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Literary Review

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Terms of Endearment

TERALYN WADE

A Father's Love
Is supposed to be faithful and true.
It should be given freely.
It's something you just do.
No cold conversations tense with silence,
No dark looks weighted with truth.
With such animosity there's little chance of alliance
You say you love me
Your only daughter
But when you say such mean things
You make me wonder
How much love admiration you think you trigger
When you called your child nigger.

FIRST PLACE • POETRY

DIVISION I

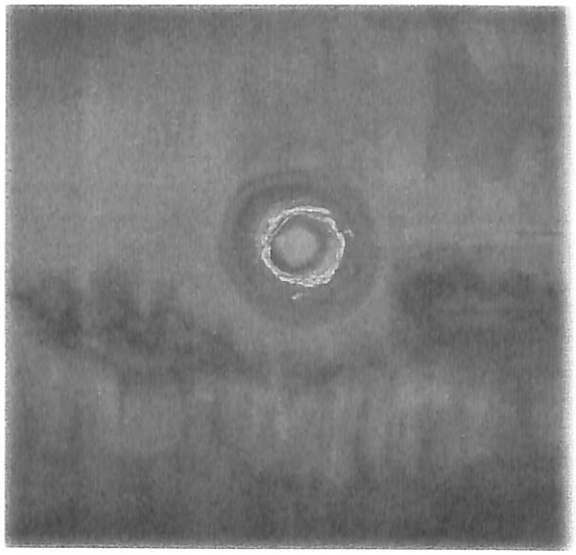
Expression

JILL HODGES

Confinement crushes the human soul
Especially my own.

Let us think for ourselves what we want to think.
Don't let them make our thoughts for us.
Don't let them make our thoughts the same.

The price will be too high–
The reward too little.



LINDA IRBY

Second Place • Poetry Second place • design

Mainstream

LAURA WEIS

Who do you think you are?
Your glossy pages and stick-thin
models tell me what to like
and how I should look.
You tell me chocolate brown was so
1998, and if I want to be cool,
I need to get gray shades of
everything, 1999's color.
You tell me about the latest trends,
which are only in style until you
say they aren't.

The one thing that remains constant
is me.
Maybe I don't want to be a slave to
fashion.
Maybe I want to wear green and be
faux pas.
Maybe I have the right to be myself.
Maybe I'm okay just the way I am.

So, tell me, who do you think you are?

Third Place • Poetry

The Florist

LAURA WEIS

JoAnn was an old fragile woman,
With delicate hands, good for planting.
Dirt covers her fingernails and clothes,
A reminder of the work she loves.

With a trowel in her hand,
She digs the soil,
Lovingly insulating the flower's roots
in Mother Earth.
The outcome is her reward: The beautiful
red roses that excite the senses and
make her content.

Her thumb, always green, protrudes like
a thorn.
Her cheeks, pink from her work, are
now red.
The dirt on her clothes is her soil.
She grows and blooms in the world
in which she belongs.

Honorable Mention • Poetry

Fly Away

Katy Atkins

My most memorable experience was on Thursday, February 19, 1998. I learned a whole new aspect of life that I had not yet experienced up close. It was five days before my seventeenth birthday, and little did I know that this day would change the way I looked at life forever.

I woke up around seven-thirty and thought that this was going to be a terrible day. I was already going to be late for school. I walked into our dining room and saw my mother sitting there crying. Right then, I had this gut feeling that something terrible had happened. I know that there must be a reason I was waking up late. I went up to my mother, hugged her, and asked her what was wrong. She looked at me with tears in her eyes, and she told my grandfather had died during the night. Completely shocked, I stood there for a long time wondering what to say.

After the initial shock was gone, I found out that we had to go and make funeral arrangements. Beforehand, we went to my grandmother's house. I went up and hugged her. We just stood there and cried. I felt so incredibly strange to be there and not hear my grandfather say, "Hey, gal!" He was not sitting in his favorite chair, looking out the window at the birds, or out picking a flower for my grandmother. He was gone, and I knew he was not coming back.

At the funeral home, my father sat in a room and started making out the program for the funeral. My grandfather always loved to hear me sing, and my grandmother asked me if I could sing at the funeral. I knew that I would never make it through the song without crying. This was one of the longest days of my life. I could hardly bear to see my mother and grandmother so deeply hurt. Deep down inside, though, I knew everything would be okay.

Friday, February 20, was the visitation for my grandfather. I still remember it clearly. All of our family was at the funeral home, waiting to see my grandfather in the casket for the first time. My family opened the doors, and I saw a glimpse of my wonderful grandfather, lying there motionless, with no life left in him. As I walked up to the casket, with tears flowing down my face, I felt as if he would look up and smile at me. He looked as if he should get up and say something to me. After all, it had only been a few days since I had talked to him. I

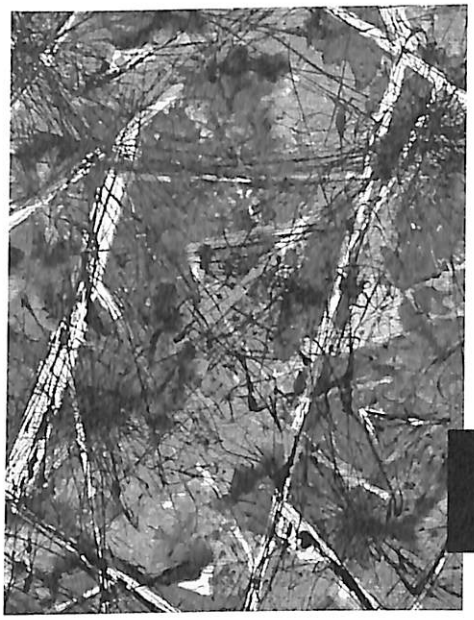
First Place • Essay

knew that there were only memories left now. He looked so peaceful and handsome. I was so proud that he was my grandfather.

Saturday, February 21, was the day of the funeral. I was sitting in the car, waiting for the procession to leave when I saw my grandfather's casket rolled out and put into the hearse. An overwhelming sense of grief came over me right then, as if I had just realized what was about to take place. I was about to see my grandfather one last time. As I sat there pondering my thoughts, I wondered many things. How could my grandfather be in that casket? He was alive only a few days ago. Why does death have to take place? Why can't my grandfather be here with me?

At the funeral, the congregation sang my grandfather's favorite song, "I'll Fly Away." We had sung this to my grandmother and grandfather less than a month ago at their fiftieth wedding anniversary. I was crying too hard to get out most of the words. I knew, in reality, that my grandfather had "flown away" to a better place and was singing his song in heaven. I walked up to his casket and looked in at his sweet face for the last time. "I love you, Papaw," is all that I could say. I knew in my heart that he said the same thing to me from heaven.

I miss my grandfather every day, but I know he watches over me from heaven. When I am up on my podium directing "I'll Fly Away" for the Meridian High School Band, I know that my grandfather is looking down smiling at me until it is my turn to "fly away." One day, I know that I will be with him again in heaven, and I am truly looking forward to seeing him.



First Place • Design
Amy Miller

Riding The Wind

TERALYN WADE

I stared aimlessly out the clear window and leaned my damp forehead against the cool, smooth pane. As the golden sunlight shone down angrily into my glazed eyes, I felt my head begin to spin dizzily. As I slowly raised my weighted lids, I stared out at the healthy adolescents. They scampered through the emerald school yard across the street, and I felt a jealous bile rise in my throat. I touched my callused fingers to my heated cheeks. After regaining my composure, I lay back in the coarse sheets and caught a glance of the girl staring back from the glass. Her cheeks were hallowed and pale. Her dull, lifeless eyes spoke of all the pain and suffering her young frame had endured.

I wept at this, and as the wet, warm tears ran down my face, I could taste the bitter and saltiness of them. The door slowly swung open and the old shrew came in carrying that malicious torture she deemed therapeutic.

"Come, Maria," she said with a false cheeriness. " It's time for your medicine to make you all better."

"Why?!" I asked, angered by her tone that sounded as if she thought I was an infant, "The only thing that will do for me is a midnight run to the bathroom." I evaded all attempts by her to administer the drug. "I wish you would leave me alone!" I screamed angrily.

"Now, Maria, if you do not cooperate I shall have to call Dr. Johnson."

"Fine," I said dismissing her, "What is he gonna do? Take away the use of my legs, worse, make me a shrewish, blimp-behind nurse who needs to invest her time in serious oral hygiene. Or have RN's never heard of halitosis?" She waddled out of the room, muttering some incomprehensible threat as I settled back into bed.

I just wish they would all leave me alone. Just then, my door creaked open and a lanky young man walked in. He couldn't have been more than fifteen, my age. He wore a uniform, a lizard green that was slightly too large for him. His dingy blond hair lay wildly about his head and fell into his emerald green eyes that examined my features as closely as I did his. After an awkward silence, he muttered a barely audible "Hey."

"Hey to you too," I said, regaining my earlier indignity, "Who are you to be barging in my room?!"

"Chill," he said, "I just came to meet the wonder girl whose got 'ol Linty in an uproar." He chuckled.

"Who's Linty?" I asked, only half interested. Even though I

FIRST PLACE • SHORT STORY

didn't appreciate his intrusion, it had been a long time since I had talked to someone my own age. I desperately needed contact from someone unrelated to the baby boomer generation.

"You know, the battle-ax you just threw out of here," he laughed. "You are the first patient that didn't bow down to all mighty Mrs. Linton."

He started to look around my room. It was hard for him not to stare at how well I had settled in and it was obvious I was here for more than an overnight visit.

My various reading materials were scattered over the desk in the corner. My very large suitcase lay completely empty in the corner. All the clothes it contained were neatly packed away in all available space. My mother, quite the neurotic, had packed everything away methodically in order to dispel the anguish over her lack of control over my condition, by having complete control over everything else.

Suddenly, without approval, the boy plopped down on the end of my bed. "So," he asked, as if nothing was amiss, "What's your label. Mine's Xander, but just call me Xan."

"Well, Xan," I said, sarcastically, "It's none of your business what my label is. You need to worry about getting your bony butt off my bed."

"Hey, calm down, girl," he said. Then he smiled a wide, lopsided grin. "You know," a devilish gleam coming to his eyes, "I could always look at your chart." Quickly, he grabbed my chart before I could stop him. "So, Maria Louisa Sanchez," he smiled, "let's see what you're in for." As he scanned over my charts disregarding my censure, I noticed a flicker of discomfort pass over his features as he scanned a certain section. He looked up at me with a knowing look, which angered me even more.

"Get out!!!" I ranted, "I don't need your pity."

"Good. Because you're not getting it," he bluntly stated. This cold statement shocked me into silence. If he didn't, he was the first. Everyone who passed through seemed to think I was some invalid who needed everyone's pity. As if reading my thought, he said, "I didn't come in here to cajole you or make you feel like a pathetic invalid. I just wanted to see if you were any fun. My visit is strictly for my own enjoyment." With that, he plopped back on my bed and stared at me intently.

"So, Maria Louisa, tell me about yourself," he instructed. And then in a rush, "Where are you from? What school did you go to? Have a lot of friends? Like it here so far?"

A bit dumbstruck by his audacity, I simply answered, "Jackson, Mississippi. Provine High School. Not that many. Not really."

He smiled that goofy grin of his which relaxed me, despite my earlier displeasure. Growing bolder I asked, "What about you, Xan? Are you an orderly?" A dark cloud seemed to pass over his features and I wondered what I had said. Then just as quickly as it came, it was gone and his earlier good humor returned.

"Yeah, I am," he said, looking uncomfortable, " I stay sometimes with my grandfather outside of town." "Hey, you want to go around the hospital?" He asked, quickly changing the subject. "I give great tours. Only five bucks a head," he joked.

Becoming embarrassed, I bluntly said, "No," and turned my head before he could see the tears well up in my eyes.

"You know, for someone who doesn't want pity, you play it up rather well, he cut, with a slight edge of irritation. Just because you are slightly inconvenienced right now, does not mean you're an invalid." He jumped up and went to my closet and pulled out a wheelchair I had not touched. I began to shake my head reverently.

"No," I said, "You can't make me."

"Hmm. Funny, I never would have pegged you for a chicken," he taunted. "I thought the girl who stood up to Linty would

have a little more guts than to be afraid of an inanimate object." He began to wheel the contraption toward me with a determined air. "Come on. You're not chicken, or are you?" he dared. This got me. I never backed down from a challenge and I wasn't going to start now. I ever so slowly edged off the bed toward the wheelchair.

Suddenly, my bravado began to ebb and I hesitated. Xander then grabbed my shoulder and shoved me off the bed and into the chair. "Come on, you Ninny. We're burning daylight." And with that he hurled me out of my sanctuary, indifferent to the insecurities raging for dominance in my mind.

After a tight-fisted ride through Pediatrics, I began to relax. No one looked at me with pity. In fact, my situation wasn't out of the ordinary. Xander, with his easy jokes, was somewhat good company. He gave me the grand tour of the entire O.R., not once leaving out one gory detail. Later, he took me through the physical therapy room. To say I was uncomfortable would be an understatement. I was supposed to start work there tomorrow, and I was not looking forward to it.

"Xander, could we go, please?" I begged. "I'm starting to get tired."

"It's OK. The people here are really nice," he reassured me. Just then a tall, well-built, black man walked in. He couldn't have been more than thirty and he had a determined set to his jaw. It was covered with dark stubble that sharply contrasted his extremely bald head. He looked at me and my blood froze. "Oh, God! Let him kill me quickly." Xander, nonchalant as if Godzilla hadn't just stepped into the room, smiles.

"Hey, Teddy," he greeted the bear of a man, "How's it going?" The grizzly grinned a big, white, toothy grin that reminded me of that old storybook verse "...the better to eat you with my dear."

"Hey, Xan," he said. Noting my apprehension, he added, "Is this fresh meat you've brought me?"

Xan laughed. "Don't take him seriously. You'll learn that Theodore is just a big Teddy Bear with a loud growl."

"Naw, I wouldn't hurt you. Not enough meat on your bones. It would be a waste of energy," he teased. As they began to chat, I relaxed and looked around the room. There were many different models of exercise devices, all looking very painful and hard. As I thought of having to put my body through that, beads of perspiration began to break out on my forehead. I wiped them away quickly before they noticed.

"So," Teddy began, turning to me, "what brings you to our lovely bed and breakfast?" Xander just looked at me, allowing me to decide to answer or not. Feeling childish, I began to tell Teddy about my condition

"I used to play basketball in my hometown. People said I was pretty good," I sighed, "Anyway, one night, during a game, I went up for a three point shot and this girl from the other team tried to block me. She lost her balance and fell on me. I landed with my legs bent behind me. I could actually hear the bones crunch." I paused to gauge their reactions. Teddy listened intently and Xan seemed to be in deep thought. "Basketball was my life. All my friends played basketball. I didn't do anything else. At school I was basketball; then in one moment I wasn't."

The pain began to rise in my chest. No, I wasn't the basketball star anymore. I was the invalid that couldn't even go the bathroom by myself, let alone make a jump shot. The pain became too much and the darkness returned.

"Take me back," I began to protest. "Please, Xander," I looked up pleading.

"Fine, we'll go. See ya, Teddy." We were silent as we rolled down the dark, lonely hall. I remained deep in thought, unable to voice the pain

eating away at my soul. Then as we were about to reach the hall where my room lay, Xander turned right in the opposite direction.

"Where are you going?" He didn't answer. "Xander, you said you'd take me back to my room."

"No, I said we'd leave," he said as he began to wheel me outside into the garden. My heart began to pound furiously.

"Xander! I don't want to be out here!!" I screamed.

"Will you just calm down and relax. Why don't you quit overreacting and just enjoy yourself." I glared angrily at him. "Just look around you." Wanting this over as quickly as possible, I began to look around. Forgetting my earlier pain, I reveled in the explosion of color. Xander had brought me to a secluded part of the garden. It was obvious that someone had taken great care in this area. There wasn't a weed to be seen. Every flower from the bright, purple lily to the creamy white roses seemed to have a song of its own, joining together to make the beautiful symphony that was this garden.

"Oh, Xan! It's magnificent. Did you do all this?" Xan ducked his head, but not before I noticed the crimson red glowing in his cheeks.

"Well, I have a lot of free time and I noticed that the gardener didn't always have time to reach this section of the garden, and well, it was overgrown and turning brown, and well, you know."

I couldn't help but smile. Xander had taken something almost gone and turned it into an exquisite piece of art that some would believe hadn't suffered any injustice.

I beamed up at him and he smiled down into my eyes. We stayed this way for a long moment until a far off voice broke the serenity.

"So," Xander said, turning away. "Why don't you want to start over. Try again?" Angered by this abrupt change in the peacefulness of our earlier moments, I snapped, "Because, Xander, it is my business what I do—not some snooty orderly who can't mind his own business." Xander looked away, the distaste at my outburst evident in his eyes. What he could never understand, and what I could never tell him, was my paralyzing fear. I can't bring myself to try. Everything I had known was basketball. When I lost my legs, I lost everything. I learned who my real friends were when I no longer could take them to the championship. It was like they blamed me for being sick.

Just when I was about to wheel myself back in, he grabbed my chair and began to wheel me rather quickly down the sloping walk in the middle of the garden.

"Xander, what the **** are you doing?!?!" I screamed.

"Teaching you to take changes. You can't live your life afraid to live it. Once in a while, you're going to have to just ride where the wind takes you."

While my knuckles whitened as I gripped the armrests of the wheelchair like a vise, I began to wonder at the sanity of this person who had complete control over my safety.

"Come on, Maria, let go. Do you trust me?" I looked back over my shoulder and thought, "What is he, nuts?!" I just met him this morning and he expects me to trust him with my life!" But as I looked back into those damning eyes, I began to wonder. Maybe I can trust him. It's either trust him or bust my head on the pavement.

I slowly, slowly let go of the arm rests as I felt the wind whip through my hair.

"That's it. Just let go," he screamed, "Close your eyes. I'll be here along for the ride."

Obeying, I closed them. It was an experience I can never accurately describe. Knowing only the swift movements of the chair, I began to feel as though I was flying. I stretched out my arms to the side and pictured myself soaring above the clouds. I was no longer an invalid. I was strong and free.

I let out a loud, "Whee" of

exclamation and Xander laughed and "Whee'd" along with me. I opened my eyes, but the spell didn't fade. Because of him, I could live again. Maybe I would never walk again. Maybe I would. It no longer mattered. In one day, Xander had changed everything. I know that's hard to believe, but it's true. When I allowed myself to let go of the pain and loneliness, I was free. Free to live, free to trust.

For months I worked hard at my rehabilitation with high hopes and a strong determination. I did rather well. Though, it was determined that I would never regain full use of my legs, I gradually worked up from the wheelchair and was able to use crutches to get around.

I hadn't seen much of Xander lately. He came to visit me during my therapy and to cheer me on, but he always looked rather pale and weak. One day he did not come at all. As Teddy and I were working on the stairs, I questioned him about Xander's absence.

"Well, Xan hasn't been well lately, and he needs to take it easy for awhile," he said matter-of-factly.

"Oh, so is he staying with his grandfather?"

"No," Teddy answered, looking somewhat puzzled, "he only stays there during his remissions. Mostly he stays at his room in the hospital."

"Remissions?"

"Yeah, you didn't know? Xander has cancer."

My mouth slowly dropped as what he said began to register. Cancer?!?! He had never said anything during all this time. I had thought there were no secrets between us after how close we had grown, and he kept something like this from me. It hurt. "What room is he in?" I asked.

"213."

I nodded a terse good-bye as I hobbled to the elevator, all the while seething with anger. I thought, how could he do this? How could he keep something like this from me? The elevator chimed as I reached the second floor. The clunk of crutches, the only sound in the desolate hallway. I slowly creaked the door open and was taken back by the sight. My savior, my angel lay motionless in the sterile hospital bed. The constant beeping of the heart monitor droned in the background as I stared into his pale face. His already thin frame barely caused an indention in the bed.

As if feeling my gaze, he raised his lids and looked straight into my eyes. For a few moments nothing was said. "Why didn't you tell me?" I accused, "I thought we were friends."

"We are. That is why I didn't tell you. To paraphrase another, I don't need your pity."

"This has nothing to do with pity. You were there for me. Why can't I be there for you?"

"Because I don't need anybody's help," he said forcefully, averting his eyes. But he did. No one should suffer alone. Being with someone you care about is the only way to deal with life. Without that, it is impossible. Xander just didn't accept that. Like me, he didn't want people coddling him. He wanted everyone to believe he could handle it on his own and that nothing was wrong.

As I looked back into his eyes, I remembered that far-gone day when a gangly young boy brought me to a garden, allowed me into his world, and changed my life forever. I could feel the tears welling up and I quickly swiped them away, refusing to give into pity. Quickly, I hobbled over to the window and pushed up the clear barrier to the outside. I again felt the wind whip through my hair like that day that seemed so long ago. I sat down next to his bed and grasped his fragile hand in mine.

"What are you doing?" he asked, staring at me strangely.

"Just coming along for the ride."

Looking Back

MATTHEW HESS

When my mother rushed into my room at 5:30 in the morning, I knew something was wrong, but when she told me the bad news about my grandmother, I could not believe it.

"She had a heart attack, and your father has already left to go to the hospital," my mother said as her eyes filled with tears. I was struck with terror. I felt like a puppy that had lost its master.

A week before in a huge storm, a gigantic oak tree had fallen on my grandmother's house. Paupine, as I called her because I could not say Pauline, which was her name, could not take the pressure from this incident. My cousin, who stayed with her, said that the tree startled her, but no one knew how startled she had been underneath that *Indiana Jones*-like exterior.

I spent much of my time with Paupine on her five hundred-acre farm after my grandfather died when I was four. I loved going to stay with Paupine because I knew that there were infinite places to play. In the pasture, the cows would "Moo" at me when I was in my giant magnolia tree pretending the tree was my ship and I was Captain Ahab chasing down Moby Dick. Or I would climb the fences and pretend that I was climbing out of prison and running to my safety as the police, which were usually the cows, were right on my tail, but the cows would not run but just stand there and chew their cud. When it was time for Captain Ahab to abandon ship, my grandmother would ring a giant bell that meant, "Get home NOW!" If I was late, she would not spank me, but she would give me that stern look that every mother figure gives to her children when they are in trouble. When I would get back to the house, Paupine would have the most delicious chicken and dumplings waiting on me. As all grandmothers, she was a master chef, or at least to me she was. After dinner, Paupine and I would play a game of "Bible Trivia," a version of "Trivial Pursuit" that deals with the Bible, before I had to go to bed. I would always sleep on the day bed next to the window so the

Second Place • Short Story

rising sun could awaken me. When the sun woke me up, there would sometimes be a cow standing next to the window that would scare me to death because being from the city I was not accustomed to waking up with cows glaring at me.

Some nights, I would lie awake on my bed, and she would come and read to me. She read me all sorts of books, from mystery, such as Hardy Boys; to adventure, such as Moby Dick; and to just plain old story-telling novels, such as Good Old Boy. I remember her facial expressions and the way her face would portray any mood that was given by the book. If the mood was happy, she would read that part with a huge smile on her face and her voice would rise an octave higher that usual, but if the mood was grim, she would have a frown that seemed to touch her toes, and her voice would be as low as a train's hum as it passes a house.

At Christmas time, after the presents were unwrapped and I was playing with my new toys, Paupine would always say to me, "Now, Matthew, I want you to line all of your toys up and pick out your favorite one, and then give the rest away." As all little children, I thought she was crazy, and I would go back to playing and pay little attention to her.

The funeral flew by because I still could not accept the fact that she was gone. Paupine might have died physically, but she has definitely not died mentally because she will always remain in my memories. Looking back, I can honestly say that I had a person that was very influential in my life. When I visit the farm, I can still picture her in the yard picking up magnolia leaves, in the kitchen fixing my chicken and dumplings, or reading stories to me as I drifted off into my deep slumber. If happiness is what she wanted for me, then her job was done and she completed it the very first day that she stepped into my life.

Black Curtains

SARA McCLURE

I kicked the stones on the ground and tugged at the blue ribbon in my hair. Addy and Kallie were walking a little ways ahead, and I could hear them planning for the upcoming weekend. Hannah skipped along beside me and started to sing the silly song we had learned in Mr. Jacob's music class that morning. I trudged along slowly behind everyone and looked down at my feet only to be disappointed by the sight of Addy's hand-me-down loafers. She always got the new clothes. I told Mama one day that it wasn't fair that Addy got all the new clothes and I got all of her old ones, but Mama just told me that I knew better than to complain about something as silly as shoes. I knew the real reason I couldn't have new things though was not because Addy was older, it was because of the war.

"Can't you hurry up, Stella?" Addy called to me interrupting by thoughts. I looked up and met Addy's eyes with mine.

"Can't you shut up complaining for once, Addy?" I asked harshly. "All you ever do is complain about one thing or the other." Addy grabbed my wrist and yanked me to the sidewalk. By then we were in front of our white wooden house, and Kallie and Hannah were walking towards theirs a few houses down. Addy shouted a goodbye to them and then immediately dragged me inside the front door.

"Mama," Addy called as I knew she would. She is always telling on me about something.

"Girls. I am in here," my mother called from the kitchen. The house smelled delicious and we were overcome by the aroma of spaghetti. We allowed the scent to lure us into the brightly painted room in which we found my mother. "Go to your room and work on your homework until I call for dinner."

"But, Mama...," I started to impose. The smell of tomato sauce encouraged my stomach to growl, which only reminded me that I had not eaten since breakfast.

"Stella, go to your room. Now!" Mama gave me a look that showed me she was not in the mood to tolerate my procrastination, and I poked out my bottom lip in response to it.

"Papa, what are you doing home?" I asked my father, ignoring my mother's demands. He was sitting next to my older brother, Jack, and I became

Third Place • Short Story

curious about what was going on.

"Stella, honestly, how many times do I have to tell you?" I could tell by the change in the volume level of my mother's voice that she meant business so I turned and left for my bedroom.

Addy was already in there, of course, steadily working on her homework at the work desk that we had set up on the corner of our room. I sat down on my bed, picked up a book off the brown bookcase Papa had built for our room, and began to read.

"You're s'posed to be doing your homework, Stella." Addy had a knack for reminding me that I never did anything right. I glanced over by book just long enough to roll my eyes at her. After a while though, I got bored with the book and set it down. I walked to the door and cracked it open.

"What are you doing?" Addy whispered. "Mama specifically told us to stay in here." I could hear talking going on in the other room which only increased the urge to spy.

"Are you coming or not?" I questioned. Addy reluctantly closed her textbook and crept behind me. We hunched near the kitchen door, but could only hear bits and pieces of the conversation. Jack was talking then, and I could tell by the seriousness in his voice that it was about the war. I heard Mama begin to cry, and I leaned around to see Papa gently try to console her. Addy and I gave each other worried glances and then hurriedly tiptoed back to our bedroom and closed the door.

When Mama came in to get us, there were dark circles under her reddened eyes. Addy and I both tried to look innocently busy. She was carrying two black pieces of fabric, and we watched as she slid them over our windows. We knew from the conversation earlier that they were for black outs. Mama sat down on my checkered bed cover and motioned for Addy and me to do the same. She hugged us both tightly and told us that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and that America was now entering the war. She also told us that Jack and Kallie and Hannah's brother Peter had been drafted. She started to cry then, and we both understood why when she explained that they were scheduled to leave in two days. I did not know too much about the war then, but nevertheless, I was terribly frightened for my brother and his friend.

On Sunday morning, after I had washed my face and combed my hair for church, I walked into Jack's room carrying the small canvas suitcase I had been ordered to bring to him. He patted my head, messing up what I had just finished neatly perfecting.

"When are you coming home, Jack?" I asked.

"Soon, Stelly," he answered and kissed me on the cheek. He looked very aesthetic in his army uniform, and I watched attentively as he packed his things and then headed for the door. He turned back and blew me a kiss. "I love you." I pretended to catch the kiss.

"I love you too, Jack," I whispered as I watched him walk out the door and into the kitchen to say his goodbyes to the rest of the family. Then as I stood, face and hands pressed against the screen door, I saw my brother at his bravest, leaving his family to fight for what he believed.

Two years passed by, along with what should have been the best times of my life. My childhood. My family tried to act as though nothing had changed. But the truth of the matter was, everything ***was*** *changing!*

"Stella, hurry up!" Addy yelled from the front door. I am surprised that I am still able to hear as much as she's yelled at me in the past years, and since Jack left, she has also been extremely ill-humored.

"I'm coming!" I yelled back. I tied the last lace on my scuffed up loafers and ran towards the door.

"Don't you girls be out that late," Mama said as I buttoned up my navy blue overcoat. "I want you two home by six."

"We will be, Mama," I said as I threw on my hat and ran out the door to meet Addy, Hannah, and Kallie.

The clouds were moving quickly in the sky as we walked to the store. We gathered up the things Mama had told us to get and hurried to the counter. Addy pulled out the food rations, handed them to the man, and we picked up our bags to leave. As we were walking out, I felt a tugging on the hem of my dress and then a ripping sound. I looked down to see the brown dress I had just inherited from Addy torn up to the waist. A piece of the torn cloth hung limp on a rusty nail that was sticking up from the wooden railing outside of the storefront.

"Oh, Stella, Mama's gonna skin your hide!" Addy, without failure, added to the situation.

"Mama's not gonna find out, Addy, 'cause you're gonna keep that big mouth of yours shut for once." I took the ribbon out of my hair and tied it to my dress so that it covered the torn part. I looked up at Addy and gave her a warning glance. I figured that Mama had enough to worry about with money being so tight and Jack being gone that Addy could stand to keep quiet for once.

"Come on, you guys," Kallie called. "Let's go." We walked home so that I could get our ropes for jumping while Hannah and Kallie went home for theirs. Mama was in the parlor talking with Papa about something new that was coming about because of the war. I think they said it was called recycling. This news didn't interest me, so instead of listening in on the conversation, I hurried outside and down the block to find Addy.

I found her and Kallie going through Peter's letters from combat. I didn't feel like discussing the war so Hannah and I left to go rope jumping.

"Hannah, are you afraid for Peter?" I asked sincerely as we stepped to the sidewalk.

"Yeah, are you for Jack?" she inquired. I nodded. I think she could see the fear in my eyes because she came over and gave me a massive hug. Our blond hair mixed together in a golden mass as we embraced each other. I could tell that she was just as frightened as I was. Startled, we looked up and straightened our worn dresses as Kallie and Addy ambled down the front steps with their ropes in hand. We all stood on the pathway and proceeded to play our silly games.

The saffron sun started to set, and my stomach rumbled warning me that dinnertime was approaching. I gathered my rope and looked over at Addy. She was wearing one of Mama's old dresses that had been taken up to fit her extremely lank body, and I found the way that the material hung on her humorous. I stifled a giggle.

"Addy, come on. Mama's gonna be angry if we stay out much longer," I commanded in a pushy tone.

"Quit being bossy, Stella. I'm coming," Addy barked back at me. "Bye Kallie. Bye Hannah."

"Bye you guys," I bellowed as I ran ahead of Addy. My stomach continued to growl, and I knew that the small portions we would each receive for dinner would not fulfill my hunger cravings.

I took a shortcut home and ran inside to get out of the bitter cold wind that had just blown in. I tugged off my loafers and wriggled my frozen toes, observing the holes in the wool stockings that I was wearing. I silently hoped that St. Nicholas would bring me a new pair for Christmas, but I knew that Mama would discover the holes and darn them herself. I sighed and walked down the hall to hang up my coat in the bedroom.

A chill hung in the house, and I shivered as I walked into the kitchen to find my mother stirring what smelled like soup. I wrinkled by nose. Soup again. Mama kissed me on the forehead and shooed me out of the kitchen. There was nothing to do. Dinner would be ready soon, and it was too cold to go sit out on the porch. I leisurely walked down the hall until I reached the bedroom. I stopped and looked at the calendar that hung solo on one of the white walls. It was turned to the month of December, and it showed a picture of children playing in a field of snow. The year 1943 was boldly typed on the top of the page, and a rush of sadness poured over me as I thought of another Christmas without Jack.

"Stell! Come here!" Addy spoke hushed and hurriedly. She was standing at the window with the black curtain pulled back. Condensation had formed on the glass and Addy wiped away a streak of it with the sleeve of her dress. An accumulation of white glitter covered every nook and cranny of the yard, revealing the first snow of the season. I stood in awe at the beauty of the serene setting. The view was so magnificent that for a moment I almost forgot about the war that was taking place overseas. Addy and I stood at that window for at least twenty minutes watching the snowflakes fall to the ground and become lost in the blanket of whiteness that covered all signs of what had once been green with life.

Christmas came and went that year and then again the next, bringing little cheer and goodwill, for we spent most of it praying that no telegram would arrive. It has been nine months now since we have received our last letter from Jack, and Mama grows more sick with worry as each day passes.

Addy and I lay on the floor listening to the radio that was set up as the focal point of the living room. Papa sat in his arm chair reading the paper, and Mama was knitting in her rocking chair. Her once brightly lit face was now frail from worry, and her hands shook from nerves.

The whole country had been celebrating lately as soldiers began to arrive home from over in Europe after V-E Day in May, but Jack was fighting in the Pacific, and that part of the war was not yet over.

Papa put down the paper and began to listen as the nightly news came on. He leaned forward intensely as the deep voice on the console radio announced that day could be proclaimed V-J Day. The war was officially over! Addy and I clapped our hands and hugged each other tightly. We asked permission to be excused and then ran down the street to see if Hannah and Kallie had heard the good news, yet. The four of us stood outside jumping up and down like fools, not worrying about the piles of neatly raked fall leaves that we continued to scatter.

It seemed almost as though a great weight had been lifted from our souls that day, and we danced as though we were not the mature teenagers we had grown up to be but instead the immature children we had left behind when the war first began.

Peter arrived home not two months later in November of 1945, but he brought home with him no news of Jack. They had been separated when they first arrived in the Pacific and had not seen each other since. A sadness filled my family's hearts when we discovered that there was no information to be reported about my brother. My family was so dispirited that we allowed Thanksgiving to pass without a thought of a turkey or stuffing, but instead we spent the next two months grieving.

The smell of spruce grew stronger the closer I came to reaching the living room. Green needles surrounded the floor

below the Christmas tree my father had brought home that day. The little tree appeared naked from lack of limbs and looked even more pitiful because no one in my household had enough Christmas Spirit to decorate the shabby holiday ornament.

A snowstorm had blown into town, and the roads were completely frozen over. The radio warned that all people were to keep inside until further notice for safety reasons. I cuddled up on the couch in my flannels and watched as the storm outside transformed from bad to worse in front of my eyes.

"Dinner time, Stella," Addy called to me from the kitchen. I stood up and hurried down the hall. Shivering, I wrapped my robe tighter around me and held my breath as I walked bare-footed across the cold kitchen floor. My family grasped hands and bowed heads as my father led us in prayer.

"Oh, Heavenly Father," he began. "Bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies...," I could almost say the frequently used prayer by heart until my father decided to add something extra to it that night. "And, Lord, as we celebrate the anniversary of your birth, please keep our son safe wherever he may be. Amen."

We took our seats and began to eat our Christmas dinner. It was not the traditional Christmas dinner that I was so used to. There was not that blissful presence in the atmosphere normally expected to be found while celebrating what is supposed to be the most joyous time of the year. We ate our meal in silence that night. Except for the occasional cold sniffle from Addy's direction, all that could be heard was the tumultuous howling of the wind outside.

Snow mixed with monstrous sized ice pelted against the window, interrupting our family time and threatening to shatter the glass. I jumped. Glancing around to make sure that the window was still in one piece, my eye caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure in the darkened parlor. I looked more closely. My heart stopped for a split second as I realized at what I was staring. I gasped and ran towards the door. Jumping up, I threw my arms around the frigid body.

"Jack! You're home!" I screamed. The rest of my family rushed over to join in on the reunion.

"Well, of course, I am, Stelly." He kissed me and then tightly embraced my mother. "I told you I would be." My mother began to cry like so many times I had seen her do in the past, except this time they were not the tears of pain, nor were they the tears of heartache. These were tears of happiness, and I watched as my mother's face rejuvenated to what I had almost forgotten ever existed. The smile that used to brighten her face daily was now shown on her face once again. Awareness filled my heart as my family headed towards the living room to celebrate Christmas as it should be celebrated, with the family.

Jack's return was the best Christmas present I could ever have received. He brought my family closer than we have ever been, and if there is one thing that I have learned in the past four years, it is that absence ***does*** *make the heart grow fonder.*

My Grandmother & Driving Home from North Carolina

MARIANNE PARK, FOR TING YIN ENG

My father guides the car
on this two-lane back route
where now and then a pickup passes
going the other way.
We drive toward highway
which will pull us
like cotton from its burr
out of the South.
Nearing a field of something leafy and green
my mother calls "collards!"
answering the question I didn't need to ask.
I am going home,
north from this foreign land
but she, once again,
is leaving her childhood,
its roots extended into this dark soil which
steadies the towering pines and
feeds acres of tobacco, soybeans, and corn.

FIRST PLACE • POETRY

Today my mother buried her brother,
gave him back to the earth from which
he had taken all his life.
After the Masons laid his white apron on the coffin and
threw their sprigs of evergreen in final salute,
she led me around the small marked field
pointing out generations of grandparents,
distant cousins, aunts and uncles,
all Warrens in some way or another
lying beneath the same grass.
Across the street the house
where my grandfather was born
leaned toward the earth,
its white paint chipped gray,
the coop in the back yard
sagging and grown over.
We will hit the interstate in half an hour.
Passing another field sown with young cotton,
my mother tells me she
picked in fields like that on Saturdays,
her bare knees to the ground
back square to the sun,
to earn a quarter for the picture shows.
I see her wrapped among growing branches
cool earth beneath her legs, the bolls
giving way to her gloved hands,
and I feel somehow this land, this life
rooted deep inside a small part of me.

My Mother's Family Gathers in Her Hometown

MARIANNE PARK

In my uncle's house I find
a photograph of my great-grandparents,
the image ashen and blurred.
Her dark hair is pulled tight
to her head, his beard peppered and full.
My cousin examines their sooty blank stares
and asks me if they ever smiled.

My uncle tells their story—
how two brothers and two sisters
met at the School for the Deaf
and married, each to the other.
All their children could hear and speak.
The whole family learned
to talk on their hands.
When my grandfather and his cousins
played outside, they heard only silence
from the kitchen where the grownups
sat telling stories, until
with a flutter and turning of hands,
their parents filled with a laughter
that did not hear itself,
the raw sound opening their mouths,
spilling out the window.

In this family we love to laugh,
snicker, cackle, bellow,
a trait passed among us
like brown eyes and wide lips.
After dinner we share pecan pie
and tell the ritual rounds of jokes.
I play different parts every year.
But tonight I only hear the laughter
rising from the kitchen table,
the laughter retelling our story
and passing it on.

SECOND PLACE • POETRY

Waiting

SANDRA VANCE

I sit here, as I do every night about this time,
  and I wonder if you're ok,
My grown-up child in every way, except
  maybe in my heart;
I reach for the phone, change my mind,
  change it again and dial your number.
You don't answer, and I pray that you're ok.

Maybe you've gone shopping with a friend,
  or ventured out alone in the dark
To capture some magnificent photograph only
  the nighttime will yield
In your city that never sleeps.

I try to let go, to not smother you with my
  motherly worries, and so far, you've
Been very patient and tolerant, as I tried
  to be when you took your wings and flew.
The phone rings, I pray, "Please let it be her",
  and I hear the two most beautiful words,
"Hi, Mom".

THIRD PLACE • POETRY

Algebra

Diane Stegall

Quadratic equations-binomial numbers
Jumble my troubled mind
Calculator buttons haunt my nights
What goes here; what goes there
So discouraged; so in doubt
I cannot figure this Algebra out.

Lost Heart

Sandra Vance

It's me,
Didn't you hear me
Calling you Or was I
Just dreaming? Don't I hear
Your heart beating Or is it just the
Sound of the clock Ticking away moment
After moment, little pieces of time. Do I feel
You lying beside me, or is your memory so
strong that my mind and heart see you
here? Have you just gone out for
a while, or did that happen
on some forgotten yesterday?
Is time standing still?
Waiting, just waiting,
Watching and hoping,
Praying, Didn't
You hear me
Calling
You?

Honorable Mention • Poetry

Returning Student

JENNIFER JACKSON

Contemplate.
Procrastinate.
Activate
anxious state.
Did my brain cells hibernate...vegetate...
degenerate?

Concentrate.
Calculate.
Punctuate.
Reiterate.
Learning can intoxicate, invigorate,
illuminate.

Acclimate.
Extricate.
Rejuvenate.
Appreciate.
Don't let the mind asphyxiate!
Liberate! Graduate!

THE LEGACY

ROBERT BERG

With the morning star shining brightly
He rises to fix a quick cup of coffee;
And splashing cold water upon his face,
He carries to the barn his horse's morning feed.
As amber glow stretches across the night,
The trees and mountains form a silhouetted outline;
And saddling his trusted Paint,
He begins his lonely ride along the fence line.

Old Joe, as he is known, is a cowboy.
In days long ago,
He would sit tall in the saddle,
Easily lifting a hundred pound load.
Today his long, thick brown hair
Has fallen from the top without a trace,
While the rest is white, like the bushy beard
That hides his deeply grooved face.
His once broad, square shoulders,
Now are stooped and rounded by Time's rain.
His muscularly-shaped thighs and calves,
Now move him slowly with limping pain.
His strong, fluid hands
Are callused and rigidly constrained,
And his once bright sweeping smile
Is shattered with teeth, missing and tobacco stained.
His once flat, firm stomach
Now hangs over a rusty "Rodeo Champion" buckle;
And his deep blue eyes tired,
To a pretty girl, still sparkle.

With dusty, torn jeans
And smelling of a sweaty, horsy blend,
As the people would turn to move away,
Joe would tip his head with a finger upon his hat's brim.
Never speaking or spending much time with people,
It is rumored that a woman he once wed;
And the cabin he now lives in,
He built to cover their downy bed.
While giving birth, she died
And his infant son was to never come home;
So on that day, deep into the mountains,
He road his Paint to a place and moaned.
Now when he comes home by the evening stars,
Old Joe lifts the gate's bar,
Only to be greeted by two small crosses
Within a broken fence and unkempt yard.
Early every morning, the townspeople expected to see
Old Joe riding silhouetted along the mountain's rim.
Then one day, he was not to be seen,
So the people journeyed to his cabin to check on him.
There they found Joe still in his downy bed
Not to be awakened by a single sound;
But their greatest surprise
Were the wondrous things lying all around.
Upon the log walls from floor to ceiling
His world was captured in the rich colors of paintings;
And upon the wooden, chipped table
His thoughts were placed in books of rhythmic writings.
One book still laid open
To these words he last placed upon the page:
"The Legacy of a Cowboy
Is to ride the range
And the trails in the snow and the rain;
And the tracks that he might leave behind
Will all be blown away by the wind's cold whine."
In the small fenced yard, in front of the cabin,
At the base of the mountain, below where the trees stand,
Where the river takes its bend,
A third cross now stands;
And the people now come to view
The Tracks of the Cowboy they never knew.

Lover of Solitude

JENNIFER JACKSON

I am a country road. Many years have passed since the time I was made. I wear a coat of red clay and dirt. I am a lover of solitude. The trees and natural wildlife at my side keep me company. Days may pass until a traveler leaves his marks upon my red surface. However, when this does occur, I enjoy pestering my guests by leaving a film of dust on their motor vehicles, or entertaining them by providing places for them to get stuck in ruts along the way.

I have seen many changes thus far in my existence, and I am apt to see several more. Wagons have been pulled over me, tired feet have trod over me, and in more recent times, cars have been driven over me. I have outlived many of the people who have contributed to my wear throughout the decades.

I am becoming obsolete. The day when I cease to exist looms in the near future. Perhaps I will become a victim of urban sprawl...lie cloaked with a cover of dreary black asphalt and have my borders desecrated by countless suburban dwellings. Perhaps with a decrease in my use, trees will grow where they stood before I was made, and I will return to the wilderness from which I was extracted.

But for now, I am a country road, a lover of solitude and peace.

First Place • Essay

Found, Lost and Found, A Love Story

SANDRA VANCE

The rain came down in torrents and the wind blew violently, throwing everything in the yard from its own little dwelling place. Going out in an attempt to secure the trash cans before they wound up in Kansas like Dorothy and Toto, I first laid eyes on this strange little creature that on first sight looked possibly a wet possum, or perhaps a strange alien blown in by the storm.

Upon closer cautious examination, I noticed it had a slight resemblance to...(I flinch at the very thought of the word)...a cat. Not being known as a cat lover, or of being particularly fond of scared, wild animals, nevertheless, not having a cold, hard heart, I attempted to see what I could do for the critter out of the storm. I heard a faint meow, which left no doubt as to the animal's genealogy. A wet nose nuzzled my leg, and though it made me cringe, I felt a little better about the degree of wildness I was encountering—perhaps it was even fairly tame.

It appeared to be a somewhat middle-sized feline with gender yet to be determined. Not wanting to touch the cat for various reasons that involve scratching and biting, I pulled a raincoat off the porch and attempted to wrap it around the cat and get it out of the rain. This was a fairly successful venture, I suppose, if you don't count the fact that before I could lay the raincoat, cat wrapped inside it, onto the porch, cat jumped out, knocking over some flower pots and winding up with me and cat covered all over with potting soil, not a pretty sight.

"OK, you can stay here just until the rain stops, then be on your way," I said as I was going into the house. I closed the door behind me, then took a glance out the window. The thing was shivering and shaking water and dirt all over my porch, just making a really big mess. I went and got a dirty towel from my laundry room, took it out and tried to dry Cat off a little. Cat was still shivering.

"OK, I'll bring you into the laundry room just until you dry off and get a little bit warm, but as soon as this rain stops, you're going right back outside." I turned off the light and went into the kitchen. I had forgotten to lock the door, so as I went back through the laundry room, I heard a lot of loud meowing going on. I decided to give the thing a little something to eat and drink just so I didn't have to listen to all that noise.

"OK, here's some food; you'd better not make a mess all over the floor, and just as soon as you're done and the storm stops, out you go." I left the light on so Cat wouldn't make such a mess, left the room, and went to bed.

The storm raged all night long, and I got up several times to check out the situation, just to make sure Cat wasn't causing any trouble or tearing anything up. He (I decided it seemed like a he) had gone to sleep on the towel after eating all the food. "Don't get too comfortable, "I thought," this storm will surely be over in the morning and I can get you out of my house!"

Morning came, and the storm had ended. For a moment, I had forgotten about my visitor, but I quickly sat up and went to see what havoc he had caused. The thing was sitting there licking himself clean. Funny, he was all dry and didn't look very wild at all. He was bigger

Second Place • Essay

than I'd thought, with very long gray hair, or fur, or whatever you call that stuff on cats. I think he was a Persian something or other. For anyone who likes cats or thought they were cute, I guess he would have passed for cute. Boy, I couldn't wait to get the thing out of my house.

I went into the room, opened the back door to the porch, and the thing rubbed against my leg. Great, I'll probably be allergic, have to go to the doctor for shots, and have a huge bill. I didn't immediately break out in hives, so maybe I was ok for now. "Shoo, go on out." He didn't budge but went and got back on the towel and lay down.

"All right, I'll get you one more piece of bread and some milk and then no more stalling, you're leaving." I went to the kitchen, and must not have shut the door all the way, because when I went back with the food, the thing was gone. I searched all over, with no luck.

The phone started ringing, and as I sat down to answer it, I sat on something that screeched like a banshee. I screamed, the phone got knocked off the table, and everything was utter chaos. Had the creature actually had the nerve to be sitting in my easy chair? I realized the phone was still on the other end. "Hello," I said, in a very breathless sort of way.

"Hi, Mom, what in the world is going on?" my daughter cried. "Is someone attacking you? Do I need to call 911?"

I took a deep breath. "No it's just this stupid cat that wound up in our yard last night and somehow worked his way from there to the laundry room, to my chair, and I accidentally sat on him because he had disappeared."

"Mom, do you mean we actually have a cat in our house? How wonderful!"

I should have known I'd get no sympathy there. How I could have raised a Cat Lover is beyond me. "Baby, I really need to go and see where the thing went, ok? I love you and I'll call you a little later when things settle down."

"Ok, Mom, I'm coming home on Saturday. Couldn't the cat please stay there, just till I get home, so I can see it?"

I went to see where it was now, and it was back on the towel, fast asleep. "Ok, don't panic," I said to myself, "No one can make you let this thing stay in your house if you don't want it to."

Just then I noticed that sticking out from under all that fur was a collar with the tag broken off. So that was no help. "You must be someone's pet. If you're determined to not leave, I'll try to find out who you belong to. I guess I'll never hear the end of it if I don't let you stay two more days so the Cat Lover can see you." I went and sat down to write a found ad for the newspaper, being careful this time to close the door very securely behind me:

Found lovable Cat,
long gray hair, Near
Meridian High School.
Call to identify
485-9849

The ad ran in the Saturday, Sunday, and Monday issues of the paper. When my daughter the Cat Lover, came home on Saturday, it was "Love at First Sight." The cat got a bath, the cat got brushed, the cat got gourmet kitty food from the grocery, and we won't even discuss where the cat slept.

After the Cat Lover went back to school on Monday, she called every night for a week to see if anyone had answered the ad. Much to my surprise and her delight, we never got a single reply. Maybe the cat (who had now acquired the name of Grey-Grey) had strayed from home as cats have been known to do, and the owners moved in the meantime and missed the ad, but for whatever reason, there were no replies. The Cat Lover came back the following weekend, stayed an extra day, took Grey-Grey to the vet to get him (did turn out to be a him) checked out, vaccinated, and all the other expensive stuff they do to animals.

While I still do not love cats, I do, however, love the Cat Lover very much, and something that makes her so happy, I can't resist. Grey-Grey is very much a part of our home. Someday he will most likely go to live with the Cat Lover when she has a place that takes animals. But until then, the Cat who came in out of the storm doesn't have such a bad life, even if I still am not fond of cats, well, not most cats, anyway, and we still won't even discuss where he sleeps.

The Prodigal

Tracy Barton

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound..." As I sing, I glance around the crowded, overly air conditioned church that I had been attending for sixteen years. It has given me the creeps for as long as I can remember. There is bad lighting and numerous statues always appear to be staring disdainfully at me and lend an atmosphere of quiet desperation and sorrow. Is the goal to make everyone who steps through those huge doors feel guilty and unworthy? Frankly, I can do without it, but unless I'm "dead or dying," I'm going to mass, courtesy of my mother. This means, of course, that occasionally I'm forced to exaggerate painful menstrual problems, which never fail to excuse me from a service or two. Yeah, I can do without it. I can do without the little old ladies who sit lined up in the front row with pastel suits and Kleenex stuffed up their sleeves. Those pious old bags perch up there every Sunday without fail, just so everyone can see them sitting up there worshipping in their pastel suits and Kleenex stuffed up their sleeves. I have yet to figure out the purpose of the Kleenex. God knows, there is no crying or screaming in this church. In fact, the old ladies have probably never even heard my voice. I do smile sweetly when I catch them looking at me, though, proud to be wearing the long, flowered, virginal church dress chosen by my mother.

I suppose they're all just here to score points somehow, either with God or the neighbors. Isn't that what it comes down to? Trying to score points for something or with someone? Trying to buy your way into heaven with church services? It's all about what people think of you, regardless of what you are. For instance, I suppose I'm here so my mother's friends can see me here. Being a Sunday regular is not my choice, and I don't place myself in the same category with all the other hypocrites packed into the pews. I'm not feigning to believe anything I don't; it's just easier to dutifully show up looking pretty so my mother can show me off. Easier, that is, when I want to keep the peace. Sometimes I do, others, not so much. I peek a look at the life size crucifix on the front wall. On dark mahogany hangs a weary and dying Christ. His face is so dejected, I don't like to look at it.

Once, when it had been my Saturday to vacuum the church, I had been in here alone with it. The light switch was in the back of the room, so I had to walk through the darkened church, cautiously keeping one eye on the icon. I was all by myself and I entertained the disturbing fantasy that this pierced Christ, clad only in thorns and a loincloth, would nimbly hop off

First Place • Short Story

his perch to where I was, and calmly confront me regarding all my sins, past and forthcoming.

The beautiful, old stained glass windows that stretch from the floor to the ceiling mistakenly suggest color, light, and freedom, none of which I've found here. When I pressed my forehead against the cold glass, I knew that for me anyway, all of these can be found on the other side of this window. But how? There is so much more than a pane of colored glass between it and me. God, I longed to be out there where those children chased the ice cream truck and my friends were driving their new used cars by, going anywhere. Instead, I'm in here for every holiday from New Year's to Halloween, with every saint's birthday in between.

After cleaning the church, time had passed with me in the presence of the huge Christ. He didn't move, blink, or breathe. Watching him, I turned off the vacuum. The low roar faded away and I approached the vestibule. Without pausing, I walked right up to the feet of Jesus. Parishioners are supposed to kneel before coming forward and make a sign of the cross, but I didn't bother. I stood at the bottom of the cross and waited. I didn't know what I was waiting for but it didn't happen. Feeling bolder, I slowly reached out and touched the wood with the back of my hand. I don't know why, but I have the feeling that if I didn't use my palm or the pads of my fingers, then I wasn't really touching it. It wouldn't count, and nothing bad would happen. The dark wood felt good beneath my touch. I closed my eyes and lightly stroked the cool smoothness of it. The warmth of my skin pressed against the wood and left a light film of perspiration. I inhaled the light aroma of the wood and the waxy, charred scent of the candles half melted on the altar.

Remaining in the same position with my eyes closed, I let my mind wander. I reflected upon images of God, Satan, Heaven, and Hell. God. Where is He? My mother and her friends talk about Him all the time, pray all the time, and go to church all the time, but what good does it do them? What good does it do anyone? I had prayed, all right. I prayed when my aunt was in the hospital with cancer; I prayed my parents would get along; I prayed for that guy in music class to notice me. My aunt died that summer, my father eventually went on vacation with his secretary and didn't come back, and the guy in music never even looked at me. I won't be praying anymore.

Shit. All I wanted now was a cigarette. There was half a pack crumbled beneath my car seat... No, even I would feel weird smoking in here. I remembered the first time I smoked one. It was three years ago, and I was hiding in the garage with my best friend. My mother was on her way to a potluck at the fellowship hall and found me clutching a pack of stolen Virginia Slims from the convenience store. She confiscated them and grounded me, all the while exclaiming, "What would the neighbors think!?" I've smoked regularly from that day on, delighting in what the neighbors would think.

My thoughts led elsewhere when I recalled the night last month when Jared Simmons, a guy in my Bible study class, and I made love on the sofa in his basement while his parents were upstairs fighting. I could hear them screaming at each other, his father, about their credit cards, and his mother, about their lack of money, while I moved rhythmically beneath Jared, staring at his flushed face above me. If I try hard enough, I can still feel his hands on my body. I remember how he had whispered hot against my ear: how beautiful I was, how much he wanted me. Later that night, he drove me home and kissed me on the cheek as he told me how much that had meant to him. He didn't call the next day or the next week. He still sits across the table from me at

Bible study, but we don't really talk anymore.

I abruptly jerked my hand away from the cross; I didn't want to think about that after all; besides, I really wanted a cigarette. I opened my eyes and turned away from Jesus. I almost expected lightning to strike or the rumbling voice of the Lord to damn me for entertaining such unholy thoughts. Perhaps dark apparitions would rise up and drag my screaming, black soul down into the depths of hell with them. I felt sinful, bad, and empowered. I felt good. If I could stand at the foot of God and think such things, then this place has no underlying threats of guilt or sorrow to keep me in line.

I decided to explore every inch of the church until I was satisfied that it was an ordinary place, made of wood and nails and concrete, without angels or demons lurking in the shadows. Off to the side of the sanctuary is a small office that belongs to the priest. While I was rifling through his personal things, he walked through the door smiling serenely, as priests are wont to do.

"Are you almost through cleaning the church, Danielle dear?"

I put the last touches on "straightening" his desk. "Yes, Father."

He walked me to the front of the church. "Good. I want to thank you for volunteering."

Volunteering. Ha.

"Will you be reading the passages from Revelation for us Wednesday night?"

"Of course, Father," I murmured.

"All right. See you Wednesday then."

"Goodbye, Father," I turned around and knelt in front of the altar and slowly made the sign of the cross. "See you Wednesday," I called over my shoulder. I smiled, and stepped out from the darkness of the church into the blinding afternoon sunshine.

Third Place • Design
Roy Terry

The care and Feeding of George Shannon

P.J. KING

Olivia Shuman knew her husband so exquisitely well. Over sixty-two years of marriage and children, and their children, and eventually, their children, had honed her wifely skills and intuition. They were like one skin, she and George, of single mind, a solitary oneness of purpose. Even in battle they each had in mind resolution and the required surrenderings. That's what made it work all these years.

Maude Kramer knew her nursing art but was introduced to Olivia rather tremulously. The family had been told that a private duty nurse would be necessary if they were to have their parents stay on at "Pathways." Maude was experienced, warm, well liked and skilled in handling the most difficult of cases. Nonetheless, the staff and family suffered fear and trepidation as they introduced her to Olivia and George. They were convinced George would like her and that she was strong enough to handle his tremendous needs.

"Nothing will ruffle her," said the supervising nurse. "She's utterly unflappable."

Whether for the reason of proving the family and staff wrong, or for any other reason, Olivia took an instant dislike to Maude and would not permit her near "Mr. Shuman," insisting that she call each of them by the formal "Mr. and Mrs. Shuman." Maude was up to it and unscathed by the negativity she faced daily.

It was the nights that gave the staff at Pathways fits. Although most of the residents were sleeping well and happily, Olivia had come to be considered a troublemaker by the others. "She came into my room last night looking for George; she accused me of having an affair with him! I don't want no man since my Ephraim, especially not a man who's not circumcised!" Edie Wellstein was angry. She'd escaped the terrors of Nazi Germany and enjoyed a happily ever after with her Ephraim until his passing a year before at Pathways. Her thick accent resounded into the lobby and was quite discernible throughout the dining room. "And if that Lottie Ratzco sits at my table again and washes her teeth in her water glass, I'm going to..."

Olivia and Lottie now both needed protection from the general populace of Pathways, giving rise to a need for their alliance! They entertained themselves pleasantly during the day but nighttime was a differ-

SECOND PLACE • SHORT STORY

ent story. The two wandered the halls and stalked the rooms of others who had not securely locked their quarters whenever Olivia discovered George out of his bed, a frequent event.

"He can't take these late hours and these hussies," weeped Olivia. "They're going to kill off my George, and then what will I do?"

Lottie empathized and glared at Maude as menacingly as one of her age could, "You should keep *her* out of your apartment, too. He doesn't need to be upset by the hirelings. We pay for privacy here." Pathways had a reputation among the wealthy and these matrons expected elaborate accouterments along with the best of what this stage of life had to offer. Their families depended upon the quality promised in the brochures and by the marketing reps.

That comment from Lottie, however, caused Olivia to announce that Maude could no longer enter the Shuman's apartment. As ever-dutiful wife, she would take over George's care completely. The family marveled at how she could change him, keep the place immaculate, and maintain his schedule. She allowed only the duty RN in with their medication. She brought his meals to him when the servers delivered them to the door, claiming to Lottie that the young aides were "after George, too." She tenderly fed him in the dining room and always gently wiped the corners of his mouth as she did so. It was touching to observe her as she continued loving him, even at this stage.

From then on, Maude was stationed outside the hall door at night to keep George from leaving, and no one allowed inside. This worked well and she could even get some shuteye. With a pillow and a pallet and cover, she could nap just outside the door. This would be acceptable to the family and Olivia would have nothing to worry about. Undoubtedly, this would have continued to work well if one of the less nomadic residents hadn't chosen to drift up to the receptionist's desk just after midnight to investigate the new night receptionist.

"I think there's a dead resident in the hallway!" Ellie Samson was all adither and remembered when Karl Easterly collapsed in the hall on the way back from the evening meal. "She's not moving at all!"

Maude heard the fuss and came to the desk to explain. "It's all right Ellie; I was just cat napping and didn't want to startle you when I felt you looking at me." This calmed the situation, but the calm was to be short-lived.

An overpowering din came from the direction of Edie Wellstein's room. The thundering of an ornate gold encrusted can on the metal security door had unsettled any residents capable of movement! Startled staff filed down the hall to find a flailing, screaming Olivia Shuman.

"Let my George go, you trollop. He needs his rest and I'm going to use this on you if you don't let him out!"

Olivia was stronger than anyone suspected when Maude rushed to Edie's apartment to bring her back to the room. She struggled vainly against the nurse's ample stature.

"But you must get George out of there." Lottie was now at the center of the fray, tugging at Maude, joined by a band of nightied protesters, as corralled Olivia arrived back to "Mr. and Mrs. Shuman's" apartment.

"I've already put him to bed for you." Maude comforted her and then had an LPN settle Lottie in her own apartment.

"The new night receptionist looked pale and worn. "I don't think I can take this job. Does Mr. Shuman do this often?"

"Not as often as you'd think dear," replied Maude. "He's been dead for two years."

Guardian Angel

Bonnie Ethridge

In loving memory of a true friend, Les Wallace.

As I walked down my brick sidewalk this humid, December morning, I stopped, exasperated, and looked to the Heavens. "A sign, Lord! Please just give me a sign. Is he safe? Is he happy? Please God, I need some kind of a sign!"

With a heavy heart, and eyes-of-red, I proceeded to my car. Reaching for the car door, I stopped abruptly as two words rang-out in my head "Guardian Angel." The words, so loud and boisterous in my mind, I turned-around expecting someone to be standing behind me. Much to my surprise, I found only a giant oak, its limbs slightly swaying with the breeze. Looking to the sky, I asked, "Is this my sign, Lord? Are you telling me that Les is now my Guardian Angel?" (Great! Now I'm talking out loud).

Shaking my head in doubt, I buckled my seatbelt as a reminder of the unknown. Five minutes into the drive I found the silence deafening and turned to music for comfort. As I turned on my radio, Sarah McLaughlin's rendition of "Angel" was dominating the airways. Tears gently rolling down my cheeks, I turned to another radio frequency -- only to find the verses of Aerosmith's "Angel" blaring from the radio. Again, a cloud of doubt filled my head and my heart. I thought, "No, this means nothing. This is not the sign, is it Lord? You know I'm stubborn. Is this the sign that Les is with you?"

The walk to my office I don't remember. I do recall the wiping away of many tears as I strolled along the same sidewalks Les had just walked, looked at the same trees Les had just looked at, and opened the same doors Les had just opened.

Then, a gift I was given, a doubter no more will I be. Waiting outside my office door stood Kathy. In a soft-spoken voice Kathy spoke the words that I will never forget. "I knew today would be hard for you, so I brought you something that might help." The tears that had stopped momentarily, now streamed down my face and danced to the floor as I looked at the gift of a lifetime. As I retrieved the meticulously crafted, porcelain-white Angel from the brightly colored wrapping, Kathy whispered, "The Lord told me you might need a GUARDIAN ANGEL today."

And, yes, a GUARDIAN ANGEL I have.

Through His Eyes

LAURA DAVIS

We saw the world,
through his eyes.
A rose, a portrait,
the clear blue skies.

He taught us to laugh,
he gave so much.
He influenced our lives,
with his gentle touch.

Our teacher, our mentor,
our colleague, our friend.
He's forever in our hearts...
until we meet again.

IN MEMORY OF CECIL ADKINS
MCC PHOTOGRAPHY INSTRUCTOR • 1977 - 1999

The Green Garden Boots

GAIL BARTON

Over the years
I've been enamored of many articles of clothing

There was my orange patchwork dancing skirt
which always inspired me to cut a rug.

And my form-fitting
linen Natalie Wood dress
which seemed to kindle sparks in my eyes
and in those of the men around me.

But now...in my middle age
my most powerful article of clothing
is a pair of green rubber boots.

As I'm putting them on,
I sense a definite mood swing - an energy surge.
I feel invincible and daring.

Maybe I feel invincible
because the boots are substantial.
My feet are fortified
and I am equipped to dig holes
and move large rocks.

Maybe I feel daring because with my green boots,
I will plunge into the creek on impulse
and walk slogging through the water
to study the moss on the opposite bank.

At any rate, the boots seem to have a magical power.
My feet will follow them anywhere.

I suspect that their power
is enhanced by the change of excitement
generated by my own pack of happy dogs
who have come to believe
that when I wear the green boots
wonderful walks will happen.

YOUTH RONNIE MILLER

Youth that was precious, life that was sweet
When we grow old, we stagger in retreat
Face that challenge with undaunted zeal
Come on old man, you need to get real

The first four rounds were a feeling out process
Rounds five through eight led to some success
Those last twelve minutes will be the toughest of all
When a hand is raised, may I accept the verdict whatever may fall
As all great champions have courage that others revere
May God help me, a middle-aged man, to persevere

RAINY DAYS MARY ALICE STOKES

A rainy day is a favorite thing
It gives me such a lovely, cozy feeling.
I recall, as a child, on just such a day,
Unable to go outside to play.
Gran would pull the dining room chairs
Into a large open square in the middle of the room,
And cover them with one of her old quilts,
Leaving just enough room inside, underneath
For a child to have a hide-away
For her rainy-day play.

A rainy day is a blue thing.
If you need to feel sorry for yourself,
If you miss someone,
If you are longing for you don't know what,
A rainy day will encourage you to sit by the window
With a box of tissues.
Go ahead. Have a good cry.
Get it all out.
This is a perfect time
For a rainy-day cry.

A rainy day is a green thing.
The flowers, so long denied,
Lift their heads in gratitude and drink deeply.
Everything enjoys the "Saturday bath."
The birds celebrate the shower.
The air is clean.
I grab my umbrella and take a walk
To be a part of the gala.
What a wonderful time
For a rainy-day fete.

A rainy day is -
Whatever you want it to be.
Enjoy!

Avila

BILL CRAWFORD

Moonlit path
Dark and quiet
Beneath the canopying wood;
Drawing the seeker
Past the stream; up the ridge;
Stone-lined
Dim mirrors
Wedged lovingly,
Nestled purposefully,
Showing the way;
To the cherished bower
Place of convergence;
Arboreal sanctum;
Setting and psalm
Intending pause;

"Be Still"
Attend the evening,
the symphony of the wood,
the theatre of the heavens;
Heed the resonance within;

"And Know"
Delve - a searching moth
Drawn to the inner lamp -
The mystery,
Wisdom's rest;
"That I am God"
Guide my retreat
To my room,
To home and work,
To life and love,
To burden and blessing.
Avila, I will remember
The path,
The place,
The peace...
And fall prostrate again.

Spirit and Body

(Homage to David)

JOHN MARSHALL

Spirit and Body, proximity the same,
Soul and Physical become one in name.

No difference there is in Art and Soul,
Except one is Now while the other grows old.

The Teacher, the Spirit, leads the body to war,
The war is good and teaches the body to sore.

Gone, never is the Spirit within,
Thanks Spirit, you are my Zen.

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RULES!

Short Story: Limit one (1) entry. Must not exceed 12 typewritten, double-spaced pages with regular margins.
Essay: Limit one (1) entry. Must not exceed 5 typewritten, double-spaced pages with regular margins.
Poetry: Limit three (3) entries. Must not exceed 50 typewritten lines.

Deadline for next Review: March 1, 2000.

PRIZES!

First Place in each division wins $50
Second Place in each division wins $25
Third Place in each division wins $15
Prizes provided by The MCC Foundation

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All members of the MCC community - students and non students - are urged to submit entries for the upcoming MCC Literary Review. Deadline for entries is March 1, 2000.
The division are:
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Submit entries to: The Literary Review Contest, 910 Highway 19 North, Meridian, MS 39307

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