And the gum on the bottom of my shoe.

20





Lance in France

THERE WAS ONCE A MAN IN FRANCE

HIS NAME WAS LANCE

HE WAS WALKING ONE DAY

AND SAW A TREAT IN THE STREET

HE BENT OVER TO PICK IT UP

AND DOWN WENT HIS PANTS!





*Opening
Night*

It is opening night at the ballet, and the premiere dancer is warming up backstage. "Fifteen minuets! Fifteen minuets everyone! Fifteen minuets till curtain call!" the director shouts as he runs by.

The dancer, dressed in her costume of lace and jewels, peeks nervously out at the audience. It is a full house. Tonight is her first performance as the premier dancer, and her stomach seems to be attempting a series of pirouette turns. She goes to her dresser and double checks her appearance. Her dark hair is pulled back into a tight bun at the base of her neck. The light color of her face has been covered by the layers of blush and eye shadow. Her lips are painted a brilliant red, which beams when compared to the pure white lace of her elegant tutu. Her pink point shoes, though well worn, are clean with the ribbon wrapped around each ankle two times. With her stomach still turning, she closes her eyes and tries to relax. The dancer stands perfectly still with her hands clutched at her waist as she breathes deeply, in and out. It isn't long before images of her dance enter into her train of thought.

"All dancers to the stage!" the director suddenly shouts.

The dancer looks up astonished at how quickly the fifteen minutes glided by.

With some apprehension she hurries to the stage. "Something doesn't feel right," she thinks to herself.

Before she can contemplate any further, the music starts, the lights go out, and the curtain rises.

She dances beautifully, until she begins to feel the ribbon on her shoe loosen. She begins to panic and rushes through the rest of the routine, praying her shoe will hold. It is near the grand finale of the dance, where she does a series of three single turns followed by a triple pirouette turn. She starts the turns. One, two, three, triple. One, two, three, triple. This is the last set, but now the ribbon of her shoe is completely undone. She starts the turns: one, two, three. As she goes into the triple, her shoe gives way and the dancer begins to fall. She can hear the audience gasp as she flails hopelessly in the air, trying to balance herself. She sees the stage floor looming closer and closer. Then everything just goes black.

"Five minuets till curtain call!" the director shouts one last time. The dancer opens her eyes, undenches her hands at her waist, and lets out a deep breath. It is opening night at the ballet, and the premiere dancer is warming up backstage.

Mama's House

The place that always brings special memories to me is the house I grew up in, today known as mama's house. Mama's house was warmed by a fireplace, full of wonderful smells, with plenty of good conversation. In mama's house the dining room was always the main gathering place when company came over to visit or when we would just sit around and play games.

24 Just the smell of the oak wood burning in that grand fireplace would give comfort to all who sat or lay in front of it, more often than not lulling them to sleep. The crackling of the wood burning and the dancing of the blue and yellow flames produced a sense of tranquility to all who sit there. My dad knew just what to do in cutting the wood to lay a fire in this splendid fireplace. This is a talent he has not passed on to my younger brother because today dad enjoys the fireplace heated with gas logs.

The smell of mama's house was that of pine cleaner. The thing I remember most about the pine cleaner was it seemed as if mama was always mopping the floor or wiping the counters in the kitchen with this fresh piney cleaner. My mother loves the smell of pine so much, at Christmas she would buy a pine Christmas tree. I can smell the pine cleaner today and I relate it to the homey smell that brings joy to my heart each time I smell it.

The dining room in mama's house was always the main gathering place, where good conversation was always the buzz: conversation on how our day went, conversation about new babies being born or about old friends dying. Dad would always talk of how many deer he had killed that particular season or how the weather was not cooperating so he could go hunting again. If my brother was at home, there was always an argument going on between him and me. Soon the quarrelling between my brother and I would become bothersome to my mama, and she would say, "If you are not going to be lawyers you need to hush." I look forward going to mama's house because of the peace and quiet I find there. Many people talk of the Seven Wonders of the World, but to me none compares to mama's house, the place I call home.



On Being Blonde

About five years ago I became a blonde. I've always admitted that there are many natural blondes in my family - I just don't happen to be one of them. But when our first grand was born she came out with a head full of platinum blonde hair so I figured now was the time if I ever had blonde tendencies. Seems that I was an expert at the blonde illusion because not long ago I came across a picture of me as a little brown-haired three-year-old girl. When I showed the picture to my little blonde granddaughter (who is now five years old), I asked her, "Who is this in the picture?" She studied it intently and when I finally said, "It's me...its MeMaw!" She said, "No-o-o MeMaw, you've got blonde hair like me! "Oops", I gulped - I may have gone too far!"

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But you can never go too far in the kingdom of blondeness, can you ladies? I laugh heartily at all of the "dumb-blonde" jokes knowing that I'm smart! Yes, my blonde roots are carefully cultivated but my brain is still brunette! Now, I've never really believed all of the dumb-blonde hype. Why, there are plenty of smart blondes. There's, uh, well....there's.... ah, Hilary Clinton...emm...oh, oh she did marry ole slick Willie...not smart, not smart. Let's see, there's uh, oh yes, there's Martha Stewart - but then she was just sentenced to jail time... not smart! Well...let me re-think on the smart blonde stuff and I'll get back to you on that.

I've also noticed doors are opened for me by the gentlemen (more than when I was a brunette) and I am greeted with more smiles by just about everyone - especially children. I'm still researching the obvious glee of the children - perhaps they think that I am the Fairy God Mother or the Tooth Fairy.

We all know someone who will search and search until they have found something (anything!) to pay you a compliment (dear people). One such man at my employment stammered one day, "Anne, Anne you're getting more b-b-blondel!" Well, I smiled and shook my head in the affirmative thinking - does he think this is natural - guess so!

Actually my co-workers will take Monday morning bets whether I am a platinum blonde, a golden blonde, ash blonde or any other number of the shades of bloneness - because I have been all of the above and I am still experimenting! One thing for sure - I will be some sort of a blonde from here on out. That ole saying - "blondes have more fun" is REALLY true at least I have found it to be; or maybe I am pass the time in my life that I over worry about what people think of me or say about me. I figure that's their problem not appreciating this wonderful gorgeous blonde (with the brunette brain) that I have turned out to be!

But my biggest surprise I suppose on being a blonde is the impression that most strangers have as to the description of my person. By this I mean in my vocation I meet many people for only one time or maybe two, three times at the most. Our next encounter is normally by telephone and B.B. (before blonde) my description to our telephone operator would be on this order, "the middle age lady at the first office" or "the tall lady up front" but as a blonde "the blonde in the first office" and more often "the friendly blonde up front!" The last one is my personal favorite! Go Figure!



"Oh, you look just like the Calvert girls."

A couple of years ago I decided to offer some additional training to three of our new employees. I invited the three into my office and went into great detail concerning some of their job duties. One looked out the window, one looked at the floor but the third one, ah, this new employee intently seized on my every word or so I thought. After the training session was over this third employee inquired to me of the following question. "Miss Anne just what color is your hair anyway?" That was one of my color experimenting weeks so I said "Blonde" and he said "Oh".

As I stated at the beginning of this blonde narrative, "I have many relatives who are natural blondes and I just don't happen to be one of them." But during the last five years many times I have been mistaken for several of my true-blonde relatives. "Oh, you look just like the Calvert girls", (they were all blondes) commented more than one old friend of the family and I have learned to smile (a blonde smile) and answer, "Why thank you very much."



Standing Buddhas of Bamiyan,

I never saw you.

Now no one ever will again.

Two thousand years
you kept your watch
over the Silk Road

linking Persia, Greece and Rome
with China and the places east.

Tall as twenty-story buildings you stood
gazing from your sandstone cliffs,
the Afghanistan sun shining hard
against your ancient robes.

Now you lie in rubble
blown to dust by Taliban,
men with faith so fierce
that taking human life is not enough.

They must destroy art and culture too,
“Old idols of the gods of infidels.”

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Iconoclasts!

I pray they will not be here long,
and in the wake of their destructive rage
a saner race is born
no longer maiming statues of the saints,
or banning books which do not bear
the stamp of Rome,
or burning groves of trees
where once the Celts knelt down.

Mahogany Soul

My skin is the color of
A mahogany soulful child
With a complexion of the Egyptians form
The bondage of my hair to my skin
Pigmentation I've been blessed with the
opportunity

To say my ancestors had the soulful color
Of a mahogany Mother and
Father to cherish the color I
Have is a blessing to say the color
Of mahogany plays a major role in my
Upbringing to singing the praises why bother
Changing when I have a blessing of
Color of a mahogany Mother and Father







MY HERO

One Saturday afternoon, after Wesley and I had been married for just a few months our friends, Dale and Belinda, invited us to their house to watch movies. We drove way back off in the woods several miles down a deserted stretch of dirt road to get to their house. Following our usual weekend routine we watched horror movies late into the night. Dale had rented several horror movies that we liked to watch when we got together. All of those movies had basically the same story lines where the car breaks down on a deserted dirt road in the middle of nowhere and everyone is murdered in some horribly bloody way. By the time Wesley and I left for home, I had become quite paranoid about every little sound or shadow.

Sometime after midnight, we said our goodbyes. It was a cold, dark night and that narrow dirt road that we had traveled during the day seemed much more menacing in the dark. I felt like there were eyes watching us from the woods on either side of the road. The further we drove the more I scooted towards Wesley on the seat and prayed fervently that our old red Ford pickup truck would get us home safely. Every unusual noise that sprang from under the hood of that old truck made my heart beat a little faster.

Wesley interpreted my snuggling closer to him as a sign of my affection for him. What he did not realize was that I was absolutely certain that one of the psychopathic murderers from the movies we had watched, was waiting somewhere on that road to kill us. I would not have been surprised at the image of a guy wearing a hockey mask and holding a deadly weapon with murderous intent. It seemed that our fate was sealed.

Although I was still a bit jumpy, I can still remember how relieved and thankful I was that somehow we had escaped certain doom. When I could finally see our little 2-bedroom, 1-bath-room trailer it looked liked the Taj Mahal to me. We got out and Wesley, ever the chivalrous husband, unlocked our front door and stood aside for me to enter. I stepped inside the door, cut on the light and immediately froze at the sight of a large, vicious-looking beast sitting atop my stove. Flashbacks to every monster movie I had ever watched ran through my mind. Now those stupid people in the movies who always went to investigate strange noises in dark places and just stood there while they were murdered didn't seem quite so stupid. I was staring into the eyes of my own creature of doom and my legs wouldn't work. Wesley asked me what was wrong, but I only gasped and stared at the creature.

The sound of Wesley's voice must have startled the thing because it jumped to the floor and disappeared behind my stove. I pointed in vicinity of the creature from my nightmares and told Wesley that we were in grave danger from a huge monster. He gave me a very skeptical look and decided right then that we were not going to watch any more horror movies. Even though I begged, pleaded and even issued a few threats about where Wesley would be sleeping if he didn't remove the menace from our home, he just would not be convinced that a threat to our very lives was lurking somewhere behind our stove.

We went into the bedroom and got ready for bed, all the while I was trying to make him believe that Sasquatch

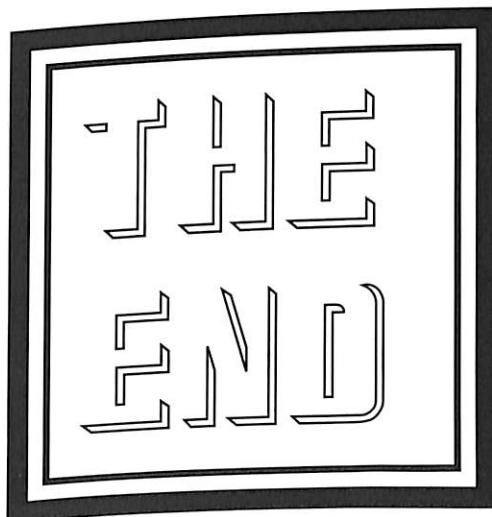
was in my kitchen. After we lay down for the night, I kept having images of this ghoul with 12-inch-long fangs dripping with blood waiting to pounce on me; so, sleep was out of the question. There was absolutely no way that I was going to close my eyes, and I made certain that Wesley couldn't either. After he tried to turn out the light and I wouldn't let him he finally agreed to go look for the monster. He got up wearing only his Fruit of the Loom underwear and slipped into his hunting boots because he couldn't stand the thought of anything running over his bare feet.

My very exasperated husband quietly walked into the kitchen with me trailing close behind. He was determined to prove that I was just being silly. Carefully, he pulled the stove away from the wall and ... all of a sudden something very large and very fast shot out, ran through the living room and straight into the spare bedroom! As with all vintage mobile homes, the spare bedroom was about the size of an average bathroom so we should have been able to quickly put an end to this insanity. Unfortunately, every piece of junk that we couldn't find a place to put was in that bedroom. There was a twin bed piled high with clothes that we would probably never wear. There were remnants from our wedding among the large collection of items that we would never be able to find but couldn't possibly part with. "Houston, we have a problem!" ran through my mind as we started clearing the room.

It was 2:00 in the morning and we were relocating mountains of stuff and taking apart a twin-sized bed. I was sure that the monster was in the closet because in the movies that is always where the monsters hid. Wesley took the

mattress from the bed and barricaded one end of the hall while I closed all the doors in the hall so that there would be no escape. We made a chute out of ironing boards that pointed from the closet door to the door of the bedroom. We had him now!

Wesley, in his underwear and hunting boots, armed with a green-handled mop began to slowly move each item of clothing until the beast ran out of the closet straight into the hallway. Wesley ran after him swinging the mop leaving stripes of green paint on the walls while I cringed in the corner. Once the cloud of white fuzz created by the mop had settled and the commotion in the hallway had stopped, I crept from my corner for a peak. There, standing over the body of a 15-inch-long field rat, was my knight in shining white underwear. He had slain the dragon and saved the damsel in distress. The night that had started as a horror movie had ended as a fairytale. My hero had saved the day.



Faculty Advisor

Morgan Boothe

Publication Advisor

Cassandra Spidle

Layout and Cover Design

Graphics Communication Technology Students

Adam Box

Carrie Germany

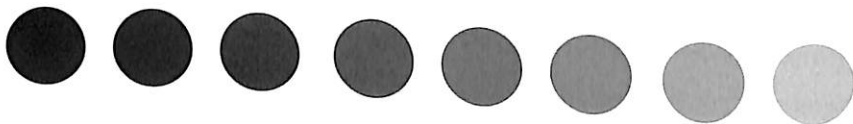
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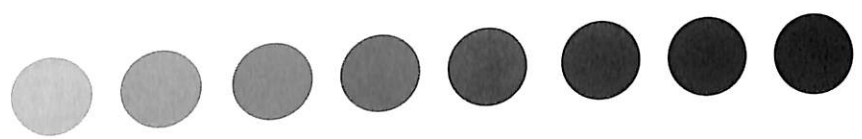
Mildred Partridge

Stan McCullough



Cover	Adam Box & Mildred Partridge
Death, My One True Fear	Cassandra Spidle
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Short Story

1st Place - "The Memorial"

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3rd Place - "Hurray for the Chitterling"

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H.M. - "Nothing To Do"

Mable Oatis

Essay

1st Place - "The Pond"

Jennifer Jones

2nd Place - "Thank You"

Kartrinia McElroy

3rd Place - "On Being Blonde"

Anne McKee

H.M. - "My Christmas With My
Grandma Woods"

Joyce Lynn Toole

H.M. - "What's Real Inside"

Ryan Sims

H.M. - "Mama's House"

Shannon Boatner

Poetry

1st Place - "Tranquility"

Shauna R. Waters

2nd Place - "Entreaty"

Clo Ann Rabb

3rd Place - "The Piece"

Lisa Rawlings

H.M. - "Free at Last"

Mable Oatis

H.M. - "Halcyon Days"

Clo Ann Rabb

H.M. - "My Self"

Candace Frazier

H.M. - "My Soldier"

Amanda Smith

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Kate Crawford MHS

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Tacara Turner MHS

H.M. - "I was Only 17"
Jamie Koch MHS

H.M. - "Time That Kills"
Abel Lowry QHS

H.M. - "Family Night"
Lauren Kemp QHS

Essay

1st Place - "My Inspiration"
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2nd Place - "A Great Grandfather"
Justin Gilbert NCHS

3rd Place - "Death, My One True Fear"
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“Those who dream by night, in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that all was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, and make it possible.”

T.E. Lawrence
(Lawrence of Arabia)

