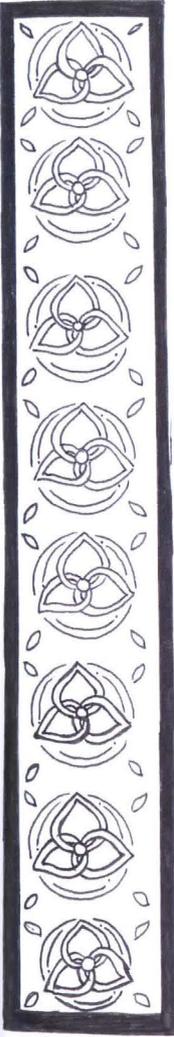




The Traveler



The TRAVELER

Volume 47, 2014

The Traveler is a student creative arts magazine produced annually by the English and Art Departments of Glendale Community College.

Those responsible for this publication believe in artistic freedom of expression. Therefore, we have not censored the content of The Traveler. It is important that the readers of The Traveler be aware that some of its contents are of an adult nature.

The designers of The Traveler volume 47 have chosen a theme of growth. Utilizing the centuries old "Book of Kells" and Celtic symbols as inspiration to represent this idea. The classical design produced by the Celts speaks to inherent ideas of growth and life forces. This representation of growth embodies the concept of why the individual goes to college or pushes forward in life, to grow into who they believe themselves to be. That is why The Traveler of 2014 encourages the prospect of "Growth" by displaying the works of those who have embraced this idea.

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Fiction

A REVOLUTION OF DANCING



ou need to get up mijo ,” Kika repeated for the fourth time that morning.

Joseph laid face down on his bed all summer, not quite crying - he was too proud for that deep a display of emotion - but stuck in the despair between uncontrollable tears and nihilistic numbness.

“Andale, Joseph. A comer chamaco,” Kika, his grandmother, instructed, yanking off the tattered zarape that Joseph had haphazardly thumbtacked over the blinds so the sunlight would leave him to suffer. She stood in her pajamas arms crossed the sun bleeding through the blinds behind her, eyeing Joseph with a stern compassion. The light created a matrix of lines around her like a deconstructed halo. The expression on her shadowed face was the same mask she wore every time they did this dance.

“Abuela I told you give me some time, and I’ll be ok, I promise,” repeated Joseph, for what seemed like the hundredth time. Every day, she would go through the same motions of opening his curtains and imparting reassuring words, hoping to jostle him out of his funk. It may have been the way the light shone behind her, the position of the sun at that particular moment, or perhaps

she had grown weary of the breakfast growing cold, but something gave her the strength to stop coddling him.

“No more cabrón , levantate , bañate y cambiate! And shave, pareces un pinché oso !” she said, throwing a towel, socks, underwear and a razor as she said each word. Joseph could not hold back his smile when she said oso the name she used to call his grandfather, who didn’t resemble a bear at all. His grandfather, Jesus, was six feet tall and 170 pounds, a wiry, leather-skinned, man with sparse hair and humorous eyes. Every winter he would grow a beard to keep his face warm, or at least that’s what he said. Joseph remembered his grandmother playfully swatting Jesus’ face away when he would get drunk off tepache kissing her with his scraggly facial hair reeking of liquor. How she would wake him up when he passed out on the porch by pulling the grey hairs out of his moustache, laughing when he woke up feigning fury. How last winter before he died she would comb his beard as he slept in his narcotic coma before his liver finally gave out.

Joseph remembered his grandfather, helpless and emaciated. His skin, blotchy from cirrhosis, was dry and cracked. His beard wild and completely grayed. His chapped lips were unable to speak as he lay, waiting to die. His bright eyes dimmed not

just from pain but seeing the hurt his family had to endure for his reckless living. How his suffering wasn't his alone but something parceled to everyone he loved.

Joseph thought and watched his grandmother standing strong, tears pooling in her eyes, as if she too were envisioning Jesus lying in his bed waiting to die. Then they both thought of Carmen, Joseph's mother, and preferred to stop thinking at all.

Joseph rolled over, his consciousness teetering toward the gravity of sleep. He blinked back into lucidity and yelled as his grandmother shut the door behind her, "Ay voy."

Ten minutes later Joseph came down the stairs, still unshaven wearing the zarape he had been using as curtain and a pair of moccasins he purchased on the Indian reservation last winter. Kika saw his reflection in the glass of the coffee pot and chuckled to herself. He always used to dress ridiculously. In the early nineties he would wear cowboy boots, shorts and a red Michael Jackson jacket with a dozen zippers every day to school. His mother encouraged his strange ensembles despite Jesus' reproaching. She would explain to her father that she was fostering his artistic side and argue about how her upbringing had stifled hers.

Jesus wasn't raised compassionate and always had difficulty dealing with his daughter's emotions. For him a good life involved having children, food on the table and most of all laughter. While Carmen and her father shared a sense of humor, he had no patience when she decided she wanted to be a photographer. Kika always regretted not standing up for Carmen, not allowing her to become the woman she was meant to be. By the time she realized that, it was too late.

"Quiéres café?" Kika asked with her back to Joseph so he wouldn't notice the tears that ached to fall.

"Yes please." Joseph decided that his Grandmother didn't deserve any more suffering, and his depression was causing her pain. If she could deal with the loss of her daughter and now her husband then he needed to man up and be strong. He stared into the coffee cup as the milk danced into a whirlpool. "I think I'm going to go see Carlos today and ask for my job back, or look for something else. I'll shave and change before I go."

"Esperate," Kika said as she placed her hands on his arm. "Don't change, mejor mañana." She had a key in her hand that she removed from the cupboard when she grabbed the coffee mugs. "Your abuelo left you this. It's for a safety deposit box at the credit union. Go see what he left for you, and take care of those other things tomorrow." She hardened her face, but the wrinkles in



her eyes couldn't hide the kindness. There was something else buried beyond the pain and age, a sweet knowledge that Joseph was barely noticing.

"What's in there?" Joseph said hoping to uncover the knowing in her eyes. "It's not like abuelo had anything. All his valuables are in the shed." He smiled at her, and she laughed. Jesus would've become a hoarder had Kika allowed it, but instead, she restricted his treasure hunts to one weekend a month. All his discoveries and speculations and hopes were packed into a shed he built in the backyard. "Maybe he found something worth money and never told you."

"There are many things more precious than money, mijo, and a lot you didn't know about your abuelo." Her eyes gleamed again.

"Ok, ok. Let me put on a shirt."

"No. Go now andale!" Kiki gave him a little shove.

"Abuela, wait. I look ridiculous," he said, noticing his absurd outfit in the mirror behind the kitchen table.

"Please. Go now."

He felt an intuition that he had been numb to for the last few months. Instead of letting his brain explain it away, he followed his instinct. "Ok I'm going."

He kissed his grandmother, grabbed his sunglasses from the counter and walked out the door into the steadily warming autumn afternoon. He hadn't been outside for a few weeks, and the slight breeze was soothing, like an invisible arm around the shoulder. Yet as good as the wind and sunlight felt, inside, he was conflicted. Joseph wasn't sure he wanted to know what was in the box. What did she mean when she said there was a lot he didn't know about his grandfather? Jesus was a fair man, and hilarious, but he had a dark side. Joseph couldn't help but feel that whatever he had gone to so much effort to hide was part of that secret life. Joseph didn't want the responsibility of knowing that, or worse; of having to tell his grandmother about it.

The speculations were rolling around in his head while he walked past the lofts and storefronts that lined the downtown streets leading to the credit union. A small brownstone coffee shop adjacent to the credit union had its door open, and the deep, eye-opening aroma of roasted coffee lingered on the sidewalk where Joseph passed. The fragrance stopped him for a moment, and a loud voice spilled out of the dark space inside.

"Make art that matters! That demands to be made! That breeds from necessity! Art that's both didactic and sexy!" A tall skinny guy with glasses and a huge head of hair was yelling into a microphone on a tiny stage inside the empty shop. "The best art is art that asks who we are, that guides to the glorious discovery of ourselves and our divinity!"

Behind the counter an attractive woman with purple hair was leaning on the counter towards the speaker, smiling and staring attentively.

Meanwhile, the man continued with increasing passion. Joseph walked in, partially to put off what he had to do, partially because of a visceral intrigue. "Make your art reflective, a mirror of the world you see. Ask yourself if your art doesn't just say something but if it speaks!" He sat at a small table nearest the exit and let the poet continue as the woman from behind the counter approached with a menu and glass of water.

"Hi! How's it?" The woman asked setting down the glass of water and noticing Joseph's focus on the words spilling from the tiny stage.

"Let your art breathe into the souls of the eyes and dance with the spirits of its observers like quantum particles! Let your colors become sounds vibrating the very being of the audience! Let your pens soak up experiences and drip with emotions! Let them move and groove with intuition and dance in your hands, because who knows what cosmic vibrations are motivating our movements?" The poet continued his energy building.

"I'm ok. Who's he?" Joseph was amazed at the vigor of the performance since until he stepped in, the man on stage was pouring his heart out to the empty chairs and nicely folded napkins.

"He's my husband, Paolo. I'm Joelle and this is our new shop." She motioned with her hand across the empty room. "Thank you so much for coming in. Would you like some coffee?"

"No thanks. Who's he performing for?"

"Your next piece could be prophecy! Give your brushes melodies and manifest the beautiful singing voice of its textures. Give your strokes warmth and depth. Mix your color with spit and sweat blood and love, massaging the intellect, arousing the spirit so every layer of paint bleeds your beliefs and ideology!" Paolo spat ecstatically, his hands waving to give the words punch. Joelle waited a moment before explaining.

"For me of course!" She said laughing exuberantly. "Well only when he's reading the really good stuff. He would probably say he was ministering the wind, or clamoring to the sun but really," she whispered the last part, "he's up there for you." She was looking at him deeply and unwaveringly, which made Joseph uncomfortable. When he had the courage to look away Paolo the poet was looking at him the same way.

"Make your art personal! We want to know who you are. What makes you cry and laugh. What turns you on and makes you angry, because we all relate to your humanity, but we're interested in your individuality." The words were raucous but winding down like the crescendo of a symphony, the poet's voice slowing and quiet-

ing as he rounded out to the end. "We need challenges! Confrontations with the beautiful and ugly because life is both those things and so much more simultaneously and infinitely changing. Demonstrate this constant evolution in all your creative endeavors!" Paolo concluded breathing heavily and sweating profusely. His wife clapped loudly, grabbing Joseph by the shoulder.

"That was great right? Good job, babe. You managed to rope one in." She said holding up Joseph's hand. He was shaken by her friendliness but more shocked by the words swimming in his consciousness.

"Hey man, thanks for coming in," the poet said, approaching with his hand extended.

"That was awesome man. I've never really heard anything like that." Joseph shook Paolo's hand.

"Well, I hope not. I just wrote it today. Did you get anything out of it?" Paolo asked hopefully. He pulled out the chair facing Joseph and sat down, peering into him.

Joseph had been confused when he walked in, and now, he was more perplexed than ever. "It was really, well, good, but I'm not sure what I could get out of it. What do you mean?"

"I mean you're an artist, so what did you think of my manifesto?"

Joseph took a long drink from his glass of water. "I'm not an artist. Honestly, I don't know shit about poetry or anything like that. I was just on my way to the bank next door and by coincidence..."

"You're not an artist?" Joelle asked rhetorically. She looked at her husband and they both looked Joseph up and down. "Well, you sure look like one." She smiled encouragingly.

"Of course he's an artist! That's the entire point!" Paolo stood up placed his hands on the table and leaned towards Joseph. "There is no coincidence, and there is no person bereft of artistry. Perhaps yours is just locked away somewhere, and you've yet to find the keys." With that, he walked to the back of the shop where the kitchen was, slightly perturbed.

"Sorry about that. As you can see he's very passionate. So what kind of art do you do?"

"No worries. When I was a kid I used to draw a lot, I was pretty good too but when my mom... I don't draw anymore. Sometimes though, I notice things, shapes and movement, and I think about how I could... Anyway, thanks for the water and the words but I really have to go." He didn't want to talk about when his mom died. It was sudden, violent and tragic, and he preferred to keep it buried deep.

"I don't know you, obviously, but maybe you should start again." Joelle said softly. He smiled



and thanked her again. He walked out of the shop and into the credit union next door.

Ten minutes later Joseph sat in a private room with the oversized metal box, twirling its keys in his fingers. "What might be in there?" was also twirling around in his head, but the words he just heard made it clear that no matter what was in there, it was his responsibility. There was no avoiding it even if that felt like the best option.

Joseph opened the box and pulled out a thick manila folder. Inside were dozens of photographs of people he knew. Black and white scenes of his great uncles and aunts, group photos of his cousins, portraits of people in his family, then desert skyline shots and strange angled city views; all original prints and negatives of professional quality. Then dozens of pictures of himself laughing, playing and wearing his favorite red jacket and cowboy boots. The last large picture of the set was of his mother taking a picture of herself in a mirror, the large camera obscuring all of her face except for her eyes. He held it in his hands for a long moment, and the tears he had been holding for what felt like a lifetime burst down onto his beard like dew. When he wiped his eyes on his arm, he noticed a small, yellowed picture taped to the back of his mother's self-portrait. It was a thick bearded Jesus in his twenties smiling and playing an accordion as Kika held up her skirt, looking over her shoulder mid-twirl. Then he found dozens of his drawings, ones that he had buried among his grandfather's junk in the

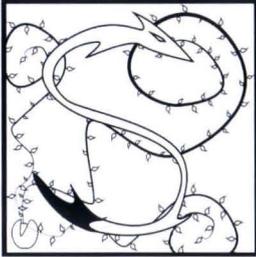
shed. Joseph smiled and rolled away a tear that landed on something large, wrapped in newspaper. He tore at the paper and revealed the accordion from the picture, wrapped in his Michael Jackson jacket.

Fifteen minutes later, Joseph stood outside of the front of his house. Everything that happened in the two hours he was gone felt surreal. He opened the door to music playing. It was a solemn ballad by Los Cadetes de Linares, and the accordion on the song wailed through the empty house. Joseph walked into the kitchen finding his grandmother sitting at the kitchen table bawling, staring at the stereo. The song ended and began again with the subdued soliloquy of the singer nostalgic about lost love. Joseph placed the folder and the jacket wrapped accordion on the table and stood wordlessly, unsure what to do. He'd never seen his grandmother cry like this even at the funerals. She always held her emotions back; quiet, proud and dignified. He opened the folder and looked at the picture of his mother, then the picture of his grandparents, and knew.

Joseph did his best to imitate his grandfather's characteristic half smile, bowed and held out his hand chivalrously. "Bailamos?" He asked. Kika looked up and remembered the day Jesus asked her to be his wife. He played her a song on the accordion while his brother took pictures and like that day, she reached out and danced.



The Patron



Something annoyingly trivial delayed the family as they left the house and by the time they arrived at **The Library™** they had missed their Patron Profile Interview appointment. To add to the embarrassment, the already distraught mother presented the wrong device to **The Library™** receptionist. He rolled his eyes and with obvious long-suffering explained that it was impossible to say if the family's appointment could be rescheduled. Perhaps if another interviewee were unfortunate enough to also be late for his or her appointment **The Library™** receptionist might be able to fit the family back into the interview schedule before the end of the day. In the meantime the family would have to go to the gift shop, purchase the correct device and wait in the café, gift shop or museum until summoned.

Diane glanced away from the orientation presentation she was watching. She felt no sympathy as she watched the mortified family slink through the waiting area, heads down, avoiding eye contact with the other interviewees. The family obviously didn't realize it was a privilege to have a corporation of the caliber of **ReadCorp™** open a **The Library™** franchise in such a small town. The others in the room nodded approvingly at the justness of the family's reprimand. All of

them secretly felt a sense of relief that a potential competitor had been sidelined.

The Library™ receptionist's understanding of the importance of punctuality impressed **Diane**. She herself had arrived for her interview an hour earlier than necessary. On the drive to **The Library™**, she puzzled over the fact that an old abandoned government building was chosen as the site for a cutting edge franchise. The corporate design team found "the bones" of the structure interesting and its character and ambience were used to advantage in packaging the franchise.

From **The Library™** parking lot **Diane** caught sight of the activists. Every day since the start of renovations a small group of anti-**ReadCorp™** protesters demonstrated in front of **The Library™**. It looked like a bigger group than usual. She glimpsed a news camera and wondered if there had been a tip off about something newsworthy happening. One of the protesters thought he recognized **Diane** and tried to talk to her but she hurried up the steps. As she entered the building she admired the craftsmanship required to tastefully integrate three corporate logos into the original granite relief carved over the main entrance.

The **ReadCorp™** device she had been instructed to purchase and bring with her to the interview was activated as she passed through **The Library™** famous cyber-security installation. Since licensing agreements cost a small fortune, all **The Library™** franchises were cyber-fortresses that protected the investments of **BigMedia™**, **ReadCorp's™** parent company. As her device synced with **The Library™** interface **Diane** basked in the knowledge that this was the beginning of unlimited access to the distinctive technology and information only **BigMedia™** provided.

The Library™ receptionist commended **Diane** for being early and rewarded her with the news that she had plenty of time to view **The Library™** orientation presentation on her **ReadCorp™** device as well as take the short self-guided tour before her Patron Profile Interview. He solemnly told her that **The Library™** Director herself would conduct the interview. **Diane** murmured an appropriately grateful response. **The Library™** receptionist uploaded the orientation to **Diane's** device and admonished her with a stern reminder not to miss her appointment time.

The orientation was upbeat and inspiring. There were numerous assurances of how fortunate the applicant was to have made it this far in the Patron Selection Process. Those ultimately chosen as patrons would be the world's media elite, secure in the knowledge that everything he

or she listened to, read and viewed was perfectly synced with his or her Patron Profile. **Diane's** mind drifted to the protesters in front of the building. She didn't understand their grievances. They claimed to be alarmed at the unorthodox deal **BigMedia™** had made with federal, state and local governments and that all this would somehow limit consumer choices. If government regulators didn't have a problem with the power the consortium had over most forms of information and entertainment then **Diane** certainly didn't.

After the orientation she started the self-guided tour. The first stop was the café, as charming and inviting as the presentation promised. Surprisingly there were not many patrons using the facility, even though there were plenty of comfortable places to linger and the cover charge was reasonable.

The gift shop sold the usual assortment of t-shirts, key chains, posters and other memorabilia featuring **The Library™** logo. The variety of technological gadgetry on display was extraordinary. **Diane** studied the prices intently, since financial eligibility was the first hurdle for potential patrons.

The clerk wasn't busy, so he obligingly explained that the gift shop was the only place in town authorized to sell **ReadCorp™** proprietary hardware, technology and accessories, twice monthly update bundles and the latest cyber-encryption

anti-hacking updates. He proudly told her that technology advanced so rapidly and in such unexpected ways that **ReadCorp™** hardware quickly became obsolete, requiring patrons to purchase new devices on a regular basis. He warned that potential patrons were carefully screened on the basis of whether or not they were in a position to keep up with the financial demands of being **The Library™** patrons. He assured her that if needed a loan could be arranged through **ReadCorp's™** Consumer Financing Department.

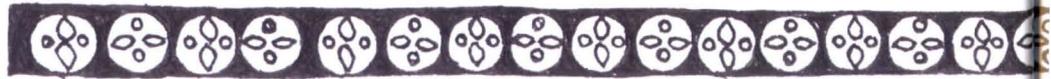
Diane was curious about the museum. During the renovation of the old building the construction crew discovered a sizeable, intact, old-style library reading room. In an uncharacteristic bow to nostalgia, **ReadCorp™** decided to retain the room as an interactive museum, a quaint look at how people accessed information and entertainment before the advent of **BigMedia™**. The museum gave the franchise the touch of local flavor the corporation included in each of its locations. An unexpected development arose when a number of residents volunteered to be museum guides. As a magnanimous gesture of goodwill, the volunteers were allowed to manage the museum.

The large number of visitors in the museum surprised **Diane**. Friendly docents welcomed people of all ages, some of whom were not even **The Library™** patrons. Volunteers directed visitors to various interactive demonstrations, helped them try a variety of antiques including

CD's, DVD's, eBooks, laptops, and tablets, and even answered questions that had nothing to do with **ReadCorp's™** products. Small groups of people discussed the content of the media they had recently used, while others talked about their common interests. Some visitors, blissfully unaware of anyone else, perused shelves of cloth and paper books, made a selection and curled up in comfortable chairs to read. Several volunteers, seated on large cushions on the floor, patiently scrolled through tablets with attentive preschoolers.

Diane noticed that the recently disgraced family had taken refuge in the museum and observed the family as they viewed artwork from a local competition. She laughed out loud when she overheard a docent explain to a visitor that in the past anyone could borrow whatever he or she wanted from the reading room, free of charge. She watched a group of teens filming a trailer for an obscure eBook that **BigMedia™** had not bothered to include in **The Library™** holdings. The author who wrote it had not received any celebrity endorsements or movie offers.

Diane returned to the reception area just as her name was called. **The Library™** Director, projecting the confidence befitting someone of her status, led **Diane** to the interview room. Both women were aware of the great responsibility the interviewer had in selecting those who would become **The Library's™** contracted patrons.



The Library™ Director immediately informed Diane that her newly purchased ReadCorp™ device was embarrassingly basic and already out of date. Although it was top of the line when it was purchased two days ago, significant software upgrades would need to be installed. The Library™ Director assured Diane that the clause about agreement to continuous upgrades would be enforced. To stream media at maximum levels a membership upgrade was required. She was warned that sharing or even discussing ReadCorp™ media with others was prohibited under its licensing agreements. The Library™ Director was polite but firm when she explained that Diane's request to opt out of the pre-programmed media access schedule was impossible. She patiently stated that patron generated media selection was an inferior system compared to automatic queuing, which ensured that patrons only received media based on his or her Patron Profile which also allowed for better licensing agreement management.

During the appointment Diane used every persuasive technique she could think of to renegotiate various aspects of her contract, but The Library™ Director remained unmoved. When The Library™ receptionist entered to witness the contract signing Diane stood up. The tour and interview revealed all the information she needed.

Diane reached into her handbag, retrieved her BigMedia™ corporate ID badge and gave it to The

Library™ receptionist to scan. The Library™ Director and The Library™ receptionist gasped. Diane was a BigMedia™ Franchise Compliance Inspector.

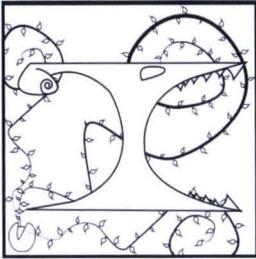
“Don't worry,” Diane said kindly. “My report will show that your franchise easily passed its first BigMedia™ Unannounced Inspection, with high ratings in every area.”

Diane shook hands with both of them, and turned to walk out of the room. She hesitated, thought a moment, turned back and spoke to them in a low, confidential tone.

“I will make one suggestion and it will be off the record. In order to ensure the long-term viability of your franchise, if it was me, I would close that museum immediately.”



WAYFARERS



was working late at the station. Not unlike any other night, it was dead—dead, silent, and dark. The gas station itself wasn't dark, but anything its bright lights weren't touching was veiled in shadow. I didn't mind it though. I enjoy the solitude. I'd grown used to the atmosphere after a couple years working here, almost fond of it. Sure, I got the occasional nut job, but, for the most part, I was alone; there wasn't anyone around to mock me. I was sitting outside enjoying a Pall Mall, legs propped up against the trash can, when this guy walked out from behind my 1956 VW Bug. Literally, this guy just popped out of the shadows, damn near gave me a heart attack. He was an older dude. Not old, but not young. Late forties maybe, or early fifties. His flops were an absolute mess; it looked like they were trying to get away from him. His pants were similarly ruined, and the shirt he wore was three sizes too big and in tatters. He was thin, which made his thick, gray beard look oddly out of place. But it was his eyes that really gave me pause. There was a gleam to them, a hint of something; I should have thought more of it.

I'll admit, I was a little upset at his arrival. Mainly because I had to cut my cigarette short for some bum on the street that isn't going to buy anything

from me. He would just take what he wanted and walk out. It's happened a million times before. My ire was slightly balanced by the fact that this guy, at least, couldn't judge me. He was a bum in a rich town. That's even worse than a failure working as a convenience store clerk. The wealthy people here view me as a loser, a poor person. This guy, they all view him as a virus, a plague on the world, making no contribution to society. You see, we're in the same boat, only he's the captain. The captain of a sinking ship. I won't be surprised if I never see him again.

I put my cigarette in the ash tray and decided I'd be nice to this poor guy, so I forced a smile and greeted him. "Hello," I said. It wasn't all that weird. I mean, it sounds awkward when I say it now, but it's my job to greet people. It came out just fine then.

He must not have sensed the sincerity in my voice because all he did was look at me. He made eye contact and smiled. It wasn't genuine though. It was mocking. It was a smile that said I'm better than you. That was the first jab. I didn't get it right away, but that was the first jab, yeah. I still can't fuckin believe it. A bum judged me. The lowest person on the chain of society deemed himself better than me; too good even to return a simple hello. Wow. But like I said I—I didn't get

it right when he did it. I knew it was weird, but I didn't understand what he was doing.

I stood and held the door open for him as he got closer, but my face must have given away my confusion. I say that because he lost his simper as he walked inside.

He turned around almost instantly. "Oh, sorry bud. I was just admiring your spirit," he said. "Hello."

That's when I caught on, when I knew what he was doing. I hate that word, bud. That's something you call someone who's beneath you, someone young and inexperienced. He thinks he's all high and mighty, this bum, but he has no idea who I am. Oh, and admiring my spirit? What the fuck does that even mean? That statement confirmed his crazy. He might have been judging me, no he was judging me, but at least he was crazy.

It wasn't until I was behind the counter that I noticed his stench. I couldn't smell him in the open air, but inside his stink filled the room. The man smelled like a rotten, age-old sock that had climbed out of a dumpster and bathed in stale liquor. I had to stop myself from cringing. I wanted nothing more than to be so rude to this man that I made him leave, but I needed to keep this job. I looked at him. "Let me know if there's anything I can help you with."

The man just smiled, again. He was really messin' with me.

As suspected, he roamed the store for only a few moments before coming up to the counter where things are easy to steal.

He looked at my nametag. "Gayle, that's an interesting name, son."

There he went again, but two can play this game. "Thanks old man. What's yours?"

The guy exhaled deeply. I must have gotten to him with the old man line.

He gazed at the ground. "Dean."

"What's wrong with Dean? At least your name doesn't make you sound like a woman."

Dean didn't answer. He just shuffled backward and forward, as if he was struggling with something. When he wasn't shuffling, he rocked. This went on for at least five minutes. I gazed elsewhere out of discomfort and feigned apathy, and busied myself with menial tasks like cleaning the counter—at least that gave me an excuse to spray Lysol. I was watching him the entire time, though. It was all an act.

Dean was quite the actor. I couldn't tell from the tapes—yes I checked them—but he had to be stealing during this awkward dance. I don't know why else he'd have done it.

"Please excuse me, Gayle. I don't mean to be rude. Dean is my real name. I had forgotten it, left it behind long ago. It reminds me of the person I once was, and that scares me. I don't know what made me tell it to you. You must be somethin' special!" He grinned at me as he said that last line.

I couldn't believe this guy. Nobody is that happy, least of all a bum. So naturally, when he called me special, I knew it was just another jab at me. I've been judged my entire life, but never like this before, on such a subtle level. Dean was an artist. I'm not so foolish myself, though. Determined to get to the bottom of this, I kept the conversation going. "Do you mind if I ask about your story, Dean? I don't think the youth of our society values the wisdom of elders as much as we should."

A look of horror instantly appeared on Dean's face. I was so damn proud of myself. There was no way he'd get out of this. It's rude to ask someone about something like that, and he hadn't come prepared with a story for me; the look on his face certainly showed he hadn't expected it. Somehow, the clever old bum wormed his way through even that.

"You know it's not polite to ask someone about their past—" Dean said.

"It's not polite to judge without knowing either."

Dean scratched his beard. "I suppose you have a point. Where do I start?" He tapped his fingers on the counter. "That's the most difficult thing about storytelling, finding a starting point."

He was just buying time, coming up with some sob story to tell me.

"I'll start at the end," Dean finally said. "That's where the lesson was learned."

I nodded for him to go on.

He did indeed start at the end. He told me about the riches he acquired through various businesses. Businesses he built from the ground up, and then sold. All this he apparently did before he was thirty years old. His work took up all of his time, and he never got to see his family. He had two daughters, Anna and Jasmine, and a wife named Joy. Up until this point, it seemed as though Dean was reflecting on these memories fondly, but when he started talking about his family, that joyful visage disappeared. His eyes puffed up, and the bags underneath became prominent, pulled down by his frown. He told me that his younger daughter, Anna, had died. His body tensed and his teeth clenched when he talked about her. Sitting with Anna during



her final hours was the only memory Dean had of his daughter. Just before she passed, she had told him that he shouldn't work so much. By this point in his story, Dean was near hysterical. He had to stop to calm his breathing. Despite what I knew of this man, I was getting caught up in his tale. It certainly was touching. When he regained his composure he continued to tell me that he followed his daughter's advice and quit his job. He was determined to mend his marriage. Ironically, when he went home to tell his wife, she divorced him.

In an explosive argument, she listed his countless faults: his obsession with work and money, his lack of love for his family, his inability to care for anything or anyone other than himself.

"The last thing she said hurt the most; the only reason I'm still with you is because you provide for our family. And now you can't even do that."

The weirdest thing about it was that he wasn't angry with her. She was a complete bitch, but he made excuses for her. He said that he couldn't blame her for her disgust of him because he never spent time with her, and that she spoke the truth. It was simply the pain bottled up for so long coming out, pain he had inflicted. Anyway, he gave everything to his family willingly. He just let go and decided that he'd live free. He gave his family everything he had because he really did love them.

He actually chose to be a bum, for them. The emotion with which he told his story, the way he cried, the pain in his eyes, and the way he humbled himself all blinded me.

Dean took a deep breath and pursed his lips together after he finished. My own eyes were watering at the end of his story. I wanted to hug the man. There had to be truth to what he was telling me. Nobody can tell a story with that much passion and be lying. I felt like a complete ass judging this guy without even knowing him. "I'm so sorry," I said.

"Don't be. I'm thankful for the experience. It's helped me grow as an individual. And I'm thankful for the time I did get to spend with my family. If there's one thing I can leave you with tonight, it's that you should always be thankful. Thankful for what you have, and what you don't. Life is good. Focus on that, and you'll be alright."

He was right, wasn't he? There was so much wisdom in the things he was telling me. I stood in awe and felt as though I had met some angel, a divine soul in the form of a homeless man. It was almost too difficult to believe. Then he gave me the ultimate blow. This wasn't just one of those jabs I was talking about earlier. This was a blow to the chest so vicious, so violent, I felt it without him even hitting me.

"I have little. In fact, I have almost nothing. It's rare that someone opens their heart and listens

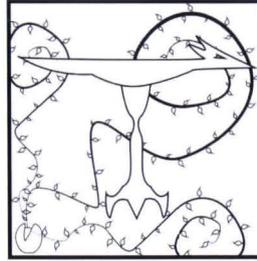
to my story. It's rare that someone even looks at me, let alone takes the time to get to know me, or ask my name. You have given me the greatest gift this night. You have given me your time. An old couple gave me this a few days ago. I was going to use it for food and water, but I'm fortunate enough that the earth is full of such things. I'm not familiar with the earnings of a gas station clerk, but I'm sure it's not what you deserve." Dean pulled a wallet out of his back pocket. He reached in and pulled out a hundred dollar bill. He put it on the counter and walked to the entrance. At the door he turned around and said, "Don't take life too seriously, bud." Then he was gone.

I stood in complete shock and didn't say a word. I just stared at the bill in front of me, thinking. What kind of person would give a homeless man one hundred dollars? Not the rich folk in this town. They spite me, and I'm not even homeless. It started to make sense to me then. This was the finale to his joke. He had come in here and undermined me. He got me to believe his story. He drew emotion out of me, and then he crushed it, leaving me devoid of any thereafter. This was an evil man, cruel. All the subtle hints at his true plan, and I still fell for his story. I couldn't believe it. I picked the hundred dollar bill up off of the counter. I held it in front of me, and I ripped the fucking thing in half. I didn't want that filthy money.

When I had gotten over the shock of it all, I took a pack of Pall Mall's off the shelf and walked outside. I lit the smoke and stared up at the one star in the sky. After a little while looking at it, even that faded to darkness.

Symbolic, I thought.

Les Preludes



Les préludes is the third of Franz Liszt's thirteen symphonic poems. It was first performed in 1856 and directed by Liszt himself.

his story is true. In Utah there is a river named the Yampa. Its source is in the snow-covered slopes of the Rocky Mountains of western Colorado. Each year, during the spring runoff and until

the end of June groups of tourists climb aboard rafts to enjoy a five day trip floating down the ever-changing canyons of this wonderful river. For the most part the flow is calm and peaceful, but occasionally rapids of varying swiftness and challenge appear to lend exhilaration and excitement. But as quickly as nature's exuberance comes it also vanishes and serenity and harmony are restored.

Only a few of the twenty-four people on this trip have ever met before. Many are couples, some are friends, and some are parents traveling with their children. A staff of six rows the boats, sets up a kitchen, prepares the meals and attends to the basic needs and organization of the passengers.

After dinner, folding chairs are arranged in a circular fashion on the beach. Jokes and stories are told; area history is related and reliving the day's experiences offers a time to relax and enjoy

a beverage of your choice.

On the third evening of this trip, a modest and retiring gentleman walked to the center of his audience and spoke.

"This is a place of astounding beauty, an ever-changing beauty that only nature could provide. If you will bear with me I would like each of you to help me supplement that beauty with a talent that you are unaware that you have." Surprised looks and glances raced around the circle of chairs. Some who were paying little attention when the speaker began quieted their conversation and motioned others to do the same.

"Each of us has a voice; a voice of great flexibility and a voice capable of making the sound of animals, the sound of man-made things and the sound of song. You have a voice that can express great feeling; love, anger, gentleness, damnation, exhilaration and even death. Your voice can bring unspeakable sorrow and unbounded happiness beyond description.

"Tonight I am going to ask you to open your minds so my musical instructions can inspire you. In turn, the sound of a musical instrument will be your voice. And all of your voices will become a symphony.

"I can tell who is most receptive to this unusual idea, so if I may I will use her as an example. Gloria, would you mind standing for a moment?"

All eyes were on Gloria. Our speaker retrieved a baton from beside his chair and began to wave it gently in the air — and at that moment Gloria lifted her head and opened her mouth and from it came the first few bars of Tchaikovsky's magnificent violin concerto. Not a person spoke, no one stirred; it was the most astonishing moment anyone had ever seen or heard. It was as though there was a full sized violin inside of Gloria's mouth; only there wasn't. Seconds later the baton gently descended and the music from Gloria's mouth ceased. Instantly there was there was a hub-bub of questions.

"How did you do that?" someone asked.

"I did not do anything. Gloria did it. I simply concentrated on the thought of what I wanted Gloria to do. It is not a special gift, it is simply a skill that you all have, but probably have never used."

By now there were more than twenty-four separate conversations going about what each person had seen and heard. A couple of gentlemen were convinced an iPod and speakers were hidden in nearby trees or in someone's tent. Others were not so concerned about why or how; they just loved the music. Gloria told everyone she knew the sound was coming from her mouth; there was

no pain or tiredness afterwards. She said it left her with a feeling of serenity; a very nice feeling.

“Shall we move on then?”

Our conductor — what else were we to call him — patiently stood with his hands crossed in front of himself and held the baton in his right hand. Slowly he got everyone’s attention. He raised his arms, the baton ready and on the down stroke the mouths of the group became a symphony orchestra. The strings were plucked and then plucked again for the ominous introduction and motif. The music swells and then repeats the motif, stronger and stronger and stronger still until it reaches its cascading crescendo. Not a person present did not envision the beauty and power of the river in spring flood, crashing, tumbling, roaring down the canyon as if pushed by Liszt’s great symphonic poem. As with the river, the tumult gently subsides to describe the peace and tranquility that follows each rapid.

The orchestra of voices was coming together; its players were finding their ability to sound as a trumpet, an oboe, or whatever instrument was required to perform *Les preludes*. The players paid little attention to each other; their concentration was entirely directed toward the conductor. Their bodies swayed in time with the meter of the prelude; their hands flexed as though pressing on the fingerboard and arms moved as bowing the violin.

Timpani sounds were accompanied by arm movement; imaginary trombone slides moved in concert with the score.

The tempo accelerates, builds and becomes a whirlpool as the conductor coaxes a dervish frenzy of sound to match the river as it encounters yet another rapid with foam crested waves, plunging holes and passages weaving through rocky monoliths. As suddenly as it has arrived, it dissipates and the river performs its seductive lovers waltz. A harp accentuates the tenderness of the river and its flirtation with the landscape; distant horns call the soaring eagles and announce nature’s tranquility. Chickadees, bluebirds and magpies perform their dance of musical happiness while lizards and geckos skitter over white sand and through the dried leaves of autumns past.

The introductory motif returns as *Les preludes* drives toward its musical summit. Horns call the totality of nature; its rivers, its mountains, its canyon walls, its life; all things under its skies. Our conductor brings his orchestra to a triumphant conclusion; the union of man’s voices and wilderness.

Not surprisingly, the orchestra is momentarily stunned by the performance they have achieved. Facing them, the conductor bows in recognition of what the orchestra has accomplished. In kind, the orchestra rises and enthusiastically applauds the conductor. It is a long and well-deserved

ovation. This is no longer a group of people that has nothing in common. Camaraderie exists with strangers congratulating each other; astounded with what they have done, and what each person next to them has done. As individuals share their feelings and the aura of accomplishment, a can of beer is retrieved and wine glasses refilled. No one notices the conductor step back into the evening shadows and walk towards his tent site.

In dawn's light, participants emerge from their tents and head to the kitchen for that essential cup of coffee.

"Wow, that was something very special, wasn't it?" Jim asked.

"Beyond special; way beyond. Who will ever believe it?"

"Is our conductor up yet?"

"I haven't seen him."

"His tent site was next to mine." said the Crew Chief. "But you know what's strange. His tent is down and all his gear is gone."

"Maybe he was up early," I suggested.

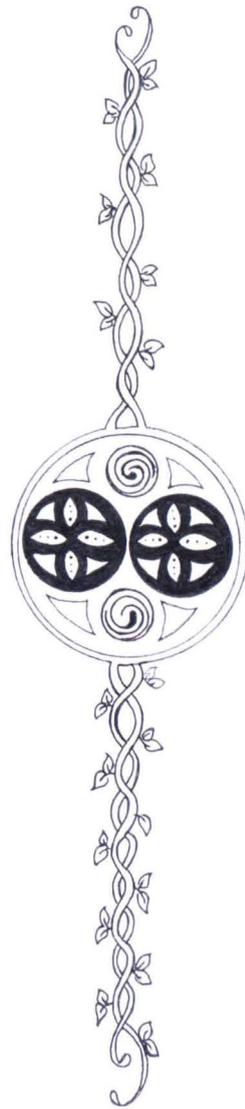
"Musta been. I was the first or second one up and I walked the whole beach and camp. He's not here."

"Well, he must be somewhere."

"We'll see if he turns up in the next couple of hours."

We never did locate the conductor. We notified the Park Service and the Sheriff's Office, but he was never found. The police in Oregon went to the home address he'd given on his trip information; it was a vacant lot.

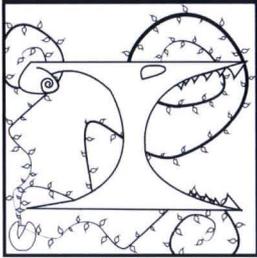
At the beginning of this story I said it was true. It was true for me. And some of the other people on the trip told me they believe it was true. I'm going down the Yampa again next year in hopes the conductor will show up again. You don't get many chances for a trip like that.





NON-FICTION

POSTCARDS FROM BANJUL



am walking back from the store with my mother. On these jaunts I am her little helper and I take my job seriously. The few groceries I carry back persuade me that she couldn't do the heavy lifting without me.

As always, on market days, the streets are agog and as always, I feel plunged into a strange, mixed-up garden. Low clouds puff hot breaths onto the river which rolls and sighs as ferries glide into view spawning fresh loads of beasts, baskets and brotherhood into the melee. Eager taxis inch their way through the jumbled morass of life, their determined honking defying defeat. The occasional donkey gets a stick on a bony back.

People idle, mingle, mix, smile, converse, cajole, caress, laugh, debate, shrug, drink black tea, devour spicy rice and beans from leaf plates, pick their teeth, glance, eye, assess, nod, shuffle, laugh, haggle, gesticulate, smooth their hair, adjust their caps, swat away flies, wipe sweat off faces with soiled shirt cuffs, fan their faces with tiny grass brooms, toss their earrings and flirt.

Children play in the dirt or chase each other, giggling and shrieking their way through people-gaps. *I have long since stopped pretending that*

they will invite me into their snappy game of tag. Chocolate colored babies, bright-eyed and wild-haired, cling to their mothers' ample backs, snort running down their noses, their heads pulled back tight at impossible angles against stretchy, vividly patterned fabric. Nevertheless, they look adorable, *their eyes older than the hills and at peace with their world.*

Everywhere, hand carts sag and groan beneath heaps and piles. Vendors in colorful flowing robes and matching head scarves roll their handcarts along, singing out their wares. Others gleam their stalls with flourish. Ivory bracelets, kola nuts, juju beads and other magic charms nestle in woven cane baskets, bits of dried baobab and milky homemade breadfruit ices in small rectangular plastic bags drip all over slip-on sandals whose stark rubbery smell vies with the red peppers in the heat. Drying fruit strung out on ropes hangs from hooks and sways back and forth in the hot, moist air coming up from the river. Raw fish, cut wide open in fatal grimace rubs bloody shoulders with fresh flowers. Their mixed scent never fails to make me gag.

But today I am oblivious to all this chaos. My hands clutch a giant bright blue card on which an obese puppy with curly lashes and crinkly eyes lolls in the grass in a smiling upside down rain-

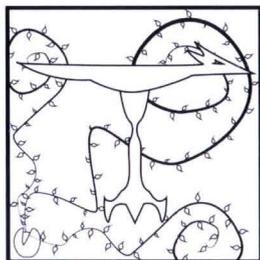
bow of push-up flowers. There is not a single cloud.

It is a rare acquiescence from my mother to an insistent request. One she doubtless finds odd and frivolous. She smiles and shakes her head, occasionally breaking into an indulgent laugh despite herself when she sees me skipping along the street, scanning the snow white insides of the card. For once this does not dampen my spirits. My mother is the proverbial ostrich in the sand. Maybe she doesn't know that the bareness inside makes the bold pronouncement on the front of the card that much more pleasurable.

I read and re-read it: "*Happy Birthday to My Wonderful Daughter.*" It is glossy music to my disbelieving eyes; more precious than she will ever know.

I am ten years old and my mother loves me.

Visit to the Doctor



he women look harried, pinched. The men, ragged, wrinkled, abused by years of obligations. Seeking an empty seat, I thread my way around sets of white athletic shoes. One of the men, splotchy faced from a previous visit, is confused by the magazine selection spread across the waiting room table. Dementia. His wife speaks loudly, as if volume would penetrate his mental fog. "We're here for a checkup, dear. The doctor took a mole off your face last week."

"I thought we were going to lunch with Bob and Judy," he complains. "I'm hungry." He moves toward the office door. She grabs an arm and steers him back into the waiting room toward an empty chair. They jostle a man in a wheelchair. She nods a tight smile and an apology. Her voice drops to a hiss. "Lunch is after you see the doctor, Roger. Sit." Roger sits. So do I. **For the first time since I was 6 weeks old, I have more doctor appointments in a month than business appointments.**

All of us are here to see the dermatologist. The men wear doctor recommended hats, covering thinning gray hair or a bald pate. Most are decorated with small bandages perched on noses, foreheads, cheeks, arms, the results of recent

surgery. I have a lesion on my temple. **Cancer, again. Piece by little piece, I'm being cut away. One day nothing of me will be left to pay my bill.**

"Mr. Mendez." The doctor's young assistant calls me from the office doorway. "Mr. Richard Mendez." I get up and move toward the door. She smiles and points me down the hallway. "So how are we today," she asks in a loud voice, leading me to the exam room.

"We' aren't deaf, are we?" I reply. Her blue eyes go wide and her hand covers her mouth. "No," she stammers, closing the door to the exam room. "Was I yelling?"

"Yes."

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Mendez. It's just..." she trails off, glancing in the direction of the waiting room. I give her a knowing look. Uh huh. The old people.

The Doctor comes in. He's young, with clear, even toned skin. **Why is it that my orthopedist has never broken a bone, my optometrist doesn't wear glasses and my cardiologist is built like a greyhound? And my dermatologist has no visible scars.**

He starts my full body check. He's muttering; I can't understand him. "Could you repeat yourself, Doctor? I didn't hear you."

"It's okay, Mr. Mendez. I was speaking to my assistant." I glance at the young assistant and see her carefully notating my chart, trying to suppress a grin.

The Doctor prepares the burner to cauterize, vaporize my cancer. I hear a sizzle. I smell burning flesh. I start crying. I ask the Doctor to stop for a moment.

Our helicopters come in fast, ready to load and evacuate. The gauges on my instrument panel tell me the story of a rattling, tired machine, begging for shutdown and service. We're flying way overtime.

We land in light rain, start to load the wounded when the jungle line explodes. Enemy gunfire. The helicopter shudders once, twice, absorbing two RPG rounds. The engine whine changes to a screech. Watching the windshield craze and crack, stitched with AK47 hits, I unclip my safety harness, set the fire suppression system, grab my shotgun and roll out my door, colliding with my crew chief. Bullets zip around us. We stumble for the tree line, using the burning helicopters as cover. Paint bubbles. Raindrops sizzle, steam rises from the hot metal. I smell my copilot and door gunner cooking.

"I'm sorry. It's the smell. It reminds me of the war."

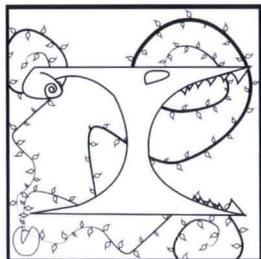
"Have you talked to anyone about it?" the doctor asks, giving me his best therapeutic look.

"Who?" I reply. "They're all dead."

Handing me a tissue the young assistant asks, "So you were in World War II?" The Doctor completes the operation. The smell lingers.

I catch my reflection in a mirror as I leave the exam room. A full head of white hair. Gravity is winning. Sagging eyelids. And an industrial sized, flesh colored bandage on my temple. All I need is the hat.

Blood



have never seen cold blood.

A hot summer day, playing flag football. **My first nose bleed. Accidental.** So bright, so warm, spilling out of my nose, trailing across my lip. Red dots drip, dripping upon my white t-shirt, spreading into irregular shapes, pulled by gravity and the cotton weave. Some drips reaching the grass on the field and dark red flowers blossom.

Tasting thick and coppery, draining down my throat. A unique taste, like Oreos, lobster, peanut butter. For me, it's how red tastes.

One of the last hot days of early fall. **My first nose bleed at school. Deliberate.** I see the fist coming. A small crunch, pressure into my eyes, across the front of my face, then that red taste again. I bent over in time for the next blow to bounce off my head, breaking his hand. I hear him scream as I watch fat red drops of my blood bombardier toward his nice shiny shoes. Splat, splat, splat onto his shoes and the black asphalt. "Break it up!" The vice principal yells.

By thirteen I had determined that face and head blood were different from limb blood.

More red, more insistent, more determined to escape. Limb blood was reluctant, oozing.

Late Spring. An early game in the season. Playing third base, a fast high hopper coming up the line, a runner coming from second, preparing to slide. The ball takes a bad bounce and, instead of nestling into my glove, it bounces off my chin, driving my teeth into my tongue and snapping my head back. **I'm bleeding and woozy as the runner slides into me, cleats first, knocking me off the bag and into the third base box.** I lie in the coach's box, tasting red, my calf throbbing, bleeding, coloring my gray uniform and white socks wet pink and creating dark red mud clods. "Safe!" I hear the umpire. "Play to home," I mumble. I sit out the rest of the game, trying to gather my wits and sucking on an orange popsicle.

A hot Friday night. Torso blood. Lit by street lights, I see the sweat stained, dark uniform, the shiny badge on his chest, cap slightly askew. His face is angry. He's pointing at me. I hear a pop, feel a hard push, like someone bumped me while running past, and then a bright, hot tingle. I touch my chest, feel the hole, smoking, singed, until the warm blood escapes, smothering my hand. It flows like a not quite clogged kitchen sink, slow but steady. "Stop! He's just a kid!" I hear before I faint.

Standing in juvenile court with my arm in a sling, charged with "assault", I'm remanded to a community service program instead of CYA camp. Unhappy with the community service program, I stop participating, and end up in youth authority camp, where fights are entertainment. **Gladiator night for the counselors. More blood. Angry blood, frustrated blood but it still tasted red.** The CYA lends us out as summer work crews for the California Forestry Service. Accidental blood sprinkled about Placerita Canyon State Park.

Combat blood. On twenty four hour R&R, a walk through town looking for beer, babes, and clean laundry. As we make our way down a narrow street to a favorite bar, a grenade rolls out from between buildings, metallic click ticks as it bounces along the rough street. I hear an abrupt explosion propelling bits of death. A sharp wasp sting just above my boot top. Chaos. Screaming. **I watch Ray collapse onto his back, arterial blood pump, pumping in tempo to his heart from a hole in his neck.** As I strip off my uniform blouse to create a wound compress, I watch his dark skin turn gray. The MPs come pounding up the narrow street, yelling and waving weapons.

I press hard on Ray's neck, trying to stop the pulsing, warm flow of blood engulfing my hand. **Arterial blood, desperate to bathe Ray's brain in oxygen and nutrients.** Instead, it turns my shirt from khaki to wet sepiá. Ray looks at me, coughs a few times, blood in his throat. "How does it

taste?" I ask Ray as his eyes close. His pulse thins. My hands and shirt are sticky warm. A corpsman throws his trauma bag down next to Ray's head and pushes me aside. "Give me room to work, Mister."

Blood type, innocent, city style. I stood in the window of my apartment on Bush St. in San Francisco, sipping Johnnie Black and watching the traffic go by. The accident happened so fast that the truck hit the car and was gone before the crunching sounds of destroyed body panels, screeching tires and shattered glass reach me. I dialed 911, reported the accident, grabbed a pair of flashlights and ran out the front door, down the steep flight of stairs and into the street.

The speeding truck had spun the Toyota across four traffic lanes and into the curb where it sat, leaking gasoline and steaming coolant. I propped a flashlight on the street and set it to flashing mode as a warning to oncoming traffic. I hear heat tick, ticking.

A young female driver was the only person in the car. Strapped in by the seatbelt, she was motionless, her head sitting on her shoulders at an odd angle. **Blood cascaded from a long, deep cut on her forehead, covering her face, a red mask.**

She wore a tank top. I could see a long hematoma, a bruise, already forming where the seat belt had violently contained her motion. Her purse and its contents are scattered about the passenger side

foot well. The collision was so brutal, the force had snapped the shoulder straps of her black bra. I carefully leaned into the window and tried to find her pulse. Nothing. I talk to her. "What is your name?" "Can you hear me?" No response. "You've been in a car accident. Emergency services are on their way." I smell her blood. "Don't let all the blood freak you out. Head wounds always bleed a lot."

I thought I could hear her wheezing breath over the street noise, topped by the oncoming blare of the emergency services vehicles.

The first ESV to arrive crushes my flashing flashlight. They casually emerge from their vehicles, large confident men, moving to their pre-assigned duties of crowd and traffic control, evaluating and stabilizing the injuries of the woman, determining how to extract her from the crushed Toyota. They tell me to step back so they can do their work. I offer that I saw the hit and run accident occur. I'm directed to a police officer who takes my name, address and phone number and asks me to return home.

Quickly, the Toyota is engulfed by the group of men, flashing lights and squawking radios tracking the continuing tragedies of the night. They brace her neck, back and legs then split the car open, removing the roof so they can lift her out the top.

I watch from my window, sipping another Johnnie Black, hoping the blood on her face didn't frighten her too much.

Hospital blood. Everywhere. In the ER, all manner of bloody cuts and blood soaked dressings. Or, pre HIV, when you arrive home, blood stained shoes, uniforms or dried blood splatter across the face of your wrist watch.

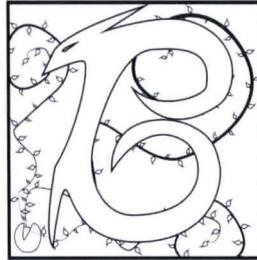
Today I carry clean, sterile blood to an accident victim in ICU. Two bags of A positive red blood cells.

The nurse arranges the bag, connects the IV tube. The tube core turns bright red, like rope candy with a surprise center, as blood flows from the bag to the body. **So clean and hygienic, no drips, not even bloody. It probably doesn't taste red.**

I join some of the ER crew for lunch in the break room. A hockey game is on the TV. The play is fast, graceful, the collisions abrupt and fierce. **One player rises from the ice, bleeding.** The blood drips to the ice. It doesn't splatter, flow. Instantly chilled by the playing surface, it looks like a spilled Slurpee, blobs of static blood spotting the ice. I wonder, when blood is cold and freezing, does it still taste red?

I've never seen blood cold.

My Walk



y all accounts, I had a typical childhood. My Dad worked. My Mom managed the house and kids. I was the youngest of five children. While my family was the typical nuclear family of the time, I was not the typical child. I was born with cerebral palsy.

My parents did not find out until they started to notice that I did not move like other babies of the same age. My parents had to find out why that was. Fortunately for me, my father served in and retired from the United States Air Force. So, as his dependent, I was entitled to the best medical care the military could provide. I got just that – the best care available. Unfortunately, cerebral palsy cannot be cured. Cerebral palsy can only be managed. In my case, cerebral palsy presents as hypertonic spastic diplegia (HSD) in my legs. I do have some fine motor skill loss in one of my arms but that is minute in comparison to the HSD affecting my legs. Muscles contract or relax. HSD means that my legs never fully or truly relax. *From the gate, every doctor told my parents I would never be able to walk on my own power. I wonder what those doctors would say if they could see me now.*

I had major surgery by the time I was three. I remember my parents coming to visit me in

the hospital. I felt so relieved to see them. “We brought you a toy and your favorite chips,” my Mom said as she sat in the chair beside my bed. My Dad stood behind her; his countenance was lovingly pensive. I ate some chips and opened the toy to play with it. They stayed for some time. When they left, I watched them walk down the hallway as far as I could see. I wanted to go with them.

More surgeries followed. By the time I was ten, I had four surgeries and three sets of scars. Two surgeries involved the same muscle group. The repeated surgery was needed to lengthen my muscles to accommodate growth. After all, I was a growing child. With that in mind, my parents tired of watching nurses wheel me away on a gurney. They did not want me to grow up in a hospital recovery ward. **Come what may, my father would not let another surgeon practice his trade on me.**

Shortly after the casts were removed, and I had recovered enough from this last surgery, my parents decided to move to Arizona. When my parents made this decision, my siblings had already finished high school. I had no choice but to move with my parents. I was only ten – where go my parents, go I. In Arizona, life continued much as it had in California. My old friend physical therapy awaited my arrival.

“Can you swim?” asked my new therapist.

“Yes!” escaped my mouth almost before she could finish the sentence. Off she went to get me some swimming trunks. My mother, wise beyond my understanding, repeated the question. “Are you sure you can swim?”

I went to change into the trunks and came back ready to swim. My mother watched as I got ready to break for the pool like Mark Spitz, or rather Michael Phelps. Mom slowed me momentarily by whispering out “John-John.” **John-John is not my name. John-John is a warning.** The warning went unheeded.

Again, the therapist asked, “Can you swim?”

Undaunted, I said, “Yes!” and ran towards the pool as fast as I could. I jumped as far as I could. I promptly sank like a rock when I hit the water. The therapist had to fish me out. Through the coughing, I heard her ask a new question. “Are you okay?” She looked surprised. My Mom looked on with “*I told you so,*” written all over her worried face. **No therapist ever again offered me the option of a pool session. And so, life went on.** Eventually, my parents decided to move back to California. Where go my parents, go I.

When I left California, I was part of the class, and had the same group of friends since kindergarten. I returned just in time for middle school. Rather than returning to be part of the same group that I had left, I came back as just another new kid in school. The friends I knew since kindergarten

remembered me; but, they had moved on to new interests. **Everybody played an after school sport. Everybody was going to the mall to hangout. Everybody was going to the next school dance on Friday. I had to go to therapy. I played "adaptive" sports in "adaptive" physical education. I was going to therapy, not a school dance.** Despite not being part of any established group of friends, I made it through middle school and even made new friends. All the while, I was doing exactly what doctors said I would not be able to do. I was walking on my own.

I escaped the frying pan of middle school to face the fires of high school. As a freshman, I wanted what every high school kid wants. I wanted to drive. Sadly, the minimum driving age went up some time during my eighth grade. Going forward, kids had to wait until they were sixteen to drive. Before then, kids could drive when they were fourteen. **C'est la vie.** I developed my own interests. Rap music and break dancing were gaining in popularity at the time. **I still could not dance; but, I was good with words. I penned my first verse when I was a freshman.** I wrote well enough to make a new set of friends. At the time, most of my friends were learning to graffiti. I learned how to write my lyrics in graffiti and took a nickname that some still use today. I graduated from high school in 1988. I went to my graduation rehearsal; and, I walked on stage to accept my high school diploma. That same day, I went on the class trip to Disneyland for Grad Night.

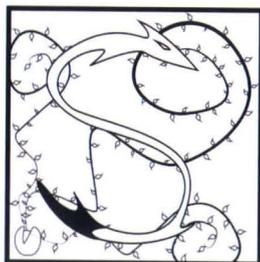
I have never let my disability stop me from trying to do anything. Consequently, I have taken on challenges that others find surprising. All my life, cerebral palsy has forced restrictions on my choices. My only recourse is to take these restrictions in stride. I have had to learn to stand up for myself and not let people discount me because I have cerebral palsy. Life passes over those who do not stand up. Today, I am married and have five children. Everything that I am is because my parents taught me to be a good man. Everything that I have is because my wife taught me to how to stand up for myself. I love my family. **I have not stopped walking since I learned how.** Try to stop me.





Poetry

At Nine, On Nine



he grips her father's hand with all her
might,
afraid, but safe, in his strong clasp;
a child of nine about to see the sight
of something he wasn't sure she'd
grasp.

A Pennsylvania summer day, a sky of
cloudless blue,

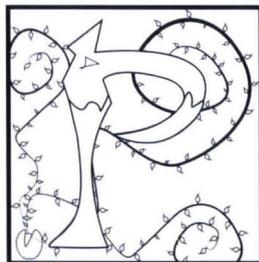
they enter a place she's never been,
with bleachers, dugouts and ground crew;
he's pleased to see she starts to grin.

Into their seats they settle, hot dogs in hand;
the Allentown nine took the lush green field;
and fair or foul, depending where they land,
he patiently explains what an ump's call will
yield.

Nine young men play Single A ball,
looking for the perfect pitch - a homer to
deliver! -
hoping major league scouts will give them a call;
and a little girl addicted, now a fan forever.

Did the Red Sox win? Who cares or remembers,
both stadium and father long gone;
but memories remain, like lingering embers,
of a day long ago, so beautifully drawn.

Metaphor for Life at Rockefeller Center



Prometheus blazes, shining symbolic of
his fiery rule,
the tree with a million colored lights
looms for all to adore.
There weren't a million lights, of
course ...

But I didn't know that then.

The skating rink, perfect as it can be,
ice hard as diamonds
sparkling in the sun, waits for a thousand skates
to scar it to the core.
There weren't a thousand skates, of course ...

But I didn't know that then.

The day is clear and cold to the bones, the sky
blue as my father's eyes;
hundreds of skaters, me in new skating skirt,
ready to take the ice.
There weren't a hundred skaters, of course ...

But I didn't know that then.

Bundled up skaters enter the rink, fall in sync
and take off in one direction
except me, of course, who thought the other way
surely would suffice.
There really wasn't just one route, of course ...

But I didn't know that then.

A flamboyant young man, glides with gusto,
leaps into the air, spins with style,
sees me in his path and crashes, falling to his
knee.

This wasn't a place for showboating, of course ...

But I didn't know that then.

At the side of the rink, snow white handkerchief
in hand to wipe away the tears,
my father asks what's wrong and I speak of the
skater who blamed his fall on me.

This wasn't a time for self-pity, of course ...

But I didn't know that then.

Sobbing, I tell of this man who cursed that I
"went the wrong way," ruining his jump.
"You didn't," my father quietly reassures, "you
simply chose a different way."

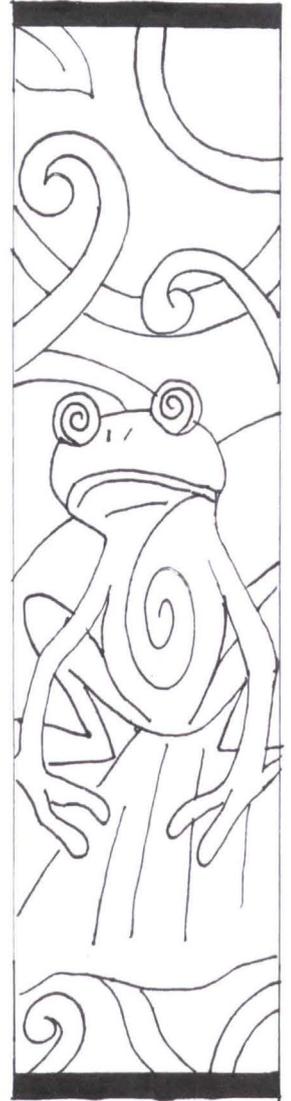
This wasn't a moment for coddling, of course ...

But I didn't know that then.

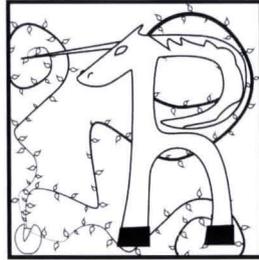
A metaphor for life, a mantra unbroken, I
reflect on those words so simply spoken,
my father's words at Rockefeller Center on a
cold December day.

That was a moment of great wisdom shared, of
course ...

But I didn't know that then.



Reading in Noisy Rooms



Reading is always best
In noisy rooms
Filled to the brim
With beautiful women

The lighting
It's always good here
The music, well
Not so much

But it sure is fun to
Turn on the pitch
And play pretend
We're famous and rich

I'm a poor artist
I see beautiful things
They like the word Artist
But not the struggle it brings

Is there a conclusion?
How about this
Life is just uncomfortable
Until it isn't, then it is

Look at them.

They're all so high
On ammonia and
Methane and
Monoxide

They're all so drunk
On knowledge and
Understanding and
Millionaire spunk

I am forced
To rely on them

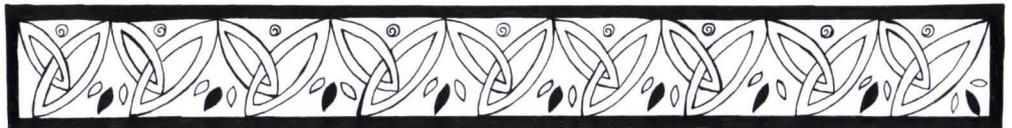
Young people
Younger than me
Old people
Growing younger than me
New people
Presuming themselves God
Abusers, confusers
Creators of fraud

Rightfully so
Rightfully so
Perhaps it's deserved
If none of us know

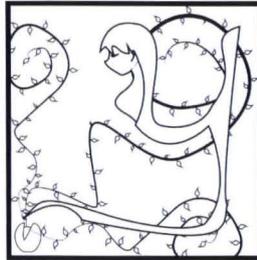
I took a seat across the room
There was a man beside me
Who also had a book
And a slouch
And a smile

"If I could share one great thing,"
He said,
"Pay your dues.
Mentally or physically.
Whichever one you are
most willing to sacrifice."

I then focused my eyes
To this book he held clenched
It was upside down
Yet he stared with content.



AFRAID TO FAIL



you are the shadow that has sat on my
shoulder
since the beginning.
You are the fickle compass
that has guided and misguided me
on the selfish quest
for more knowledge, money, and
respect.

*Motivated by the fear of inadequacy ,
but never inspired by the thrill of achievement,
you are the persistent ringing in my ears,
a reminder that my feats are never enough.*

All the accolades in the world
could never fill the void that created you.
Is it nature or nurture?
It matters not.
I wear these signs of stress the same either way.
Dark circles and ground teeth tell the story
of my Greek tragedy,
a journey with no destination.
Not because I'm blind to the absurdity or repe-
tition,
but because the quest itself is enough to fill my
heart.

*It is my boulder to bear.
And, like Sisyphus, I must persist.*



Visual ARTS

First Place

Aaron Murillo

GOLDEN TANGERINES



50

Painting

Ilusion



Third Place

Mary Lou Johnson

Tom's Dream



52

Painting

Honorable Mention



Brittany Rislund
Untitled

Accepted



Sylvia Husted
"Urban Jungle"



Lonna Gutierrez
"Moonlit Lilies"



Claudia P. Martinez
"Kaleidoscope"

Painting

ARE YOU MY TEDDY?



Alexa Clinite

Second Place

Wolf's Gaze



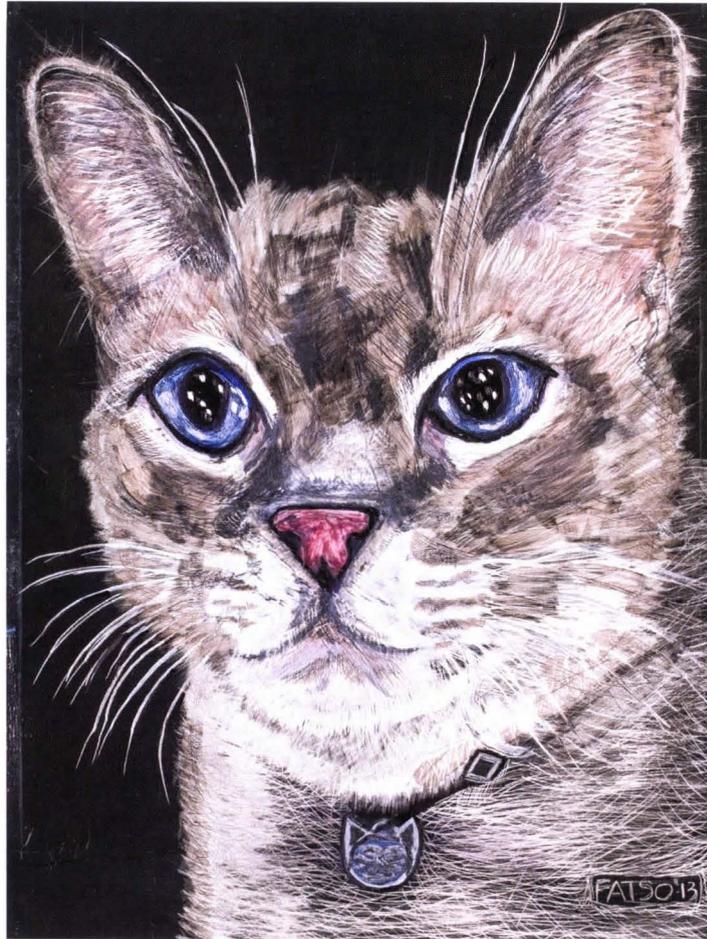
Drawing

55

Third Place

Celia Corrales Martinez

FATSO



56

Drawing

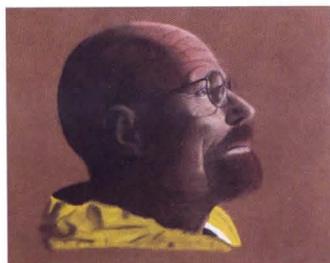
Honorable Mention



Kiersten Bauer
"Moonlit Pearl"



Jose Arias
"CV-6"



Jose Arias
"W.W."

Drawing

Accepted

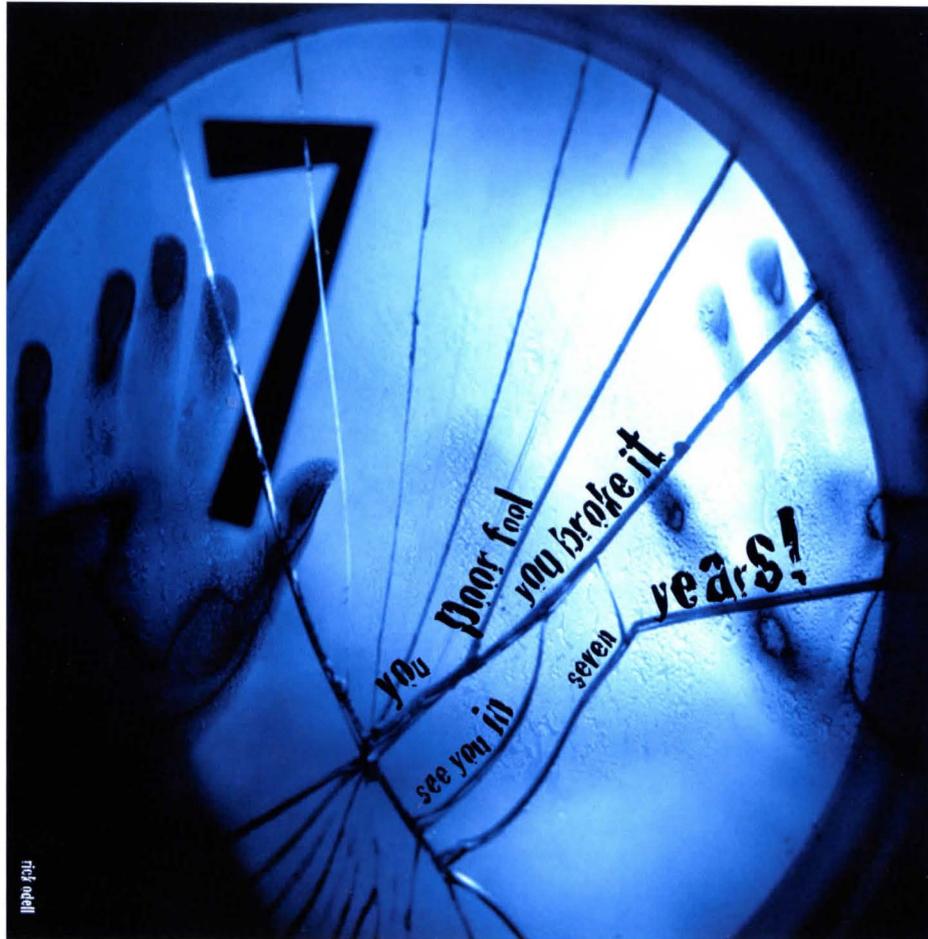


John V. Aragon
"Model #3"



Cherisse Garcia
"Locomotion"

Bad Luck



The AVENGERS

AVENGERS



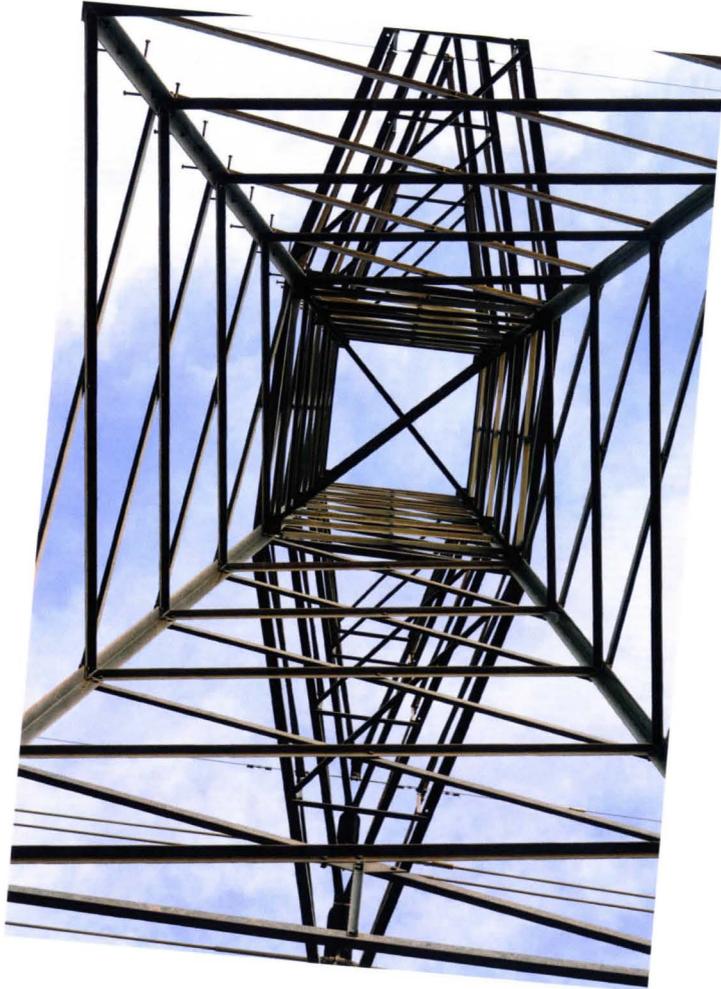
VANAKEN pet Hospital



First Place

C. J. Edwards

X Marks the Spot



62

Photography

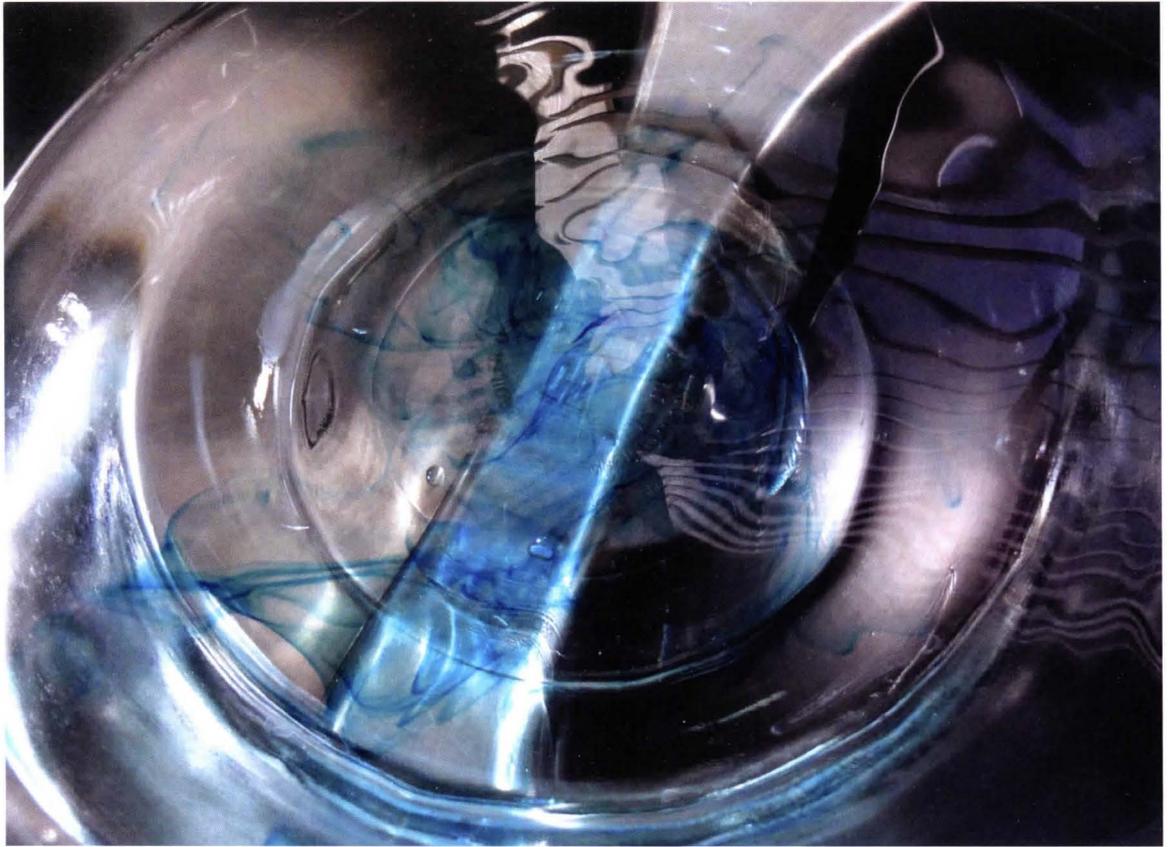
Illuminated



Third Place

Amber Day

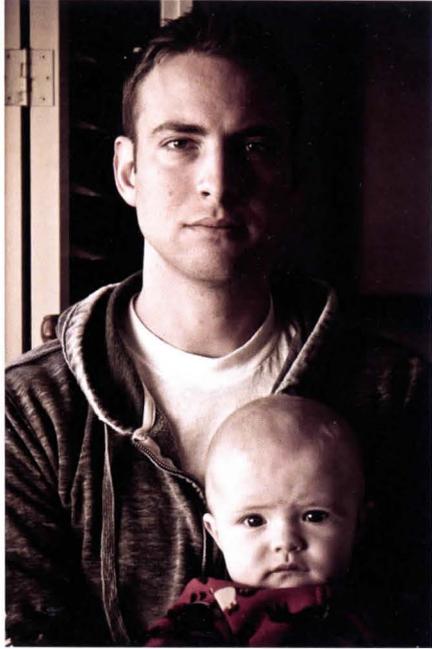
b₂O



64

Photography

Honorable Mention



Arnon Livingstone
"Untitled 2"



Mike Moore
"Untitled 2"



Christina Romano
"Fire Gods"



Christina Romano
"004 Dirtfinger"



Dakota Ostler
"Renewal"



Terrence Pierce
"Falling for Fall"

Tap DANCING

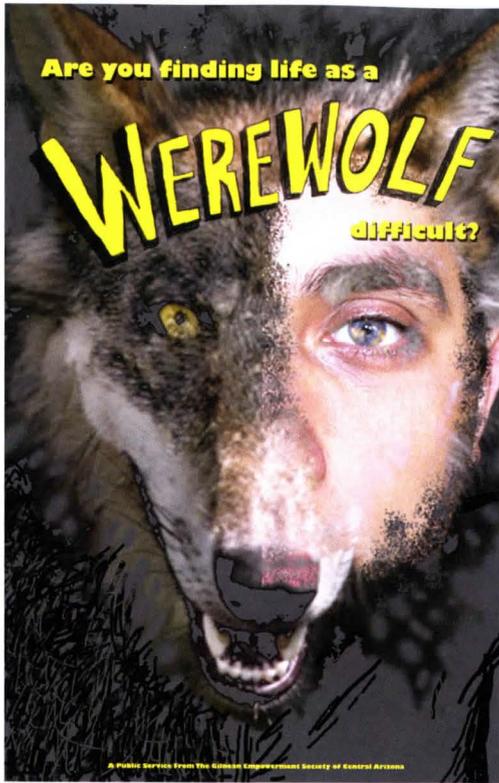


Second Place

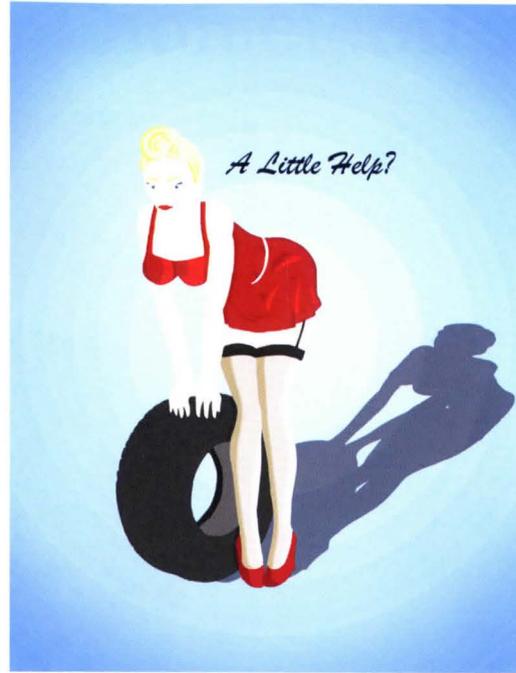
Samantha Maughan

GROWING PAINS





Megan Jacobson
"Life as a Werewolf"



Miguel Moreno
"Pin-Up"

First Place

Melissa Palacios

Mermaid's Tale



Sandi Whyman

Second Place

Chameleon



Jewelry

71

Third Place

Patricia Keanini

Layered Syphtomy



Through Sound & Motion



NORTHERN EXPRESS



Sandi Whyman

First Place

The Family Tree



Sculpture

75

Second Place

Arnon Livingstone

Elmira



76

Sculpture

Nannette White

Third Place

RIVER OF LIFE



Sculpture

Family Totem Pole



Nannette White

Second Place

Paisleys



Ceramics

79

Third Place

April Watt

GROOVY SQUARES POT



SUMMER GARDEN



First Place

Mary Worel

AUTUMN



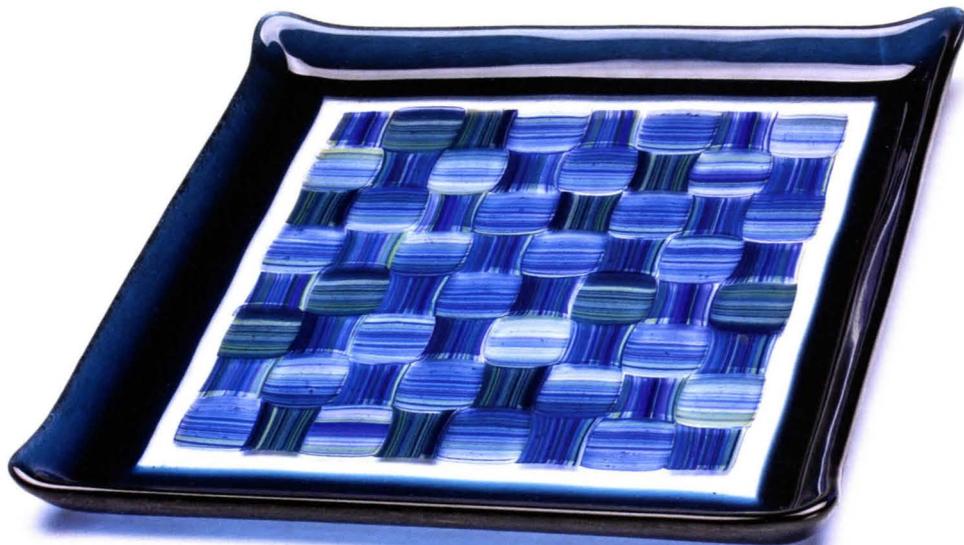
Ruffled Confetti



Third Place

Mary Wore

Blue Square



Glass

Credits

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<i>Project Manager & Designer</i>	Kiersten Bauer
<i>Designer</i>	M. Alec Lomas
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<i>Illustrator</i>	Katie Bernard
<i>Illustrator</i>	Amy Wahl
<i>Illustrator</i>	Kenzie Guerrero
<i>Illustrator</i>	Miguel Moreno
<i>Illustrator</i>	Nathaniel Weinstein

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<i>Literary Arts Content</i>	John Ventola

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Marlys Kubicek

Community Reader

Molly Villemez

Faculty Literary Judges

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Renee Barstack
Lauren Brandenburg
Jayme Cook
Gina Desai
Trevor Duston
Roxanna Dewey

Jenna Duncan
Kimberly Mathes
Virgil Mathes
Rashmi Menon
Phillip Roderick
Mark Viquesney
Lori Walk

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