The Traveler

Volume 48
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The Traveler is a student creative arts magazine produced annually by the English and Art Departments of Glendale Community College.

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

Patterns are everywhere. They are hidden in the biology of nature and woven through concepts in college textbooks. They rest in the framework of architecture and dance on the fibers of our clothing. Earning a place by talented students, they can be found in the pages of this book in words that travel through creative writing and in repeated elements skillfully placed in visual art. The theme of patterns, designed with inspiration from the Arts and Crafts Movement of the late 19th century, guides the readers through their travels. Each section uniquely points to London, Tokyo, New York, Barcelona, and Rome.

Literary Arts

Fiction

Non-Fiction

Poetry

Play

Visual Arts

Photography

Drawing

Painting

Three-Dimensional

Graphic Design

Glass & Jewelry

Fiction

1st Place

Twinkle Twinkle

by Dexter Ferrie

The moonlit sky danced in through the windows, decorating everything it touched with a silvery glow. Henry enjoyed specifically two things about this time of night during this time of the year: that he had large windows on both the northern and southern sides of his house, and that it meant a certain star was free to be observed.

Henry never understood his fascination with this star. It was a rather ordinary star of no particular significance; an underwhelming star if anything. It shined the same way all the other stars did, white and uneventfully. However every year around this time he felt the urge to pull out his telescope and observe it.

He would find himself sitting there for hours just staring at it, seemingly unaware of the amount of time that passed. It was both an enthralling and mentally stimulating experience for him. He felt it difficult to express these feelings to his peers though.

If anyone, an astronomer is aware of the myriad stars in the universe, and therefore tends not to take particular interest in one star and one star alone. Expressing his fascination for a particular star to a fellow astronomer would be like a chicken farmer trying to explain to another how much he fancies one egg above the rest; an essentially futile effort. However, this didn't bother Henry much; he preferred the comfort of his own mind to that of another's.

There Henry sat, like he did every June, in his front row seat to the galaxy. He favored this spot over any other spot in his house. Occupied solely by a swiveling, somewhat grandiose leather chair suitable for any Bond villain; accompanied by a contrastingly

humble side table to the right. Nothing pleased him more than to sit in this chair, at this time of night, at any time of the year.

Henry walked to the kitchen and opened the cupboard to the right of the fridge to pick one of three clean whiskey glasses. The movements he made in this process lacked fluidity, but felt like a practiced rhythm. He removed the stopper from his Waterford decanter and poured himself two fingers of scotch. He didn't bother with ice.

Henry didn't need to adjust his telescope to find the star. He had actually created his own algorithm specifically for this star. The algorithm took into consideration the location of the Earth at any point in time in its solar orbit, as well as the minute factor of planetary precession. With sufficient information both of these variables are predictable down to the decimal point. Having only one celestial body to track, creating the algorithm itself became an easy task, for Henry at least.

His mind craved the scientific advancement of his era, but the sedative bliss of simplicity tugged at his heart.

Henry released a sigh after sipping his drink, sitting in his walnut colored throne. If it were any other time of the year he would have a record playing. He had a penchant for vintage interests and arcane artifacts of any sort. His mind craved the scientific advancement of his era, but the sedative bliss of simplicity tugged at his heart.

Henry fixated his gaze on his star, the star which Henry and everyone else called Eta Ophiuchi. A pearly nearly incandescent ornament in the sky, carved into the black nothing housing it and everything else. Henry explained it as a binary star system. Two stars orbit around a shared center point. Being all that they were, and considering everything around them, he had no choice but to admire the sheer romanticism of their relationship.

He couldn't put his finger on it, but something felt just *different* this time around. This had been the first viewing of the year, but something caught Henry's attention. A ringing of sorts;

not like the incessant ringing of a phone, but the kind that lures a person in, like fresh honey and milk in a hot cup of tea.

His gaze ever-fixated, five minutes had passed before Henry blinked for the first time. In the last thirty seconds of the fifth minute, Henry witnessed something he was then incapable of understanding. He observed an intense radiation of colors throughout the entire electromagnetic spectrum. His body had no possible way of interpreting the events taking place; therefore basic sensory functions became muddled, scrambling to make sense of it all. It was a rainbow that not only shined in every color visible to the human eye, but strummed the strings of life itself, on the cusp of reality.

The radio waves sung shrill like banshees, erecting every single hair on Henry's neck, leaving a sweet, mellow taste in his mouth. The x-rays massaged and permeated his being, allowing him to feel parts of his body he had not previously been aware of. The infrared splashed and swarmed him, enveloping him in a salty, thick, electrifying tide.

The star became rather normal looking again, but it was definitely not the same.

The euphoria never waned in the half minute that it gripped Henry. However after that thirty seconds had passed, as if directed to do so, Henry blinked, and it had all disappeared. The star became rather normal looking again, but it was definitely not the same. Not to Henry.

He continued to stare at the star after the phenomenon occurred, yearning for another performance. Henry chose to sleep in that chair that night.

While he slept something stirred deep inside of him, fighting to unwind and dismember whatever reality Henry held onto.

* * *

Henry woke up the next morning with no recollection of the fantastic wonder he witnessed the night before; he felt

completely and utterly exhausted of anything resembling the will to work. Henry taught two introductory level astronomy courses during the summer. He was Dr. Henry Louis by trade, but what few peers he had preferred to call him Hank. He somewhat liked the name Hank, but never had the courage to introduce himself as a Hank. Henry didn't feel like a Hank.

The classes he taught blurred together like the words in the textbooks he wrote.

The classes he taught blurred together like the words in the textbooks he wrote. Henry thought it might be a good time to get his eyes checked again. He found himself to be intellectually deprived and ultimately bored with his status as an educator; the students always asked the same questions about the same things. Discontent as he may have been with his choice in professions, he didn't have many other options.

Henry felt somewhat out of focus, life seemed to be hazier than usual. It wasn't just his worsening eyesight either.

The tether that kept him from drifting into insanity was loosening its hold.

He sat in his classroom, wasting the time it took for one class to leave and another to enter. Henry usually used this time to do one of a few things he normally does. Catch up on his reading, grade some exams. This was just an attempt at speeding through his dreaded days at work. This time though, he was doing none of the things he would normally do. In fact he was completely idle, mentally and physically so. He was positioned in his desk at the base level of the lecture hall; the epicenter of knowledge. His mind drifted from one thought to another with no segue, with glazed and shallow eyes. Solely conducting his train of thought was a dull ringing in the back of his head. The tone, not unlike Henry, sat perfectly still. It remained in the back of his head like a hermit crab inhabiting a new shell, or rather, cohabiting one.

As he entered his house he cast his messenger bag to the floor whilst slipping off his penny loafers. The way his house was

designed his telescope welcomed him every time he opened his door. The hardened leer of an exhausted man softened to a look a person might give a loved one. He walked to the kitchen and opened his fridge, and without examining nor removing any of its contents he closed it. He opened the cupboard and shoved his hand in the direction of the whiskey glasses. As he retrieved one he managed to hit both the other whiskey glass and the bottom of the cupboard; sounds that might normally irritate Henry had he not been so unusually absent-minded. Gracelessly he filled his glass to an indiscriminate level.

Ignorant of whatever time it may have been and the fact that the Sun still sat in the sky, Henry sat in his chair. He nearly burned his corneas after thoughtlessly staring into the eyepiece. There was nothing else to look forward to that day, so in the chair he would remain. He grabbed a leather-bound notebook and pencil from under the side table.

He didn't write much, but the urge to do so occasionally bubbled up inside of him, like a growth that could no longer hold its form. He wrote poetry, scribbled some sketches. This made him feel like a thirteen year old boy, and that made him feel slightly uncomfortable.

Before Henry knew it the Sun was just saying its farewells, only to be seen again tomorrow. After the sun had fully sunk below the horizon, Henry would make a point to check every five minutes to see if his star might be visible. He bounced from his notebook to his telescope and back for twenty-three minutes--Henry had grown impatient in the last three minutes and chose to check again short of the self-allotted five--before the star system made her encore.

Frozen in fervent anticipation Henry sat waiting for *something*, the nature of which he was unaware.

Beaming with lithe and glowing with grace she soared, at no pace but her own. Frozen in fervent anticipation Henry sat waiting for *something*, the nature of which he was unaware. A

leitmotif was beginning to make its presence known

After seventy-one minutes something separated Henry from the world around him. Torn free like a page from a book these two became isolated, existing only in the vicinity of each other. As Henry stared into his lover's eyes, his heart rate soared, and his palms began to perspire. Instantaneously his hands began to shake and writhe, and did so for five minutes.

In the last thirty seconds of these five minutes the episodic euphoria resurfaced; the same euphoria that enraptured Henry the night before, at that exact same time. Ecstasy filled his being, and he became extremely and apparently sexually stimulated. After the final thirty seconds had made their on-stage bows Henry blinked, shuttered, and simultaneously climaxed. This above all else had been the most intimate thing Henry had ever experienced, as it stood unmatched to anything he had ever felt for a woman. This, however, may have been the most tragic part of it all, for Henry would never remember or ever be able to feel those completely intoxicating emotions again.

His head fuzzy with an unrelenting ringing, he finished his drink, laid his head back, and closed his eyes. He quickly fell into a slumber; unconsciously awaiting the final act, the magnum opus of the universe itself.

* * *

Henry slept for a total of fifteen hours before waking once more. Work was not an option, as it was already eight at night. Though, even if he had the opportunity to work, he most certainly would not have been able to. This fact became clearer and clearer to Henry as he attempted to simply accomplish his daily routine.

He stumbled, staggered, and fell through the chaotic haze from his telescope to the kitchen. His body no longer wanted to work the way it usually did. Fumbling through the cupboards it became apparent that reading or really comprehending the words on the labels was futile. These straight and curved lines he once knew as letters and words were now no more than just that, meaningless lines with dots here and there. He grasped for familiar

shaped objects, but this effort proved to be fruitless as well. Henry only became aware of the fact that he was trying to make coffee with cocoa powder and garlic salt until tasting the vile concoction. He threw and shattered the coffee mug on the ground. He felt useless. He felt more monkey than man.

He grabbed a cool, smooth object containing a liquid that audibly sloshed around. He opened it, drank some, and immediately gasped, the acidic vapors choking him. Despite the unpleasantness of this experience he continued to drink, based perhaps solely on the premise of familiarity. After a couple shaky sips his vision returned, his hands calmed. Henry wasn't sure whether the two events were related; someone or something had just thrown him a life preserver.

Henry himself had become both the instrument and the musician, strumming his own strings to vibrate in harmony with the stars.

He rubbed his temples, clearing the fogged window of his mind. He opened the cupboard and took the last remaining whiskey glass. Not only had Henry regained his lucidity, but his robotic functions seemed to be intact as well. He opened the freezer and plucked out three ice cubes separately, and separately put three ice cubes in the glass. He was moving with such mechanical efficiency that he started to maintain a rhythm. Henry himself had become both the instrument and the musician, strumming his own strings to vibrate in harmony with the stars.

He poured exactly thirty milliliters of scotch into the glass. He had labeled the shot glasses volumetrically when he first bought them; knowing the exact amount of alcohol he consumed was a generally comforting idea.

He walked back to the telescope and stood next to it, like a father would with his son. He sipped his drink and closed his eyes. What or if he thought at that moment was unknown. He hung his head at a low angle, and a crooked smile cracked open across face. He opened his eyes and set his drink down on the side

table that was now to the left of him.

He began giggling, which climbed to laughter, and finally crescendoed to hysteria.

Henry shouted cheers and applause, "Brava, Brava!" "Encore!" He felt the clock tick towards finality with every clap of his hands. Tears formed a constant stream down his face, and the hairs on his body stood in ovation.

Henry's knees buckled underneath him.

The rapid descent of his body hitting the side table knocked over and shattered his whiskey glass. All movement had left his body.

The universe made its final bow.

Henry bowed back.

2nd Place

The Man in the Polka Dot Dress

by Amber Rhodes

I walked in on my mother crying again tonight. A high-heeled shoe nearly grazed my cheek as I came in to check on her. With desperate, shaking fury, she hurled them, one by one, across her room. My stomach felt empty and tight as I watched her untangle her small, delicate feet from the straps of a much too big stiletto.

I wanted to ask when dad was coming home. I wanted to yell at her to stop being angry at him. I wanted to sit down next to her and cry and throw things, too. Instead, I looked away from her wet, red face and started picking up the shoes that were now littered across the hardwood floor. She didn't look at me, either.

Behind the mirrored door of my parents' walk-in closet were two very neat rows of dress-clothes and expensive shoes – each row ending in a tall, dark wood armoire. My father's long, stern, successful-looking suits stood like dark shadow soldiers to my left. To my right, my mother's wild, floral summer dresses and elegant, bright evening gowns shown like a sunrise against the darkness.

As I made my way down the length of the closet, clutching several pairs of pretty, pointed shoes to my chest, the walls seemed to turn and topple around me. Suddenly I felt as though I was in a vortex tunnel at some sick carnival: disoriented and dizzy, heels pressing painfully into my ribs. Tripping wildly over my own feet, I dropped the shoes and reached out blindly to my right as my knees began to buckle, desperate to catch myself. In the end, I only succeeded in pulling one heavy, charcoal suit down with me.

I waited. Either my mother hadn't heard the loud clatter of shoes hitting the floor and my elbow slamming against the wall, or she couldn't be bothered to check on me. Still, I waited. I leaned my head against the wall of the closet with a pair of crisply creased pant legs swaying in front of my face like the pendulum of a clock and trying to catch glimpses of my mother's favorite gold, silk gown between each pass.

"You are the sun" Daddy told her, when he bought her that dress, "The warmth and light of my life."

I rubbed my aching elbow and thought that I had waited long enough, but I couldn't make myself get up.

I rubbed my aching elbow and thought that I had waited long enough, but I couldn't make myself get up. The charcoal suit still lay across my knees like a weight, keeping me down. I touched the sturdy fabric, softly at first, and then clenched it in a fist.

"Take care of your mother," he told Jason, just before leaving. "You're the man of the house now."

But, Jason is only twelve years old, and this suit is far too big for him. The pants and jacket were hemmed and specially altered to fit the wide, muscular legs and strong, broad shoulders of my father. The scale and seams were tailored specifically to his strength and social standing. No one else in the world could fill these for him.

Taking a deep, shaky breath, I finally got back to my feet. Slowly, and with much care, I re-hung the charcoal suit in its rightful place. I gathered the fallen shoes, silently. I couldn't hear my mother's weeping anymore, so perhaps she had managed to compose herself enough to leave the room – to leave me here in this closet. Standing here, I felt like I walked the thin line of a deep chasm that was too deep for anyone else to find, while each of my parent's essences loomed over me on either side.

I walked anxiously to the end of the closet. To the right, my mother's armoire door had been left open slightly. I pushed it closed without looking inside. Children shouldn't know all of

the secrets kept by their parents. Those thick, wooden doors were built to shield us from all the somber, serious and angry things that mothers aren't supposed to show the world; all the things in her eyes that her sky-bright dresses worked so hard to distract us from.

Unlike my mother's, my father's secrets were no longer safe.

Turning away from my mother's closed doors, I faced the matching wardrobe. Unlike my mother's, my father's secrets were no longer safe. I had seen what lay behind these doors – seen him flaunt it unforgivingly in front of my mother without any consideration for her feelings.

"You understand, don't you Princess?" he had asked me, while my mother screamed and threw expensive china in the kitchen. "Keeping secrets…lying to yourself, and to the people you love… Every lie and every secret is like a little piece of glass," he picked up a shard that had slid across the perfect marble floor to land at his feet. The light coming through the French doors gleamed off the sharpened point of it as I stared. "They slice you all up inside until everyone around you can see them poking through."

Slowly, and without much feeling, I opened the doors to his armoire one at a time. Ebony wooden hangers hung in a perfect row along a brass pole looking, for all the world, like bones beneath the collars of the clothes that clung to them. From each of these expensive skeletons hung a large dress in deep, sensible, solid colors. They were made from fabrics of the best quality and tailored in a way so that no one else could fill them but my father.

I lined the large high heeled shoes neatly on the shelves beneath the dresses, taking my time to insure that they were each placed perfectly where they belonged. I turned my attention back to the dresses and ran my fingers through them.

"Can I still call you Papa?" I had asked.

"Of course, Princess," he smiled at me, though he looked on the verge of tears. "I'm all mixed up. I can't seem to get my insides to match my outsides. But the one and only thing that stays the same about me when everything else changes, is that I love

you so very much. No matter what else I am, I am your Papa, and I always will be."

My fingers rested on a black and pink polka-dot dress, wedged into the very back corner of the wardrobe. It was the only one of the dresses that didn't hint at sadness and shame. Picturing my stern, imposing father in the dress brought a smile to my face. And, silently, I prayed one day he'd get a chance to wear it.

I wondered if I'd be brave enough to walk next to him when he did – hold his hand in public and call him "Papa." People would walk by and whisper loudly about the man in the polka-dot dress, but I would smile at how tall he stood beside me. I would strive to match his strong walk and build my shoulders up as broad and straight as his.

And, I've seen him smile with pure joy when he tries on a pair of women's shoes.

That's the hardest part for my mother: the whispers. Even though he swears he loves her just as much as the day they married, she's embarrassed of him. She wants him to forever be the successful man in the neat, dark suits who intimidates and empowers the people around him. But, I've seen him crying in his suits in front of the mirror when he thinks no one is watching. And, I've seen him smile with pure joy when he tries on a pair of women's shoes.

He's right when he says that secrets tear us up inside. When they touch the surface, no matter how perfectly fitted and masculine his suit may be, we'll all get a glimpse of the man in the polka-dot dress.

3rd Place

A Man of Light and Scales

by Sara Dobie Bauer

You meet him your second day in Charleston. More so, perhaps, you meet his violin. He's wearing a suit you imagine cost as much as a car. No tie, which allows you a peek at his long, pale throat and into the shadowy place were neck meets chest. As he speaks to you, he's still holding his violin: a red piece of wood with scratch marks and a faded veneer. You wonder at the abuse the instrument has taken but soon think these are not marks of abuse but marks of love—of devotion.

You're in a place called the Charleston Grill. Waiters scurry like albino beetles in white shirts and dark slacks. The restaurant smells of butter and fish but mostly butter. There's a large framed photo of Billie Holiday on the back wall.

After the jazz quintet finishes their last set, you find out his name is Graydon Kelly and he would like to take you to dinner. At first, you think you should say no. He has that look about him: the thorn on the rose, the sugared rim of the poisoned glass. He's over six feet tall. He has black hair, offset by light blue eyes. His cheekbones are even higher than yours, and you fleetingly think that if you reproduced with this man, your children's faces would be pointed and sharp.

You agree to meet him the following night at a small Italian restaurant around the block called Il Cortile, translated from "Courtyard of the King," and you laugh when you realize there is something quite kingly about Graydon Kelly.

When he shows up to your date late, you reassess. He's in a pastel linen button-down and torn jeans. He has on boat shoes, and his curly black hair is a mess. He smells like pine. "Rosin," he

explains. Something to do with his violin.

He takes your hand and leads you to a table in the courtyard. His left hand is callused against yours. Outside, winding, wrestling fig veins grow up the exterior wall, illuminated by white twinkle lights that mimic the stars. He pulls out your chair and sighs into his seat.

He must notice you looking at him, because he smiles. "I look different when I'm not on stage."

You acknowledge this is true.

"What's the old adage? Fall in love with Gilda, but wake up to me?"

You fall into conversation, and it's not the usual, polite, getting to know you babble. Graydon Kelly says odd, irresponsible things like, "You seem like you're running from something" or "You have an amazing mouth" or the worst, "What do you think of me exactly?"

You know this is a lie. You're wild about every inch of him.

You only respond to the last comment: a terse, "I'm not sure." You know this is a lie. You're wild about every inch of him.

He walks you home in a rainstorm, leaving you both soaked and panting on the crooked front porch of the yellow plantation house you rent on Vanderhorst Street. He presses you against the exterior wall and kisses you with his hands in your hair. He smells like rain and marinara sauce with the lingering touch of pine. He tastes like tiramisu.

You invite him to fuck you on the front porch. At this, he falters. Perhaps not the thorn on the rose after all. But he falters only a moment before lifting your skirt, lifting you.

But Graydon Kelly does not fuck. He is an artist. His hips move the way he moves his bow across violin strings. When he comes with his forehead pressed against yours, you're horrified to realize you could easily love this man.

Later, in your bed, you find him conversational. He makes himself at home. He is comfortable with pillow talk, even with an

almost stranger. Again, you doubt your assessments.

He seemed so dangerous in his dark suit at Charleston Grill but so playful in his boat shoes with his messy hair: almost innocent—the kind of man you would take home to meet Mom. His comfort in your bed, though, is his tell, his admission. He does this all the time. He makes love to women he doesn't know because they ask him to, because of his violin and his face and the strange questions he spouts over champagne.

When you ask about a white scar on his rib cage, he tells you his father used to beat him. One day, his father broke his ribs. One poked through the skin. In Graydon's words, the bone looked like "a stick dipped in marmalade." He was sixteen.

His honesty makes you awkward. You feel a need to share something, too, so you tell him you've been diagnosed schizophrenic. He doesn't know what this means, not really, so you explain to him that you see things sometimes—children in white light on sidewalks; grown men covered in red scales. You tell him things have been better since the medication.

You expect him to leave, but he doesn't. He stays until morning. You wake with his long appendages wrapped around you, his nose in your hair.

Then, he disappears. He's gone for days before you hear from him again. By then, you've run the race of emotions and lost. You were cool at first, calm. Then, you missed him and hated yourself for missing him. Then, you were angry, which was when he returned—at the height of your anger.

He tells you he was gone to Nashville for a show. He tells you he travels a lot. You let him kiss you at Charleston Grill, and that night, he takes you back to his apartment: the second floor of a Battery mansion in the French Quarter. The floors are crooked, and his house smells like the sea.

He calls it "The Ballroom."

It's just one huge room with a bed in the corner, spotless kitchen, a rack of what appear to be expensive clothes, and finally, behind the only door, a bathroom.

He makes love to you in a grand, encompassing way, with his gaze on your face. You want to shield yourself. You feel like Lot's wife, turned to salt.

There is no discussion of titles. You are not his girlfriend.

When another woman kisses him in front of you, you say not a word.

After that, you allow yourself occasional visits to the Grill to watch him play. Graydon has played since he was eight, taught in Ireland, where he spent his childhood, which explained the accent that circled his vowels when he drank too much scotch. You watch his callused fingers. Your eyes wander down every crease and crevice of his black suit. You picture the way he looks underneath: a sinewy stretch of muscle and pale flesh and wonder how many other women in the room picture the same. You run your fingers down the side of your glass, slick with condensation.

He spends more time at your house. He brings sheet music, composes. One day, as you bring him a cup of coffee, you see your name written in pencil at the top of a page. The sound of musical scales is omnipresent.

You tell him you love him months later, and he frowns.

You tell him you love him months later, and he frowns. He says, "I told you not to fall in love with me."

And he did, too, the night you met his rich, Irish mother. In fact, he begged you. He begged you again and again, "Don't fall in love with me. Don't fall in love with me."

You were afraid to ask why.

With your newly recognized emotions, you think Graydon Kelly will stop seeing you. Instead, the sex gets even better, almost as if he seeks to fulfill your emotional needs by giving you the gift of his skin. And it is a gift. You suspect he knows it.

You stop taking your meds and end up in a hospital. You don't remember much. You remember the Grill and violin music. You had one of your hallucinations—a child surrounded by light, then nothing. When you open your eyes, you're in an

uncomfortable bed. Machines beep around you. Your head aches, and the violin player sleeps, slumped in a chair with his hand over yours.

You wake him with your voice, and he seems panicked. His light blue eyes dart around the room. He paces. He wants to know when you ate last. He demands, "When was the last time you ate?"

There is blood on his white shirt. It's from a wound on your head. Apparently, you passed out and knocked yourself against a barstool. Graydon curls up in the little hospital bed with you, and you run your fingers through his hair.

He tells you he loves you, and now, you understand his earlier request: *Don't fall in love with me*. You are panicked to understand you've been waiting your whole life for a man to love you. Now one does, and the pressure in your heart equals only the pressure in your bandage-bound head.

He says playing music is like drowning, like when you stay underwater too long and feel light-headed, high.

His composition is finished by Christmas. It is, in fact, your Christmas gift. He named it for you, and he plays it with his eyes closed. He plays most music with his eyes closed. He says he likes to feel the notes. He says playing music is like drowning, like when you stay underwater too long and feel light-headed, high. He says it feels like that.

You begin to wonder how much he hides from you. You know about his father, dead now ten years. You've met his mother, who worships him like the Christ child. He has only one friend: a dreadlocked drummer named Quent with flawless skin and beautiful teeth. Women circle Graydon, always.

Some nights, you stare at yourself in the mirror. You know you are lovely. You have long, chestnut hair. You have multi-colored eyes that resemble flower petals up close. Your cheekbones are high—but not as high as his. As he said, you have a very nice mouth. Despite all this, you sometimes wonder why he chose you.

Of all the women in Charleston, he chose to love you.

When you end up in the hospital again, you fight. You had one of your visions. You saw a man with red scales, and you passed out. Graydon does not call you crazy, but he looks strangled. You decide your love is his noose, so you send him away, screaming.

He tells you days later that he slept with one of the nurses. After you kicked him out, he asked her out for coffee and instead fucked her in the hospital parking garage.

You take him back, because he's not the man in the suit when he admits all this. He's the man from your first date in the torn jeans and boat shoes. He's the man with the unkempt black hair and the cloud of pine. He reminds you of home when you hug him and hold him until he stops shaking. He moves into your yellow house permanently.

At your wedding, he plays the song he wrote for you. He pays the big bucks to get you a suite at Charleston Place. In your fervor to remove his suit and find him, just him, underneath, you forget the condom.

When you tell him you're pregnant, he worries his bottom lip. You think he's going to tell you to get rid of the child. He can't be a father. Of course he can't. He travels and plays late nights and drinks too much. As you prepare yourself, though, he leans over in bed and rests his head on your stomach.

He says, "I think I hear Bach."

He missed Angela's birth by five minutes but rushed in, hair askew, sweat on his brow, and took your newborn daughter in his hands like a Stradivarius.

Graydon Kelly is a wonderful father, despite everyone's expectations. He was playing a show in Columbia when you went into labor. He missed Angela's birth by five minutes but rushed in, hair askew, sweat on his brow, and took your newborn daughter in his hands like a Stradivarius.

He played a new song—a secret song—that he'd written for his little girl to the delight and amusement of the entire

obstetrics floor.

He devotes all his emotion to Angela and to you. There are still those nights when you look in the mirror and wonder how you ended up with the talk of Charleston as your husband.

He gets more handsome with age, and you didn't think that possible. He fills out a little. You enjoy the way his chest expands, the way he makes you feel smaller, smaller. There is less of you now, more of him. His black hair mimics the slick iridescence of a duck's wing. His eyes darken. His left hand, as always, is callused.

You love how in bed you know which of his hands touches you, right or left.

Sometimes you think you never should have agreed to that first date.

You love him more than you love your daughter. You would die for him, kill for him. Sometimes you think you never should have agreed to that first date.

But then, he starts composing again, and when composing, he looks like a scungy frat boy. He goes from thirty-eight-year-old celebrity violinist to backwards cap-wearing, finger-chewing, forgets-to-shower little boy. You love him the most when he's like this. Then comes a new song, and you love him more, more.

Angela grows. Graydon decides she will learn piano. She looks just like her father. You feel as though there is none of you in her, as though his dominant features suppressed your own. Your features linger in your empty uterus.

One night, you ask him to fuck you. You don't want to make love, and he obliges. By the end, you slide over each other, covered in sweat. You pass names back and forth, pants of heated breath. His orgasm is so jarring he leaves fingerprint bruises on the outsides of your thighs.

Since they adjusted your medication, you don't see the demons or angels anymore. There are no children in white light

waiting on the corners of Vanderhorst and King. There are no slinking men with red scales and yellow eyes. No more hospital visits.

You think you are happy. You watch Graydon play with Angela in your backyard. She already far surpasses her piano teacher's expectations and her father's. The little girl has long, black hair that curls around her pale neck. She has her father's fleeting smile, his long fingers. She has his glowing blue eyes.

When he's on stage at the Charleston Grill, he doesn't look at you because he enjoys the slow asphyxiation his violin allows. When he is at home, he stares at you, adores you. Then, he looks away. You often wonder if you've stopped seeing things at all. Don't you?

Honorable Mention

When the Dogs Cry

by Amber Rhodes

I find it hardest to sleep when the dogs cry. Under the stars in the dark desert night, they cry the loudest.

We had dogs when I was younger: dozens of them. But, I never had a puppy or a pet of my own. Once when I was about seven, I remember sneaking out to the shed after one of the dogs had just given birth. I took one puppy from the cold, Afghanistan dirt and sat there, cradling its small body in my small hands while it blindly sucked at my fingers. Then my father came in, cuffed me on the ear, snatched the pup up, and tossed it casually into a crate with the rest of the litter.

"It is not smart," he said, "to let a fighting dog get a taste of you."

Such compassion, my father knew, bred weakness.

At the time I thought my father was trying to protect me. I recognize now, though, that he wasn't afraid the dogs would hurt me. He was afraid they would love me. Such compassion, my father knew, bred weakness. Breeding death and violence was much more profitable.

Smiling unhappily at the memory, I readjusted the shoulder strap of my gun and let the weight of it rest on my lap as I sat against the mud brick wall. I was never warned about how heavy it was: the death and violence that men like my father liked to breed. My shoulders ached and my neck was tight with it. But I had learned of it early enough without their warnings.

Every afternoon as a child, I listened to the dogs fighting as I went about my chores. Every night I dreamed of them

screaming: that high-pitched, quick-as-a-heartbeat song that pierced right through my chest and out the other side. I woke every morning, before sunrise, to their pitiful crying.

They never cried in the daylight. It might be that they would have been punished if they had – though I never saw my father do such a thing. It could have been that they were too proud to show that weakness to the rest of us. Or perhaps, like me, they were afraid of the dark and the loud, red dreams that followed it.

"*As-salamu alaykum*" said the tall man who came to relieve me of my post, interrupting my thoughts.

What strange things we've become, to hold such a big gun in one hand and offer peace with the other.

It was a windy night and my face was covered by the extension of my turban to prevent the dust from invading my lungs. But even with such protection I did not let my lips twitch as I accepted his offered hand and pushed myself off the ground. "*Wa alaikum as salaam*," I replied automatically. Peace. What strange things we've become, to hold such a big gun in one hand and offer peace with the other.

The dog at his side, a sand colored kuchi, lowered its ears at me and snarled so silently that his master didn't notice. I couldn't tell if its coat was naturally brown or if it had been white before the dust storm drowned it out. I marveled at its defensiveness, even as I walked back to my room and my cot. All of the dogs here hated me. I wondered if they heard the screams that echoed in my ears; the screams of their brothers dying, or the pitch dark sound of them crying.

Upon entering my small room, I glanced at the prayer mat rolled up at the foot of my mattress. At sunrise I would wash the layers of dust from my hands, face and feet, point my mat towards Mecca, and kneel in front of Allah. I would touch my forehead to the ground and show my subservience to God, as I did five times a day, every day. Then I would be able to rest with the daylight shining through my window, burning away bad dreams.

In truth, my prayers are just empty words spoken to the lifeless mat below me. Not because I do not believe in God, but because I am not worthy of his blessing. The *salat* is for the clean and pure. My mind is muddy and my soul is soiled. To offer myself to God would be blasphemous.

When the time for fighting finally arrived, I didn't watch the dogs. I couldn't bear to. Instead I watched the men.

The first time I knelt before Allah in shame, I was eleven and old enough to handle the daily chores of the pit. I fed the dogs cold, red meat while flies restlessly followed my movements. I raked the dirt floor until it was even and the dried rust spots had faded into the rest of the pale brown earth. I collected money from the men who came to watch the melee. When the time for fighting finally arrived, I didn't watch the dogs. I couldn't bear to. Instead I watched the men.

Their faces were as hungry as the sounds that came from ring they surrounded. Bets were placed. Dogs fought, snarled, screamed, and bled. Some died. Some injured were killed by their owners. A few fights were called on submission without serious injury to either animal. Even so, the whole event ended in blood. Blood pooled in puddles on the ground and glittered in the eyes of men. And I was there to clean it.

I dragged two bully kuttas to the bin by myself – trying not to see their familiar faces – and set the brush and flame. Afterwards, with only ten minutes to spare before our late afternoon prayer, I ran quickly to wash up.

It wasn't until I was kneeling and reciting the first lines of the *salat* that saw it: red crusted crescent moons buried under my fingernails, as clear as daylight. My fingers reached towards Mecca but ten blood moons stared back at me, accusingly, like mocking little slices of the Islamic flag.

One does not worship at the feet of God with blood on his hands. Women aren't even allowed to pray when their monthly blood is on them – and that was of their own flesh. Mine was the

blood of lesser creatures. Animals were ours to protect in the eyes of Allah.

More than anything, though, I grew to be like those dogs.

Lying in my bed now I contemplated the consequences of being raised among the fighting pits of Kabul. I had grown into a man much like my father – willing to sacrifice the lives of some to appease the appetites of others. I adopted the blind hunger of the men who came to savor the violence. More than anything, though, I grew to be like those dogs. I lived in an ocean of fear and savagery. And I fought every day. I fought myself and others for my right to cry when the sun went down.

Suddenly, I was startled by the sounds of gunshots and yelling, and grabbed my gun instinctively. Running from my mattress and my memories, I burst into the open desert where the dust was finally settling down and American soldiers could be seen creeping towards the camp under the cover of the storm.

"Time to kill some American dogs!" said a man who crouched beside me.

I nodded in agreement, though all I could think about was blood on my hands and the dogs crying in the night, and the sound of men screaming as it pierced through my chest and out the other side.

Non-Fiction

1st Place

The Day My Father Fell

by Amber Rhodes

There was something in my brother's voice when he told me: an emotion so far from anything I could reach.

"It's dad," he said. "He fell."

I listened to the trembling in his voice and how clearly his sorrow saturated each syllable. Like a sociopath, I marveled at his capacity for compassion – his aptitude for agony. As he relayed the circumstances of my father's fall, between sobs and heavy silences, I sat in wordless wonder.

Later that evening, I would sit in my room practicing.

"He fell." I'd say, but I could never quite get the facial expressions to match the vocal queues.

"He fell." I'd say, but I could never quite get the facial expressions to match the vocal queues. It never sounded personal enough.

Out-loud, I would describe those first few days as having been "numb." My brother preferred to describe me as "unfeeling." But, in all honesty, I did feel something. I felt relieved.

My darkest secret and most unflattering confession is that I was happy that my father slipped over the ledge on the roof of a four-story building and landed, face first, on the hard-packed earth below. He was so high for so long, and he finally fell.

Seventeen hundred miles away, a team of doctors stood over my father and tallied up his injuries: trauma to the brain, broken femur, broken shoulder blade, crushed knee caps and elbows, broken ribs, fractured tailbone, broken hip, ankle, arms, fingers, loss of hearing in left ear, complete loss of vision in left eye,

and internal bleeding.

Like any selfish person, I justified his pain with my own. I sat at home and itemized my own suffering: trauma to my childhood, broken heart, broken promises, crushed hopes and dreams, broken trust, fractured families, broken homes, loss of innocence, complete loss of faith, and internal scars.

Like the Six Million Dollar Man, he was reinvented – changed in all the ways that didn't really matter.

My father was placed in a medically-induced coma while the doctors began rebuilding him. Like the Six Million Dollar Man, he was reinvented – changed in all the ways that didn't really matter.

"He will walk," the proud doctors said. "He will be able to speak and see. And, after some intensive physical therapy he will be able to shower and shave, brush his own hair and teeth, cook his own meals and make his own bed. He will walk. It's a miracle."

Unlike Stephen Hawking and Franklin D. Roosevelt, my father would regain nearly full mobility. After all, who is more deserving of a miracle, if not my father? His contributions to society may not have been in quantum mechanics or economics, but he did traffic a lot of crystal meth across the central part of the United States. That must account for something.

On the day my father woke from his coma, and the feeding tubes and breathing machines were removed so that he could communicate, there was no one familiar at his side. As I was later informed by a disapproving nurse, my father's first words after the incident were: "Has anyone come to visit me?"

When I asked her if his question was the result of his brain injury, she snorted in disgust and passed the phone to a colleague. It wasn't entirely that I thought my father deserved no visitors. It's more that I knew my father was aware that, up until his accident, no one in his family knew where he was. He had bought a car and as much meth as he could afford with his inheritance from his mother's death and drove off into the sunset five years before.

Still, when my father tells the story of his fall, it is very inspiring. He was working construction. He had only taken his harness off for a moment while he ate his lunch. On his way to reclaim his harness, he lost his footing and tumbled over the edge. He says he doesn't remember hitting the ground.

"It's like a falling dream," he always says. "Right before you hit the ground, you just wake up."

The problem is, my father never woke up – not really. He lives an imaginary life with reconstructed memories. It's as if he knows he did something bad, but he can't quite say what it is. Instead, he talks a lot about his revelation. His near-death experience and subsequent immobile isolation left him with a new perspective on life and family. But, the change in perspective is in all the wrong places.

He spoke to me, upon returning to Arizona, of the long days and nights of contemplation he endured in the hospital. His favorite memory to dwell on was my mother's miscarriage. My father lamented the loss of "what might have been" and how heart-broken he was when he heard the news.

"I was so mad at your mother," he likes to say. "If she had taken better care of herself…if she had stayed off the drugs, the baby might have lived."

The one time I tried to remind him that he was the one who kicked my mother multiple times, causing the miscarriage, his hearing aids inexplicably ruptured. Weeks went by before he spoke

Each time I visited with him, he had a new memory to try and convince me was real, and I eventually lost whatever morbid fascination I had in pointing out his inaccuracies.

to me again. Each time I visited with him, he had a new memory to try and convince me was real, and I eventually lost whatever morbid fascination I had in pointing out his inaccuracies.

Only once, after the accident, did I ever hear something true and real from my father. It was about two years after the incident and I was over at his house, trying to help him pay some

of his bills. He had been drinking for the better part of the day. Whether it was the alcohol or his new antidepressants, or the unwise combination of the two, my father was in a state of panic. And, it was from within this state of drunken panic that his first sane and lucid words were wrought.

"I'm sorry." He said. "I was on drugs and I did stupid things, and brought you around stupid people. I did drugs and I was a bad father. I was just like my father, and I never wanted to be like him."

My father pleaded at me with his blood-shot eyes and I watched saliva drip from his lips as he continued, never reaching out to me, "I tried to fix it. I was a bad father and I tried to fix it. I took my harness off, and I tried to fix it. But, I woke up before I hit the ground. I can't stop dreaming. I can't hit the ground."

I'd like to say that even part of me wanted to comfort him. It would be more flattering to say I cried, or hugged him, or accepted his apology. But, that wouldn't be true.

My father was always a horrible person, but I've become a wholly different kind of monster as a result. I didn't cry with him. I didn't touch him or reassure him. I only wished, fervently, that he hadn't failed.

2nd Place

Guilty

by Charles Hisey

My father was a hero. My father was an alcoholic. I share his name, with the exception of the junior tucked on behind. I have memories, both good and bad about my father. I have a guilt that lingers after fifty six years.

He pushed Red out of the way, but he just wasn't quite fast enough.

Charlie, as my father was known, worked as an electrician for Mackie Clemens Coal Company in southeast Kansas. The company strip mined for coal, digging into the earth's entrails for the black rock that burns. One evening in 1946 my father looked up and saw a boulder about to topple from the jaws of the gigantic steam shovel's bucket. He saw its path, and the man standing where it was going to hit. He pushed Red out of the way, but he just wasn't quite fast enough. The boulder landed on my father's legs, crushing his left foot and amputating all but the big toe on the right foot. Both femurs were broken, and the doctors said he would never walk again.

One other thing about my father – he was stubborn. Tell him he can't do something and he'd figure out some way to do it. That seems to be a family trait. The doctors agreed that Charlie would never walk again, and they finally sent him home in a wheelchair. He didn't like that much, so he got a pair of crutches and practiced until he could navigate on them. Crutches were fine, for a while, but he wanted to prove the doctors wrong, so he kept on practicing and soon was walking with a cane. After a while the cane wasn't good enough for my father, so he started walking

without it, just with a slight limp. A miracle, the doctors said – Bull! – just my father's way of working things out for himself.

Charlie started his own business, Hisey Electric, in Pittsburg, Kansas on the family property. He had a building of concrete block erected on the back lot, on Euclid Street. The business was a successful concern, and he hired several employees. My sister worked as secretary and my mother answered the phone, while I worked there after school and on weekends. We kept the business running.

It all sounds like the American success story doesn't it? Well, let me tell you the rest, the unvarnished truth.

Each day my father came home after work, ate dinner and went directly to his bedroom, turned on his radio, and listened to the baseball game. If anyone asked where he was, he was in St. Louis if the Cardinals were home, or whatever city where they were playing.

He was not savage, he was not belligerent, and he was not a noisy drunk. He was just a sad drunk.

I now know that at first my father drank to ease his pain. At least it started out that way. He was not savage, he was not belligerent, and he was not a noisy drunk. He was just a sad drunk. His eyes became glassy and he fell a lot as the iron control he practiced in order to walk slipped with the lubrication of the alcohol. It became so frequent that, when I was old enough to drive, my evenings and weekends consisted of driving around from bar to bar, to hideout, to strip pit to find my father and bring him home. It was not fun. Southeast Kansas had too many bars and hideouts, even though Kansas was a dry state where bars could serve only 3.2% beer, liquor stores could sell vodka and peppermint schnapps, my father's favorites because he thought no one could smell them on his breath. Anyplace big enough for a car to pull over was big enough for him to stop and tilt a bottle. I knew them all. I drove to them all. I drove in pouring rain, in a truck where the defrosters didn't work, and I had to keep wiping the windshield

in order to see. I drove at night, when I should have been studying for my schoolwork. I drove on weekends, when I should have been hanging out with my friends. Everyone knew the situation, but no one ever mentioned it. It was like the old cliché about the crazy uncle in the attic – it just wasn't talked about. Sen-Sen doesn't mask everything.

Now you know about my rage. My father's drinking was ruining everyone's life. As the son, I had to keep everything running, even though I was young. My life consisted of school, work, and traveling the back roads of Southeast Kansas to find my father.

"Why don't you get some of that anger out. Wanna hit me?"

Now here comes the guilt. It was a rainy day, not a drizzle, but a downpour. The cats and dogs wouldn't even come out, so it wasn't raining cats and dogs –it was much worse I was out, as usual, searching for my drunken father. I was driving in the 1949 red Chevy panel van with Hisey Electric painted on the side with floor mounted stick shift and no defrosters working, so I'd drive a few feet, wipe the windshield, and ascertain whether I was still on the road. I finally found him at Barto's, a bar in Frontenac, Kansas. I finally got him in the truck and drove him home. I knew I'd have to have my sister drive me back so I could drive his Studebaker pick-up back home. That Studebaker was so weather-beaten that the original dark blue color was degraded into a rather anemic purple. When I finally got back home, he was in the living room, slumped in a chair. When I attempted to help him to his bedroom he stood up, wavering a little, and looked at me with those glassy eyes that were so shiny you could see your own reflection and stated in a surprisingly calm and precise tone, "Are you pissed off at me?" "Hell yes," I replied, "It's not like I have anything else I'd rather do than go out in this weather to chase down a drunk." He looked at me, still teetering, and added "Why don't you get some of that anger out. Wanna hit me?"

I answered "Yeah, I do." He looked at me and in his

Sen-Sen flavored breath mumbled "Go ahead - get it out of your system." I punched him in the stomach and he doubled over, then stood erect and stumbled into his bedroom. No other words were spoken by either of us.

I did not see him the following day, and as evening came and it was time to go looking for him again, there was a phone call from the Sheriff's department in Missouri.

I did not see him the following day, and as evening came and it was time to go looking for him again, there was a phone call from the Sheriff's department in Missouri. My father's Studebaker had been found wrapped around a tree. My father didn't make a turn in the highway, went off the curve, and died. I had a friend drive me over to see the truck, as the body was not recognizable, and when I saw the mangled mess that had been a proud Studebaker I realized that the last time I saw my father I had punched him in anger. Now you know the guilt. The guilt is mine! I still carry that guilt after all those years.

3rd Place

Just Keep Counting

by Cashandra Almada

Every day I fight with myself like a rabid dog, just to win one second of peace from the dominoes filling up my mind. One falls, knocking into the next one, sending that one toppling until the clatter of tiles become a constant hum in my brain. I know now, I'm not like everyone else. I'm not normal.

Normal is being able to shake someone's hand without feeling their germs swarm across your skin at first contact. Normal is going out to eat and not washing the silverware you're given because of a water spot that might contain deadly bacteria. Normal is being able to breathe in a room full of people. Normal is not having to count everything just to keep from screaming.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven.

There are seven steps from the dishwasher to the fridge in my kitchen.

One. Two. Three. Four.

Four steps take me from the fridge to the stove.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.

If I space them just right, it's six steps from the stove to my sink.

If I can stick to a pattern, if I can count the steps, I'll survive.

Having tile floors is a blessing and a curse for someone like me. I can count my steps, navigating through my house like Indiana Jones exploring a new land. Danger, lurking around every corner, waits in the most unexpected places. If I can stick to a pattern, if I can count the steps, I'll survive.

Patterns and numbers consume my life. They keep me

safe. If I hang my clothes up right, I'll be able to find what I need. If I don't…I can't bear to think of it. I'll be late to class. I'll fail the course. I won't be able to get a job. My kids will go hungry. I'll end up on the street, my children being raised by strangers, or worse—by their dad. I'll die in a ditch, alone and dishonored. So, I hang my shirts just so. I make sure my socks line up. I keep my pants separated by style, by color, by texture.

I can feel my family watching me.

I can feel my family watching me. Their eyes bore into my back as if they were bullets being fired from a gun. *She's reorganizing the dishwasher again. I just loaded it five minutes ago. Does she think I'm too stupid to do it? I was just trying to help.* Their thoughts are written on their faces, grotesque characters pretending to smile and understand.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.

Six plastic bowls fit perfectly in the top shelf, organized by style and color.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight.

The glasses look like crystalline soldiers, lined perfectly in a row.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.

How do my kids go through so many plates in a day? They stack just right, opposite the bowls though, so it's okay.

It's a good thing I checked the dishwasher before someone started it. Nothing was in its proper place. If it gets loaded wrong, the dishes won't get clean. If someone eats off of a dirty dish, they could get sick. Medical bills will start adding up. We'll lose the house trying to pay for all of that. I'll lose my kids. They'll be raised by strangers, or worse—by their dad. I'll end up on the street. I'll die in a ditch, alone and dishonored. So, I sort the dishes, by style, color, and size.

I'm not a "neat freak." I'm not "picky." I'm not "normal."

I'm just me. That's good enough. If only I can just keep counting.

Honorable Mention

An Apron for Donald

by Roderick McIver

Endowed with good looks, an enthusiastic smile and an excellent figure, Mother learned to flirt, but never misbehave, with the railroad men at her mother's boarding house in Houston when farming proved too much work for too little income. She was a damn good typist and stenographer, and soon had a series of jobs of increasing responsibility and remuneration. Shortly before marrying Father, she was secretary to Jake Butler, the manager of the Classified Advertising Department of *The Houston Chronicle* newspaper. Mother was attracted to individuals who were held in high regard for their accomplishments. I think she thought some of the admiration, perhaps deserved or perhaps not, wafted on to her like the aroma of expensive perfume.

One of my earliest recollections of Mother, and a forecast of the future, was a social event at Aronimink Elementary School in Drexel Hill where I attended grades 1 through 5. This particular event celebrated successful completion of the 1st grade. Mother felt very strongly about assisting with this event, along with one or two other mothers, because it marked my first step toward getting a Ph.D. like Father. It also marked the first in a series of academic disappointments for Mother as I never obtained a degree beyond a B.A. in Mathematics. Anyway, at this particular gathering, proud parents maneuvered children for individual and group pictures so as to obtain the best, cutest and most adorable photographs possible. At one point, a classmate turned to me and asked:

"Who's the bossy woman who talks funny?"

"That's my mother," I replied with a bit of surprise that anyone wouldn't know my mother and her Texas drawl.

"Oh," he said.

I've forgotten the name of the classmate who was the first to plant the thought-seed of Mother's bossiness in my brain. But over the years, the seed grew to the size of a mighty Oak and spread its shade over me, my wife, my kids and just about everybody.

But her creations didn't always turn out well and of course I paid the price.

Mother could sew anything. And she could do it on short notice. But her creations didn't always turn out well and of course I paid the price. After graduation from the 5th grade, we rented a house for three months and then moved to Austin, Texas. This was sort of like moving from Finland to Nigeria. On the last day of school I was supposed to wear a white shirt and a tie. As Mother pulled the short sleeved white dress shirt on to my compliant body, an ugly stain revealed itself on one of the sleeves. This simply would not do. Jerking the shirt off by body, Mother quickly ripped out the shoulder seams, removed both sleeves and neatened up the shoulder seams. A boy's shirt with no sleeves! A fashion statement if there ever was one. As soon as I saw myself in the mirror I knew we had another reason to move to Texas.

I'd almost forgotten about the sleeveless shirt by the time I was in 7th grade at University Junior High, across the street from the University of Texas campus in Austin. The curriculum included a "sampler" course consisting of Print Shop, Typing and Home Economics in five week segments. Print Shop taught me how long it takes to pick up all the tiny pieces of type from a spilled type case and get them all back in their proper places. Typing was better. We also learned some business fundamentals such as how to write a check. This skill would be one of the contributors to failed marriage number one. I can hear my ex's voice now:

"Do you know how many $5.00 checks you've written this month?" she asked venomously.

In the Home Economics segment I had visions of sitting

around reading the bra ads in *The Ladies Home Journal* and trying to understand the Doctor's response to a reader's complaint about her malfunctioning vagina, uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries. At times it seemed so complicated I wasn't at all sure it would provide the enjoyment I had heard so much about. But, alas, I needn't have worried: Home Economics was simply cooking. Our teacher was the Nurse Ratched of food preparation. One female student, Allison, made a Jell-O concoction substituting salt for sugar, and Nurse Ratched made her eat it!

Boys partnered with boys and girls with girls, as was the custom in those days. Jamie Ferris and I sat at a back desk, next to the inward-tilting windows. This happenstance was most fortunate when we had to make shredded-carrot and peanut butter sandwiches and couldn't bear to eat them. Now shredded-carrot and peanut butter sandwiches might be okay for the fairer sex, but men do not eat raw carrots. At least the men I associate with do not. And to ruin fine peanut butter by polluting it with shredded carrot … an unforgivable sin.

In less than two hours she proudly produced an apron with pockets, a bib and ruffles!

Nurse Ratched told us we had to wear an apron in class. Trying my best to make Mother proud of me, I brought this news home one day. You would have thought I told her I had found a million dollars lying in the street. Digging through dresser drawers of fabric, she came up with a sheet-like material with one-fourth inch red stripes. In less than two hours she proudly produced an apron with pockets, a bib and ruffles! It reminded me of a candy-striper uniform from the 1950s. After all her effort I couldn't tell her that it made me feel like my testicles hadn't dropped yet and I needed to go to the doctor to get a testosterone shot. So I said thank you, gave her a kiss and carried it to class in a paper grocery bag.

Nurse Ratched had not forgotten about the apron requirement.

"Everyone, please put on your aprons," she commanded.

And as we did as we were told, she walked around the room saying "yes, good", "it'll do", and "do not fail to wear your apron tomorrow." I got a "very nice."

Jamie, asked: "Where'd you get the apron?"

"My mother made it," I replied.

"It looks like a girl's apron," Jamie said.

"I know. It was my sister's," I lied. "Mom didn't have the money to buy one."

I had just invented a very useful tool. When criticized, if you say you are too poor to buy an apron, then you can avoid having to answer awkward questions about your gender or sexual preferences.

I grew up eventually, married, fathered my first son, Mark, graduated from college and moved to Arizona. Later I had another son, Grant, and a daughter, Cindy. On one of Mother's visits, she insisted I take her, and young son Grant, to Penney's Department Store, to purchase some new Levis. As you should have guessed by now, shopping with Mother was akin to devising an experiment to disprove one of Sir Isaac Newton's laws.

Arriving at the Levis section, Mother whipped out her measuring tape and proceeded to measure Grant's waist and the distance from his waist to where the bottom of his pants should be. With not the slightest pause, she was fanning through a stack of pants as an accomplished gambler would fan a deck of cards. A few samples were held at Grant's waist, but the bottoms of the pants were midway up his shins. A different pair, of correct length and sufficiently generous in the waist, could accommodate another similarly sized child or a good-sized watermelon. Mother was becoming exasperated and angry.

"Why don't you have Levis to fit my grandson?" she asked. Her tone reminded me of the Spanish Inquisition.

"What size, does you grandson take, ma'am?" the young assistant asked.

"He needs a 26 waist and length of 30 … slim," Mother responded.

"Let me measure," said the assistant.

Kneeling in front of Grant, the assistant gave him a smile and a wink and proceeded to re-measure. "He is a tall and slender boy. Let's try this one," the assistant said and she pulled another pair from the pile.

When Grant walked out of the dressing room, the look on his face was one of despair and defeat. The waist was still too large and the legs resembled pedal pushers. By now the assistant was tiring and Mother was nearing a melt-down. When Grant returned dressed in his old clothes, Mother announced her new plan.

"We'll just go over to the women's department. I'm sure we can find something there."

"Mother, for god's sake, we are NOT going to buy a pair of women's jeans for Grant."

"Mother, for god's sake, we are NOT going to buy a pair of women's jeans for Grant."

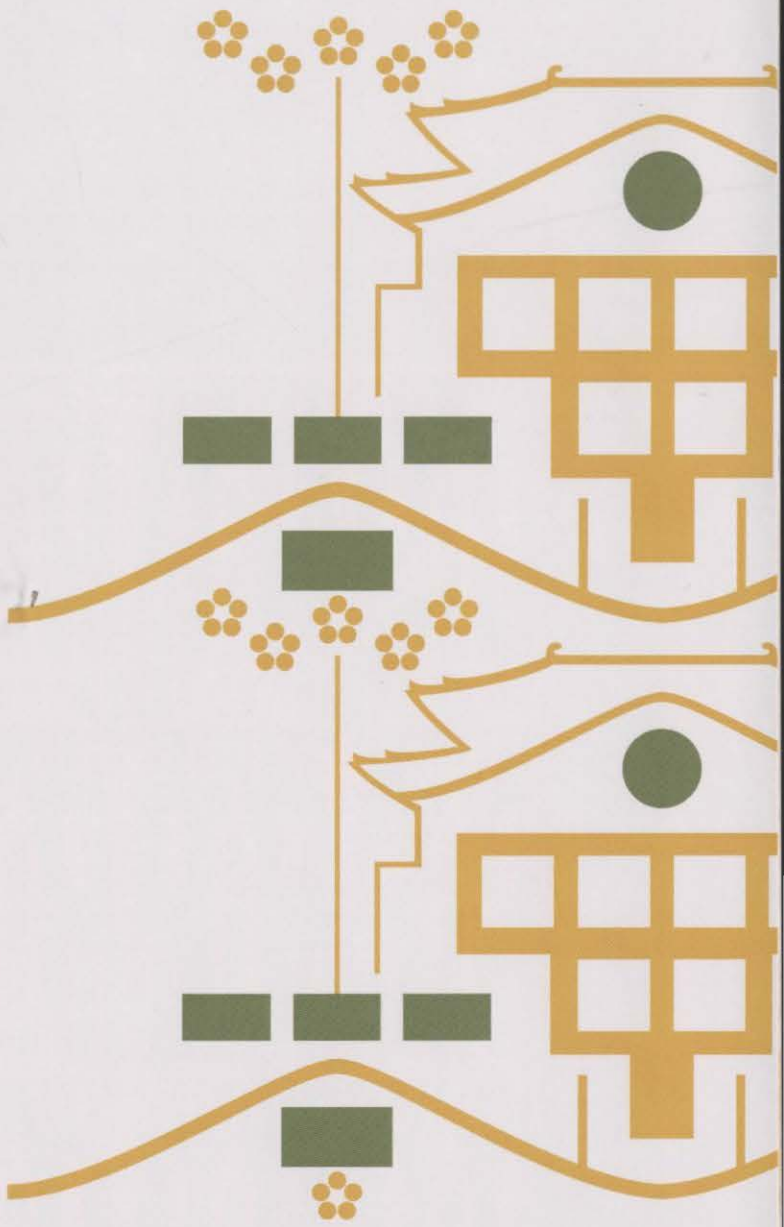
"But I can alter them and no one will know," she pleaded as though I was being unreasonable.

"No. Absolutely not. End of discussion."

It has been about forty years since Mother tried to dress Grant in a pair of women's jeans. I had forgotten this event, but one evening Grant told me the story again. When he finished, he said.

"Dad, I never loved you more than when you told grandmother we weren't going to buy me some women's jeans."

From the sleeveless shirt and the red and white apron with a ruffle, it was all worth it to get those words of praise from my son.



Poetry

1st Place

On Being in Love

by Charles Threat

Have you,
ever…
been in love?
I mean like have you,
ever…
been in love?
I'm talking about the kind of love that's somewhere between fact and fantasy-fictionalized fun-forbidden fornication and factitiously flaunted fakery!
The kind of love that's always right-never out of sight. Keeps- you-awake-at-night-thinking-about-the-next-time-that-you-can… hold-her-tight kind of love.
The kind of-gotta-maintain-your-grip-as-you-slowly-raise her-slip-bite-your-lip-as-you-wildly-gyrate-your-hip kind of love.
The kind of having-you-dancing-on-a-cloud-poking-your-chest out proud, talking-fast-and-talking-loud kind of love.

Have you
ever…
been in love?
I mean like have you
ever…
been in love?
The kind of love that you knew from the beginning was wrong, but if you ever saw her in a thong… dear lawd! Your whole body would be singing that song,
"If loving you is wrong, I don't want to be right. If being right, means being without you, I'd rather live a wrong doing life!"

Uhn! Hallelujah.
The kind of love where you knew that she was too young-too wild-too tall-too sexy and yes, too impulsive!
And you were too old-too blind-too deaf-too loving-too caring-too giving and most times just too damn dumb!

I mean the kind of love that leaves your heart so full of tears when she leaves that it presses against your lungs making it damn near impossible to breathe, the kind of love that has your mind wandering while you are driving around looking for her, contemplating giving up over 20 years of sobriety one day at a time so that you can search for her in the bottom of a liquor bottle or find relief in a cloud of smoke (puff, puff, pass)

Have you
ever…
been in love?
I mean have you
ever…
been in love?
The kind of love that has you feeling blue-seeing red-becoming green with envy when you see how happy she is without you, using yellow caution as you stumble around this life trying your best to just… live.
The kind of love that leaves a ball of excruciating pain deep down in the pit of your stomach, pressing against your intestines so hard you feel you just might shit them out! The kind of love that has you depressed as all hell, crying and shaking so much that you wind up in a mental ward for 30 days because you wanted to take your own life to stop the pain… but you were too afraid.

Have you
ever…
been in love?
Um hum,
Neither have I.

2nd Place

There is a Place

by Philip Boddy

There is a place within the Field of Reeds
For the faithful Egyptian boy who leaped
Between his beloved grandmother and a Hatti's
Bronze battle axe during their Nile Valley
Conquests

There is a place among the Gods and Goddesses
For that young Carthaginian daughter
Who took up her dying father's dagger
Rather than becoming a slave of Scipio's
Roman Legionnaires

There is a place at those tables in Valhalla
For the children of their fiord's Norse chief
Who chose a Viking's death, swords-in-hand,
Barring the village gates during a rival clan's
raid

There is a place in Paradise amid Blessings of Allah
For the Saracen knight's youthful squire
Who chose fealty over flight beside his master
As Richard III's bannered elite, devoid of honor,
Slaughtered their prisoners

There is a place in Heaven
For the Williamsburg Settlers' English children
Who continued to load then prime their
Mortally wounded parents' muskets
During Opechancanough's surprise night
Assaults

There is a place among the Angels
For that Roman Catholic Vietnamese daughter
Ordered to detonate a grenade amidst Korean Marines
To save her hostage widowed mother from
Execution

For the myriad of those undecorated and unpraised
But never forgotten by their kin or even enemies,

There has always been
And always will be
Beyond any veils...

A place for those Littlest of Warriors

3rd Place

When it Ends

by Chrispin David

When is daybreak?
As the moon is straight in the sky?
Or when sun rises on the horizon?
I remember the day,
Lying awake last night
As if it were yesterday.
When you left I was alone and awake.
You'd taken trips before
And had been back before I was home,
But this was different.
You came to see in school
Because I couldn't see you off
And told me, "Be good, son. I won't be gone long."
Nine years old I learned
The pain of separation greater than divorce,
Though for Dad and lil' sis I stayed strong.
My tears watered the pillows, as I stayed awake
Waiting for the day you'd get home.
As you said a long time ago,
"Son, I won't be gone long."

Honorable Mention

This River

by Samantha Escobedo

Come here I'll tell you a story.
'Er know how this river came to be?
If you listen close you can still hear her crying.
Listen to her tear drops drumming.
Her tears raining down, sad but sweet.
Do you hear her heart playing the beat,
While her voice is singing the agony?
Hear whilst it comes into perfect harmony.

Can you hear the sad melody?
The one without any remedy?
Her voice cries out but none will hear.
Her lungs scream, gasping for air.
Life left her eye; she was not strong.
Have you ever heard such a song?
It's more of a prayer than a plea.
That's how this river came to be.

It's said she loved a navy man,
And marriage was their plan.
On the day she became his bride,
He promised to stay by her side.
He did all he could to keep his word,
Yet too soon the war yelled, "All aboard!"
He had to go to do his part
And now he's only in her heart.

Day after day locked in her room,
All she did was cry for her groom.
And as the storm came rolling in,
She only thought of what could've been.
She cried and she cried and cried some more,
He was not there as he had sworn.
It wasn't his fault; that she knew,
For now she must say forever adieu.

She went for a walk to clear her mind.
She thought of how life could be so unkind.
When not another step could be taken,
She looked at her hands and saw they were shake'n,
She fell to her knees crying all over again.
She looked in the water and counted from ten.
She entered the river forgetting to swim.
All she want wanted was to be with him.

Can you hear the sad melody?
The one without any remedy?
Her voice cries but none will hear.
Her lungs scream, gasping for air.
Life left her eye; she was not strong.
Have you ever heard such a song?
It's more of a prayer than a plea.
Yes... That's how this river came to be.

Pray

1st Place

Britney's Corner

by Samantha Escobedo

ACT 1
SCENE 1

SETTING: We are on the set of a television show.

BRITNEY
Welcome to Britney's Corner, I'm Britney!
(Poses)
I'm here with your latest fashion news.
(Audience applauds)
We will be having a special guest on our show today. Her name is Leila Bell. Let's give Leila Bell a nice, warm welcome!
(Audience applauds)
(Bell shyly enters)

LEILA
Hi everybody.

BRITNEY
Hi Leila! How's your day?

LEILA
(Quietly)
It's going great. Today's my birthday.

BRITNEY
Well, happy birthday! How old are you today?

LEILA
Thirteen.

BRITNEY
I think you deserve another round of applause!
(Poses)

Can we have another round of applause, please?
(Audience applauds)
So, Leila, do you know why you're on my show?

LEILA
(Shrugs and seems embarrassed)
No.

BRITNEY
I can tell you.
(Poses)
Your friends wrote in to Britney's Corner
(Poses)
and told me about your little… fashion problem.

LEILA
I don't understand.

BRITNEY
Well, Leila, just look in the mirror.
(Hands Leila a hand held mirror)

LEILA
Okay?

BRITNEY
Your clothing is out of date, you have no make-up on, and your hair is a disaster!

LEILA
(Grabbing a piece of her hair)
What's wrong with my hair?

BRITNEY
Honey, it's just not trendy. Look at it! It hangs there like a dead rat.

LEILA
What?

BRITNEY
Yeah! Haven't you ever picked up a magazine before?

LEILA
(Proudly)
I pick up newspapers.

BRITNEY

Newspapers don't count! I'm talking about Vogue!

(Poses)

LEILA

What's Vogue?

BRITNEY

O.M.G., guys! She doesn't know what Vogue is!

(Audience gasps)

Now, now! She's only thirteen.

(Poses)

Alright? Well, today is a special and very lucky day for you because I'll be giving you a… MAKE OVER! Britney Style.

(Poses)

LEILA

I'm grateful, but I…

BRITNEY

Yes, you're welcome.

(Poses)

Alright, can I have my beautiful assistants come out and help this… child be turned from a pumpkin into a princess?

(Poses. Audience applauds.)

Oh no! We're going to have to take a break.

(Audience awes)

Stay tuned to see how we step by step make Leila a trendy fashioned gal!

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 2

SETTING: Lights come up and they are now BACKSTAGE.

BRITNEY

Welcome back to Britney's Corner!

(Poses)

We have with us full on make-up artist, hair artists, and stylists. All right, how would you describe your fashion sense, Leila?

LEILA

Hand-me-downs?

BRITNEY

Noooooo. Wrong answer. It would be… Well it's not up to style in the least!

LEILA

But I'm comfortable in these.

BRITNEY

That doesn't matter. You must remember that beauty is pain.

(Poses)

So! Let's do first things first! We need to get you out of that drabby wardrobe and into something trendy! You see this form fitting dress? Let's try to get you in there. What size would you say you are?

LEILA

Um, size two.

BRITNEY

Well, you're a size zero.

(Turns to the stylists)

Lets help her put it on.

(The stylists crowed around her blocking her from Aud. Leila gives a gasp as they "make the dress super tight" Stylists back away. Leila is now in a very tight, formfitting outfit and looks like she's having a hard time breathing in it.)

This is the latest style we see on the catwalk everyday!

(Poses)

LEILA

It's a little tight

BRITNEY

It's perfect! Look at that form! It's so beautiful!

LEILA

I can't breath

BRITNEY

That's okay. Fashion hurts. Let's ask the audience. What do you think of her dress?

(Audience applauds and awes)

I know, right? Okay, let's move on to your make-up! I know you're

only thirteen, but you're never too young to start wearing make-up.
(Poses)

LEILA

But, my mom says…

BRITNEY

You're mom isn't here right now.

LEILA

But..

BRITNEY

No.

LEILA

My…

BRITNEY

No.

LEILA

Mom…

BRITNEY

No. Get in the chair, Leila.
(Leila, looking down, moves to the chair and sits.)
Okay! First we're gonna do foundation! We have to cover those little blemishes.
(Poses)

LEILA

Where?

BRITNEY

Right there! Don't you see?

LEILA

I guess.

BRITNEY

Okay, we're gonna cover it now.
(Stylists come up to her putting on make-up)
There you go. Now, we're gonna add blush, mascara, lip gloss, and let's pluck these eye brows while we're at it.

LEILA

Isn't this a bit much?

BRITNEY

Oh, you're going to be beautiful, Leila!
(Stylists back away)
O.M.G. Look! We can see your eyes!
(Audience applauds)
Okay, Leila, on to hair. Michelangelo, Let's get this hair going!
(Poses and audience applauds)
You're hair is just so dreary right now! We literally can't do anything with it. What do you think about going short? It would just be wonderful!

LEILA

But I like my long hair.

BRITNEY

Totes.
(Gestures for stylist to cut Leila's hair)

LEILA

What?... No… Stop... Don't cut my hair… Wait…

BRITNEY

Too late, Leila. You have to take a big step forward in fashion.

LEILA

But... that was my hair.

BRITNEY

It's okay. It'll grow back.
(Poses)

LEILA

(Quietly to herself)
Maybe.

BRITNEY

Let's move on to styling your new hair! We're gonna give you a nice little bob! It'll frame your face perfectly!
(Stylists crowd around Leila and Leila gives a few sniffles then stylists back away)
Awe! Look at that! Isn't it so beautiful?
(Audience applauds)
What do you think, Leila?

(Hands her a hand held mirror)

LEILA

(Stunned. Doesn't recognize herself)

I… is… is that me?

BRITNEY

It is you! Isn't it wonderful? You didn't even recognize yourself!

LEILA

I look nothing like myself.

BRITNEY

Isn't it perfect? People will comment on your clothing, your make-up, and your hair!

(Poses)

Look at you and this girlie magazine!

LEILA

I look exactly like her!

BRITNEY

Exactly!

LEILA

Aren't I supposed to have individuality? Uniqueness?

BRITNEY

Noooo. Fashion is universal. We all follow the hottest trends!

(Poses)

Can't you see yourself in this magazine?

LEILA

Well, yeah. I look just like her.

BRITNEY

Exactly. We took the exact clothes, make-up and hairstyle!

LEILA

That would explain it.

BRITNEY

Yes, isn't it picturesque?

(Audience applauds)

All right! Lets give Leila another round of applause!

(Audience applauds)

Until next time! This is Britney's Corner and I'm Britney!

(Poses)

LEILA

And I'm Leila

BRITNEY

(Under her breath)

Nobody cares, darling. It's Britney's Corner.

(Gives multiple poses as the light fades)

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 3

SETTING: Leila's room. A bed, dressing table with a mirror, and chair are in the room.

(Leila is looking at the mirror and is in a type of a nightgown too big for her.)

LEILA

Who is that girl? This isn't me.

(Leila wipes of make-up and then walks over to the bed. With back to the aud., She scratches her head then takes off the wig revealing a baldhead and gets into bed.)

(Mother walks in)

MOTHER

How are you today, beautiful?

Visual Arts

1st Place

"Waiting"
by Rocko Labastida

Medium: Archival Ink Jet

2nd Place

"A Road Less Traveled"
by Victoria DeSanti

Medium: Archival Ink Jet

3rd Place

"Untitled"
by Jay Franzen

Medium: Archival Ink Jet

Honorable Mention

"Three Hangers"
by Chantil Marie

Medium: Photography

"Gloria"
by Rachel Rodgers

Medium: Photography

Accepted

Untitled
by Jay Allen

Medium: Archival Ink Jet

"Red Apples"
by Rachelle Anderson

Medium: Archival Ink Jet

Untitled
by Alonia Coburn

Medium: Digital Photography

"Sunset on Mars"
by Gregg Griffith

Medium: Photography

"Ameyali"
by Elizabeth Pineda

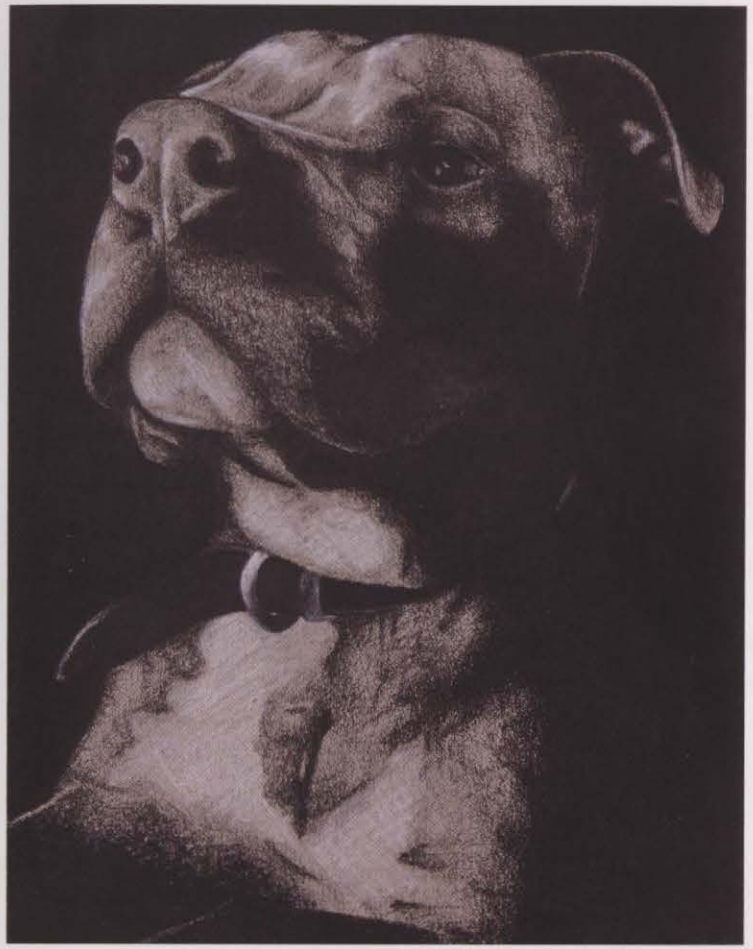
Medium: Digital Print

1st Place

"All Scales"
by Lindsey Nowicki

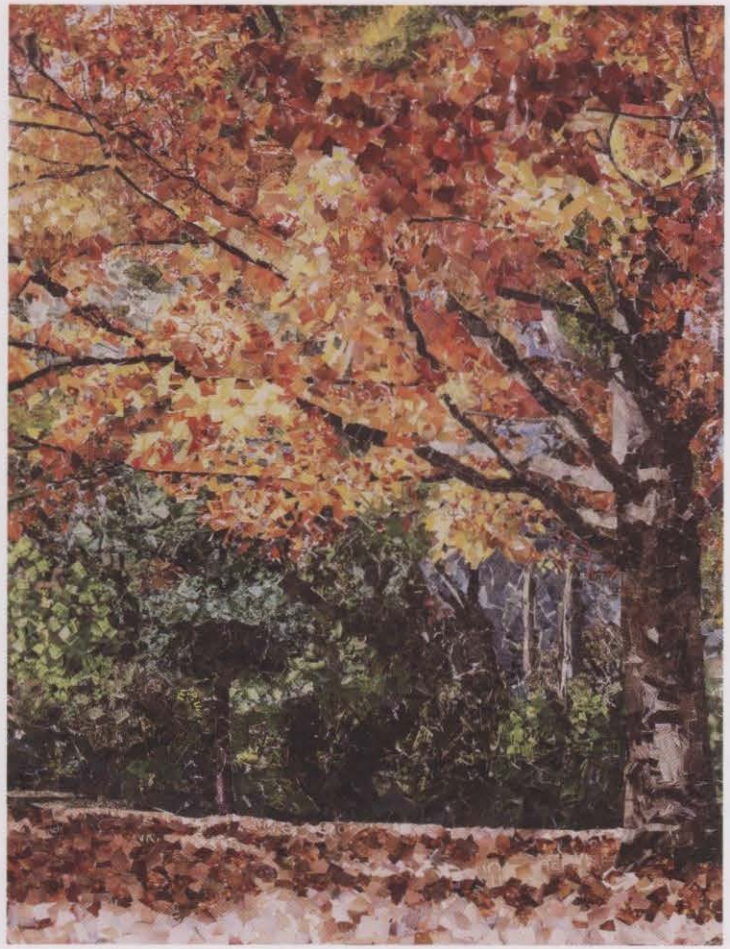
Medium: Scratchboard

2nd Place



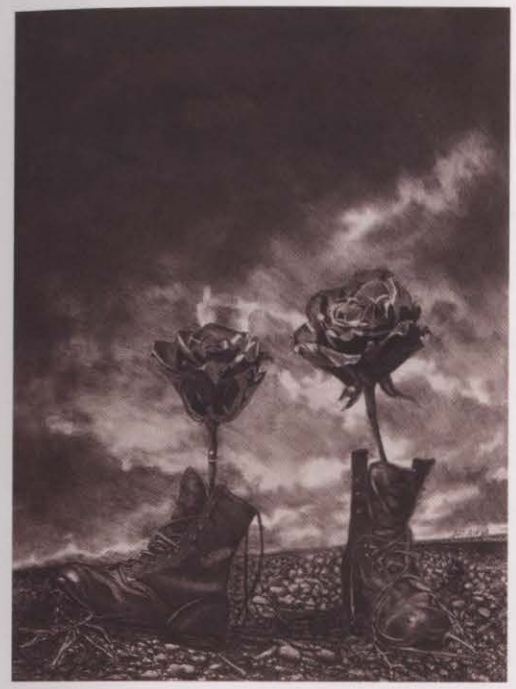
"Cain #1"
by Amanda Tufts Medium: Colored Pencil

3rd Place



"Another Season"
by Brittany Freeman Medium: Collage

Honorable Mention



"The Flower Against War"
by Ali Altaye

Medium: Charcoal

Accepted

"Alors On Danse"
by Amirah Chatman

Medium: Charcoal

"Trompe L'oeil Leaf"
by Jocelen Dunham

Medium: Colored Pencil

"Izzy"
by Catherine Michela

Medium: Scratch Board

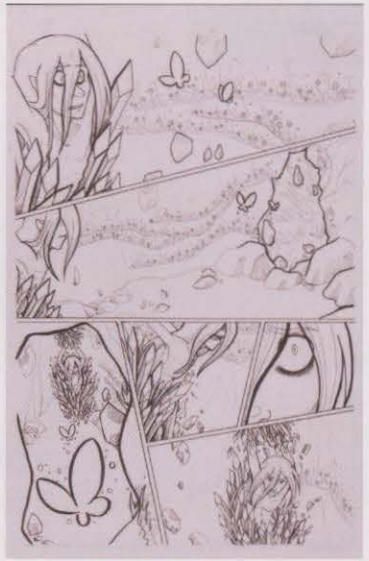
"Feathery Focus"
by Alicia Robles

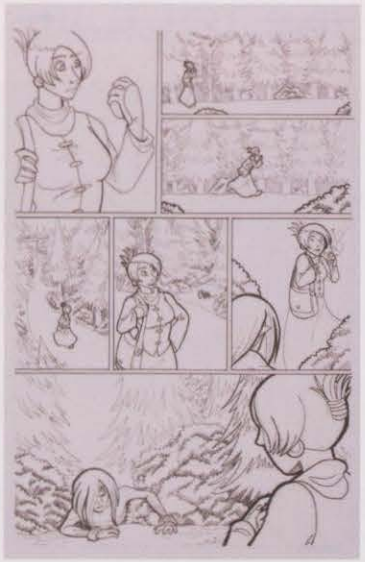
Medium: Ink

Accepted

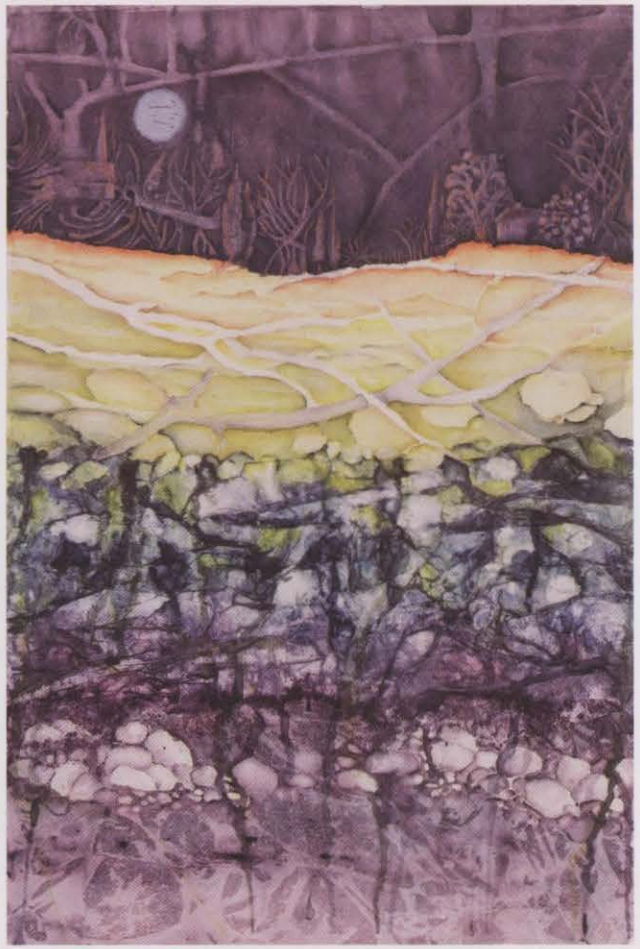
"Crystals in a Cave"

by Betsy Petree





1st Place



"Underworld"
by Sylvia Husted Medium: Watercolor

2nd Place

"Three People"
by Rafiq Majeed Medium: Acrylic

3rd Place

"Study of Kingfisher"
by Jowel Paul
Medium: Watercolor

Honorable Mention

"Constelation"
by Claudia Martinez
Medium: Acrylic

"Love Birds"
by Veronica Worel
Medium: Watercolor

Accepted

"My Hand"
by Nicole Davy

Medium: Oil

"My Boob Job – The Blue-footed Booby"
by Mary Jane Johnson

Medium: Watercolor

"Red Storm"
by Mary Lou Johnson

Medium: Watercolor

Untitled
by Bill Sears

Medium: Watercolor

"Oceans Orphans"
Kathy Willis

Medium: Watercolor

1st Place

"Captive Mermaid"
by Betsy Petree
Medium: B-Mix

2nd Place

"Harmony"
by Rumi Poling
Medium: Ceramic Sculpture

3rd Place

Untitled
by Nina Wee Medium: Stoneware

Honorable Mention

"Black Swan"
by Amy Nichols
Medium: Ceramic

"A Life Well Lived"
by Nannette White
Medium: Ceramic

Accepted

"Mariposa"
by Marion Blake

Medium: Stoneware & Glass

"There Was an Old Lady"
by Nicole Davy

Medium: Stoneware

"Sabotage"
by Amanda Duncan

Medium: Ceramics & Metal

Untitled
by Sheril Sam Huselton

Medium: Clay

"Quilting Pot"
by Rumi Poling

Medium: Ceramic

1st Place

"Surprise Pin-Up"
by Miguel Moreno
Medium: Photoshop

2nd Place

"The Medium is The Message"
by Quincy Reams
Medium: Ink Jet

Accepted

"The Gods Have Spoken"
by Derius Aguirre

Medium: Ink Jet

"Creative"
by Christina Kim

Medium: Graphic Design

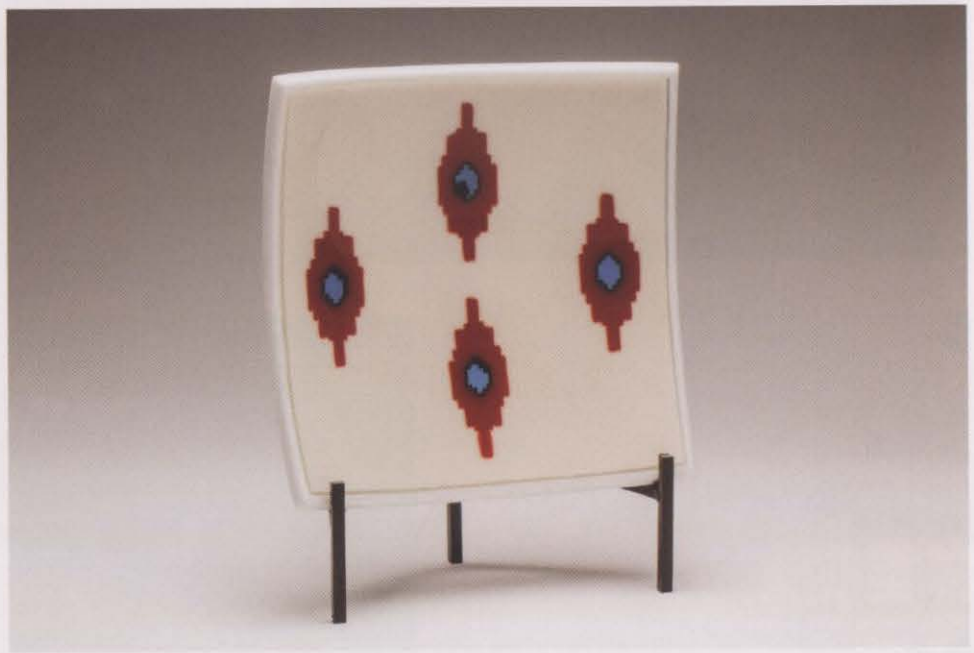
"Dragonball Z: Future Trunks"
by Miguel Moreno

Medium: Photoshop

"Sketch Art Poster"
by Carlos Poblete

Medium: Photoshop and Illustrator

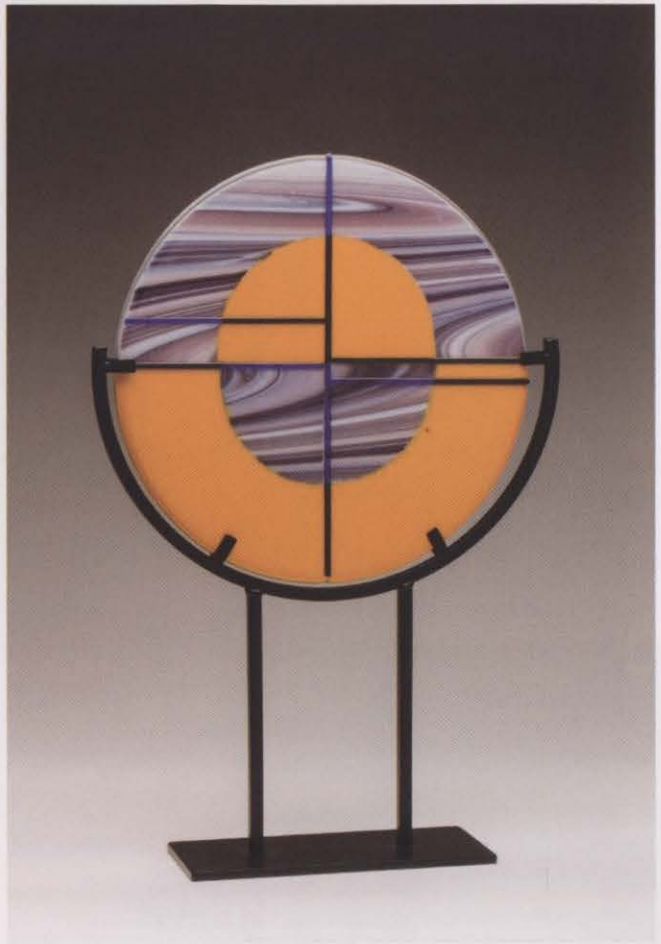
1st Place



"Windows"
by Mary Worel

Medium: Glass

2nd Place



"Desert Sun"
by Wendy Retzer

Medium: Glass

Accepted

"Silver Infinity"
by Patricia Keanini

Medium: Sterling Silver

"Dufus"
by Wendy Retzer

Medium: Glass and Metal

"Lost Lake"
by Susan Walsh

Medium: Sterling Silver & Malachite

"Fern"
by Mary Worel

Medium: Glass

The Traveler

Volume 48
2015

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