



LITERARY REVIEW

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MERIDIAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE LITERARY REVIEW

2003

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Defunct

Mary Kathryn Covert

my love made perfect
the addictions and overconfidence
naked flaws
as a child– incapable of reason

in my tirade of vintage and ritz
superficially swanky
obsessed with sophistication
but it was never quite par

I want the bliss again
Oh euphoric ignorance!
the laughter and the passion
jaded by realism

in our circles
of pointless rendezvous
a centrifugal force
sends us spiraling back

swirling chaos of words
contriving for my demise

To Great Measures

Joseph Johnson

I have gone to extreme measures to capture the heart of “that girl,” the very unspecific girl who becomes the object of my affection. She is the girl whose attention is more valuable than life itself. As I mature, I see that many relationships are based upon childhood fantasy. Perhaps my quest for “that girl” is my hamartia. It leads me to distraction and obsession, the common symptoms of being “in love.” The evolution of love and flirtation is as curious and contrived a process as the so-called evolution of humankind. It begins quite primitively and slowly develops into a more complex and sensible form of coquetry. The picture remains as hilarious as the model describing Darwinian evolution with which we are all familiar: a monkey slowly grows into a human, a naked human, who walks erect, but never seems to fully attain dignity. That is how flirtation is.

For me, it all started on the playground. I was Robin Hood, and my sole purpose was to capture the heart of Maid Marion, Beth. Chris, my best friend who doubled as my nemesis, was Little John; he, too, was in pursuit of my fair lady. This was my first experience with competition. Had Chris not met another little girl, one of us would have faced certain death on the jungle gym. I have always done outlandish things to attract “that girl.” The adage says, “with age comes wisdom.” Poppyclock, with age comes foolishness, along with boldness, obsession, heartbreak, craziness, stupidity, romanticism, idealism, egocentrism, being “in love,” friendship, maybe a black eye here and there, and finally lasting love. The road is, indeed, long, and the means of getting on and to the end of that road are amazing.

During my early adolescence I participated in many “activities” to get a girl’s attention. I took to smoking cigarettes, grew my hair long, and paraded around in baggy pants. Once, I rode a “stunt bike” off a ten-foot wall, and, yes, I *was* knocked unconscious. I have risked bodily harm just for the attention of “that girl.”

Now that I am much older and wiser (my voice *is* deeper, I’m a little taller, and I have to shave more than once every three weeks), I have taken to more subtle methods of attracting the opposite sex. For example, I recently stood on a table in a crowded restaurant and sang “happy birthday” in my most operatic voice. I was sober, by the way. It is funny how love fuddles the mind and good judgement.

My favorite and most recent act of lunacy occurred just before “she” left for college. At two o’clock, on

the morning of June 29, 2002, I sneaked to her house and scribbled in sidewalk chalk on her driveway as we had done together when we were younger. I did not write my name or draw a funny picture; I wrote the phrase *carpe diem*.

That phrase had been the force behind our existence. I was leaving behind an age of platonic relationships and delving into something that resembled love more closely than anything I had ever experienced.

As I learn, my pursuit of love is becoming less of a fatal flaw. Love is no longer a perversion of lust to me. It is something that, though I do not fully understand, I want. I am beginning to understand that love encompasses everything; it is something as big as the sky. Love is not simply the pursuit of “that girl,” but the understanding of and the friendship with “her.” No longer do I simply long for “her” attention; rather, I am content. I know, for now, that friendship and faith are enough. But, I still walk like an ape. No matter how refined and mature I become, I grunt at the sight of “that girl,” and when she sees me, one would have no trouble believing that evolution had never begun.



Invitation

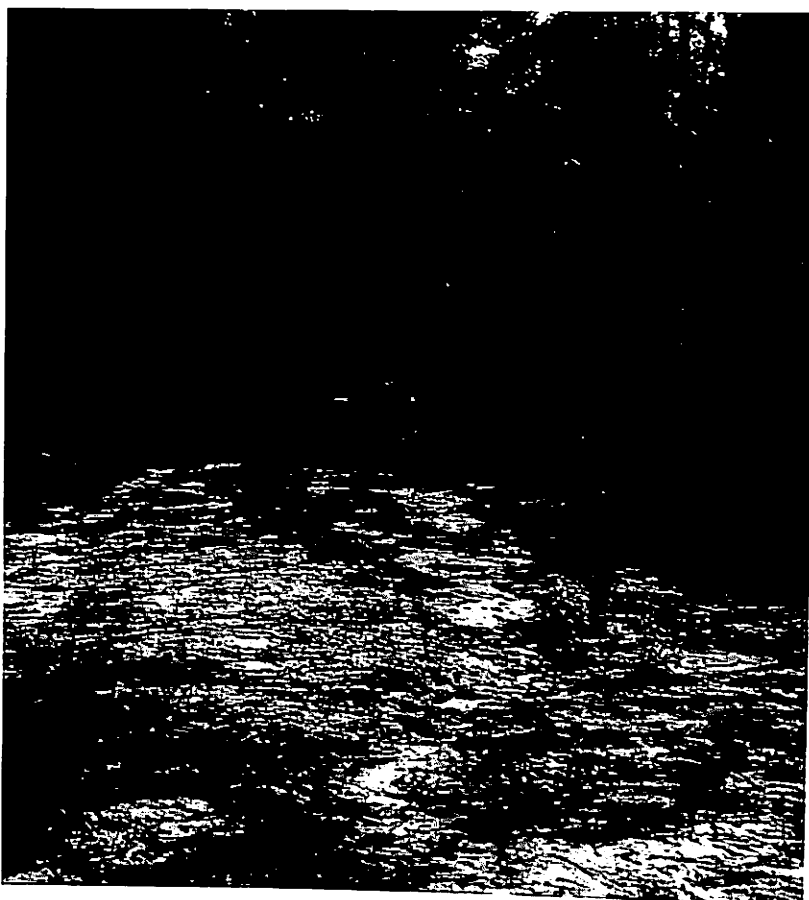
Katie Snowden

Come down the old, dark path with me,
from the days of our childhood,
to the place where we first met.

Skip past the old, tall oak with me,
where we carved our names,
on the place where we first kissed.

Run in the old meadow with me;
let's dance with the butterflies.
Then to the place where we were married.

Finally, return to the old hill with me,
overlooking the sea,
to the place where we are now laid to rest.





"Let's Play"

Cynthia Gibbons

The spider said, "Let's play!"
The fly replied, "Okay."
Wings flapped.
Uh oh, trapped!
The spider's the winner.
Guess the fly is staying for dinner.

SPIRIT OF THE WIND

Linda Farmer

Crystal Brook's ankles nudged the spotted pony onward. She didn't look back, didn't care that the younger women would whisper about her as they squatted around the fire. "Dark Bear is a good man," they would say, wondering why she left. The other men might not notice at all or might pretend they didn't. Dark Bear would be silent, to save face, but he would know. She didn't care.

It didn't matter, for the moment, that the old women would later speak softly but firmly to her, admonishing her about duty, about responsibility and example. But for now, she rode away, her face to the wind and her back to them. She did not see the knowing in their eyes, the glances they exchanged that said they understood more than she realized. All she knew was that her spirit was called to be free!

Faster, faster, she nudged him! She wouldn't look back. She leaned into the wind, her face peering from between the stallion's ears, his mane and her own dark hair flapping behind them, waving a vigorous good-bye to the village and her people. No, she would only look ahead as they crossed first the grassy meadow, then the small stream, finally reaching cover as the forest began. Tomorrow she would belong to the white man's world.

The horse traveled more slowly now, but steadily, and her concentration was not on the reason for her flight but in dodging limbs, bushes, and briars. He seemed to sense her urgency and follow her command, though even she did not know exactly where they were going. They simply climbed higher and higher until the air was cool and the horse's nostrils produced smoky puffs as he faithfully obeyed. It wasn't until she finally pulled back on a fist full of his mane and the animal stopped that she allowed herself a glance over her shoulder.

Below her lay the village of her youth, the place where Dark Bear had brought her as his squaw so long ago. Smoke curled from their evening fires and while she was too far away to tell exactly, she could almost name the small groups gathering for maize cakes and pemmican by the space of time and the direction from which they came. Squaws spent an unusual amount of time with their men tonight, taking advantage of every moment. The men were with them now, but soon the hunting would begin in earnest. Sometimes they would be gone only a few days; other times, several weeks would pass between them locating a herd, the kill, and



preparing the meat and pelts for travel. Each year the hunt became more intense; buffalo grew more scarce with each season as the villages of the white man spilled onto their roaming meadows.

A moment later, the wind stirred, whispering Crystal Brook even farther up the mountain. The sun was low in the sky and stars sprinkled the heavens. Already her spirit was lighter—she felt almost free! She traveled a short distance more before coming to rest near a cleft in the mountain. A stand of nearby trees rustled, and she heard the whisper again, only louder this time. Sliding easily from the tall mount, she patted his neck and he eased toward a grassy knoll. She fairly sank under the trees and waited. Soon her own breath came slower, and she knew it was time to listen. She closed her eyes, but still they saw.

Dark Bear would be angry, but he would never hurt her. He was a good man with good aim. Her tent had more skins and furs than any other, and he had many feathers from battle. When the men gathered for sport and games, Dark Bear was among the strongest and fastest. The village trusted him and knew of his bravery by the scars he bore. But they did not know what she knew. They could not know how lonely she felt after they had shared time alone beneath the furs. His soft snoring could not silence the voice she heard afterwards, the longing for that other brave warrior who had come to her in her dreams long before Dark Bear, that voice she had run toward today and which she now heard speaking softly through the branches.

When Dark Bear proudly brought her there, Crystal Brook was young and hadn't known how to love, but it didn't matter; there wasn't time. A large herd gathered on the nearby plain, and soon afterward, he left. Dark Bear was a good man, and there was work to do. The hunt had come quickly and lasted for months, and when Dark Bear returned she gave him first a son, and then a daughter. It didn't matter then that she didn't love him; her love for her children was consuming and complete. Still, there were silent times when her mind drifted to him, to the love she didn't know how to miss because she never really had him anyway. He belonged to the tribe.

Crystal Brook pulled the colorful blanket off the stallion and lay upon it looking at the stars, smiling. She had woven this blanket recently, and its colors made her heart sing! It was very near here that she had come to find roots and berries to color the wool and to listen for his voice. No one in all the village could match Crystal Brook's colors!

She nestled into the cleft, wrapping her thick pelt around her as sleep crept up the hillside. Soon her spirit was carried to places of understanding, places she'd needed to visit for long.

Her dream took her back to when her babies were with her constantly; they nestled first at her breast and then gathered beneath her skirts. Barely past childhood herself, they had learned together from the older women how to dry the pemmican, how to fish and farm, and how to find the best clay to use for pottery. Furs were combed and tanned by her long slender fingers working steadily beside their short, pudgy ones; precious hands that she kissed and held, too tiny and weak to carry a gourd of water yet strong enough to hold her heart. At night they would gather around their fire, just as the families now did below her. After their meal, stories would be shared.

until her little ones drifted off to sleep, and Dark Bear lifted them and placed them gently onto a fur, tucking it snugly around them. He was a good man.

Now her children were grown; Night Hawk had been on his first hunt and was almost as strong as his father now. Soon, he would defeat Dark Bear at sport, and even in her sleep she cried as she saw him prepare for his first, inevitable battle. Grey Dove was older now than Crystal Brook had been when she first came to be the squaw of Dark Bear, yet to her mother, she was still a little girl. Grey Dove had been chosen as squaw for the Chief's son, High Eagle, and would soon give birth to the child who would grow up to lead their tribe one day. Dark Bear, who was a good man, was very proud indeed!

A soft thundering woke her at first light. Sleepily, she uncurled and opened one eye. It could not be thunder, for there were bright stars about the dawning sky. Still, she heard it, closer and closer, until she raised her head. Just beyond the cleft and the stand of trees she caught her first glimpse of the herd! They were huge, the woolly beasts snorting, pawing, and breathing a cloud of smoke that mingled with the morning fog and hung mustily over them.

Crystal Brook's foggy mind was forced into action. The men leaving for the hunt today were to head east, *away* from the herd; she knew this from Dark Bear. If they missed them, food would be scarce throughout the winter and the whole village would suffer. But they were so...so massive! Never before had Crystal Brook seen such strength. They roamed free, unnoticed and unafraid as she trembled close by. She knew now why the women weren't taken on the hunt. These magnificent beasts were both frightening and liberating, and though her arrow could fell a buck she'd never attempt this.

For an hour, it seemed, she watched them graze as the sun slowly illuminated the herd, then the hilly plain, and far in the distance, her destination. It stretched before her, that place which called to her from beyond the dots of their glowing morning fires; the exciting place of wagons and trade, of music and interesting people; the village of the white man. If she rode very hard, she could be there by sunset! But the herd stood between her and that place, just as Crystal Brook herself stood between a winter of hardship or a season of provision for her people, for her children, and for Dark Bear.

She knew what she *should* do; surely she knew what Dark Bear would do. He was a good man. She whistled softly and the stallion came. Quietly, easily, she slid onto his back. Her people slept innocently below and here, on top of the world, it seemed, lay their sustenance for winter. Beyond her lay the place of her dreams, the escape she longed for.

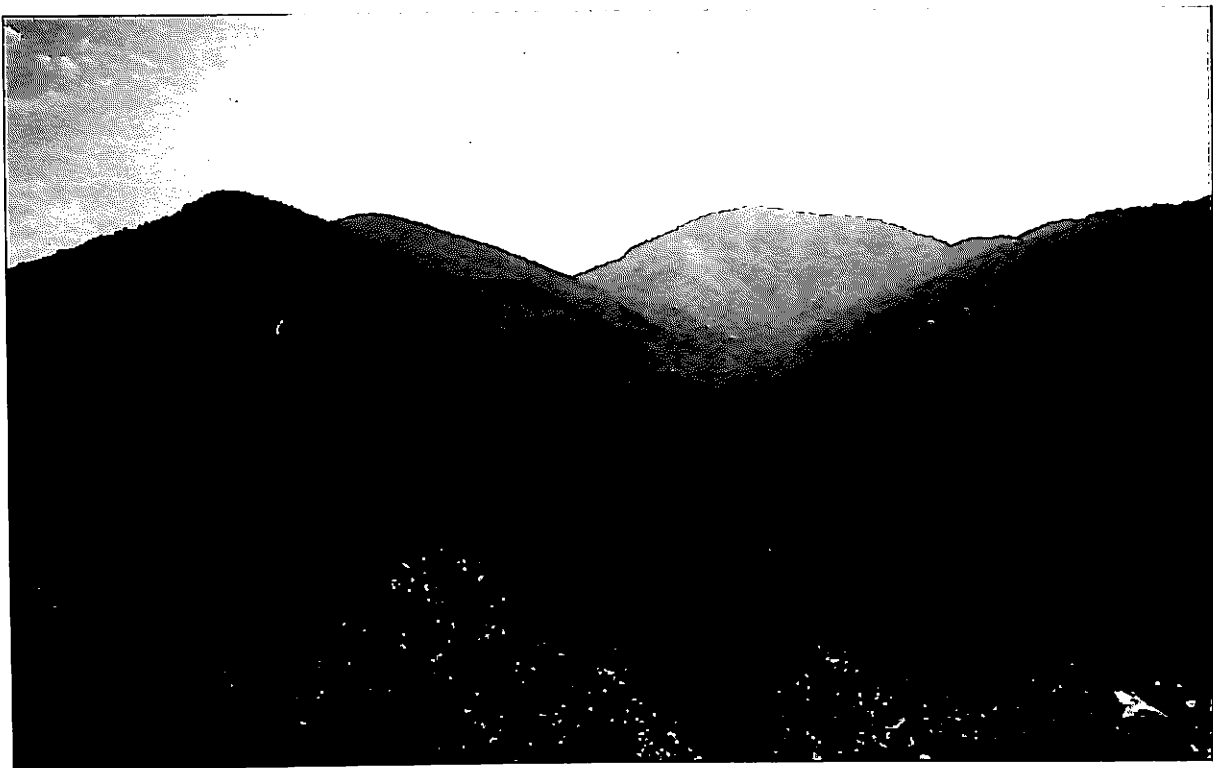
The voices she'd come there to hear were silent now, offering no direction or clue, and Crystal Brook wondered again where he was, why when she needed him most her father's spirit soared far from her. Her father was a free spirit even before he was killed in battle. He would understand her restlessness, her longing

to be free, and would tell her what to do! She'd come her to hear from him; to have him either release her from her people or urge her to stay, but her ears were as lonely as her heart.

Her pulse quickened as she grabbed her blanket and hastened the pony. I must not look back, she told herself! But as the horse rose to the top of the little cliff, he turned toward the east, rearing gently and forcing her to look below at the village she was leaving.

Suddenly and without warning, the herd startled, and one huge buffalo gazed into her eyes. His sense of knowing and depth of understanding now met her own, and instantly she knew she'd heard from her father. So long ago he'd gone! She'd last seen him the summer before she had come of childbearing age. How she longed to see him, to listen to him tell of the hunt and of battles he'd fought in long-ago wars. She wanted him to have chosen her mate; perhaps if he'd chosen Dark Bear she'd then feel his heart connected to her own and this restlessness within her calmed. She longed for him to know her children. But he was gone; at least to her eyes. Still, though she never knew when, there were times like now when she knew, really knew, his spirit was with her. And gazing into the face of the buffalo she knew in that moment that he had come to her with the answer she had been seeking, the answer she had refused to hear until now.

With a surging strength she'd never felt before, Crystal Brook gave a shrill cry, dug her heels into the pony's sides, and urged him onward! And as she traveled down the hillside toward the village to bring news of the herd, the warmth of her father's spirit drifted around her like the smoke from the fires of her home below. It was beyond her understanding, but her heart was full, though now more of love for what she had than of longing for what she might have had. Soon the camp would celebrate, and once again her heart would sing as she made provision for the ones she loved. And instead of whispers and stares, they would say, "Dark Bear is a good man, and Crystal Brook is a good squaw."



The Rim of Green Above

Pauline Busbee

There they are,
filling the valley where
I sit,
dry bones, many of them,
and very dry, the valley deep.

I stand,
move forward, stumble
over bones, dry bones...
no sinews, no flesh, no breath.

I fall,
lie upon my back like dead
for days, dry bones my bed.

I wake.
A voice is calling from
the rim of green above the valley.

I know
it is my long-quiet Muse (as
Ezekiel knew the voice he heard).

I listen.
A noise, a shaking, then the words,
These bones shall live again!

I watch
as bones come together,
bone to bone, sinews and flesh
come upon them, skin covers all.

I cry out,
"But there is no life in them!"
Once more, the voice,
I'll stir the wind.

And the wind blows
And the breath comes into them
And the bones live!



PERFECT PEACE

Richelle Putnam

Roberta gazed into her den. White on white. Clean. Fresh. Brilliant without a bedlam of colors tossed about like unrelenting stains. She ambled through the arched doorway. The scent from lilac potpourri made her stop, close her eyes, and enjoy. The air-conditioner clicked on and stirred the white sheers that resembled waterfalls cascading down each side of the picture window. White Hunter fans whirled above. She embraced herself. A huge fan twirled inside her as well, mixing emotions until they became a tangled mass. Frowning, she crouched to straighten the fringe of the thick white rug and picked up a loose fur ball. She pulled a Ziploc bag from her pocket and placed the fur ball inside as if it were a key to solving a heinous crime.

The muscles in her face relaxed. Her rapid heartbeat calmed.

Better.

Much better.

She trudged to the window, hearing her slippers shuffle across the high-gloss oak floor.

Outside, waves rushed into the sandy beach, in, out, leaving behind a jagged wet stain. In some areas, white water rolled. But in other dark silvery places it peeked out and disappeared again. If she were the ocean, only one long white roll would tumble in and leave a taut edge one could walk like a tight rope. Surges exactly the same size would reach up in unison and roar.

There were no trees to cry upon her emerald lawn. No flowers. Petals only tire and fall dead to the ground. She chose hollies and boxwoods meticulously shaped into perfect worlds.

She stared into the beam that penetrated the spotless window. Dust motes danced in the warmth. She slapped at them, but as always the obdurate little devils eluded her. “Damn nuisances,” she uttered and moved away from the light.

Quiet, peacefulness enraptured her, yet her stomach felt like an unattended blender left on high. She paced and wrung her hands. The small antique blue and white vase caught her attention and she ambled to the iron table to adjust the vase about a quarter of an inch to the right.

There.

Perfect.

Roberta glanced at her watch. Jack and their daughter, Victoria, had probably reached the Florida line, and she imagined their smiles as they told corny jokes to one another. They’d be singing to the radio. Jack would’ve bought their only child a Baby Ruth and Coke. Victoria would throw the wrapper on the floor, and Jack wouldn’t say anything. Nothing. If Victoria spilled the drink on her brand new outfit, it wouldn’t matter.

They were gone. It was for the best.

Yes.

It was.

Roberta could forget her six-year-old daughter's laughing eyes and her husband's humor.

But maybe...

She shook her head. No. No. They didn't understand her. Roberta pulled out a rag. A few tears spilled, but she wiped them before they struck the spotless floor, and then she rubbed and rubbed the iron table's dustless legs.

Roberta's eyes widened. A bright pink feather from Victoria's boa that Jack had given her had hidden itself under the couch. It trembled as if afraid. Roberta picked it up, and blew on it. It quivered even more. She thought she'd found them all, those feathers that shed like a snake's old skin and made a mess of things. While Victoria and Jack danced like restless souls, Roberta had to pick up the mess. The big mess.

The feather was soft in her hands. She closed her eyes and envisioned her husband and daughter dancing, laughing, loving so easily, and not caring what they had left behind.

"Leave it, Roberta," Jack had said. "It'll keep until tomorrow."

Roberta had wanted to. Really. But she'd shrieked, "And the next day. And the next." She had grabbed the boa and ripped it to shreds.

"Daddy! Daddy!" Victoria had screamed, Jack shielding her as if she'd needed protection.

"No more, Roberta," he'd uttered through tight lips. "I—we can't live like this anymore. It's too much. Too damn much."

And they were gone, leaving behind silence.

No.

Perfect peace.

She glided the feather across her cheek.

Soft.

Tender.

Like Jack's touch.

Like Victoria's cheek.

If she could only have them both.

Tenderness.

Order.

But they never cooperated with one another, just like Jack never cooperated with her. It was always one or the other, never both. Roberta didn't need medication.

She needed cooperation.

And what was wrong with meticulous efficiency anyway, labels turned where one could easily read them, books and tapes in alphabetical order, and clothes hung properly in designated sections—pants, shirts, dresses, jackets, and so forth?

Nothing.

Not a damn thing.

Victoria didn't need stuffed animals. They were dust catchers and ridiculously foolish, just like that feather boa. And makeup? For a six-year-old? Preposterous, and Roberta had told Jack so. And had he ever had to clean up the crumbs in Victoria's closet where she had hidden and eaten potato chips? Had he had to deal with shoes and clothes thrown carelessly into the bottom of her closet? Had he had to sit for hours watching his daughter clean out her room, and give careful instruction as to where each item should go, listening to her whine and carry on?

No.

Never.

It was always Roberta who taught their daughter responsibility and the importance of order. Never Jack. She pulled out the Ziploc bag and dropped the pink feather in.

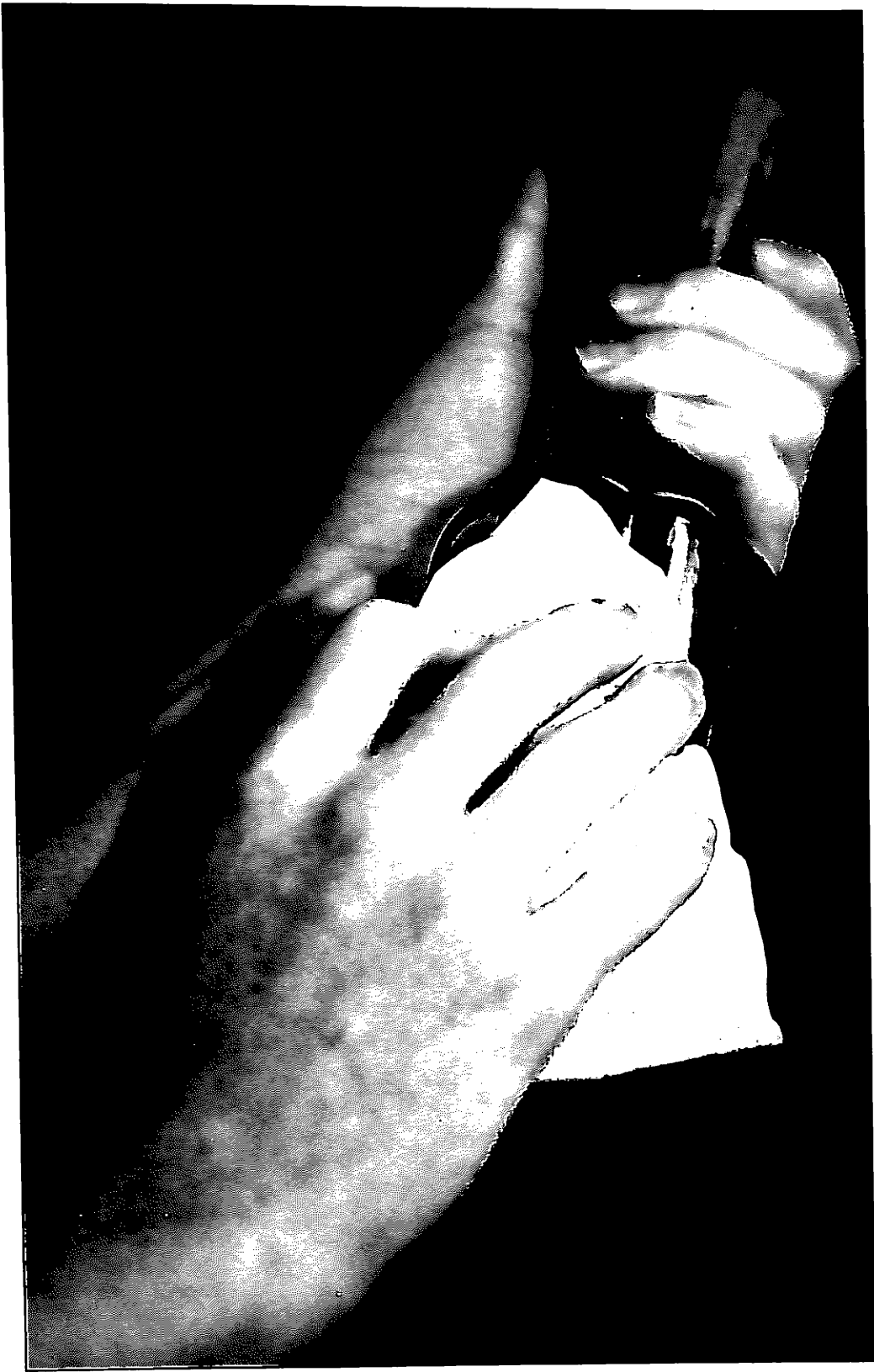
There.

That's better.

No.

Perfect.

The end



To Be a Child

Amanda Carroll

Know what it is to be a child—
To see a world in a single grain of sand.
To find a miracle in the palm of a hand.

Look through the eyes of a child,
To see life in a tiny seed
And beauty even in a weed.

A tiny glimpse of a child's mind
Where the imagination is a powerful thing.
Become a hero fighting dragons or one of Arthur's knights.
Fly through a fairy kingdom or live a pirate's life.

A child's heart, so strong and true
Yet so innocently returns to
A place where dreams are just paths that haven't been walked,
And caring and love are more than just thoughts.

A child...
A tiny life in a great big world.
Each one wonderful and unique,
Born with wishes and dreams they seek.
Each one special in his own way,
Born to make a difference in the world today.

Now that's what it is to be a child.



Choosing Life

Robby Followell

Life, as we know it, is a conglomeration of happiness, anger, celebrations, tragedy, excitement, depression and much more. Our earthly existence, our life, is drawing nearer and nearer to its end with every breath we take. Despite this definite mortality, it is so beneficial for one to consider life as a privilege rather than a right. It would make sense for our modern society to understand this concept more than any other because of the widespread life inhibitors that seem so prevalent in our society today, but it does not take much to realize that we are frivolous in our appreciation for life and treat it with little respect. In striving to develop a mind set of this nature, it has been easy to recognize that the heart-wrenching and joy-bringing opportunity of life is unquestionably the best gift I have ever received. This gift was a privilege to acquire, a challenge to form, and proves continually to be an opportunity to make of it whatever I desire.

The high risk of pregnancy complications, abortions, and birth disorders can make the possibility of starting a new life seem like a humongous feat. Nevertheless, when this feat is overcome, the obvious result is a new life. The stages of human development are categorized by drastically different characteristics and infancy has its definite share of such peculiarities. At the time of my birth, my life belonged primarily to my parents. I was in no way responsible and had little control over my actions—yet as a helpless infant I was still considered a precious gift...by some. I depended solely upon my parents and lived completely for them while their lives, accordingly, centered around my well-being.

The beginning of my elementary education marked a time when I began making decisions that allowed me to form, create, and recreate myself. Because my elementary years involved a home schooled education, I was able to create an academic foundation while still revolving my life around the home and my family. This gift of life was a fresh and an intriguing source of fascination to me. As middle school came and I entered a traditional school setting, my life began to transform in many ways. Besides the obvious changes of becoming a teenager, I began developing my character, personality, and a newly-formed spiritual commitment. I grew as a person and began to cherish the gift of life I had only begun to discover and understand.

Recently, at a point in my life when I began to think that I had things figured out, life took a “wrong” turn. This turn led not only myself but a seemingly close family down a path of disjointedness because of the effects of divorce. Because of my dad’s occupation as a Baptist minister, castigations were voiced, depressing times hit hard, and life, a forgotten gift, had become nothing more to me than a series of horrible events. I began to hate this gift. However, these events took me to depths of questioning and self-realization that I had not yet even discovered. I began to respect my life for the experiences it had brought my way: experiences that tested, challenged, and strengthened me in immeasurable ways. I now realize that this gift is not limited to the confines of the “now” but may be transformed and used however I choose.

The opportunity of life is afforded to all, rejected by some, and a gift to whomever chooses to live its full potential. In infancy, I did not understand the significance of making decisions that would positively impact my life. In the early parts of my education I was using my life only for surface reasons, not understanding the fullness of the gift I possessed. Although still learning, I now strive to use this gift for the benefit of myself, and to the aid of others. My life has been the greatest gift I have ever received because it transcends the materialistic, superficial, futile “gifts” of the world and allows its recipient to do with it whatever he or she could possibly imagine. With constant effort I now not only realize, but make it my goal to choose a life worth living.



That Girl

Lauren Hughes

Where is the girl I used to be?
Where, oh where did she go?
That sweet, innocent virgin.
That simple, trusting soul.

I left her in a field of flowers,
Where she stopped to dance in the sun.
I left her laughing, daisies in her hair,
Her eyes reflecting all that spring had done.

She was the girl who climbed the trees,
Who jumped headfirst into the creek.
She ran full speed, tripped and fell,
Then laughed as she got to her feet.

She dared the world to make her cry,
Then forgot each time it had.
She smiled and giggled over all the good times,
She always forgot to remember the bad.

She ran wild through every turn of the season.
Her warm smile— a memory of sunlight.
Her laughter was echoed by every babbling brook,
And her eyes shone like the stars at night.

She was a princess in a kingdom of light.
With rose-colored glasses through which to see.
Wizards, unicorns, faeries, and Santa Claus:
These were the things she knew to believe.

She is the girl we all left far behind,
The memory that makes us stop and pick a flower.
The little voice that reminds us to live our life,
When we forget in our rush to get from hour to hour.

So when you feel like tearing out your hair,
Grab up your planner and rip the day's page away.
Go back to that daisy field and grab her hand,
And remember who you were— if only for a day.



Salome! Salome!

Ann Taylor

On that horrible day in Judea at King Herod's palace, I was surrounded by people, slaves, servants, family, guests, even children, but there was no one to help me. A child, lost and alone and frightened, I could not allow myself to think or feel because it was too hideous. Terrified I was, yet I wanted to preserve my life. Propelled by shock and fear, I did not know how not to do what I had to do. No one had taught me about simple human kindness - I didn't know about personal responsibility.

I remember when I was a tiny child and we lived in a house in the city of Rome. Sometimes my father would come to my mother's apartments. My room faced the atrium, and there was a high window. My father would often ride in the late afternoon, and I would hear the equestrian sounds of his arrival as his entourage dismounted. He would stride through the garden toward my room, reaching up to the high window, and tapping lightly with his riding crop. I would run to the door waiting for him to open it and scoop me up in his strong arms, swinging me high into the air! Always he would say, "Salome! Salome! My beautiful princess of the shining curls and the sparkling eyes and the happy smile! Are those pearls in your mouth? Open up, let's count how many!"

I would laugh with delight and pat my father's whiskery cheeks with my little hands! He was big and warm and he smelled of horses and leather! I loved him so!

One day my mother and I left the house in Rome with the garden and the high window. No one told me we were going away to live in Judea. I wanted my father. He didn't even say goodbye! My deprivation was painful and urgent! I thought he didn't have a place to sleep. I thought he didn't know where I was and he was sad! I missed him so! I needed him so!

But Shira came into my life. From an ancestry of sheep herding dogs, she couldn't bark because of an accident to her throat. My older cousin, Aphrodite, told me that my mother, Herodias, probably caused it because she had a swift foot that would kick anything human or animal that got in her way.

Shira chose to belong to me and her devotion was absolute. She slept beside my bed and when I went to the nursery kitchen for my meals, she laid at my feet under the table while I ate. I might have thought she was there for the food I slipped her from my dish, but I remember that if they put her out of my room, she would lie patiently outside the door and doze until the opportunity came for her to reenter.

And if I cried, Shira would come and lick my tears away. I often smothered my sobs in her fur until I fell asleep, my arms holding her, my little fingers twisted in her ruff.

I was growing up. One day I was summoned to appear at the apartments of my mother's new husband, King Herod. An attendant led me to the door and knocked. I stood there feeling very small and insignificant until my mother flung open the door and looked at me, motioning with her hand for me to enter.

The king did not look at me. He reclined at his table, chewing thoughtfully, his eyes following every movement of my mother. "Herodias, I'm not interested in seeing children! Come here and sit close to me!"

My mother stopped her restless pacing. Sitting on the floor beside him, she pulled grapes from a vine in a bowl on the table. As she fed him the grapes, he nibbled and sucked on her fingers. Stopping suddenly, he said, "I've been hearing about that street preacher, John, the one they call the Baptist. Actually, I've heard him myself! He speaks with conviction and his words are compelling. He has a great following of the people. He has been telling them that it is wrong for me to have my brother's wife."

My mother was furious. "You should have him killed! Will you tolerate his foul words? You are the king! You can do anything you wish!" Rising to her knees, she looked deeply into his eyes, lowering her lips until they were full upon his mouth.

King Herod stood up, pulling my mother into his arms. "I know that John has a very large following and the people listen to his words. They believe he is a prophet from God. Rome will not help me if the people rise up against me! They would be most happy to be rid of Judea's rightful ruler." His hand rubbed along her thigh. "But come, darling. I'll have him arrested and put into the dungeon. We shall see what follows."

Returning to my room feeling lost and confused and wondering about the man called John the Baptist, I wished I could hear him talk. Perhaps he was a prophet of God. But who was God?

I had Shira until I became a teenager. It was my birthday and I had grown into a voluptuous young woman, slender and graceful. A natural dancer, I had learned the routines well. I could perform the movements of the dance gracefully and seductively. Dancing enabled me to express myself.

The birthday of the king it also happened to be, and my mother arranged a huge party with clowns and ponies and games. All the wealthy Roman citizens, as well as the important men of Judea, were invited to the party along with their families. There would be ices flavored with fruit and anise and chocolate. Relay runners would bring the ice from the mountains and the cooks would have the sweet delicate flavors ready as they arrived panting and sweating and thirsty. But Shira would not be there.

On the day before the celebration, I answered the door and my mother swept into the room. "Where is that dog?" Always vigilant, Shira had been careful to disappear whenever Herodias entered my room at King Herod's palace. I said, "What dog, Mother?" She answered me angrily. "The one who is always with you, Salome! You don't need an animal following you about!"

My mother began lifting draperies, curtain and looking under furniture. Shira hadn't a chance. With the help of an attendant, a young slave, my Shira was dragged from her hiding place and taken out of my room, silent except for the scream I saw in her eyes as the door closed. I never saw her again.

Helplessly, I turned away from the door, listening to my mother giving instructions about what to wear and when to appear in the state banquet hall for the party the next evening.

That night I crept into my bed exhausted, missing my Shira's joyful bound when I came into the room, missing her goodnight licks on my face. I sobbed into my pillow, and in my dreams there were many shadows, vague and frightening.

With early morning sunlight streaming through the window, I awoke with a vague uneasiness, remembering that my mother had told me she would come to my room with something to wear, a dance costume that had arrived from Greece a few weeks ago. Rubbing my eyes and stretching, not allowing myself to think of my dreams or the events of the day before, I clapped for a servant to bring my bath. The hairdresser had just finished an elaborate style of curls and ribbons when I heard my mother's knock at the door.

Herodias swept into the room followed by an attendant holding a shimmering silver dance costume folded across her outstretched arms. I liked to adorn myself with beautiful clothing and that gauzy, revealing bit of fabric intrigued me. I wanted to wear it so badly I was afraid. I reached out with one finger to touch it, but casting down my eyes I whispered, "I don't want to dance tonight, Mother. I don't feel well."

"Worse you'll feel before this night is over, my child." She touched my shoulder very gently and held my chin in her hand, turning my face to look into my eyes. "Hmm. You are very beautiful, Salome, and you are a younger version of myself! Ah, yes! You will dance and he will do whatever you ask of him." Abruptly, looking satisfied, she left my room.

Later in the evening, I was summoned to the banquet hall where King Herod reclined with my mother close beside him. They were joking and laughing uproariously when I entered. I could see that the wine was flowing freely among the guests.

I stood at the table near the king, waiting, once again feeling very small and insignificant. My mother rose and clapped her hands for attention as a flutist entered through the curtains at one side of the banquet hall.

"I looked at the vastness of the night
sky over Judea with its
brilliant twinkling
stars. I thought of
the faithfulness
and devotion
of my little
dog. I
thought of
the father
I had lost
so long ago
and the
warmth and
safety and
delight of his
love. I
thought of
the man
who had lost his
head because of
my request and
I wondered if
he had
children,
perhaps a
little girl
who loved
him. I
thought of
the world
so full of
cruelty
and
violence
and
pain,
desperate
need
and
I

I wondered. How did it make any sense?"



At the first haunting strains of the flute, my mother announced that I would dance.

Listening to the music, I opened my arms, flowing gracefully into the movements. Losing myself in the haunting melody and the rhythm of the dance, I forgot everything else. To the plaintive tones of the flute, I floated like a butterfly drifting in a sundrenched meadow full of blossoms. When the soft, lonely strains ended, I dropped breathless into a final graceful bow before the king.

For a long moment the room was hushed. As the guests broke into applause, King Herod stepped toward me offering his hand. Rising gracefully, I heard his voice, "Beautiful! Enchanting! Salome! Salome! How can I reward you? Tell me what you wish! I'll give it to you! Up to half of my kingdom! Salome, tell me your heart's desire!"

What was my wish? What was the desire of my heart? Could the king restore my father and the years we had lost? Could I have the warmth and affection once again of my lost little dog? Would somebody love me?

I looked at my mother. With a cloying smile at Herod, she took a large serving platter from a passing servant, shifting it so that the large roast of mutton it contained thudded onto the floor. She held my eyes. "Salome, you want the head of John the Baptist! Tell him you want it on this platter!"

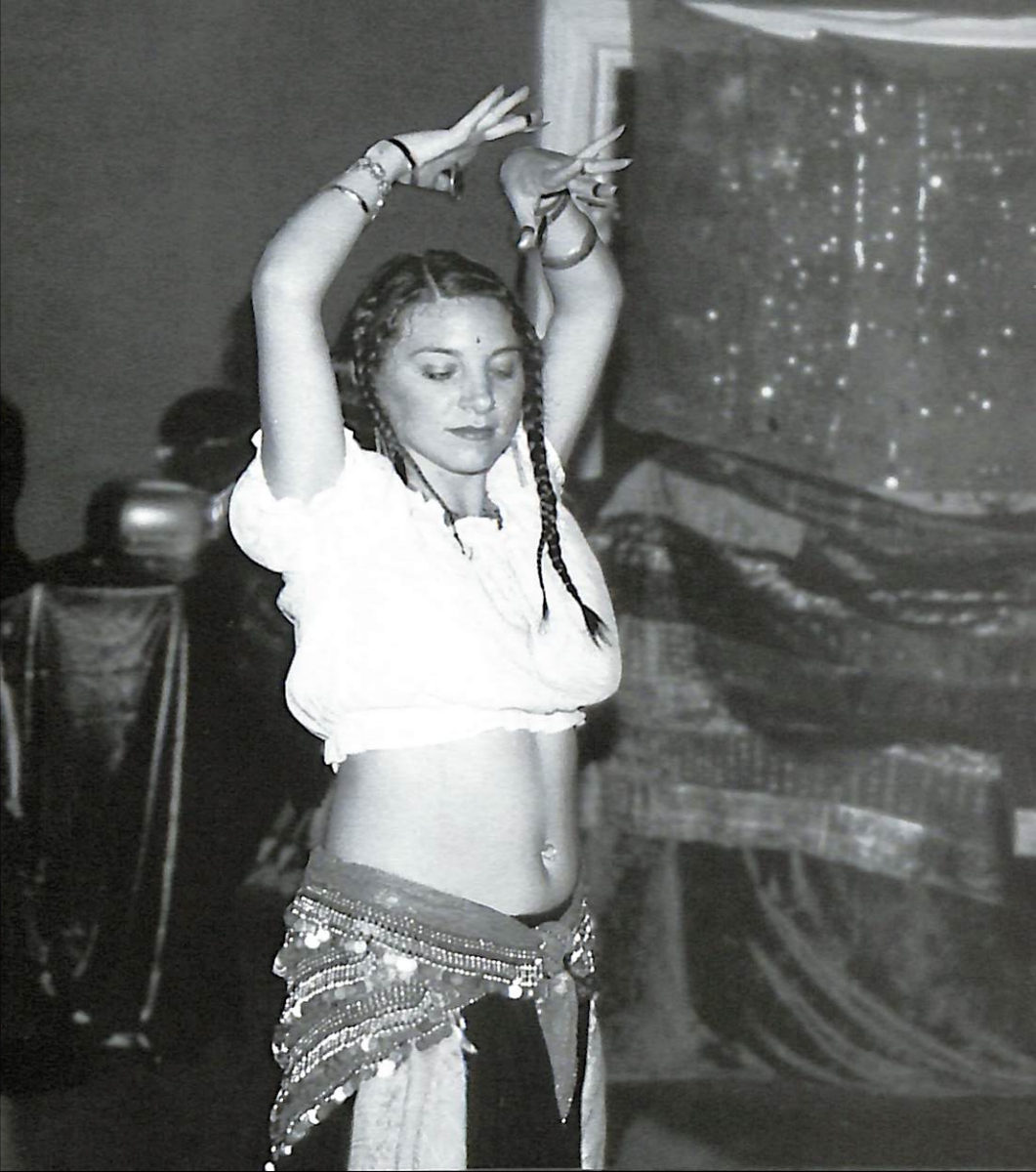
The king realized he had been tricked. His face suddenly lost its joviality. I could see that he was distressed, but he couldn't back down. Too many people had witnessed his oath to me. And my mother stood there smiling at him.

I took the platter from my mother. Raising my eyes to look directly at the king, I said, "Bring me the head of John the Baptist on this platter."

He sent a servant to fetch the executioner and in less than an hour I was handed the same dish on which lay the severed head of a man.

Calmly, I stood to receive my reward. Calmly, I carried it to the banquet table at which my mother reclined. I set the platter down in front of her. Then I turned and walked out into the garden, alone and in shock.

I looked at the vastness of the night sky over Judea with its brilliant twinkling stars. I thought of the faithfulness and devotion of my little dog. I thought of the father I had lost so long ago and the warmth and safety and delight of his love. I thought of the man who had lost his head because of my request and I wondered if he had children, perhaps a little girl who loved him. I thought of the world so full of cruelty and violence and pain and desperate need and I wondered. How did it make any sense?





Raindrops

Laura Carmichael

Oh, what delight raindrops bring!
When I see them on water, I long to sing
of the days as a kid when I laughed and played.
In rain I danced and in creeks I stayed.

Oh, what sorrow raindrops imply!
When I see them on water, I long to cry
about that awful day I lost my friend.
In rain on the road came her tragic end.

Oh, what intrigue raindrops bear!
When I see them on water, I long to stare
and imagine what they will soon encase.
In the rain will be more memories to embrace.

Reviewing

Russell Morgan, (Alumni Contributor)

Former editor of the Review, Russell Morgan, is now an “old-timer.” Remembering by-gone days here at MCC, he reflects on his love of writing and his fond memories of the time when he wrote “teen angst” poetry...

Back in the days when disco was just beginning to die a grudging and gaudy death, I was editor of the Review. The year was 1982 and though most college literary magazines were fixated on the recent invention of movable type, we were blazing literary trails through the tar pits of torpidity, the alkali deserts of banality, and the campy garage sales of teen angst poetry. Then, as now, I was too dependent on tortured metaphors and strained hyperbole. However, 1982 was a good year for me, and I blame owe that in large part to my stint as editor of the Review. It gave me the confidence I sorely lacked and, more importantly, it gave me a literary outlet, a faucet if you will, a conduit . . . in fact, an entire warehouse of literary plumbing fixtures that would help me plumb my way through the next twenty years. That is why even today, my “3D Pipes” screensaver is the most productive piece of software I own.

My stint on the Review changed my life. Under the guidance of Mr. Owen, what was previously a little hobby that elicited no end of “that’s cute” reviews from forbearing relatives, became instead a passion that is unabated to this day. Though I chose a career in engineering for the financial stability and the creativity that it provided (albiet highly structured creativity), writing has always been my first love, and it is what I do when I have a few spare minutes and access to a pen or a word processor. It is what I do to relax. It is what I do to vent. It’s what I do when my boss isn’t looking. While my co-workers are surreptitiously surfing eBay looking for vintage 70’s slide rules or Johnny Cash 8-Track tapes, I am furtively typing out fragments (or perhaps figments) of a great American novel for my own amusement. Even though these shards of a novel often turn into the stuff that Reader’s Digest “All in a Day’s Work” rejects are made of, I still enjoy them a great deal. And it’s a lot cheaper than Paxil®. (As an aside, we didn’t have Paxil® in 1982.) All we had was Mad Dog 20/20, and though its mood-altering properties can be debated, its contributions to teen angst poetry cannot be underestimated, as in the following:

void

of nothing

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REVIEW LITERARY CONTEST WINNERS

High School Division

Poetry

1st Place— “Defunct”

by Mary Kathryn Covert (Meridian High School)

2nd Place— “The Circle of Life”

by Samantha Brooks (Meridian High School)

3rd Place— “Night Falls”

by Matthew Beau Nicholson (Meridian High School)

Honorable Mention— “We Must Go On”

by Katie Snowden (Meridian High School)

Honorable Mention— “Ordinary Poem”

by Erin Reynolds (Meridian High School)

Short Story

1st Place— “Baskets, the River and Sign Language”

by Elaine Allen (Northeast Lauderdale High School)

2nd Place— “Manipulating the Shadows”

by Alexander Scott Cofield (Meridian High School)

3rd Place— “The Thing with Cooties”

by Richard Noble (Meridian High School)

Essay

1st Place— “Choosing Life”

by Robby Followell (Meridian High School)

2nd Place— “Should School Uniforms Be Required?”

by Elaine Allen (Northeast Lauderdale High School)

REVIEW LITERARY CONTEST WINNERS | *MCC & Community Division*

Poetry

- 1st Place— “That Girl”
by Lauren Hughes
- 2nd Place— “The Rim of Green Above”
by Pauline Simmons Busbee
- 3rd Place— “Darkness and Light”
by Amanda Carroll
- Honorable Mention — “11:47”
by John Irby

Short Story

- 1st Place— “Spirit of the Wind”
by Linda Farmer
- 2nd Place— “Only a Leaf”
by John Boudier
- 3rd Place— “Foreshadows of Danger”
by Laura Carmichael
- Honorable Mention— “An Icy Betrayal”
by Cynthia Gibbons

Essay

- 1st Place— “To Great Measures”
by Joseph Johnson
- 2nd Place— “Death of Immortality”
by Lauren Hughes
- 3rd Place— “Does Faith Leave Room for Science?”
by Donna Key
- Honorable Mention— “Memories”
by Flora Conner-Sumrall

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2003

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"I love the South because it helps me remember. It helps me know who I am. When I am there, it haunts me that all my people—my great-grandparents, my grandfather and grandmother, my aunts and uncles, my father—lie close by in the dark. 'Be with me,' my father whispered to me when he was dying. I am aware that I am among them and that they will always be with me."

*—Willie Morris
from A Southern Album*



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