

MERIDIAN COMM. COLL. LIBRARY



3876000065660

the review

2000

808
M54
2000
c.2

1892

Cover: A collage of Meridian buildings thanks to René Pickens, MCC Graphics Communication graduate, and photography by Yvonne Parr.

First Place

Poetry - Sue Ammon, <i>Mattie</i>	2
<i>& In Memory of PawPaw</i>	3
Essay - Sandra Vance, <i>How to Assemble a Swing Set in Only Two Years</i>	4
Short Story - Linda Farmer, <i>A Kindled Legacy</i>	7

Second Place

Poetry - Doug McClain, <i>John Turk</i>	9
Essay - Wilma Whitfield, <i>My Uncle, My Hero</i>	10
Short Story - Jo Ann Brown, <i>The Devil's Sister</i>	13

Other Adult Division Winners

Other Adult Division Winners	
Tracy Barton, <i>Sweet Marie</i>	15
Marianne Park, <i>Burn Patient</i>	18
Linda Farmer, <i>Partners</i>	19

1

First Place

Poetry - Jessica Long, <i>Interrupted Sleep</i>	20
Essay - Jesse Niland, <i>M&M's and Academic Success</i>	21
Short Story - Pascha Brown, <i>The Menace of Memory</i>	22

Second Place

Poetry - Pascha Brown, <i>The Holy Ghost</i>	25
Essay - Keith Farmer, <i>My Triumph</i>	26
Short Story - Lori Marie Sanders, <i>Serenade</i>	27

Other Student Division Winners

Clay Jones, <i>Pretty in Pink</i>	29
Jessica Eakes, <i>Fallen Angels</i>	30
Kira Nicolle Allard, <i>Breaking In</i>	34

Community Guest Writer

Frank Charles Winstead, *Goin' Home* 35

One of MCC's strongest advocates, alumnus Frank Charles Winstead, is a retired educator. Presently, he is a national keynote speaker to educators on the subjects of motivation and the importance of teaching. "Goin' Home" is an excerpt from a book he is writing about people—especially educators—who have been major influences on his life. Perhaps no other remark better sums up his philosophy: "After all, it is the teaching profession that makes all the other professions possible."

Adult Division: First Place Poetry/Poem #1

by Sue Ammon

Mattie

A hundred at least...
We all agreed about her age
Since her skin held crevices
Filled with old lady pink powder—
Red lipstick bled into wrinkles around her mouth;
Her teeth could be removed.

She hung fish heads as trophies
On the sides of her storage shed—
Wide mouths, gasping the air
Longing for water to wet their brittleness.
Worm beds below them on the ground
Held writhing reptilian earthworms
In the ebony soil made blacker
By coffee grounds she added nightly.

Her courtesan cats' admirers sang nightly
Beneath my father's bedroom window.
He wasn't impressed, but I was.
I knew them all—the tabby tenors
And the bushy-furred basses,
A cacophony of mewing melody
Until threats thundered from his window
And the symphony abruptly ended.

The framed jigsaw puzzles above her bed
Were yellow-shellacked pieces
Forever fitted together.
Dutch windmills, red sailboats on blue water
Far away from her world
Of stained pots and pans piled high in the sink.

We spied on her sometimes at night
When her windows were open
And the heat hung heavy in the air.
The mumble sound of her television droned
Across the way to our ears next door.
Munching on moon pies in her kitchen
And scraping dishes to be washed—
Mattie made mounds of leftover
cornbread and gravy
In the plate with the piled coffee grounds.
Crossing to the other side
The curtain veiled her from view
And then darkness...
She was gone.
We heard the screech of the rusty screen door—
And knew she had stepped into the night
To feed the worms.

Adult Division: First Place Poetry/ Poem #2

In Memory of Papaw

by Sue Ammon

I remember...

Dusty, brown brogans—
Well-worn furrow travelers.
Hot sweat from man and mule—
Streaming rivulets watering
Newly-planted seed rows of golden corn.

A dirty, woven straw hat
Tattered and stained—
Salty-smelling.
Acrid smoke from Prince Albert tobacco
Stinging his gray eyes.

His expertise in sculpting an orange
Carving peeling in longitudinal sections
Revealing the juicy prize within—
A work of art
To this child's eyes.

Watching him survey his realm
From the front porch rocker, gently rocking.
Haggard hands resting on faded blue overalls
As yellow butterflies floated eastward
On locusts' hum.

Heaven cannot be all white gossamer
And glassy gold.
Sweat-soaked denim and plowed land
Have their glory
As topaz butterflies float heavenward
On angels' song.

Adult Division: First Place Essay

How To Assemble A Swingset In Only Two Years

by Sandra Vance

4

When you get ready to buy that swing set for those adorable little tykes, children or grandchildren, nieces or nephews, the very first thing to do is watch those sale papers to be sure you get the very best price. That way, when you go to the big Superstore, with money, checkbook or credit card in hand, they'll be out of the item you wanted, so you'll get something much bigger and more expensive. To save lots of wear and tear on your nerves, go ahead and request the swing set with the box most likely to have several important missing parts you really need and several hundred extra parts you don't need. If you're expecting to open up a perfect box, all parts intact, you'll get very tense when you find out this just doesn't happen in the free world. Be prepared!

When you get the very large box home (you'll probably have to borrow a truck if you don't have one), try to leave the box in your carport or in the middle of

your den over the weekend. This way your family will get used to walking around it just in case you don't get to open it up right away. It's best to get someone to help you if you can. My helper was my twenty-one-year-old daughter. She has one of those scientific mathematical brains for the most part, where mine tends to run in one of those other directions. Her help and input was invaluable. If you don't have a daughter, anybody you choose should be okay. If you happen to have a friend or relative who is a rocket scientist, this would probably save a lot of time. Otherwise, I would say to allow about two years for this project.

One night, if you happen to get the children to bed a little early, you might want to open up that swing set box and jump right in. In my case, the children are my grandchildren, two little boys ages four and five, who live with me, and on the night in question, they went to bed early about ten p.m. (Well, to

backtrack just a bit, I guess they were two and three when this venture first began, my daughter was about nineteen, and I was, well, I was two years younger too). Anyway, the daughter and I got the box from the den to the carport. I really think the family kind of missed it being in the den. It had become a combination eighteen-foot-long ironing board/coffee table (good for those impromptu family buffets). We opened the box right up, which took about fifteen minutes by the time we pried all the staples out and sawed it open.

It only took about an hour to extract all the parts from the box. Then, working about an hour or two a night for the next two weeks, we had all the parts separated, identified, and labeled. The next two nights were spent figuring out which pieces were missing, and making a list. You can vary from these instructions for whatever best suits your lifestyle, but this is what worked for us. I was a

little upset with the company for leaving out some of the big parts, but they really tried to make up for it by giving us lots of little extra useless parts, I guess in case we lost some or they got stolen.

Now, speaking of the company that made the swing set, there should be a phone number listed in the instruction booklet for you to call if there is a problem with missing parts or assembly. But, again, listen to the voice of experience. Save your nerves, save your blood pressure, save your sanity, save your money, DON'T CALL!!! They may pretend to be nice and apologetic, they may even pretend to write down all your missing parts and say they'll get them in the mail to you right away. IT'S ALL LIES!!! You'll NEVER hear from them, and if you call back, you won't get to speak to the same person, and you'll just have to start over with someone else who'll also do nothing.

Now, this is assuming that you are one of the ones lucky enough to get an English-speaking individual. In my case, the 800 number on my instructions turned out to be the cell phone of a used ox-cart salesman in the Asian Province of Bangyourthumb. He spoke very broken English and said for me to "call back when rainy season over."

Now, at this point, a lot of

variables can jump in. When I made my purchase of a lifetime, it was winter. The daughter and I got a little cool on some of those late night work sessions. Depending on what part of the country you live in and the time of year you make your purchase, you may not have this problem. It would be nice if you had a big enclosed place to work in, but just be sure you have a door big enough for you to take your finished project outside when you're through.

We decided to go ahead and do what we could with the parts that we had, so we proceeded, biggest parts first. Of course, we did this according to the instructions, and did pretty good for the most part (if you don't count one major piece we put in backwards, that we laughingly say just makes our swing set a bit unique).

It did take a little time to figure out the instructions. I even considered calling our ox-cart guy back, but I didn't think the rainy season was over yet. We just did the best we could. But, pretty soon, my helper had to leave and go back to college, so you might want to keep this in mind, that you may wind up on your own with this project except for occasional help on weekends and holidays. She did great, though. I couldn't have made it without her. She helped me reach that all-

important two-year goal.

Now, when you have missing parts, BIG missing parts, you finally come to a stopping place where you just can't go on without them. So, when I reached that plateau, I called on a trusty ex-boyfriend who knew a man who was good with legs (that's legs to assemble the slide). The Ex said his friend could "probably" duplicate the missing slide leg.

Actually, by this time, another slide leg had somehow disappeared. So, he threw the two remaining legs in the back of his pickup and took them to his genius friend. Well, it only took the genius a year to get around to recreating one of the legs, and another few months for my ex to get it back to me. The genius didn't have time for the other leg, but as luck would have it, when I was cutting down some bushes, there was the other leg by the edge of the fence. So, at last, we had all the pieces to the slide. They were a bit rusty and old looking, but that was okay, so was I.

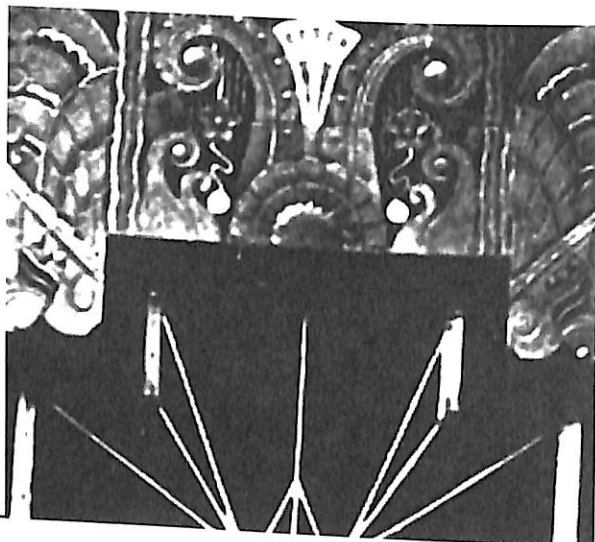
For the really adventurous souls out there who love a challenge, here's a piece of important advice. If you have a mother, grandma, or favorite aunt who just loves to come over and clean up and throw your important stuff away, invite them over

when you're about halfway into your project. Just think of the joy you'll get by doing the last half of this with no instructions. It will stretch your mind, stimulate the imagination, it will add six months at least to your ETIWTTFTDS (Estimated Time It Will Take To Finish This Damn—oops, sorry Mom—swingset), and it will take six months off your life span. By now, the pieces the daughter and I had so carefully separated and labeled, nuts, bolts, screws, plastic cover things, washers, etc., had somehow become unseparated and unlabeled. They had been moved into one big pile (thanks, Mom) in the carport. Also, some of them had gotten into the yard (thanks, grandsons) and gotten a little rusty and a little lost, just like me. Indeed this venture had become a quest.

After only two years, I was finally getting close. I spent a Saturday afternoon getting the slide together. It was just a bit wobbly, (by this time, so was I) and I think it was supposed to hook onto the swing set somehow, but I thought if I buried the legs into the ground just a little with some cement, it should be okay. The only part left was the two-seater glider swing. I'd run out of nuts (no comments) and bolts, so a late night trip to the hardware store brought me a little closer to my goal (which by now was to have this swing set finished before the grandchildren started to college). I encountered a grumpy nut and bolt salesman, so I was on my own to figure out what I needed. I did okay, though, only four more trips to other stores, and we were in business.

Those boys are swinging. Those boys are sliding (well, I haven't done the cement yet, but they climb carefully). Those boys are seesawing and gliding. I don't think they fully appreciate the fact that this was all done in only two years. They'll probably have to be a little older to realize all the sacrifices that were made just so they could swing.

Two years, just think of it! I wonder what my next project should be. Maybe one of those car kits you assemble yourself. You know, the ones that look kind of like a Mercedes roadster on the outside, but are built around a Volkswagen or something? I could probably have it finished in time. After all, they'll be old enough to drive in only eleven or twelve years....



Adult Division: First Place Short Story

A Kindled Legacy

by Linda Farmer

Bearing my awkward load up the narrow path, I could see the smoke from her fire long before the cabin was in sight. She was genuinely glad to see me, though she was comfortable being alone and didn't mind her own company. After pleasantries were exchanged, it was clear she wanted to know more about the contents of the box I bore, and her childlike curiosity soon gave way to direct inquisition. Her expression changed, however, as soon as she opened it. For a few moments the old woman simply glared into the box, her steely eyes fixed on the object within, until I finally lifted it out.

"Do you know what this is, Grandma Pearl?" I asked. She gave no indication she did, and simply turned away to poke gently at the fire, disappointed another log wasn't necessary. Grandma Pearl's fire burned brightly, filling the room with warmth and light.

The blanket was clear, robin's egg blue, her favorite color, but all she saw were the ugly wires hanging from it, dangling like a noose. And though she was drawn

to its satin trimmed edge and plush softness at first, a moment later she shrank away from it in apparent disgust.

"Now Grandma Pearl, it's the very latest thing. You won't even have to use your foot warmers anymore, because this blanket will keep you nice and warm all night long."

Grandma kept two bricks on the hearth beside her poker. On cool nights, she placed them strategically onto the coals right after she finished her supper. By bedtime, they were piping hot, and she wrapped them in cotton rags before tucking them beneath the quilts near the foot of her downy featherbed, until the faint stench of burnt feathers stung her nostrils. Toward morning, however, those bricks were like blocks of ice, so that even in her sleep she shrank away from them. She often awoke to find herself knotted in a ball, her feet pulled as far away from them as she could get.

"Anyway, Gram, you're almost ninety, and you really shouldn't be getting up at night to keep the fire going.

With this electric blanket, you can just pile the coals up high before you get into bed, and in the morning your feet can stay as warm as toast while you wait for the sticks to catch up. Getting up three or four times a night for all these years would wear a body out, I'd think."

"I learned a long time ago to keep the fire going all night. My pappy let the fire go out and first thing you know, he caught the influenza. That was the death of him," she said firmly. "After eighty-odd years, I wake up on my own to stoke that fire. I'll keep doing just fine without that electrical blanket contraption." I knew better than to press the conversation.

The fire crackled and popped as she stretched out wrinkled hands toward its penetrating warmth. Her face glowed in its light, and gradually she turned, until her backside was toward the flames. Modestly, delicately, she slowly lifted the back of her skirt and petticoats and, holding them firmly, bent ever so slightly forward.

She continued, "This fireplace has warmed me all



my life. My mama rocked me on her lap, and Pappy told me stories about fighting for Kentucky in the War Between the States while we sat right here in front of this fire. He taught me my letters here, and I practiced writing with the ends of kindling sticks he burnt off for me in the fire. I rocked my babies here, your daddy and his brothers, when they were sick or scared, and I sat right here and cried when your grandpappy, my husband, came home from fighting in the Great War, and again when he took his last breath sittin' right here in front of this fire. No, I'm not near 'bout ready to let this fire go out."

8

With that, she eased out onto the porch to get another log from the woodbox and I watched, amazed at how spry she was for her age. I hoped I'd inherited her constitution! Last year, I bought her a kerosene heater so she wouldn't have to bother going out for wood or worry about keeping the fire going. But it sat there too, another "thing" that threatened to breach the gap between her world and modern day conveniences. She was wary of electricity, and though she'd gradually given in to reading the Bible a little from the light of a single naked bulb that hung from the ceiling on a skinny wire, she never kept it on for long, and then only when the sultry summer heat made it

too warm for a fire or the oil lamp. Like most of her mountain neighbors, her life had changed very little over the decades. The Depression had come and gone and she'd barely noticed, so sparse and simple was her existence. Now, though, with her getting so old, I worried about her. She had flatly refused my offer of a telephone when the party lines went up back in the 70's. Back then, my own children were small, and I would have liked them to know her better, or at least talk to her on the phone. But though I worried, I still could not bring myself to force progress on her, for I respected her too. Gentle was the best approach when dealing with Grandma Pearl.

Eventually, with much urging from me and an unusually long, cold winter, she did begin to use the blue electric blanket, but she always kept the fire going. It was early one Sunday morning, after the roads had thawed enough so that I'd only have the standard quarter-mile hike to her cabin that I fully understood Grandma Pearl's connection with the fire. Tramping through slush and mud, it took all my concentration just to navigate up the hilly bank. When I reached the edge of her yard, I realized there was no smoke coming from the chimney, and quickened my step.

The cabin was cold and quiet, and I half expected to find her in the kitchen or out on the porch, but she was still in bed. Breathing shallowly, she smiled a weak smile and told me to build up the fire. We both knew this day would come, but somehow it took us by surprise.

"I tried to get the fire going, but it didn't catch up too good, so directly I gave up," she said softly. "Now, you take a fat liter'd knot and see if you can bring it up!"

Hoping she wouldn't hear my shaking voice, I said, "If there's one thing you taught me, Grandma Pearl, it's how to stoke up a fire." Kneeling down, I raked the dying embers with trembling hands, fanning and gently laying kindling pieces until the embers began first to glow and then gently flame. She had been too weak to bring in any more wood, and I didn't want to leave her, even for a minute. Using only kindling, I soon had the fire blazing brightly, but we both knew it wouldn't last long. I sat there saying nothing, biting my lip to keep it from quivering, and she held my hand until the last of the flames had died down. When I knew she was gone, I allowed the tears to flow as I slowly smoothed the covers and tucked the blue electric blanket neatly around her feet.

Adult Division: Second Place Poetry

John Turk

by Doug McClain

Who will mourn for you John Turk
this deceitful morning's red sky dawn
spilling lead into my soul, and who will praise you?
What minstrel sings your deeds when I, too weak with
grief, beg quiet forgiveness.

I, a boy, in awe of your greatness
could watch you through the screen, tattooed hero,
reading your newspaper in boxer shorts
Schlitz at your elbow, you saw life clearly only
through the amber liquid in your glass.

D-Day dodger of bullets,
constructor of mighty towers
and of tire swings, rope splicer
fighter of men, and of ghosts unseen,
silent poet, misunderstood.

You gave your shirt to strangers
let your own children go hungry,
some say, deserter of your children.
You? Hard man, stern disciplinarian
made them nap and brush three times a day.

You could have been a preacher,
followed a path with less curves, fewer detours,
or an artist, painter of canvas instead of steel.
You drew so well, but kept it all inside, wrapped
golf ball tight, and they never even knew you.

I will mourn for you John Turk,
even if there are no others, on this saddest
of June days, month of weddings when lovers
should be dancing to violins, singing in the streets.
Today there is no music and I die inside.

What legacy? They ask and say you gave nothing,
but they are strong, with anchoring roots
they draw and sing and dance and fight,
never bite their nails and they have good teeth,
You know, they have such great teeth.

Adult Division: Second Place Essay

My Uncle, My Hero

by Wilma Whitfield

The first time I noticed numbers tattooed on my uncle's forearm I was seven years old. When uncle Wim reached for his coffee cup, the sleeve of his sweater rode up, baring his wrist and revealing part of a series of numbers. As I asked why he had those numbers, mother pulled me aside, scolding, "Don't you bother your uncle with those kinds of questions now, you hear." But Uncle Wim waved Mama away saying, "It is time to answer when children ask these kinds of questions." He smiled at me and said, "Come here, Wilma, and let me tell and show you what these numbers mean."

Uncle Wim rolled up his sleeve to let me look at the small, ugly black numbers tattooed on the inside of his right wrist. I hesitated, then carefully stretched my fingers to touch them. "It does not hurt, you can touch," Uncle Wim said. Very slowly I tentatively tapped then with my fear gone I let my fingers slide over the faded black numbers, somehow expecting them to feel rough. To this day I still remember my

surprise that the only thing I felt was my uncle's bony forearm, not a burning tattoo.

"Did it hurt when you got this?" I asked.

"Only in here," Uncle said, pointing at his heart. "Your Uncle, Gerard, Jan and Henk have also a number there. Have you seen those?"

"No," I said, "they always wear long sleeved shirts."

Uncle Wim nodded and gave me a sad little smile and whispered, "Some people just can not talk about bad things that happened to them, but I will." As he told his story, he became my hero and my role model. I learned to admire him for his integrity, honesty and unbelievable will to survive what he had to endure. Often I used the values he handed down to me to help me overcome my life's trying ordeals.

On his way home, he was caught after curfew by German soldiers and thrown in the back of a Nazi truck. Wim was put on a transport with other "dangerous persons to the German Reich" and taken to s'Hertogenbosch where he

was interrogated. From there he was taken to Westerborg, the last stop before entering Nazi Germany. Upon entering Westerborg he was marched to the train station. He recalled incredible chaos and noise as the Germans forced him and others onto the train. Nazi's screamed and struck out randomly at people with whips and sticks. Machine guns placed at strategic points overlooked the loading platform, and guards on top of the cattle cars pointed their rifles menacingly. German shepherds snapped at legs that were not fast enough, regardless of age or size of the people.

Panic and fear were so vivid that I sensed his terror. Everybody was herded in the cattle cars. There was no room to sit. Packed like sardines, they stood with hardly enough room to breathe, no sanitation, food or water. Many died in transit. Their destination was Buchenwald.

I still recall Uncle Wim, my hero, so frail, skin drawn tight over bones, sitting in his wheelchair, his body a

witness to bygone horrors. But most of all I remember his smile, and how that crooked grin took away the pity I felt for his pain and the rage for the people responsible for crippling him. Uncle Wim told me, "Whatever life throws you, grieve and shed your tears, but never lose your ability to laugh. Bitterness brings sorrow and pain and makes all that is worthwhile in vain."

Ironically, one of my first trials needing Uncle Wim's philosophy was my own confrontation with hostile Germans. Moving with my parents at age twelve to Telgte, Germany, a NATO base was hard. This little town was not used to foreigners, and it showed not only in faces but in outright animosity towards us. Germans, young kids and adults alike, threw rotten apples and potatoes at us. They yelled, "Kaese Koepfe, haut ab, geht Heim" ("Cheese heads, get out, go home"), and Lord knows I wanted to.

When I tried to deal with the rage that I felt against these Germans, Wim's words came back to me. I began to understand—not liked, and never condoned—the actions of those German people, but understood nonetheless. In

their eyes we came into their country, helped to keep it divided, united as allied forces against them. I learned that the laws and mores as well as the folkways of the people of a country are just as important as learning and comprehending their language. Without knowing this important information about people in general, communication would break down; forgiveness would be impossible. Wim's crooked grin and how he overcame his animosity helped me understand and forgive.

Time passed and I grew older. Little did I know how much I would come to depend on his lessons in adulthood. When I needed them most, recollections of his words gave me the strength to survive, not to become bitter but to work through problems until I could smile and forgive.

Also, being raised Roman Catholic, I believed wedding vows were sacred and permanent, and since the church seldom granted divorce, I felt incarcerated by a husband who locked me away in a nightmare of abuse. His repentance and then lapses into new violent rages came in ever-accelerating cycles, resulting in a variety of injuries, from spilt

lips to broken bones. My self-pride, confidence and will to fight withered and died under my husband's cruelty. Even the fact that my children would hide under the table or cower behind the couch could not bring me out of my trance. My first thought was to appease my husband to delay the next altercation.

I was five months pregnant when my rock-solid, never-sick father died. My little piece of sanity that I so tenaciously clung to cracked. Three and a half months later I delivered my precious baby girl stillborn. In the hospital, through a haze of despair and misery, slowly my uncle's words came back to me. His lessons helped me deal with the trauma of losing my child and the death of my father. Slowly I learned to evaluate the increasing violent episodes of my husband, to question his reasoning, and finally to follow my instinct to flee into a shelter and to take charge of my life.

It was incredibly hard to decide to leave, even though the situation at home was becoming hazardous. To question and revise my upbringing made me feel even more lost and insecure. Living in a foreign country

without mother or father, and no job security, trying to raise two sons, felt like being in an abyss. By comparing Uncle Wim's experiences to my own, the seemingly overwhelming problems fell into perspective.

Uncle Wim's words served to help rebuild my shattered self-image and restore my children's trust and adoration, so that peace of mind and laughter came back into our lives. I realized that strength comes from within. When burdens became

overpowering, like him, I needed to show courage and meet my personal holocaust head-on and survive smiling.

Wim's experiences and explanations more than those of anyone else I have ever known have helped me find and recognize what is important, and what I would love to do. In the face of adversity and against all odds, my uncle survived. He carried his pain and scars with dignity. With his body broken, he died in 1963, only thirty-seven years old. He

left a void that will never be filled.

Today I share his legacy. When I am asked to speak at my son's school about the war years in Holland, I always tell the students about my hero—the smiling man whose spirit could not be broken, and whose voice echoes, "Whatever life throws you, grieve and shed your tears, but never lose your ability to laugh. Bitterness brings sorrow and pain and makes all that is worthwhile in vain."



Adult Division: Second Place Short Story

The Devil's Sister

by Jo Ann Brown

"I declare that woman gives me the nervous hives. I ain't never seen nobody so stuck on theirself," said Kissie, talking to herself as she entered her kitchen.

The door closed behind her, and she put a bag of groceries on the table and reached for her apron that hung on the pantry doorknob. She looked around and sighed, as she compared it to the large kitchen at the Nelson's where she worked as maid. Maybe she could make a new curtain for the window over her sink. Maybe she would use yellow. That should brighten it up a bit.

"Who you talking to, Woman?" asked Jess.

Jess was a big man with broad shoulders and a body as hard as steel. Kissie loved it when he picked her up and swung her in the air as if she was no heavier than a rag doll. He had not done this often lately. Not since the mill had closed, and he had lost his job. She did hope he would find something soon. She was worried, for her husband was not a man who could take being idle long. Their bank account could not take it long either.

"I'm talking to Kissie. I gotta right to talk to Kissie, ain't I? Everybody else does. It's Kissie do, Kissie go, Kissie come, all day long. I swear, Jess, you'd think I was more than one person, the way Mrs. Nelson goes on at me."

"What you upset about tonight?"

"That woman. You'd think that she was Ms. -Lord-of-Us-All. I bet she could even talk down that Hillary woman in the White House, if she was a mind to."

Kissie began preparing supper. Jess went back to reading his paper. He looked over at her several times as she slammed pots and pans on the stove. She set a plate down so hard it cracked.

Jess knew his wife well. She had a sharp tongue and could blow a lot of hot steam for such a little woman, yet, he knew too, that she was really the most gentle, good person he had ever known. He wished he could make life easier for her, but right now things just didn't look good. He might have to look for work in another town, but he wouldn't bring that up tonight.

"Well, don't you want to

know what she done gone and accused me of this time?"

"I figure you'll tell me when you dang well please, and not a minute before," Jess laughed.

"Well, I dang well please now, and you listen. I don't want you talking up for her either. First thing this morning, when I went in to fix the breakfast, she accused me of causing the milk to go sour. Now why you think I'm going to cause the milk to go sour? Then she puts on her green designer afternoon frock, and says I done shrunk it."

Kissie's voice rose to a high shrill. "I shrunk it! That lady done shrunk it eating too many of them dainty little cakes she has me make for her fancy afternoon do's."

Supper was on the table now, and Kissie bowed her head and asked the blessing. She could not keep from adding to her usual prayer, "Lord, give me the patience to deal with the devil's sister I work for."

Jess tried not to laugh because he knew it would start her off again.

Kissie cleaned the kitchen in silence, and Jess turned on the television. Just as Kissie finished in the kitchen and sat down to watch with him, the picture began to fade. Then it went out all together. This was not a total surprise, since the set had been threatening a breakdown for some time.

"Bet the big color TV at the Nelson house wouldn't dare go off. If it did, they have a backup set in every room. There's even one in Mrs. Nelson's bathroom. Can you imagine Peter Jennings telling you the news while you're using the bathroom? I'd feel like he was looking right at me."

Kissie began to cry softly. Jess let her cry a couple of minutes, and then sat down beside her and wrapped her in his big strong arms. "Okay, Kissie, tell me what is really wrong. This is too much ranting even for you."

"Do you know what she accused me of doing?"

Jess smiled as he wondered how many times Kissie asked him that question in a day.

"She accused me of turning Teddy against her. The very nerve! I try to make up to that little tyke for the meanness his mama throws his way. That woman treats that boy like a little ragamuffin. I can't help it if he follows me around all day talking and asking questions, can I? I'm not going to act like I don't hear him. If she thinks I don't have enough sense to

answer his questions, she ought to take time to answer him herself. She's too busy bossing folks around to give him the time she ought to. I love that boy like he was my own. I swear, Jess, if it wasn't for him, I'd tell that old witch exactly what she is. I may do it anyway. I know I need the job, but, Jess, she just riles me so."

"I know she does, Kissie, but don't let her get to you. Teddy is lucky to have you. He needs you there to look out for him."

This soothed Kissie. She dried her eyes and prepared for bed.

Jess shook Kissie awake. Kissie realized Mrs. Nelson's shrill voice she had heard in her dream was really the telephone ringing, but when she put the phone to her ear there was Mrs. Nelson shouting in a voice Kissie had not heard before.

"Where is Teddy, Kissie? What have you done? Tell me where he is!"

"I don't know what you're talking about. I haven't seen Teddy since I left there at five o'clock."

"He's not here. The baby sitter put him to bed, and when we came in from the theater I checked on him. He's gone! The baby sitter says he kept telling her about the things the two of you do each day. Kissie, where is my baby?" She was almost sobbing now.

Kissie handed the phone to Jess. "I'm going over there. They can't find Teddy, and I have to help."

Mr. Nelson opened the door before Kissie could ring the bell.

"Kissie!" called Mrs. Nelson from the upstairs landing. "You've got to help us find Teddy."

"Now try to be calm, Mrs. Nelson. Maybe Teddy's hiding. He loves to play hide-and-seek. I know where his favorite hiding places are."

Kissie went first to Teddy's room. As she looked under his bed, she said, "I know Teddy can't be under this little old bed. Not Teddy. He's too big. He'd get stuck."

She looked in the closet, in his big toy box, and the dirty clothes hamper in his bathroom. By the time the search had covered the other rooms upstairs, Kissie was having trouble ignoring the little knot of fear growing in her stomach.

Mrs. Nelson had followed from room to room, making a funny crooning sound.

"Mrs. Nelson, why did you think I had Teddy?"

"The baby sitter said he kept telling her about a puppy you had given him. I thought you must have it at your house."

"Oh, I know where Teddy is! Lord a mercy, why didn't

I think of that puppy before now?"

Kissie ran down the stairs and into the kitchen. She opened the pantry door and saw what she had hoped to see. Teddy was asleep with a stuffed puppy in his arms. A cardboard box with a towel covering the bottom was on the floor next to him.

Mrs. Nelson pushed past Kissie and gathered Teddy in her arms. "Why are you in the pantry, Teddy? We've looked everywhere for you."

Teddy rubbed his eyes and reached for his puppy he had dropped. "I came to see if Mack was all right. Kissie gave Mack to me so I could

have my own puppy. Is that okay? He doesn't make a mess."

Mrs. Nelson looked at Kissie. "I think I understand. Teddy wanted a puppy. I told him no. A puppy would make a mess. Teddy, if you promise to never put Mommy through a scare like this again, maybe we can see about getting you a real puppy."

As Kissie started to leave, Mrs. Nelson reached out and touched her arm. She was all watery-eyed and Kissie thought, "Lord a mercy, is she going to hug me?"

Instead, she said only, "Thank you, Kissie." Then

she turned and took Teddy upstairs.

Jess had to listen as Kissie told each detail of her search for Teddy.

"You should have seen him, Jess. The little tyke was so cute lying there with that little puppy in his arms. I hope his mama doesn't change her mind about the real puppy."

Kissie was finally back in bed. As she snuggled under the covers, she yawned sleepily, "You know, Jess, maybe she's not the devil's sister. Maybe she's just his first cousin."

Adult Division: Other Entries

Sweet Marie

by Tracy Barton

Hello. I would introduce myself, but I don't really have a name. Marie may call me "the voice" or "she" or "her," but I think we all know I'm much more than that.

I've known Marie forever, but we didn't start "conversing" if you will, until a few years after her marriage to Doug. She needed me. I don't expect you to under-

stand me; what I am or what I do. You see, I'm part of Marie. She is me and I am her.

The first time I had to show up, Marie was only seven. When her father came in her room at night, I would take her away. When he left, I brought her back. She never knew I was there; she was too young and wouldn't have

understood. All that matters is that I was there when she needed me, and still am.

Now, my job is to help as I see fit. And I see fit that the best way to help Marie is to get rid of Doug.

Look, I'm trying to help you out, okay? You want to understand us? You want to

know how Marie got to where she is today? Read this. It's a page from her diary that she wrote a couple of years ago. We'll get around to Doug later.

I had that dream again. This is the third time so far and it's always the same. I'm seven years old, asleep in my bed, clutching my Sparkle Beach Barbie. She's new, so I don't let her out of my sight. My door opens quickly, but it still wakes me up. I suck in my breath because I know who it is. A crack of light falls on my father before he closes the door behind him. I steady my breath, pretending to be asleep. He slips into my bed, but I am so soft that I don't even move. Over and over in my head I chant, 'Please, God, please.. Please God, help me!' He doesn't. My father doesn't say anything, but he is under the covers now. I hold Barbie so tight that my knuckles turn white and my hands start to sweat. I wait for it to be over, and finally it is. My father pats my hair and kisses my forehead like good daddies do, and quickly leaves my room to go back to my mother's bed. I take a huge gasping breath but don't allow myself to cry. I just hold Barbie close and finally fall asleep.

He was a sick bastard, all right, but Marie was too young to do anything about it, even with my help. I know what you're thinking. If I was doing my job, then she wouldn't remember any

of this, right? Well, slips happen in this business, but Marie remembers it all as "a terrible dream." That's right. I do my job. Marie's older now; she knows I'm here. The better to help her, my dear. Welcome to our story.

Finally, Marie stops rolling and lands on the bottom step. How long had it been since she fell off the top one? She must have been falling for hours, or maybe it was only seconds. It was hard to think right then. There were hundreds of thoughts racing around in her head, bouncing into each other and getting mixed up. And yet there were none.

Doug stood at the top of the stairs, looking. Marie lay motionless, her blue flowered dress rumpled around her waist. A small red dot on her white cotton underwear blossomed into an ominous looking stain. Doug watched her, taking a sip from his Budweiser, until she started moaning. Then he went back into the bedroom to continue watching the football game.

Marie, disoriented, pulled herself into a sitting position where her fingers found the sticky, red blood. She quietly looked at them until she understood, and then...nothing. No screaming, no crying, no hysterics. She wiped the few spots of blood off the floor with the hem of her dress and crawled into the bathroom. She took off the stained underwear

and pressed a washcloth against her until the bleeding stopped, curled up into a fetal position and fell asleep.

Marie was pregnant. She had just told Doug the good news when he said; "We're not having any kids. I told you to take care of that!" and pushed her down the stairs.

Having a baby had been Marie's secret obsession for years. She knew exactly how it would be: the birth would be natural so she could feel and experience every moment of it. The baby would be a girl and look exactly like her. She would name her Madelyn. When the baby got older, Marie would braid her long blonde hair and put pink bows in it. They would talk about everything and be best friends. Madelyn would call her Mommy even after she was grown, and she would always love her. She would *never* tell her she was stupid or worthless.

In her dreams on the bathroom floor, Doug was dead. It was a tragic oil rig accident. She bought a house in the country with a meadow where she and Madelyn played all day long and ate homemade ice cream.

When she woke up a few hours later, Marie found a quarter-sized blob in the washcloth. It consisted of red and white looking tissue with a white stringy thing coming out of it. She hadn't felt it, but there it was. Marie held it in the palm of her hand.

"Hi there," she crooned,

"Are you my little baby? Are you my little girl? You are so beautiful I can't wait until you get older. I am going to be such a good mommy to you." She placed the blob on a clean towel and carefully stood up.

Marie didn't want to look into the mirror because she knew *she* would be there. She was always there once the trouble started, giving her opinion and telling her what to do. Marie eased in front of the mirror and confirmed what she already knew. Her left jaw was swollen and the corner of her mouth was wet from a trickle of blood. She poked at it with her tongue until she heard the voice and stopped.

The woman in the mirror had the same tired, lined face as Marie, but the voice was different. It was disbelieving and unforgiving, and always gave Marie a terrible headache.

"Hey, you."

Marie turned her weary eyes up to the glass and the other Marie looked back at her. She was many different Maries. Sometimes she was the eighteen-year-old beauty queen Marie who had never heard of Doug Riley, and other times she was another Marie—ten pounds underweight, looking older than her time with a bruised and swollen face.

"What's the matter? Get into another alley fight last night? Were you jumped by a gang?"

"No."

On the bathroom counter was a set of powder-blue nesting boxes that Doug had given her back when he still gave her things. On the lid was a lavender ribbon that Marie fingered nervously. The boxes were the only points of color in the dimly lit bathroom; they were empty. She had never put anything in them, but she treasured them.

"What did he do?"

"Doug and I just had a misunderstanding."

"Yeah? Like what? Did he misunderstand you for a punching bag again?"

Marie rubbed her forehead. "Would you just go away?"

"I'll go away as soon as you do what I've been telling you to do every day for the last four years."

Marie startled and knocked the boxes over. They crashed to the floor, each one falling out of the one it was enclosed in, until half a dozen tiny boxes littered the floor. The voice was getting mad now. Sometimes Marie was scared of her. She couldn't look her in the eye. She stared at the little black hairs in the sink. Doug never cleaned them out.

"I can't."

"Yes, you can. I'll tell you how to do it."

"No, it won't work"

"Where is he now?"

"In the bed, asleep."

"Okay. Go in the kitchen and get the meat cleaver. Then come back in here."

Marie didn't move.

"Remember your baby, Marie. Go get it!"

Slowly, with shallow breathing, Marie went to the kitchen and came back with the cleaver, glancing dully at the blob as she passed.

"Good. Now go in there and do what we've been discussing."

Marie looked up the stairs at the open bedroom door, and then she looked at the crude weapon in her hand. Her head was beginning to ache.

"What are you standing around for? Get in there!"

She felt hot, as if she had a fever. "Leave me alone," she told the voice.

"What? I'm trying to help you. What do I have to do? Come out there and do it for you?"

Her breathing quickened. "Go away and leave me alone."

"You stupid, scared little nothing," the voice seethed, "You make me sick. Don't you remember the way we used to be, before him? Don't you want to be that way again?"

Marie started shaking her head, slowly, back and forth.

The voice continued, "You never asked him for anything, Marie. Not a new dress, or a diamond ring, or a



trip to Jamaica. All you wanted was that baby, and when you got it, he killed her! Look at her now; she'll never call you Mommy! He killed her, now kill him!"

Slowly, Marie turned around and raised the weapon. The pain in her head felt like a roaring, and she looked at the meat clever in her hand. It looked beautiful, and she felt like a warrior. The voice started laughing triumphantly.

Suddenly, she turned around and flung the meat clever into the mirror. Over and over, hundreds of times. The mirror was now thousands of tiny pieces flying through the air, landing on her face, hair, and arms. Even in her frenzy, Marie heard the voice. She was banished to a tiny part of Marie's brain until she could find her way out again. But she was still laughing.

Burn Patient

by Marianne Park

His body spread-eagle
naked on the OR table,
patchwork of healing skin,
pieces charred and thick, pieces
still raw and oozing. Try not to think
of the gasoline he poured over himself
cold at first, then suddenly
burning, fumes choking.

The surgeons shave layers off his scalp
just healed from the last harvest
to sew onto places burned too deep
to regenerate, laying new squares of grass
on bare spots of lawn. The blood oozes
over his eyes taped shut, spilling
off his cheeks onto the floor.

A bag of ice on the thermostat
forces up the heat so
he won't freeze to death from exposure.
Sweat soaks skin beneath
gowns, hot wet air reinhaled
behind masks. Think of the soothing
coldness of a grave.

Partners

by Linda Farmer

Nudging the silence, the notes of their voices,
like beams of light vainly penetrating a thick veil of fog
whisper of long-ago happenings—
a pianissimo sonata; a melody they alone hear.

Dipping, bowing to the music of time's heavy footsteps,
they unfold themselves,
waltzing past this occasion or that event
with such ease!
They spin about the ballroom of life in synchrony—
I cannot interrupt; I would not want to.

Though at times they waltz in silence, it seems,
with rhythm and beat obscured by life's demands,
still the dance continues.

By now they feel one another's steps before they're taken,
and in fluid motion they waltz, as one,
though in brief pauses between numbers
they must work to maintain rhythm,
for distractions would steal their focus.

A gentle tap on the shoulder, and the partners exchange reluctantly.
The unity is fractured; the timing is off
and they, helpless to counter this interruption,
this inevitable break in their rhythm,
must struggle to regain their place.

Yet they continue.

Grudgingly, sometimes awkwardly or stiffly at first;
occasionally, accidentally in harmony,
they pick up where they left off,
falling into step.

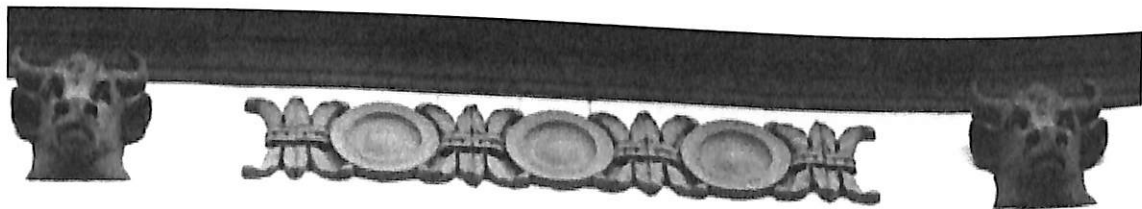
The dance resumes.

Student Division: First Place Poetry

Interrupted Sleep

by Jessica Long

Lying on the cold, silver table
I prepare for the four-hour sleep--
Stare at the needle,
Feel the burn of the venom
and I drift away.
Walking the hallways of the hospital
I climb up and down the walls
Free as a bird,
No limitations to what I can do.
Sudden jolt of pain!
Eyes fly open; my surroundings clear,
I feel tubes running down my throat.
Unable to speak--
My face hidden from the doctor's view--
The clock slowly ticks.
Forty minutes of excruciating pain.
I hear my heartbeat dangerously rise.
Blackness surrounds me.
No pain radiates from my chest.
Bright lights and voices resume.
Salty tears slide down my cheek.
I reach for a nurse's hand,
Eyes pleading for relief.
Conversation of my interrupted sleep--
Alarm in their voices.
Confusion consumes my thoughts.
I suffer from their mistake.
Yearning for the blackness
The venom creeps through my veins.
Pain fades into sleep.



M&M's and Academic Success: A Symbiotic Relationship

by Jesse Niland

I could have spent days studying for the largest test in the most difficult class I've ever taken in high school. But why work hard for a C when I could easily pilfer an A? So naturally, I spent five hours creating a hollow digital watch containing a strip of paper wound around rollers that could be turned to reveal a long list of Spanish words and phrases. Forget what you've seen on sitcoms; today's cheater employs complex methods to avoid detection. The most effective ways to cheat almost always revolve around note smuggling and conspiracies.

The oldest and easiest method of cheating on exams is to bring a small page of notes to be hidden in the palm of a hand or shirt sleeve during the test. Of course, these are easily discovered when the student is seen staring at his or her hand while consulting them.

The innovative cheater uses creative means for smuggling text into exam rooms where it can be read easily and not seen by the instructor. An excellent example of this is the case of Bob Corbett, author of *The Cheater's*

Handbook, who recounts using a clear plastic soda bottle to ace his chemistry final exam. He wrote the notes on the inside of a soda bottle label and glued it to the side so that the notes were visible from the inside of the bottle whenever he took a sip.

He also printed notes on a small piece of paper pasted on his bottle of correction fluid and lightly etched important equations on his number-2 pencil. As if that wasn't enough, he hid his textbook and class notes in a ceiling tile in the bathroom, so he could take a bathroom break and get answers to troublesome problems. Needless to say, he was awarded a near-perfect score.

Sharing answers with a conspirator is also a good way to cheat on an exam. Of course, instructors generally aren't fools, so the modern cheater must employ complicated codes and symbols to communicate with fellow test-takers, such as eating M&M's that correspond to test answers (red-A, yellow-B, etc.) or shining small laser pointers on ceiling tiles (rows and columns correspond to

problem numbers and answers, respectively). Systems of tapping in Morse code or poking Braille through shared scrap paper can also be effective. Conspiring with someone outside the classroom, who has full access to course notes and text, is even more effective. Beepers can be used to transmit coded messages, such as when an instructor posts the answers elsewhere during the test, or when a classmate finishes the test early enough to get to a phone and provide answers. Small concealed microphones and ear-pieces, while expensive and difficult to operate, can provide the best in dynamic cheating since specific questions can be answered by the accomplice.

Of course, no method of cheating is foolproof. Even the most skilled cheater can fall victim to random twists of fate. But as technology moves forward and the pool of knowledge surrounding this art becomes more available, cheating becomes a more and more viable alternative to actual study. It's something we can all depend on.

Student Division: First Place Short Story

The Menace of Memory

by Pascha Brown

As the car sped down the slippery highway, the boy in the passenger seat emanated soul-shaking sobs that were unmatched by the storm that wailed outside. His painful sobs were so intense that they sent an invisible current through the car and shocked Amy out of her reverie. She increased speed, and as she signaled to switch lanes, a deer materialized from the darkness. Simultaneously, she slammed the brakes to the floor. The force of the impact lifted her from her seat and sent her crashing through the windshield. Gravity roughly threw her to the ground. Before she became unconscious, she reached for the boy. She was only met by a deafening silence devoid of his sobs.

She entered a vortex of darkness that could easily have been mistaken for death. Her eyes opened to encounter the same degree of darkness that had accompanied her in her unconsciousness. She sat there for what seemed an eternity, confused and vulnerable, a bleeding

carcass on the cement. The beam of a flashlight appeared in the distance. The beam increased in size until it became a weight shining painfully in her eyes. The face of a man could be seen behind the light, and even in her confusion and the intensity of the storm, his beauty was unmistakable. He eyed her impersonally, but very carefully, and asked her what her name was. Due to the circumstances, at first the question seemed absurd, and then even more importantly she realized she honestly couldn't answer his question. She had committed the ultimate betrayal against herself. She had forgotten everything she had ever known. "I don't know," she answered.

It suddenly dawned on her how terrible the entire situation was. The man put her weight into his arms and carried her back into the woods. Mercifully, she fell asleep because if she had been awake she would have been forced to logically ponder her situation and it

was a blessing she didn't have to.

She awoke to light that was blinding compared to the darkness she had become accustomed to. The man walked slowly into the room to avoid frightening her. She began to cry uncontrollably because she was afraid the man held malevolent thoughts toward her.

"I'm not going to hurt you," he said. He had a beautiful voice that was very reassuring, and at that moment she was certain that he could never hurt her.

Soon her eyes adjusted to the light and she surveyed her surroundings. She was in a small cabin. He instructed her to go to a bathroom where she closed the door and was forced to face her image in the mirror. What looked back at her shocked her so deeply that a small scream caught in the back of her throat. Her entire face was covered in blood and disgusting clumps of dirt clung to it. Frantically she washed her face with cold water and dried it on a

nearby towel. Once again she encountered the mirror, but this time what looked back was recognizable as human. There were only a few small scratches on her face and she was surprised to find that most of the blood draining down the sink did not belong to her. She took one more look at the face she didn't recognize any more than the man's face outside the door, and emerged from the bathroom.

As soon as the man saw her, there was a look of terror in his eyes unlike any she had ever seen, and for a moment she ridiculously thought that he was afraid of her.

"You look exactly like that woman on the news who killed all those people and kidnapped that little boy," he said.

"I really don't know who I am," she said, her voice shaking.

He pulled up the sleeve of her sweater and looked at the tattoo of an angel on her arm. He quickly threw down her arm and put a distance between them.

"You are that woman from the news. That tattoo identifies you without a doubt," he said. "What did you do to that little boy?" He screamed at her. "What did you do?"

The power of his accusations weakened her and sent her falling to the floor. She had flashes of images: a little boy smiling and laughing,

the glint of a knife in the sun, and loud screams. She remembered her own laughter as flesh was pierced by a sharp butcher knife. Her mind wandered back to the cabin and the man with fear in his eyes. The memories and the look on his face served to convince her that she was who he suspected her to be. Even as terrible as her rediscovered identity was, it filled an emptiness in her soul and gave her a hint as to the entirety of who she was.

"We have to find that little boy," he said.

He grabbed her and they went back out into the storm with only a flashlight leading them through the darkness. They found their way back to the crash site, and there he was still in his seat belt with the dashboard and windshield harshly crushing his small body.

"We have to get rid of this body before the police come," he said. "Help me get him out of here."

They brutally ripped his body from the car as best they could and carried him back into the woods in front of the cabin. He went back inside and left her there with the dead boy. He looked so fragile and pathetic. She did her best not to cry. The man came from the cabin holding a shovel.

"You dig the hole," he demanded.

She did as she was told and when she was done, she disrespectfully pushed him in with the toe of her shoe. He was merciful enough to cover the boy up because she was drained of all energy. They went back into the cabin and sat looking at one another—each lost in their own world of thoughts. She broke the silence and attacked him with question after question, greedy with curiosity.

"How many people did I kill?" she asked him.

"They found twelve dead bodies, but they suspect more," he said.

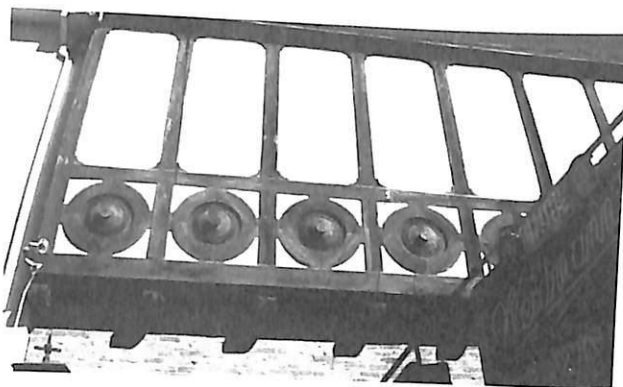
He continued to talk, but she had stopped listening. She wondered how she could have done that to that little child. She was so repulsed by her own capabilities. And suddenly it became so clear what she had to do. She got up from her seat and walked out of the door. The man ran after her but strangely stopped and stood in the doorway. She frantically searched for the shed she saw him get the shovel from. When she found it, she ran inside. She carefully analyzed the rafters from the ceiling, the stool in the corner, and finally the rope. She tied the rope to the rafter and made a noose which she slipped around her neck. She stood there for a while.

It would have been nice to remember beautiful thoughts from her childhood before

she went, but none came to her. She stepped off the stool. She was utterly surprised when her hands betrayed her and clawed desperately at her neck in a futile attempt to stop the pain. Her body swung crazily on the rope. There was a pain so sharp it caused a great white light that flashed her life before her eyes. All her memories came flooding back to her, and the horror of realization struck her.

She had never committed murder. She was completely innocent. Her human mind in all of its complexity had been easily manipulated by the words of a stranger. She remembered rushing her son to the hospital for a broken leg. She also remembered how she unknowingly pushed him into a shallow grave with the tip of her shoe. As her eyes were popping out of her head from disgust, realization, or near death, the man appeared and stood in front of her as she drew her last breath. He started laughing and wouldn't stop.

At that crucial moment for her soul so close to her departure from this earth, she felt a hatred for the man that was so far from the purity of heaven, it sent her straight to hell. And when she got there, his face was the first one she saw.



Student Division: Second Place Poetry

The Holy Ghost

by Pascha Brown

It is terribly cold in that place
Into stone turns many a face
However there are a few
Who do not know
How new skin cares to grow
With so little sun left to see
The gift of sight does tend to flee
Feeling their way
Along the back
In search of the cross
They must hack
With apprehension the axes shy away
After all, this pain promises
The endless day
Barefoot into the wintry night
They went to freeze or take flight
Into flames most of them burst
For you can not fly
Without freezing first.

Student Division: Second Place Essay

My Triumph

by Keith Farmer

Children's laughter rang through my ears like the sweet sound of church bells on Sunday. It was 1986 and I was at the local pool watching the "big kids" have fun swimming in the deep end while I cowered in the security of the shallow end. I had been taking swimming lessons for some time, but I was still wary of venturing out of my comfort zone. I had visions of jumping off the diving board and sinking like a pebble in the Pacific Ocean, and I knew that if I went down the slide, I would never come back from the depths of a watery grave. It was lonely in the shallow end, but I did not care since I was safe.

Amidst the splashes, the screaming, and all the sounds of youthful days, my mind began to wander under the influence of the blistering sun. I fell into a trance and saw scenes of a glorious summer day. There was a pool filled to its zenith with crystal-clear water, just the perfect temperature for a day of festivity. The pool had no shallow end, but I did not mind; I was a "big kid" in my fantasies. The other children were screaming my name, saying, "Look at Keith, he is the biggest kid here. He is

wonderful. We proclaim him king of the pool. Three cheers for *King Keith*!"

The refrain of my name trailed off into silence when I heard the harshest, most raspy voice screaming the two most hated words to a five-year-old. "Fraidy Cat, Fraidy Cat," my big sister was calling me, in her most insulting tone. "Look at the baby in the shallow end. Where is your blankie, baby?" she taunted. The visions of King Keith of the Pool soon tuned into visions of a baby sucking his thumb.

"I am not," I shouted, "I...I just don't want to swim in the deep end today."

"Well then," she sneered, "if you aren't a baby, why not come over here and prove it."

The challenge was initiated and so, not wanting to be outdone, I accepted. I walked slowly toward the diving board and visions of a murderer being lead down death row entered my head. "Dead man walking," I heard, along with the demented laughter of my sibling in the background.

As I broke out of my trance, I noticed that I was standing on the extreme edge of the springboard, feeling as if I were a victim captured by

pirates being forced to walk the plank. Chants of "jump" began to crescendo, and it was now time to take the plunge. My knees bent, my feet pushed off the board, and I was weightless. It was as if I were a baby bird spreading his wings for the first time. I began to fall and my gut was tingling. To me nothing else mattered; this was the most wonderful feeling. That was until my body hit flat against the water, stinging my face and punching me in the abdomen.

However, I had done it! I was in the deep end and the others were cheering me, but none louder than my sister. This truly was a feeling to which none can compare.

The day grew short and it was time to go home. My mother herded the two of us to the car. As she drove us away, I looked back and laughed, eager for our next visit to the pool. I showed everyone that day that I was no longer a baby, but the "big boy" that I so longed to be.

"I guess you really are a big kid now, huh?" my sister questioned.

"Yes," I replied with a triumphant smile, "I guess I am."

Student Division: Second Place Short Story

Serenade

by Lori Marie Sanders

"So, how long have you played?" Dr. Engleman asked as Sasha took the old violin from its case.

"I think I was four years old when my grandfather began to teach me. That would make ...thirteen years.

"Thirteen years? That's quite a long time."

"It does not seem so long to me," Sasha replied with a reminiscent smile. "I enjoyed my grandfather's lessons." He carefully tuned the strings which had become slightly flat during his long flight from Moscow.

"Your grandfather must be a very special person."

Sasha nodded. "It was always his dream to visit America, but he became too sick to travel. I promised him before he died that I would take his music to America even if he could not go himself. Because of my promise, I have only played for family and friends for the past seven years. Until I perform in America, I will not perform in public anywhere else."

Mr. Morrison was never the

person to make sudden changes in anything, let alone in the repertoire for a symphony concert. However, this time he was compelled to add Tchaikovsky's *Serenade Melancolique* to the opening night's schedule after listening in fascination to the young exchange student who was staying with Dr. Engelman. Sasha Kabalevsky would appear as guest soloist for his first performance in America with the Lydon Symphony Orchestra on June 25, 1999. It would be a memorable event.

"All right, let's take a fifteen minute break. We'll start with the *Moldau* when you all get back."

The last rehearsal for opening night had finally arrived. Sasha could hardly wait for the concert to begin. Aside from the fact that he would be playing a solo with the Lydon Symphony in America, knowing that his father was to be in the audience especially helped to foster his anticipation. Mr. Kabalevsky was on furlough from an extensive cancer

research project and had not seen his son for almost two entire months. Eight o'clock could not arrive quickly enough.

During the break, Sasha sipped an orange soda and chatted with some of the other orchestra members. He had already made several friends since the first rehearsal. One in particular was Peter Stanford, a flautist from Jackson, Mississippi. Peter was famous for his hilarious stories told in a classic Southern drawl. He was in the middle of one of his most successful attempts at making the entire assemblage in the lounge laugh until tears rolled down their cheek, when a cellist called their attention to the television in the corner. Someone adjusted the volume so they could all hear the broadcast, "...in Atlanta earlier this afternoon..." a reporter was saying, "so far twenty of the forty-five passengers aboard National Air Flight 462 have been confirmed dead. Among those twenty were six men who were part of an international team of engineers

involved in cancer research, as well as...."

The can of orange soda fell to the tile floor.

An awkward silence permeated the air of the lounge for several minutes. Sasha's eyes remained fixed on the television screen even after the grim footage was switched off hastily. After a moment or two more, he turned his attention away from the television and retrieved the aluminum can from its effervescent puddle, blotting the spill with some paper towels.

"Here, let me help you with that," Peter offered.

"Thank you, Mr. Stanford, but I am almost finished." Sasha gathered up the soggy brown mass and tossed it into a nearby trash can. "The floor is still wet, but I was able to get most of it."

Peter was puzzled at Sasha's composure. With hesitance, he said, "I can take you back to Dr. Engelman's house if you want."

"Why should we go when rehearsal is not yet over? I have no reason to leave."

"But don't you think that maybe you should?"

"You do not understand, Mr. Stanford," Sasha replied in a disturbingly level tone. "It is not a question of what I *should* do, but what I *must* do. A promise is a promise."

Dr. Engelman sat in the middle of the second balcony row in Harris Hall Audito-

rium. The balcony was the best place to sit in Harris Hall, for it not only possessed outstanding acoustic quality, but the view of the stage was excellent. Dr. Engelman had attended many a concert and play in Harris Hall, and had sat in the same place he chose to sit the night of Sasha's debut. He looked forward to another pleasant evening. The only thing he was concerned about though was how Sasha was holding up emotionally. For the entire afternoon, Sasha had only spoken when Dr. Engelman addressed him directly. Even the phone call from the hospital in Atlanta failed to produce more than polite affirmation. Not one tear, not one facial expression had Dr. Engelman seen that betrayed the least sign of emotion. That was what worried him.

The lights in the crowded auditorium flickered momentarily to signal the rise of the curtain in another two minutes. Dr. Engelman looked over his program and scanned the list of selections. Rimsky-Korsakov, Dvorak, Smetana, Tchaikovsky—and Sasha's name at the very end next to the *Serenade*.

Sasha Kabalevsky, all alone now. How could he seem so calm after what had happened? Dr. Engelman was unable to rid himself of the question until he saw Sasha take the stage. Upon the first doleful note that drifted from the old violin, he knew. Sasha was pouring out his soul through the music, transforming each rising

melody into a desperate plea, grasping hopelessly at elusive consolation with every ebbing strain.

When the last dying vibrato faded into nothingness, the entire audience burst into thunderous applause. Sasha bowed and exited the stage, oblivious to the resounding shouts of "Bravo!" and "Encore!" that filled the auditorium. Once out of view behind the curtain, he fell to his knees, no longer able to contain the overpowering grief which had silenced him before. It was there that Mr. Morrison found him, cradling in his arms the violin that his grandfather had made, protecting it from tears that refused to be restrained. Mr. Morrison approached Sasha but said nothing. He waited until Sasha found voice enough to speak.

"I kept my word," Sasha finally managed to say in English. "I kept my word."

"Yes, you did," Mr. Morrison replied. "He would be very proud of you right now."

Sasha looked up at Mr. Morrison and gave him a weak smile. "My father would want me to give them an encore," he said, taking the handkerchief that Mr. Morrison offered. Rising to his feet, he said, "I will give them one. For my father."

He followed Mr. Morrison back onto the stage, where they were met with a fresh wave of applause.

Other Student Division Entries

Pretty in Pink

by Clay Jones

Ten times sweeter than sugar can sugar can be
And soft as powdered baby's skin.
At the sight of you some darkness will flee.
Shockingly you stop me from giving in
To the part of me that's always wrong.
Some say, "Don't worry." So I begin to gorge
All because today's hope is gone.

There you are standing in the door,
Saying nothing as you see me reach
For another who is not of dust,
But grains of sand gathered at the beach.
Why do I allow myself to begin to lust
For the one I know I can not have?
Some say, "Who cares?" or "So!"
I say, "I do!" or maybe even, "I love!"
The one I call my 'Sweet and Low.'





Fallen Angels

by Jessica Eakes

A chill rushed over my body as the wind drifted across me. I put my arms around myself and inhaled the moment. It had started to rain, and I felt the usual tension in my chest return once again. Flushed by the night air, I turned and walked back into the house.

I stood in the corner, listening to the music. I could not concentrate on anything. I glanced across the dimly lit room, trying to decipher the nameless faces secluded in the crowd. I have lived in Corner Creek all my life, but it had been a while since I had appeared on the social scene. It was really hard to accept the way things were. I still felt uneasy walking into a room without him by my side. Surrounded by everyone, I was still alone. It had only been a year. I slowly became unaware of the atmosphere around me and like before, I was with him.

The telephone was pressed firmly against my shoulder as I tried to hold it in place and continue packing. I placed it comfortably against

my chin as I folded up my red cashmere sweater and put it in my suitcase. William had once said that I was absolutely radiant in that sweater and I planned to wear it tomorrow night.

"So, how nervous are you? I mean, this weekend is the perfect opportunity! You know he will," Leigh said, a little overly excited.

"I don't know, not for sure anyway. I am just hopeful," I replied.

"More like hopeless. Do you realize how wonderful this weekend is going to be? I still can't believe that you got Mr. Kincade to rent out the cabin. He is usually really uptight about people staying up there in the winter," she said.

"I know. Somehow, with my sweet tone and innocent appearance I talked him into it. He is just worried because of the roads. I guess I am really surprised that he let us, now that I think about it, because of last week's storm and all. I bet the roads are messed up pretty badly. It must be fate. William and I are meant to be together this

weekend ... and hopefully the rest of our lives if everything goes like I hope it will," I said still packing.

"You are such a romantic! Kevin and I are going to meet Lindsey and Brian at five-thirty and go on out there. You and William should be out there around eight, right?"

"Around then; it depends on what time he gets off. Mr. Kincade said he put the key above the door. Just go ahead and let yourself in. Be careful going out there," I said.

"Okay then, we will see you guys out there. Be careful, too," Leigh said as she hung up.

I placed the phone back on the receiver and closed my bag. I walked downstairs, calling for my mom, but my parents had not made it home yet. William would be at least another hour, so I plopped down on the couch and began watching television.

I had been dating William since I was seventeen. Three years had gone by at an

incredibly quick speed. He was amazing. I met him at a party my sophomore year in high school. His big, beautiful brown eyes captivated me. He was immeasurably sweet and extremely caring. My friends had all deserted me to go with some guys from school. He came to my rescue. I think I fell in love with him that very moment. He was my angel. We had been together ever since.

An hour later, already dark, I noticed the headlights as William pulled into my driveway. I quickly picked up my things and hurried outside to meet him. I had just seen him about six hours ago, and I still missed him like crazy. He always told me that he would be lost if I wasn't there to find him every ten seconds.

"Hey, Beautiful. Miss me?"

"As always," I replied.

William kissed me hello and tossed my bag into the back of his jeep. He came around to open my door and helped me in. He leaned over and kissed me again, this time a little longer, a little deeper. I melted at his every touch. He finally went to the driver's side and climbed in, playfully kissing me once more.

"I think you missed me more than I missed you, huh?" I said nudging him in his arm. He just looked at me.

"What?" I asked.

"It's nothing. I did miss you. You are beautiful. Did you know that?" He smiled his gorgeous smile and winked at me, then started the jeep.

I have never felt the way I feel about William toward another living person. I love him, not just for who he is, but for who I am when I am with him. I was over anxiously suspicious that he was going to ask me "the big question" this weekend. I knew I would have to practically force the word "yes" not to explode out of me at any moment!

The ride to the cabin was about an hour and a half, so I leaned back in my seat and made myself comfortable. I listened to the music on the radio and slowly closed my eyes, feeling William take my hand in his as I drifted to sleep.

Although it was probably a split second in time when I was awakened from my sleep, those few moments after I woke up seemed to last an eternity.

As my body slammed into the side of the jeep, my eyes popped open. My first instinct was to look over at William. The distinct look of horrid fear covering his face made his muscles appear stiff and full of tension. He said my name in a low whisper. I

looked forward, noticing that it was raining terribly. Suddenly, lightning struck directly in front of the vehicle. The jeep started to spin out of control. William managed to get it steady again, and it was at that moment I became aware of what was about to cause an accident which could not be stopped.

William slammed his foot hard against the brakes as a massive oak tree fell ahead of us on the deserted country road. The lightning illuminated the sky around us, and I saw that the base of the tree was on fire. The brakes squealed as we slid across the narrow dirt road. I don't remember how long I was unconscious; I can simply recall hearing the glass shatter when the jeep finally stopped flipping.

I came to as the rain hit hard against my face. I was no longer in the jeep. Pain shot through my arm as if the members of a minute army were all trapped beneath my skin and using their daggers to cut themselves free. I knew it had to be broken. I glanced down, and the bone was in plain sight. I picked myself up and incoherently walked toward the mangled jeep.

"William!" I screamed.

No answer.

"William?!"

The jeep was empty when I looked inside. The entire windshield was in pieces on the ground and a still-present tree limb had ripped through the top. I frantically looked around for him. I was in shock I'm sure. I don't know how I was moving or thinking.

Then I saw him. My stomach rolled, and I felt as if all the breath in my body was immediately sucked out. I carefully knelt down beside his limp body, calling to him softly. He was not responding. I was crying. The only way I could tell was by the heat my tears were providing against the frozen rain. I placed my hands on his face, now unable to recognize the pain that still consumed my body. Relieved, I watched his eyes flinch and hesitantly open. His entire body shuttered. I knew not to move him, but I placed my right arm underneath him and lifted him slightly closer to me to keep the pounding rain away from his eyes. They were still so beautiful. I looked deeply into them, and I could see straight into his soul. I knew he was hurt. He weakly reached up his hand and caressed my face gently, wiping the tears from my cheeks.

"Don't cry. Don't cry," he said faintly.

But my tears would not

stop, and now began to flow more steadily. His arm slowly slipped away from me, down to my hand. He held it close to him, moving it to his heart. His eyes closed.

I felt my heart stop beating. I could not breathe or see clearly. I put both my arms around him, slowly rocking back and forth. I kept telling him that everything was going to be all right. He never replied to what I was saying. He was dead.

It was not apparent to me how much time had passed when Leigh and Lindsey arrived. They took their cell phone, dialed 9-1-1, and finally called Kevin and Brian to tell them what had happened. I barely recall the events that took place the rest of that night. I was pulled unwillingly away from William and taken to the hospital. I was given sleeping pills. The next days did not exist to me.

The following week was hell. I could no longer cry; I had run out of tears. The funeral was on a Wednesday. William's mother and I were the last people to leave.

It took three months before I would even talk to anyone. I secluded myself from the world and attempted to heal alone. I should have been smarter than to think I could do it without help. Depression and sadness were the only emotions I allowed

myself to experience. My heart was broken; my angel was lost.

The hardest thing to accept was not being able to simply hear his voice. I called his house once and asked for him. I was only making things worse. I apologized and hung up the phone.

In April, William's mother called and asked if she could come see me. I decided it was time to face the future and stop dwelling in the past, so I agreed to let her come over.

Talking to her was hard. She told me how much William had truly loved and cared for me. She said how his whole world had been based around me. It flattered me immensely, but it made my heart drop to the depths of my soul. I was finally realizing how much I really missed him, and that I could never physically have him with me again. I knew, however, that he would always be in my heart. I just had to learn how to make my heart work without him being there.

His mother and I talked for a while, but she said she had to be going. I thanked her for caring about me and for having patience with me. She started to walk to the door, but stopped abruptly and turned back to me.

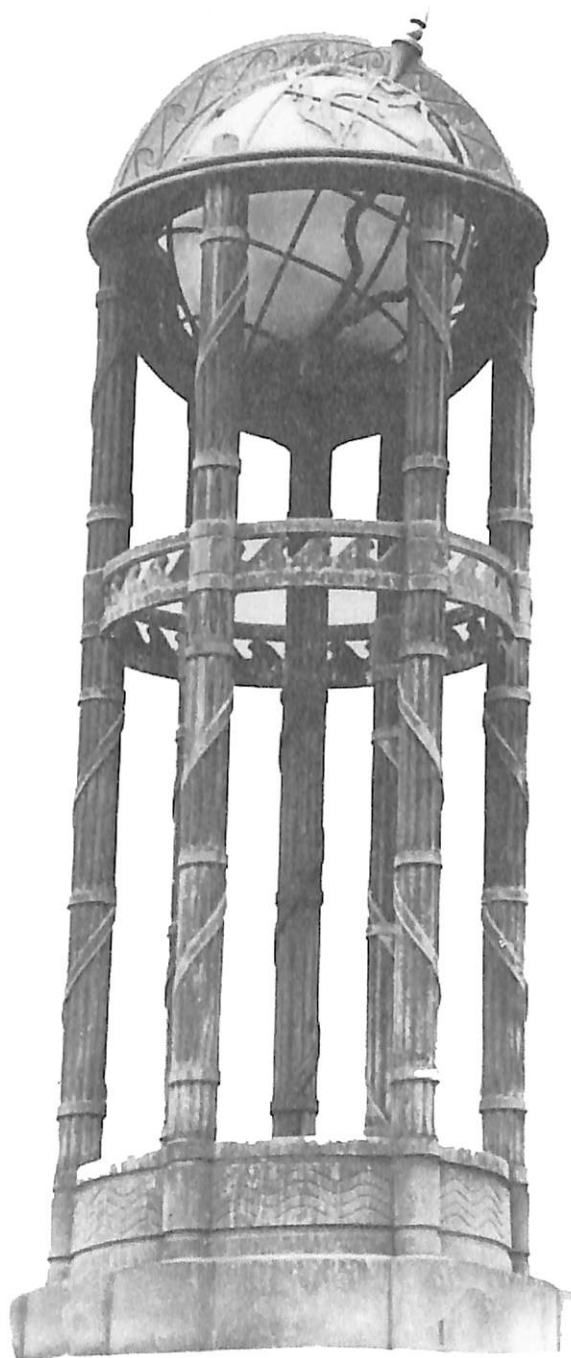
"I thought you would like to have this. It was meant for you before, and I am sure he

would be upset if I didn't get it to you. Please don't forget us. You are still a part of our family," she said as she brought out a small box from her purse.

She set the tiny box on my dresser, gave me a small hug, and walked out. I walked over to the dresser and slowly opened the box. Enclosed was a blue velvet ring box. I opened it and took out a beautiful diamond engagement ring. The band was engraved—"*Always and Forever.*"

A warm tear rolled down my face. I reached for my coat, said a few good-byes, and walked outside to my car. As I put the keys into the ignition, I noticed the ring I now always wear. William was my true love. He had once told me, "We are angels, each with one wing. We can only fly by embracing one another."

He was my angel. I learned to fly.





Breaking In

by Kira Nicolle Allard

Stepping into the dry hallway
Out of the pounding rain.
The heavy door slams
And shuts out all the light.
The dark musty odor surrounds
Like unused textbooks
And newly sharpened pencils.
They watch our every move
Storing us into their memories.
The mechanical monsters
Cause the paranoia to rise.
A noise like footsteps on the tile
Penetrates the still silence
And causes us to run for our lives.
The door gets pushed open.
I fall to the ground.
The light is shockingly bright
And the rain has stopped.
We pick up our bikes
And rush home through the slick mud.

Goin' Home

by Frank Charles Winstead

"The young people of Mississippi must learn to remember who they are and where they came from. They must be encouraged to remember: there is a message to be carried."

--Willie Morris



The region where my daddy grew up, south of Pelahatchie, Mississippi, was a place he said "never amounted to much." Even so, I was eager to return to that place in the fall of 1981 to visit my Aunt Marguerite Winstead, the widow of my father's brother, Hugh.

On a hot Sunday afternoon, I departed the smooth ride of I-20 and turned onto a well-worn gravel road that led to the small frame house where my aunt was certain to be engaged in some never-ending task. I was already familiar with Aunt Marguerite's work ethic: "Frank Charles, country folks work from can 'till can't. They ain't no stoppin' place except for church on Sunday unless, of course, 'the ox is in the ditch.'" I was sure hoping the ox was not in the ditch today.

The washboard surface of the gravel road provided a jolting ride that was relieved only by the paved surface of the bridge across Ash Log

Creek. Beneath the bridge was the place where Daddy and his brothers were allowed, on rare occasions, to swim. Swimming was the only playful diversion I can ever recall my daddy describing when he talked about the harsh regimen of early 20th century farm life.

The timber along both sides of the road had been clear-cut, leaving ugly fields of stumps, tangles of vines, and treetops turned brown by the unrelenting Mississippi sun. Almost all of the old farmhouses, barns, and outbuildings familiar to my daddy had long since disappeared. On this stretch of road, the only remaining sentinels to the past were a few weathered fence posts along the roadside. Years before, they had rotted off at the soil line and tumbled over on the red clay banks.

Almost every trip that I or my parents had made down this familiar road had brought a degree of sadness. Sometimes it was because an elderly member of the family

had died. At other times, a house fire had claimed another remnant from the past; or another piece of property had been sold off and an absentee landowner had liberally distributed "Posted—Keep Out" signs on trees and fence posts on what had been land with family connections. On this trip, however, I was happy to be going to see Aunt Marguerite, a gifted storyteller who could make our family's past come alive again.

Aunt Marguerite's small house, nestled under massive oak trees, was clad in weathered asbestos siding that had not aged gracefully with the passing years. Her house sat so close to the road that one could almost spit from the front porch and hit the middle of the road. As I drew near, I slowed. A log truck passed kicking up a great cloud of suffocating red dust that obscured my sight. With great caution, steering through the dust, I turned into her side yard and bounced across giant roots

that spread from the base of a massive oak. When I opened the door of my pickup, a wall of stifling, humid heat engulfed me, and, as if on command, the sweat began to exude from every pore.

"Welcome back to Mississippi," I ruefully thought.

One suspicious and gaunt old coon hound slowly made her way, with an unsteady gait, from under the front porch. She peered at me through weary looking, steely brown eyes. A river of tears and yellow pus seeped from her eyelids, leaving the sides of her old battle-scarred nose wet and the fur discolored. It looked as if her rib bones would poke through the tightly stretched skin if she took another step. This veteran of many a hunt was so weak she had to lean against the house before she could muster enough strength to sound a warning that a stranger was on the premises. Her bark turned into a surprisingly strong and mournful wail that threatened to cause all the acorns to fall from the white oaks at the edge of the woods.

Cats were everywhere—on the porch, in the swing, under the house, and dozing on window sills in the hot sun. Population control for pets had not yet come to this part of Mississippi, and Aunt Marguerite was an easy touch. Folks from far and near dumped unwanted animals on her doorstep, knowing this caring widow

would feed them as best she could with table scraps. And so, they stayed and multiplied.

When I stepped onto the front porch, I could hear Aunt Marguerite stirring inside the house. I knocked. I waited. Finally, she appeared at the screen door, holding a large, battered, white porcelain dishpan overflowing with purple hull peas. It appeared, on this hot Sunday afternoon that the "ox was in the ditch." Even so, on her soft old face was a large and wonderful smile.

As I entered the front room, which also served as her bedroom, she quickly placed the dishpan on her bed and gave me an enormous hug. Then she carried on about how glad she was that I had taken the time to come for a visit, no matter how brief. Most of us like to be "carried on about," and I am no exception. I just glowed.

The front room was just as I had remembered it from my last visit. The walls were still painted an even, vivid pink. Aunt Marguerite's bed, covered with an aging pink chenille bedspread, was positioned so as to take advantage of any breeze that might develop and pass through the two open windows. The fireplace opening had been covered for many years with fiberboard, and this modification was also painted pink. The gaiety of all this color and the

bushel basket heaped with purple hull peas that awaited her attention spoke volumes about the spirit and strength



of this fine old woman who was not about to let herself be defeated by the countryside's barrenness and heat.

An idle propane gas heater now stood on the hearth where an open fireplace had for so many bitterly cold winters glowed with the hot coals from well-seasoned red oak and hickory logs. Aunt Marguerite explained her concession to gas without hesitation or apology.

"Frank Charles," she said, "hit gets to the point where old folks can't cut, split, and tote wood no more."

A small television supported by a spindly-legged stand sat off to one side. In all my visits to see my aunt, I have never been present when the set was turned on. The top of the TV was adorned with a large arrangement of artificial poinsettias out of whose midst sprouted the TV's rabbit ears.

Hung high on the wall behind the television set were two, large, late 19th century portraits. A man and a woman, their stern expressions frozen in time, gazed down from dark wooden frames upon all who entered the room. As a child, they had frightened me. Now, I looked up at them with admiration.

Uncle Hugh had rescued the two photographs years before from the loft of a barn, but not before a leaky roof had left permanent water stains on both. Even so, this damage did not diminish the dignity of those ancestors. The man was my great, great grandfather, Philip Marshall Huffman, who, like my other great, great grandfather, had fought in "The War for Southern Independence." The woman, Sarah Everett Huffman, was Philip's second wife. Both faces reflected the hardships of dirt farmers who had worked worn-out soil.

Aunt Marguerite left the room momentarily, and I turned and stared through the wire mesh of the front screen door. My eyes traveled across the unpaved road and into the garage where Uncle Hugh's 1966 pickup was parked. The structure was leaning precariously to one side. The only reason the building had not toppled over was that someone, perhaps a kindly neighbor, had propped large wooden poles against one of its sides.

Even so, the ramshackled edifice tilted so severely to one side, its interior cross beams almost touched the top of the truck's cab.

Daddy said that Uncle Hugh bought the truck with some of the money he received for a piece of land that became a part of I-20. Sixteen years later, Uncle Hugh was dead, but Aunt Marguerite still used that battered farm truck to get herself to church every Sunday. She was proud of that truck and proud of Uncle Hugh. We all shared her pride in Uncle Hugh, whose picture hangs in a place of honor in my home—a black and white photograph of a youthful World War 11 soldier seated on a rattan sofa and wearing a freshly starched army uniform: Private First Class Hugh T. Winstead. His back is ramrod straight and behind him a huge American flag drapes the wall.

Family lore has it that this young private volunteered to scamper across a field somewhere in France or Germany to rescue a fallen comrade. The bullets that flew around him were said to have been thicker than blackberries at the edge of a swamp, but he found the wounded soldier, brought him back, and eventually came home with a Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster pinned to his chest. The full details of the story are lost. Uncle Hugh never talked

about the war and his military records burned in St. Louis in 1973 in a fire at the National Personnel Records Center.

My daddy and his younger brother, Taylor, said Uncle Hugh was never quite the same after the war. The constant artillery bombardments he endured while crouched in foxholes led to an undocumented but quietly whispered diagnosis among some family members that he suffered from "shell shock." At times, Uncle Hugh would sit in a chair and, for no apparent reason, cry. This good man, loyal husband, devoted father, and hard-working farmer was living testimony that even when a war is over, it never really ends for those who fought in it.

Now, his widow, my Aunt Marguerite, was shuffling back into the room where I stood, holding out to me a large glass of sweet iced tea in one hand and a dishpan in the other.

The tea was Aunt Marguerite's sign to me that "I'm mighty glad you're here;" and the dishpan meant, "Since you are here, you might as well help me shell some peas."

As the peas started falling into the pan, I noticed that multiple trickles of sweat were rolling down the backs of both of my arms and dripping from my elbows into the peas in the bottom of the pan. At this point, I

realized once again that this woman of the farm was pure pioneer stock; and in the smothering heat, I thought, "My God, how can you stand it!"

My eyes darted about the room looking in vain for an old-fashioned electric fan. Anything to stir the thick, sultry air. Soon, every thread on my back was soaked, and I flirted with the idea of asking my aunt to come sit in my air-conditioned truck until we had finished shelling all the peas. However, hearing a lecture on how soft Americans had become—or worse, how soft I had become—was not something I wanted to risk.

So, we shelled and sweated and talked. We talked about old times, sick folks, dead folks, lack of rain, the price of pork and beef, and finally, church.

"Aunt Marguerite," I asked, "did you go to Sunday School and church this morning?"

My aunt peered at me over her glasses, her eyes brimming with irritation and disbelief. I immediately wanted to withdraw my question . . . but it was too late.

"Frank Charles," she snapped, "you know I always go to Sunday School

and church!"

Chastened, I shelled a few more peas. After what felt like a very long silence, I asked her to tell me about her preacher.

Aunt Marguerite smiled broadly and her eyes sparkled.

"Oh, Frank Charles," she said, "We have the finest young preacher down at the Lodebar United Methodist Church!"

That's wonderful," I said, relieved. "You know what my daddy would ask, don't you?"

Daddy would want to know if he can preach. "

"Can he preach!" exclaimed my aunt. "Why, Frank Charles, he is one of the finest pulpit ministers I have ever heard in my life, and I've been around a lot of years "

I shelled a few more peas in silence, musing about how uplifting it must be for the Methodists in this rural community not only to attend a beautiful, carefully maintained church, but, also, as one of my friends would say, "be fed" by a good and faithful servant of the Lord. So, I asked another question.

"Aunt Marguerite, what did the preacher talk about this morning?" Silence.

The peas stopped falling into the dishpan. My aunt's hands grew still, and she furrowed her brow.

A little over three hours before, she had been in the church she loved, listening to a "fine young preacher. " Now, she was trying to recall what he had said, and it was obviously hard. I could almost hear the wheels and gears turning in her brain as she struggled for the answer. She shifted in her straight wooden chair with the cowhide seat and stared straight at the wall.

"What's taking her so long?" I wondered. After all, age had never seemed to diminish the quickness of her mind.

Finally, with an abundance of meekness and in a very quiet voice, she said, "Frank Charles, I just don't remember what the preacher talked about this morning—but I can tell you one thing, his sermon was a goodun'!" At that, she smiled, and the peas resumed falling into her pan.

Later that afternoon, after both dishpans were full, we said our goodbyes. Our sadness over parting wasn't helped when she said, "At my age, you never know when you say goodbye if it might not be for the last time or not." After giving my aunt a prolonged hug, I turned



and walked silently to my truck.

As I drove away from the land where my daddy had grown up, I reflected on the events of the day. A comment by Vernon Law, the Pittsburgh Pirates' pitcher who had beaten the mighty New York Yankees twice in the 1960 World Series, suddenly came to mind: "When you're through learning, you're through."

"Not me," I thought. "I'm not through."

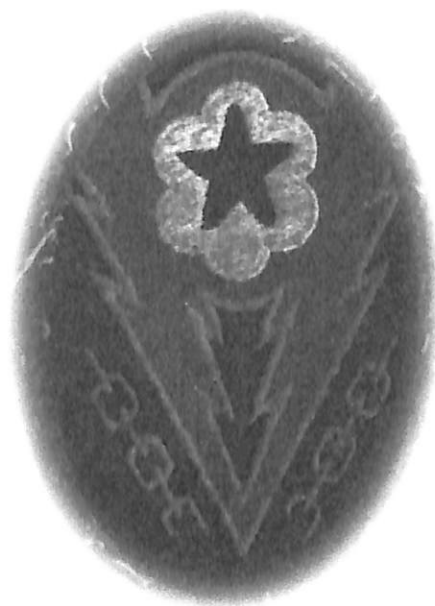
I had always learned something of value when I visited my Aunt Marguerite, and my visit with her on this hot, sultry, August Sunday was no exception.

Part of this day's lesson had to do with Aunt Marguerite's

failure to recollect what the preacher had said that morning, which to me spelled out a caution for all who preach and teach. Teachers and preachers talk a lot; but at the schoolhouse, this method of instruction doesn't prepare students particularly well for the future. All that teacher talk may help to explain why when parents ask their children, "What did you do today in school?" They almost universally exclaim, "Nothing." If, as Elbert Hubbard suggested, "The object of teaching a child is to get him to get along without his teacher," then we clearly need to devote less time to talking and more time to helping students learn how to learn. Because, the truth is, we forget most of what we hear at the schoolhouse—and in church.

Even so, out of the richness of my Aunt Marguerite's

being, she took home something of value from that young preacher that hot, August Sunday many years ago—even if she couldn't remember the words he had to say, and even if all she carried away was simply her own deep affection for him and her pleasure in belonging to the Lodebar Methodist Church. So she not only inadvertently cautioned and reminded me about the shortcomings of too much sermonizing and lecturing that day and made me think about my profession, but she also reminded me, with her pink walls, her proliferation of cats, her dishpans full of peas, and her welcoming smile, that the human spirit can flourish almost anywhere. She made me proud once again of my people and my roots.



2000 Review Staff

Editor Jill Hodges
Short Story Editor Tracy Barton
Design René Pickens
Photography Yvonne Parr
Publication Design Advisor Laura Davis
Advisor Steve Owen

Judges

Dr. James Barloon, MSU Meridian - Student Division Poetry
Pamela Waters, West Lauderdale High School - Student Division Essay
Laura Singletary, Kate Griffin Jr. High School - Student Division Short Story
Diane Reynolds, Northwest Jr. High School - Adult Division Poetry
Dr. Jo Ann Belk, MSU Meridian, Adult Division Essay
Annie Burns, Meridian Community College - Adult Division Short Story

Rules

Short Story: Limit (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, 2001

*Be advised, rules will change for the Review 2001 Contest. Please see Steve Owen for new rules to be released November 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

Be Published

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, 2001.

The divisions are:

Student Division, high school students 9th and 12th grade.

Adult Division, MCC students, MSU-Meridian students, and other community writers.

Submit entries to: The Literary Review Contest, Atten.: Steve Owen, 910 Highway 19 North, Meridian, MS 39307.

MERIDIAN COMM. COLL. LIBRARY



3876000065660

Meridian Community College Library
910 Highway 19 North
Meridian, MS 39307

GAYLORD M

MERIDIAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

910 Highway 19 North • Meridian, MS
1-800-MCC-THE-1 • www.mcc.cc.ms.us

Meridian Community College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion or age in admission or access to, or treatment or employment in its programs and activities. Compliance with Section 504 and Title IX is coordinated by Dr. Tommy McDonald, vice president for student services, 910 Highway 19 North, Meridian, MS 39307. 1-601-484-8622; fax: 1-601-484-8607; email: tmcdonal@mcc.cc.ms.us