
p·ism
artists' guild
2009

PRISM 2009

A publication of the LTU Artists' Guild
Spring 2009

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A journal of art and literature featuring work by students, staff, faculty, and alumni of Lawrence Technological University.

Prism was founded in 1978 by Prof. Paula Stofer

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A Note from the Editors

A prism is defined as a medium that changes the appearance of what is viewed through it. The same can be said of this collection of works included in PRISM2009. The creativity and imagination from the students, alumni, faculty and staff of Lawrence Technological University is presented in this publication. PRISM2009 is compiled and distributed by the Artists' Guild.

Prism was founded in 1978 by then-student and later faculty member at LTU, Paula Stofer. Prism was only printed for two years until Dr. Melinda Weinstein with generous backing from the College of Arts and Sciences, resurrected the dormant Prism in 2000. Since then, every year has led to a more refined collection. The Artists' Guild continuously strives to expand its presence on campus and evoke creativity from students, faculty and alumni.

We would like to sincerely thank the College of Arts and Sciences and the department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Communications for their support. Additionally, we give special thanks to Sofia Lulgjuraj and Sara Lamers for their guidance in completing the finished Prism. Also, thank you to all the contributors for their inspiring pieces.

Enjoy.
~The PRISM2009 Editors

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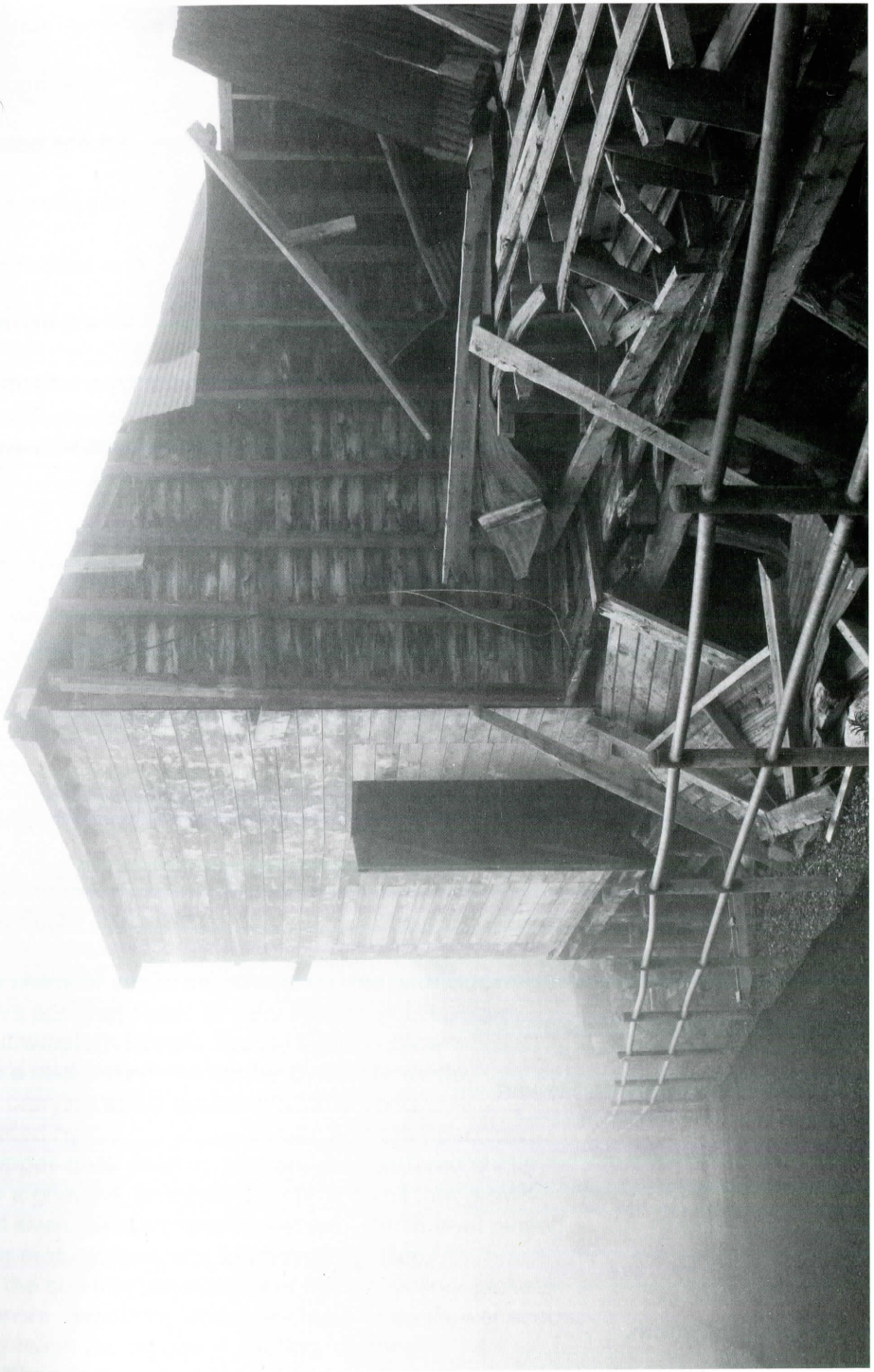
Editor's Quote

All true artists, whether they know it or not, create from a place of no-mind, from inner stillness.

~ *Eckhart Tolle*



Independence Mine **Tracy McGhee** Digital Photograph

Advertisement
Brad Allen

The screen flashes.

"Save your money!"

"Don't leave home without it!"

An Englishman in a suit.

Floating credit cards.

I change the channel

hoping for an escape.

"Rising crust!"

"Lose weight fast!"

Bubbling cheese.

Before and after pictures.

The phone rings

"Hello?"

"I'm calling on behalf of..."

I slam the phone down on the receiver.

I flop down into my chair and

my show's back on.

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart

What a funny guy but he

needs to speak up the

volume seems low, like

a forest after a storm.

Another storm is on its way

right on schedule.

"You can do it, we can help!"

"Instant relief!"

Orange aprons.

Little white pills.

Sound bites and

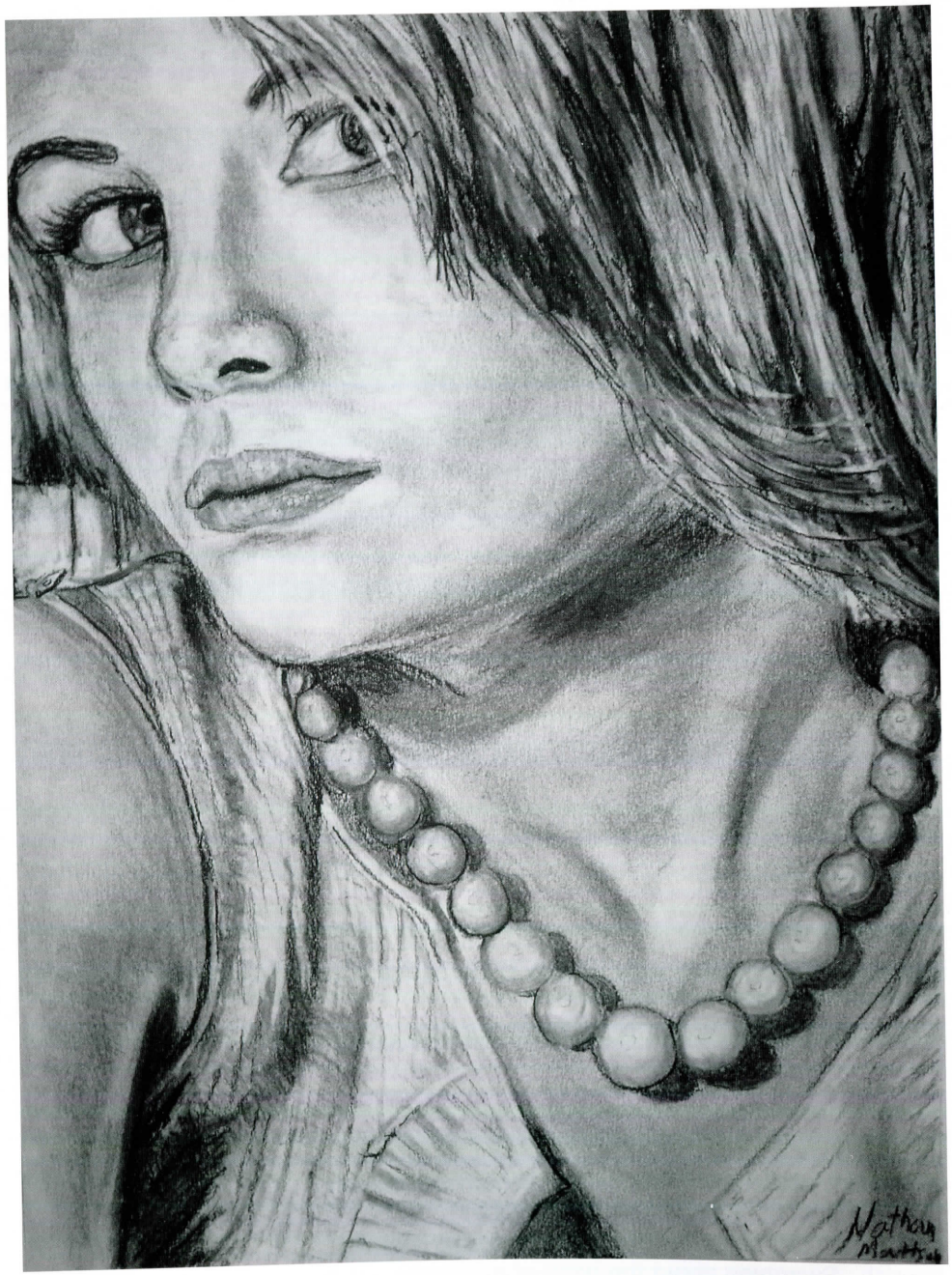
I turn off the TV.

I'm late for my therapy session and

I have a headache.

Comerica Park: Section 344, Row 19
Charlotte Bohnett

The shells of sunflower seeds, coated with Budweiser
saliva and fragments of salty flavors — Barbeque,
Southwestern Ranch, Tequila Lime — blown
into a sticky concrete corner by sunny winds
still carrying sport-fan chants. The bend,
created by narrow stained stairs and cramped rows
of upper-deck seating, harbors the scattered shells
into a gnawed, bacteria-spawning swell that grows
with every packed, drunken event. When cool playoff
temperatures become too hostile for flies,
yet the sun still bakes cement stands, yellow-jackets
flourish. Swarming about the heap of sunflower seeds,
they relish the breeze — darting, dipping,
smothering the riches that blow into the bend.



Breah **Nathan Mattson** Charcoal

Commuter
Joshua Maddox

The leather seat is my second cold
shower of the morning, as I slide
through the driver door. Laptop,
stack of papers, half-eaten muffin, cup of
coffee spills over the cup holder.
Too much in my hands as usual.
Ready to go.

14 miles, 27 minutes, two thirds of
a gallon of gas, one cup of
coffee, half a muffin. I collect
my thoughts one mile
at a time until they're interrupted. The
odometer clicks. The light is red.

Waiting. Watching the *W'04* bumper sticker inch away from me just before the
light turns

Green. Moving again. I start
a new thought. The old one
lost, attached to that bumper
along with the Bush sticker
eight car lengths ahead of me. Late
turn signals keep my wits sharp, "Thank
you for the warning, I didn't notice
you slowing down three blocks ago." I can't
complain for too long, my foot reaches
for the brake, the
odometer clicks. The light is red.

Waiting. The glare of green reflects from beneath the hood of the perpendicular
traffic light. It
becomes yellow.

Green. 13 miles down, almost there. I can
see my usual markers of arrival. The
radio tower in the distance, those
red lights blinking along that
slender spine. All red, no greens or even
yellows to offer solace. So many red lights. The
odometer clicks.

Chasing Cars

Carrie Rasak

He wouldn't tell anyone this, but he chases red cars on the freeway. Yesterday a pretty blonde girl was driving a red mustang convertible with the top down, and he admired the way her hair flew around her face at 95 mph. In real life he scorns red cars and the pretty girls who drive them, not practical, begging to be pulled over, he says. His wife agrees. She drives a six-year-old minivan that's already rusting, he drives an old Buick that's held up longer than it should have. Material things aren't important, says his wife, and while he agrees with her he doesn't understand why she insisted on an upgrade for her wedding ring set for their 30th anniversary. He doesn't understand why that doesn't fall under the "unimportant material thing" category and a red car does but as his father said boy you just can't understand women, you just can't. Don't even try, son, just buy her what she asks you to and shut up when she says to and don't ever be honest if it means you have to insult her. If she asks you if this makes her look fat, of course it doesn't. Even if it does. Do that, and she'll stay with you. Don't do that and you'll end up a poor old bachelor in a run-down apartment with weekend custody of your son and everyone knows *that's* no way to live.

Lately, he's wondering if that might not be such a bad thing. His son is grown now, almost twenty, and living on his own. His wife is a stranger. His friends are her friends and they're all exactly like her, and he wonders when he gave up what he wanted for the sake of happiness. Is this happiness?

The blonde veers in front of him and he swerves into the right lane, blasting his horn at her and scowling. She appears not to notice and her cherry-red mustang disappears from his view. Damn her, he thinks, not because she cut him off — he's over that — because of her *freedom*.

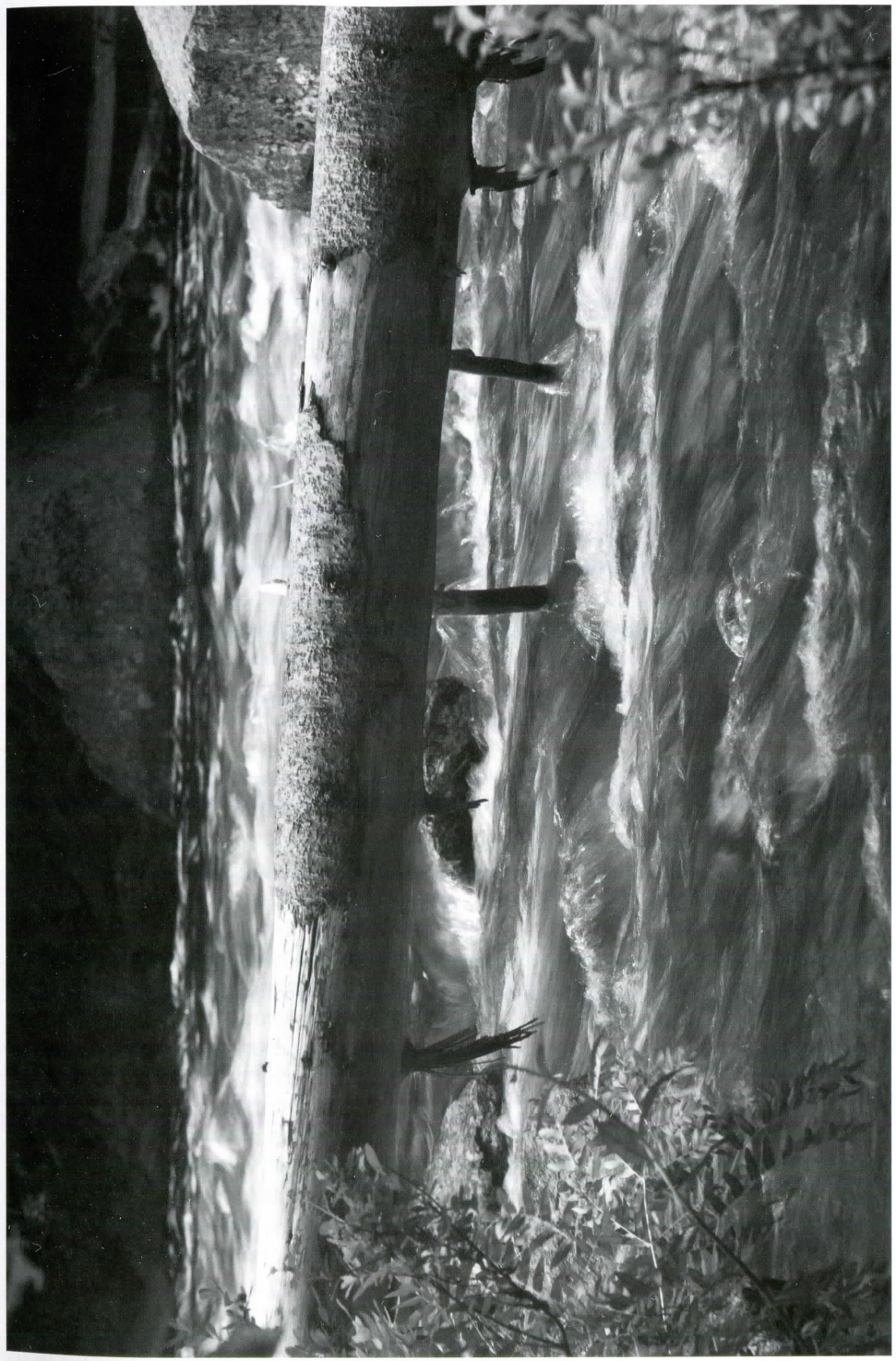
Her red car, he thinks, represents his goals, his dreams, his wants, leaving him forever. That's why he chases red cars when he's by himself. They represent him as a young boy with the whole world in his hands. He thinks of who he is now: an older man, working the same dead-end job with his old Buick clunking along at a steady 65, coming home to a nagging wife who lost all romantic feelings for him long ago. He can't pinpoint the exact time where he lost his feelings for her too, but he guesses it was about the same time she lost hers for him.

His Buick is on its last legs. Maybe it is time to trade it in. Maybe his wife will allow him to lease a red car, if not buy one. Then, at least temporarily, he could drive without a care in the world on the freeway like the blonde girl. He gets more and more excited as he thinks about it. He'd be the envy of the office. Maybe he could take his wife cruising like they did when they were courting so long ago, and maybe some of the spark could come back.

When he gets home he tells his wife his idea, his eyes bright with excitement for the first time in years. She listens, nods, then frowns as his heart sinks. Your Buick is fine, she says, you don't need to trade it in just yet. Why fix what's not broken?

He feels his dreams slip away from him as he slowly makes his way to the bedroom to change. His wife starts cooking dinner.

What she doesn't know, of course, is that he has already been broken for a long time.



Buttermilk Falls Scott Schneider Digital Photograph

Contribute a Meaningful Verse

Robert Fletcher

North Hill and Normandy Park are adjacent communities on the south side of Seattle separated by 1st Avenue. 1st Avenue runs north and south and when I was a kid it was only one lane in each direction, but given the differences between the two communities it might as well have been the width of the Atlantic Ocean. The two populations were a study in marked contrasts. Poverty and despair in North Hill, located on the east side of 1st Avenue, choked the life out of its blue-collar residents, while Normandy Park, on the west side of 1st Avenue, populated by doctors, lawyers and other professionals, was wealthy and prosperous. People found it very difficult to work their way out of North Hill both physically and psychologically. This was no Mayberry RFD, and the happy families of TV land such as the Cleavers and the Huxtables did not live next door. It was a community that wore down everyone who lived there; parents, as well as kids. North Hill was gritty, raw, and dangerous. I grew up in North Hill.

In contrast to that, Normandy Park kids often lived in homes with waterfront views of Puget Sound and joined socially elite clubs called The Evergreen Athletic and Swim Club, or The Marvista Tennis Association. They drove blue Mustangs or red Camaros, and eventually went to schools with names like Stanford, or Harvard. North Hill kids joined clubs too, but their groups were on the other end of the social spectrum with names like The Nomads, The Riders, or Hell's Angels. They drove homemade, bare-knuckle, no-suspension motorcycles and got their education, not in a classroom, but on the streets and back alleyways. Back then I could not have told you, even if my life depended on it, what "let," 30-love, or Break Point meant, but at the age of ten I knew exactly how to install the fuel line on a bored-out Harley shovelhead engine, and how to adjust the brakes on a Triumph Trident 750. . . which sometimes my life did depend on, since that is what I rode even before I became a teenager. Don't even ask how I got the parts to keep it running. . . you don't want to know.

Most of the kids on our street were older than me, a few by a couple of years, the others by several years. In some ways that was good, and in other ways that was bad. It was bad because they were all bigger than me, so when they wanted to beat on someone, or they had a dirty job to do, you know who got it. It was good in an unfortunate sort of way because as those kids continued down the path of what the rest of the world considered socially unacceptable behavior and one-by-one were sent into juvenile detention, prison, or worse yet, wound up dead (and many of them did), I could observe their actions and see that they were racing full-speed towards a difficult and sometimes tragic end. Even though at the time I did not know about all of life's options, I understood very well that I didn't want to walk the same path they had chosen. There had to be something more to life than booze, drugs, gangs, crime, poverty, and despair. I didn't want to be a loser.

It's been said that when you're poor, even going to the department store only reminds you of the things you can't have. I couldn't agree more. Every kid growing up in North Hill, including me, hated going to the department store. Who wants the humiliation of being coldly reminded that you are at the bottom of society and cannot afford to buy anything there? In the summer of my tenth year, however, I glimpsed a ray of hope. . . it looked like things could change. A few years prior the State of Washington legislature passed a bottle bill where you could get three cents for every beer or pop can or bottle returned. Not far from our house, at the bottom of 199th Street, where it intersected with 1st Avenue, was the XL Supermarket. Everyone from North Hill and Normandy Park shopped there because it was the only full service grocery store in the area. The "XL," as everyone called it, was located on the Normandy Park side of 1st Avenue and served as the informal center of both communities. It had a gas station, an adjacent drug store, drycleaners, flower shop, a gifts shop, a bank and even a Photomat. The owner of the XL, Mr. Takahashi, sponsored activities in the local youth center, especially little league baseball, boxing classes and two Junior Golden Glove boxing competitions each year (that I was part of and where I really learned to defend myself). He always let the local kids hang out at his store without ever hassling us. He knew all of our names (because he knew our parents who shopped there) and in his broken English told each of us to always stay in school and get a good education. His encouragement didn't help the North Hill kids much, but that never stopped him. On Wednesday nights during the summers he would give away free slices of watermelon and make root beer floats for all the local kids in the Junior High School parking lot just up the hill from his grocery store. As a result, the XL was never hit with any criminal activity by kids in the area. . . no five-finger discounts, no robberies, and no break-ins. No matter how tempting. . . the XL was off-limits, and everyone knew it. North Hill kids may have been impoverished, but they were not stupid. Mr. Takahashi was a nice guy and he treated everyone the same; none of us wanted to take advantage of, or lose, a good situation.

One time, however, two wise-guys from another neighborhood held up the XL with guns just at closing time and cleaned out all the money from its six cash registers. This made Joey the Bull, a North Hill biker gang leader, really mad. Joey was big, about six foot six, almost 350 pounds, and he rode the biggest custom Harley ever. He was a Vietnam combat vet who could seriously hurt you if he wanted to with a pair of brass knuckles he always kept in his back pocket. I once saw Joey beat a guy to an unconscious pulp with his brass knuckles just because Joey thought the guy was disrespecting him. Sometimes Joey carried a gun, which he was also not afraid to use. He could be very dangerous when he was upset, but he never said very much, so it was hard to tell what kind of a mood he was in. Usually most in the neighborhood thought it was better just to stay well out of his way. Regardless, people always seemed to be trying to meet and talk with him about something. But nobody dared to mess with Joey. Even the local police were very cautious of him. Thankfully, he always treated me well; like I was his kid brother. He even came over to talk with me when he saw me on the street. Mom told me to stay away from him, but Joey was actually the first one who encouraged me to get out of North Hill, go to college, and become a lawyer, or a doctor, or something, and do something worthwhile with my life. When I got older he would sometimes give me rides in the morning to high school on the back of his Harley. I didn't think anything of it, but students and teachers would tend to stay out of your way when you showed up at school on the back of a motorcycle driven by the local chapter president of Hell's Angels. He was always friendly and generous with me, and I never really

knew why. Maybe it was because of Joey's girlfriend, Suzie, who use to baby-sit me when I was little. . . she always liked me. . . she was a sweetheart. Why did she go with Joey? What can I say, she loved him.

Eventually Joey found out who hit the XL and he tipped-off the cops. After the pair did their time at King County Juvenile Detention, Joey and a few of his business associates found them early one evening and grabbed them right off the street, threw them in a "borrowed car" and took them to see Mr. Takahashi. On the way to the XL Joey explained to them that either they where going to walk into the XL by themselves and apologize to Mr. Takahashi for robbing his store or no one would ever see the two of them again. Like everyone who dealt with Joey, they knew full-well how unhealthy it was not to follow his instructions to the letter when he was ticked-off, so they wisely did as he said and apologized to Mr. Takahashi. Several years later, when I was in college, I learned that Joey was sent to San Quentin State Prison for some very bad things he did while traveling through California. Joey was a Hell's Angel entirely capable of doing some very bad things. Recently I called his mom in Seattle to see how he was doing. After a long pause she told me that he was dead. Apparently Joey was murdered in San Quentin by another inmate in the exercise yard, but she never found out why. And so it predictably was for those from North Hill.

Another plus for Mr. Takahashi and the XL, was that he would exchange money for beverage bottles. The bottle exchange in Washington State at the time was voluntary for stores, and Mr. Takahashi did not have to participate. He was glad, however, to be part of the exchange because he thought it would bring more customers into the XL. There were always lots of beer bottles and cans on the North Hill side of 1st Avenue, and after watching the people from Normandy Park who shopped at the XL, I knew there were a lot of pop bottles on the west side of 1st Ave. To me it was an obvious no-brainer business opportunity just waiting to be tapped.

Every Saturday morning that summer Dirk, my best friend who was also my age, and I would "borrow" Tommy Green's big wagon. (Actually we just took it and when he complained we told him that he would get it back and that if he didn't shut up we would beat the crap out of him. After that he didn't seem to mind us using his wagon.) We'd go from house to house asking for all the beer bottles in North Hill, and the pop bottles in Normandy Park. It appeared to us that the people in Normandy Park did not drink much beer. With the XL central to both communities we could make several bottle return runs for money each Saturday. One Saturday, when we were collecting bottles in Normandy Park, a lady in a house there asked us if we were from the group that announced a few days before they would be collecting bottles to raise money for the underprivileged and needy families in the area. We had no clue who she meant, but I said "of course." The way I figured it was us who were from underprivileged families, and I thought we fit the bill quite nicely. . . and hey. . . who was needier than us, right? She gave us a huge bag full of bottles she was saving for the other group. It alone filled the wagon, but we didn't mind.

After that we got the hint and from then on we told everyone that we were collecting for some of the needy families in the area. This was a much more respectable way to introduce ourselves, and it worked every time. On a good day Dirk and I made between $4 and $5. We split the money 50/50. If the

cash came out to be an odd amount, we rotated who got the extra penny from week to week. We were rich! I usually saved some of my money each week in a jar I buried in the ground outside my bedroom window, but Dirk would spend his cut every Saturday. On a really good day, we would even give Tommy Green some of the profits. . . fifty cents or so, which made him very relieved and even more willing to let us use his wagon. He eventually figured out that if we were giving him some money we probably weren't going to beat him up. We never would have really beaten him up. It was just something that we said. Tommy was a scrawny kid who lived alone with his mom who worked two jobs. Even Dirk's younger sister could whip Tommy, so what would be the point in beating on him? After all, it really was his wagon.

The XL had a small short-order grill in the corner of the store and after our collection efforts we would sometimes get their Saturday lunch special of a hamburger or a fishwich sandwich and a Coke. . . all for only a buck. For twenty-five cents more we could get a bag of fries. It was heaven, and the first time I had ever tasted tartar sauce. I doubt they ever made any money on the special because it was at least half the price of the same food anywhere else. But the place was always packed with people in a line going out-the-door on Saturday for the lunch special. Hard candy, chocolate bars and licorice at the XL or from the drugstore were also tasty options on which to spend our fortunes. Unfortunately, that's what one day brought our bottle return enterprise to a painful end . . . but more about that later.

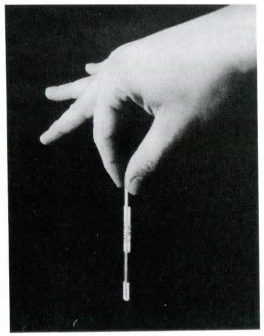
Dirk was a good business partner back then. However, at the age of 21 he went to prison for life on a murder charge. By then our lives had taken very different paths. He chose the North Hill route; one built on progressive stages from petty theft up to eventually very serious crimes. Fortunately for me, a few great people intervened in my life and helped me see a different way to live. I thank God every day for the investment of time and effort they made in me. They literally saved me and showed me a new way. Later while still in college I went to visit Dirk in the McNeil Island Penitentiary after his conviction. He admitted to me that he really did kill that policeman. He then asked me never to visit him again. I knew he was embarrassed for me to see him like that, and it literally broke my heart to hear him tell me to stay away. He felt that I was one of the few who would actually make it to the west side of 1st Avenue. He called me a "west-sider" college-kid now and he knew that we would never see the world in the same way again. If you have never been inside a high-security penitentiary there is something you have to understand about them. Prisons are very scary places, even for tough-guys, and when you hear and feel those massive steel doors slam shut behind you, no matter how cliché it sounds, it really does send shivers up your spine and make your hair stand on-end. I was very happy to get out of there after only 30 minutes, but Dirk was going to be in a place like that for a long time. . . for life. . . my God! Even today the thought still sickens me. That place was dark, oppressive, and gave me the creeps, but Dirk was my friend, and North Hillers never abandoned their friends, ever. Regardless of what they did. When you grow up with nothing, the friendships you make on the street are often the only things of value you will ever have. Those friendships gave you as sense that you were still a human being. In that culture losing someone's friendship was a big deal, and it was the ultimate in humilia-

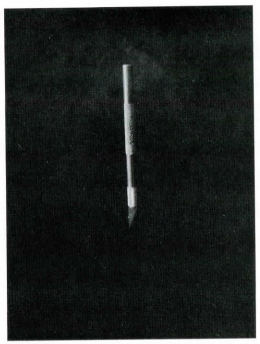
tion to pull your friendship away from someone. By doing so you were telling them they were nothing. . . that they were worse than nothing. We knew what being nothing was all about. Losing a friendship in North Hill stripped away some of your humanity. Each loss took a little bit more of your soul. Even today if I lose someone's friendship or if they make it clear that they don't want my friendship, it still deeply wounds me. I don't like it. Sometimes I still over-react to get a friendship back. It is instinctive. Eventually Dirk was moved to another correctional facility and the letters I sent to him were returned to me unopened and unread. Now I don't know where he is in the Federal Prison System, or if he is even still alive. And so it predictably was for kids from North Hill. As I say, it was tough to get out of North Hill.

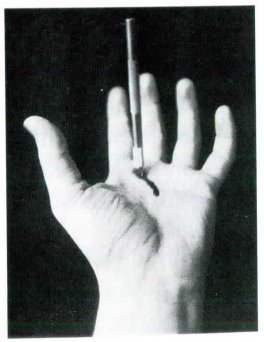
Now, what brought our lucrative bottle collection business to a grinding halt was not its failure, but rather its success. One day Dirk and I made a huge haul. We struck pay-dirt and we each made almost $10. I bought a bunch of candy and still had money left over. But I bought so much candy that I couldn't eat it all, so I took some of it home. That's when the problems started. As with most parents in North Hill, Dad had his problems. At a very young age he had been a fighter pilot during World War II and gained Ace status the first few weeks he was in aerial combat over Europe. He was a great pilot and received many medals for his skills. The only problem was that by the time I came along (I was very much the youngest of three brothers) he was not in Europe and there were no Messerschmitts flying the skies over Seattle that needed to be shot down. It was the only thing he was ever really good at doing, so after the war, life passed him by. He knew it. Just below the surface Dad was always angry. When he had his problems his first response was to hit something, but usually someone...you. I got really good at listening to the tone of his voice, reading his actions and watching his eyes. The eyes said it all. It was purely a matter of survival. I could tell if and when there was going to be trouble when he came home at night and, if I thought there was going to be problems, I would sneak out of my bedroom window and hide to avoid him. A couple of times I even ran away for a few days and slept for the night in some woods near our house. It turns out that I was not the only kid from North Hill who sometimes slept overnight in those woods.

Those survival skills helped me many times but this time, my successful bottle collecting day, wasn't one of them. When Dad saw me with the candy I'd purchased with my profits he was instantly outraged. He wanted to know where I got the candy. He exploded. "Did I steal it?" He assumed that was the case, and quickly pulled off his belt and started to let me have it. When Dad hit you with is belt, he didn't use the leather strap end. No way. He hit with the big metal buckle end of his belt, and that really hurt. His buckle had sharp corners on it, and they could cut you. The tongue of the buckle was pointed and usually dug into flesh. Anything from the shoulders down to the bottom of your feet was a legitimate target, and sometimes a beating would go on for four or five minutes. He usually tried not to hit your head because he knew people would see that. This time, and with school out, he didn't care and let the buckle land where ever it fell. Eventually through my screams I was able to explain to him that I didn't steal the candy, but that I had bought it with money I earned. He stopped and wanted to know how I'd earned it. Selling drugs?. . . he questioned. Whack! Whack! Whack! The beating started up again. It lasted for several more minutes. I was starting to get dizzy from the pain and the blood was starting to flow from my arms, back, torso and legs. Through more frantic screams I finally told him about the bottle returns. This made Dad even angrier. What! Squander good money on candy! Was I saying that we were beggars, humiliating our family by begging from our neighbors? Why was I going around telling everyone that my Dad could not provide for the family? Who did I think I was, anyway? He was furious and the beating resumed for several more minutes. There was one strange, but interesting, phenomenon I learned that day about pain. Eventually you reach a saturation threshold and, although you keep getting hit, the pain actually stops. The only sensations you have of the hits are seeing the buckle bounce off of your body, hearing the thump of each hit, and seeing the blood flow or spatter on the walls, but the mind goes numb to the pain. You literally stop feeling anything. . . pain, emotion, fear, love, rage, anger. . . you become devoid of any feeling. It all stops. It really is an odd experience when that happens. With Dad's help I unwillingly went through it many times over the years. By now the room was spinning and I stopped trying to protect myself with my arms and hands and just crumpled in the corner and let him flail away, striking whatever parts of me he wanted to hit. I could not scream any more. My voice left me, not because it was raw, but because once all emotions were gone there was nothing more to cry out about. I became empty. The wall I was leaning against became smeared and spattered with blood. Eventually he got tired, stopped the discipline, wiped off his belt, put it back on and walked out. Such violent outbreaks were pretty common with Dad. He flared up instantaneously. He hit us a lot. Once in our kitchen he beat my oldest brother so badly with his fists that he knocked him unconscious for several minutes, breaking his jaw and several of his ribs. When I was older he used his fists on me, too. I have the missing teeth and other permanent injuries to prove it.

A few minutes after the belt beating ended my mind started to clear and I was able to muster enough strength to drag myself over to Dirk's house three doors down. After knocking on his door it opened and there was Dirk. He took one look at me and immediately ran and woke up his mom. She was a nurse who worked the midnight shift at a local old-folks home, so she slept during the day. When Dirk's mom came to the door and saw me she stepped back gasping with her hands over her mouth. Tears welled up in her eyes. She partially turned away while holding one of her hands over her eyes and for a moment I thought she might be mad at me. She choked. I did not understand and wanted to run away, but my legs hurt too much and they couldn't move. I was a bloody mess, and some of it had started to dry on my t-shirt, arms, head and neck. After regaining her composure Dirk's mom guided me in to their house and kept asking what happened, but I wouldn't say. I think she knew. With my head still spinning she tenderly took off my shirt and pants. Without saying a word she gently washed me from head to toe, put ointment on the cuts to help them heal and then bandaged me up. There was not much she could do for the welts and bruises which were now starting to grow and merge into large blue-black masses all over me. For the biggest welt on my head she got an ice-bag and had me hold it in place for a while. That stung like crazy, but the cold helped clear my mind, stopped the bleeding, and did reduce the swelling while







slowly deadening the pain. Dirk got some of his clothes for me to put on, as mine were pretty torn up and now quite stained with blotches of dried brownish-red blood. After a terrifying ordeal it is funny the things that come to your mind in such situations. I remember how surprised I was that Dirk's clothes actually fit me so well since he was much smaller. Then I remembered they were from the Salvation Army Thrift store, just like mine.

After caring for my physical wounds, Dirk's mom then did something that helped relieve the pain and that profoundly helped my emotional healing in a way that no medication ever could. . . she carefully and tenderly pulled me into her arms and gave me the warmest hug. . . the type of hug so gentle and so full of love that it could only come from a mom. In that neighborhood boys did not cry, ever. Not even at ten years old. Crying was for sissies. But that afternoon I cried and cried when she held me, not because it hurt, but because I was knew I was in a safe place, at least for a little while. I was truly grateful and didn't want to leave those loving arms. My tears flowed, and flowed, and flowed, and flowed. There would be no beatings here, and that knowledge gave me a greater peace than I had ever experienced before then, and rarely thereafter. Why couldn't it be like this at my house? Eventually I noticed there were tears flowing from her eyes too. Kindness is an amazing thing, and when you experience true kindness during a desperate time it profoundly affects you. I have never forgotten it. Even today when I think of what kindness really is, I immediately reflect back to Dirk's mom. She was wonderful. She was an angel. She was kind.

Catch

Nathan Mattson Analog Photography Series

"O Me! O Life!" – Walt Whitman (1819–1892) from Leaves of Grass

O ME! O life!. . . of the questions of these recurring;
Of the endless trains of the faithless — of cities fill'd with the foolish;
Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more foolish than I, and who more faithless?)
Of eyes that vainly crave the light — of the objects mean—of the struggle ever renew'd;
Of the poor results of all — of the plodding and sordid crowds I see around me;
Of the empty and useless years of the rest — with the rest me intertwined;
The question, O me! so sad, recurring — What good amid these, O me, O life?

Answer.

That you are here—that life exists, and identity;
That the powerful play goes on, and you will contribute a verse.

Never underestimate the impact you have on others. You might be the one to show kindness where it has never been known. You might be the one to provide guidance when a clear path cannot be seen. You might be the one to bring peace where only hostility resides. You might be the one to give hope when there is no hope. You might be the one breathing life into a dying spirit. Live life wisely. Anyone can take, but can you give? The powerful play goes on. Contribute a meaningful verse.

(Child abuse is a serious crime that is much more common than often realized. If you suspect sexual or physical abuse and believe a child to be in imminent danger, call the police immediately. Children's Protective Services (CPS), Department of Human Services, State of Michigan, is responsible for investigating reports of child abuse and neglect. Contact CPS at 866-975-5010. It is your responsibility as a citizen and your obligation as a human being.)

Conan O'Brien and His Supercollider

Janelle O'Hara

> *The Large Hadron Collider (LHC) is the world's largest and highest-energy particle accelerator complex, intended to collide opposing beams of protons, made from hydrogen atoms stripped of their electrons, or lead ions, two of several types of hadrons, at up to 99.99 percent the speed of light.* ***–Wikipedia, Source Moste Excellente***

Let's get ready to activate the supercollider.
So the one in Switzerland is faulty;
Who cares?
We have our own, a very sophisticated machine.

Instead of shooting particles straight at each other
at crazy high speeds to prove
the big bang theory,
our supercollider shoots douche bag celebrities

straight at each other at crazy low speeds
just to try to get rid of them.
Last week, in the epic battle between
Spencer Pratt of "The Hills" and

Dog the Bounty Hunter, our supercollider
proved faulty just like the Swiss one.
Because Spencer survived the collision.
So today, on the supercollider that looks

suspiciously like two toy trains with annoying
famous faces made of paper taped on them, we are
going to give Spencer Pratt another go at total
physical and spiritual destruction, by

supercolliding him with Criss Angel,
that weird magician "Mindfreak."
But some are afraid that by colliding
these two douche bags, that some sort of

wormhole will form, a sort of rip in the
douche bag continuum that will suck all
the d-bags of the world into it and sort of . . .
evaporate them from humanity.

I'm not getting the problem here,
because wouldn't the world be a
better place to live in without Spencer and Heidi
and people that call themselves a Mindfreak?

And that is exactly why I press the green "on" button.
And I send Spencer Pratt and Criss Angel
hurtling toward each other at speeds roughly
equivalent to that of a toy train, and I watch

gleefully and toss my trademark debonair hair
as the supercollider smashes the two
most annoying celebrities on the planet
into a sparking, joyful mess.

Faint Ring on the 4th Grade Carpet

Charlotte Bohnett

Ana Saavedra had to pee—bad. The fluorescent track lights
stretching across the classroom ceiling glimmered and shifted
along the creases of her wine-colored velveteen dress
as she teetered and jittered in her blue plastic chair.
Her shiny, white buckled shoes kicked the legs of her cubby-desk
with the fast-paced rhythm of an angry symphony.

Mrs. Diechmann was oblivious. She pierced the atmosphere
with the drag of a felt-tipped marker across the dry-erase board
and rambled about long division. First, she spoke in English,
bouncing around the front of the class; her back turned,
solving simple equations. Then, with this class
being bilingual and all, she repeated herself in Spanish.

As my ears shut out the foreign language
and my eyes moved slowly to the window, Ana's bobbing caught
my gaze. She swayed in her chair, her fingers clinging
to the seat's bottom. Her knuckles were white as if she'd held
on to that seat all her life. The first time I flew, I remember looking
at the flight emergency handbooks. Those drawings of passengers,
leaning forward, gripping the life vest collapsed under
their up-right positioned seats, preparing to crash—
that's how Ana looked. I raised my hand for her.

Mrs. Diechmann turned from the board and continued talking.
She was ignoring me. How could I have a question?
She knew I didn't speak Spanish. But I kept my hand raised.
When she finally called on me, I simply pointed
beyond the ferret cage we had gazed at wide-eyed for months
before realizing caged animals are not as entertaining as wild ones,
over the head of Alfredo Llamier who looked as though he might have eaten
the previous class that resided in the room. All eyes found Ana.
Her bronze skin reddened like chocolate-covered strawberries.

"Bueno, Ana?" Mrs. Diechmann asked. The pleading commenced.
While I couldn't comprehend the dialogue,
I knew the sounds of need, persistence,
and deniability. Everyone knew Mrs. Diechmann had a bathroom rule—
once a day during class-time. Ana had already gone today.
The conversation ended and Mrs. Diechmann continued her lecture.
Ana continued dancing in her chair. And I?
I continued to gape like those tourists who fly
all the way across the world to watch Ol' Faithful erupt,
except I didn't have a camera or an umbrella-hat.

It didn't take too much longer for Ana's body to go completely still.
Her face went pale like green olives. And I watched the soft folds
of Ana's dress go damp and sink. Urine rolled down
the metal legs of the chair, soaking the textured, multi-tonal carpet.
And as the final beads of gold clung and dropped from the edges of her seat,
Ana whimpered so soft, so high that it broke the attention of the room
and everyone turned yet again to gaze upon Ana—
even Mrs. Diechmann.

In a turbulent commotion of children
snickering, laughing, and pointing, Mrs. Diechmann yanked Ana
out of the class, her berry dress hugging her backside.
I stared at the moisture staining her desk and the floor.
I didn't feel embarrassed or saddened for her.
I wasn't angry at Mrs. Diechmann. Instead,
I only though about how I would finally get to see
Janitor Hernandez use that magic sawdust that absorbs accidents
and erases the proof that they occurred.

Five Stars

Janelle O'Hara

When people say they hate funerals, I giggle. Because honestly, who *likes* funerals? Does anyone really *like* to go stare at a dead body? Is there anyone who actually *enjoys* watching people cry their eyes out over a 98-year-old man who had glaucoma for 25 years and inoperable lung cancer? Are there people who revel in the sea of black clothing, greeting and consoling people they either have never met or haven't seen in five years?

Of *course* I hate funerals. Everyone does. Dead people creep me out, I get anxious when people cry around me, and on top of all that I'm so disconnected from everyone in this town. I feel like I'm the new college girlfriend of the high school quarterback who led the team to the State Championships, and people wish he was still dating the head cheerleader.

But, though I wouldn't admit it to anyone besides the woman herself, Bess Plum was pretty special to me. If it had been anyone else, I wouldn't have traveled all the way from New York City to this podunk town in the sticks to gaze listlessly at a corpse. At the ripe old age of 90, she had finally taken her last breath (probably full of tobacco smoke) and died peacefully.

I suck on my cigarette like it's life support. I usually try not to smoke in my brand-new Toyota Prius, but this is an emergency. I need to be as calm as possible.

Mom had persuaded me not to stay at the Days Inn off the highway and to sleep in my old room for a few days. "Save the money," she had said, thinking that this was really the only way to change my mind. Mom had been careful to keep her tone practical and emotionless, though I knew she was overjoyed that her prodigal daughter was coming home for the first time in – what was it? – five years.

Bess Plum was my great-grandmother, a fact I hadn't learned until I was about fifteen. She was everyone's grandma, so I never even thought to ask if she had any real grandchildren. Luckily, my sisters and I were those kids. It seemed like everyone in town had always known that we were Bess Plum's Real Granddaughters, and that they were fake. Lakewood had a population of only 654 people, so everyone is like family.

I know that everyone always says that about a small town, and that it's totally cliché. But I'm dead serious when I say that everyone in Lakewood is so close that most little kids didn't know who they are related to biologically and who they are just unnaturally close with until they reach middle school, and even then it isn't always clear. Which is why most teenagers in Lakewood avoid dating anyone who actually lives in Lakewood, lest they find out they are actually dating their cousin.

The houses begin to appear closer together until suddenly I am at the flashing red light that indicates "downtown Lakewood." My house, the Bishop house, one of the oldest in town, is just a few driveways past it. Funny how I still consider it my house, even though I haven't stayed there for more than a summer since I was eighteen. I feel my stomach clench with irrational terror. It's just Mom. What are you so afraid of?

Sometimes I *think* in typewriter text, if that makes any sense. It's the journalist in me, I think.

I pull into the gravel driveway, cringing as I hear the *ping-pings* of rocks ricocheting off my beautiful blue car. Reminds me of a scene in *I Know What You Did Last Summer,* Jennifer Love Hewitt and Freddie Prinze, Jr., 1997, contrived and run-of-the-mill. When Julie James goes to see Anne Heche's crazy hermit character. One-and-a-half star review.

In the past, Mom was always sitting on the porch in her rocking chair, waiting for me. Sometimes I feel bad for what I've put her through over the last twenty years – actually, I always feel bad. But I have always struggled with my own personal sort of insanity, and I'm selfish enough to believe that it's my parents' fault, ultimately.

But Mom isn't on the porch this time. An omen. This visit is going to be much different than the others. I park and grab my carry-on, which is all I brought with me. Ever-practical, I'm wearing the outfit I plan to wear to the funeral, and packed pajamas, clothes for tomorrow, a toothbrush, hairbrush and makeup. That's all. So sparse. But that's me. Sparse.

Before I mount the slightly lopsided porch steps, I flick my cigarette into the mulch surrounding the famous rose bushes. If Mom had seen that, she would have flinched.

I kind of just barge in, because this is my house, after all. Mom is nowhere to be seen. I drop my bag in the hallway, take a deep breath and call, tentatively, "Mom?"

Dishes clink in the kitchen, and a soft voice answers, "Back here."

My heels thud on the hardwood floor as I continue down the hallway, to the enormous kitchen that encompasses the back of the house. Mom is at the sink, with her back to me, black-clad shoulders hunched over.

"Hi," I say, immediately regretting the wariness I infuse in my tone. I stand in the doorway, afraid to advance further. Mom looks so small and defeated, like those abused puppies they show in those Humane Society commercials.

She dries her hands on a towel and turns to face me. "Hi, Alice," she says, voice trembling. I expertly hide the shock on my face—she has aged tremendously in the last five years. She has always been slender, but now she looks frail, almost like I had looked when I was on coke. Her hair, once the precise shade of chestnut that mine is, has large streaks of gray in it that she hadn't bothered to cover with dye. She still wears makeup, I notice, but I only notice because it is streaked down her face. She's been crying a lot. My mind flies to Sally Field in *Steel Magnolias*, 1989, with Shirley MacLaine and Dolly Parton in the cemetery after Shelby dies. Heart-wrenching and overly sappy, but entertaining nonetheless. Three-and-a-half.

I take a deep breath and advance slowly across the kitchen, and Mom bounds over and wraps her arms around me tightly, like a blood pressure cuff. Since I'm about four inches taller than her, she can rest her head on my shoulder. She does this, and sighs heavily – I have a feeling that she had thought I wouldn't come.

"Are you okay?" I ask, patting her on the back. I'm perpetually awkward with tender moments.

"Yes," she replies, voice still a bit shaky. "I'm just . . . I'm really glad you came, Alice."

I pull away and wave it off. "It's Bess Plum, Mom, of course I was gonna come."

She nods, surveying me up and down. "You look better, honey. I'm glad to see some meat on your bones."

"Well, when you rediscover that food tastes good, you're bound to gain weight," I say offhandedly. I neglect to mention that I've completely lost my sense of smell, undoubtedly due to years of snorting.

Mom is still highly uncomfortable discussing my history, mainly because she doesn't approve of my nonchalant attitude toward it. She smiles, though. "I like your outfit."

"Thanks," I say, looking down at my gray dress pants and black sweater. I think it's pretty bland, but Mom always appreciates simple, classic things.

Suddenly, she claps her hands together, startling me. "Okay, well, we have a half hour to get to the service. You should be glad you missed the visitation, it was a madhouse. I don't know why I never realized how many people were in love with Bess Plum."

It was true. Bess Plum was probably the most loved person in town — in the state, in the country, in the world. Part of it, I think, was because she could be outright ornery sometimes. But when it was just you and her, she had a way of making you feel like you were the world and she was the Atlas holding you up.

Mom goes the bathroom to clean up her face, and I wait dutifully in the foyer. I wonder vaguely where Mary and Elizabeth are, and then I hear a yell from upstairs.

"I need to take a shower!" comes the all-too-familiar screech of my baby sister, Elizabeth, seventeen years old and bound to be worse than I ever was— which is very hard. Think Evie in *Thirteen*, 2003, Evan Rachel Wood and Holly Hunter, difficult to watch and too juvenile for adult tastes. Three.

My ears pick up the sound of my mother throwing the door open in a rage. "It's not my fault you waited until the last possible second to get ready for the funeral! Alice and I are leaving right now, and you can get there however the hell you want to. I *cannot* deal with you right now."

"Tell Alice to fuck herself," Elizabeth screams, and a door slams.

And of course, Mom appears at the top of the stairs, looking as calm as if she had just emerged from a long bubble bath. Everyone in our family has nasty tempers — except Mary — and we are all *creepily* good at hiding them when necessary.

"Let's go," Mom says coolly. "Do you want me to drive?"

"Yeah, sure," I reply, following her out the door. I half-expect her to correct my slang with "yes," but she doesn't. Apparently she is out of mom-mode for me.

I slide into the passenger seat of the 2001 Volvo S40, a car I had seen when it was practically new. Unsurprisingly, it is still in pristine condition, not a chip in the white paint, not a leaf on the floor.

"I like your car," Mom remarks, glancing at the Prius.

"Thanks," I reply. "I'm in an Environmentalist phase." Really, I'm not. I just want to *look* like I'm an in an Environmentalist phase.

"That's the trend nowadays," Mom muses as she turns the key in the ignition. The car roars to life smoothly, without so much as a sputter.

I realize with a start that Dad had probably taken it in for tune-ups every six months. The reason it was such a jarring thought is because my dad died three years ago, committing suicide by jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge — a funeral I hadn't been allowed to attend, because I had been in rehab.

"Have you taken this in for a tune-up recently?" I ask, sure she hadn't.

"No," she says. "But does it sound like it needs one?" The question hangs in the air, heavy like a suffocating fog, and I feel uncharacteristic tears prick in the corners of my eyes. I want a cigarette, but can't bring myself to light up in this perfect car.

"No," I reply. I can't say anything else without my voice betraying this embarrassing wave of emotion.

Then there is silence. I gaze out the window at the dismal landscape as it flies past, the clouds overhead casting a hazy gray light over everything. It makes the normally pretty trees and fields seem like something out of a Tim Burton movie. *Sleepy Hollow*, I mentally note. Johnny Depp and Christina Ricci, 1999. One of my first reviews at Columbia. I wrote that it was visually captivating and the characterization was great, but the pacing was erratic. Four.

Mom pulls the Volvo into the parking lot of Old East Catholic Church, a small, elegant cathedral in the middle of nowhere. It looks like *hundreds* of cars are in the parking lot, but I know that's not feasible. I get out and follow Mom through the throng of people trying to cram into the door, but I look at the ground. I am determined not to be noticed, if at all possible.

And of course, once I get into a relatively open area in the lobby, who do I bump directly into but Todd Marlowe, my brother-in-law. I guess it's inevitable that I see him, but I would have liked to postpone it.

"Oh," he says, unable to hide his shock. Although Mary got hitched to him three years ago just before Dad died, I hadn't been allowed at the wedding. But Mary and Todd had been dating since they were fourteen, so I knew him before I began my "downward spiral."

"Nice to see you, too," I remark sarcastically. Defense mechanism.

"No, no, I'm sorry," he says. He shakes his blonde head as if he thinks he's seen a ghost. Todd is so *nice*. "It's just, your mom said she wasn't sure if you were coming. Mary knew you would, though."

Good ol' Mary — still has faith in me after ten years of nothing but disappointment.

"Where is she?" I ask, mildly curious to see my beautiful, perfect specimen of a sister.

"In the corner over there," he says, pointing."She's taking it pretty hard."

"I'm gonna go say hi. Nice to see you, Todd."

"You too, Alice."

Sure enough, there's Mary, perched on an ornately carved oak chest, staring at her folded hands in her lap.

"Mary, Mary, quite contrary," I say, loud enough for her to hear. Her mass of brown curls snaps up quickly, and once she registers it's me, she flies to me and nearly tackles me with a tight hug.

"Oh, Alice," she sighs heavily, not letting go. "I *knew* you would come, I knew it, I prayed and prayed and I guess it worked!"

I manage to extract myself from her death grip and look her over head to foot. She's still breathtakingly gorgeous, from the lustrous brown curls to the sweet, smiling face, slender middle and mile-long legs. Think Audrey Hepburn in *Charade*, 1963, with Cary Grant, dated but masterfully made—four-and-a-half.

"I had to say bye to Bess Plum," I say with perfect composure.

"Mom is probably thrilled that you're here," Mary says, beaming. "Have you seen Elizabeth yet?"

"No, but I heard her. Loud and clear."

Mary sighs again, this time wistfully. "She's been so much worse ever since Dad died. I try to hang out with her sometimes to keep her occupied but it doesn't work."

I want to laugh — picturing Mary, sweet, caring and genuinely concerned for every living creature, trying to find something in common with Elizabeth, the devil in human form.

The service is starting, and Mary takes my hand and leads me to the very front pew. I'm mortified, as I had planned to sneak quietly into one of the back rows. Mom's already there, front and center, along with numerous vague cousins and aunts and uncles that years of living in New York have faded from my memory, but they all crane their necks and look at me with curious and slightly disapproving expressions. Mary and I slip in beside Mom and Todd, and the service begins.

I am surprised to learn that Bess Plum's name was actually Elizabeth Alice Plummer, and that she had lost her husband at the age of 31 to kidney failure, and had raised five boys on her own, my grandpa being one of them. A sense of shame fills me—I had never taken the time to ask Bess Plum about that kind of stuff. I had never known my grandfather, John Paul Plummer, father of two girls, Aunt Liz and my mother Mary Alice, but I had been close with Bess Plum my whole life.

I don't pay attention to the sermon.

Instead, I think back to the many times I stayed at Bess Plum's house as a surly seven-year-old, "running away" from my father's too-lenient punishments. Or how, at eleven, she taught me to crochet and I made Mary and Elizabeth wear my lopsided berets. How, at sixteen, after my first breakup with Steven Hoffman, Bess Plum and I ate a gallon of ice cream and watched a John Wayne marathon on TV — the first time I realized that films fascinated me. The two thousand dollars she gave me as I left for Columbia after graduation, so I could afford to live in the dorms.

The grocery money she sent me while I was a freshman and sophomore, the money I was too ashamed to tell her I spent on coke. The letters she wrote me, that I returned faithfully, never telling her I weighed 108 pounds and lost my sense of smell, but I did send her clippings of my feature articles and movie reviews published in the school paper. I thought of how, when my father and I had a huge fight and he banned me from the house the summer before junior year, I stayed with Bess Plum, and since you couldn't get coke in Lakewood, she sat up with me during my nightmarish bouts of withdrawal, where I wouldn't sleep and sank into a depression so severe she was afraid I would hang myself if left alone — and I probably would have.

How I credited her with my recovery, even after I went back to school and snorted Ritalin so I could make the newspaper deadlines, doing coke only on the weekends so it wouldn't interfere with school. *Bess Plum made me stop using coke every day*, I would tell my roommates. *Now I'm down to Friday, Saturday and Sunday only, with Ritalin on the weekdays.* And one day, my 80-something year old great-grandma showed up at my student apartment in New York City and dragged me off to the hospital for detox —because somehow, she knew I couldn't do it alone. This woman, whose only vices were cigarettes and swearing, Elizabeth Alice Plummer, drove 200 miles to New York City because she knew her great-granddaughter needed help.

At the time, I was so enraged that I didn't speak to her for nearly a year. But later, when I talked to Mary about it, I learned that Bess Plum wasn't angry or hurt by my silence. She knew I was upset, betrayed, and, above all, craving drugs.

There was rehab, and a brief stint at home. Out of necessity I stayed sober, because my dad basically put me on house arrest. It didn't matter — there was a period of time I didn't get out of bed for three weeks, besides the necessary bathroom trips.

I made it back to Columbia somehow, I took a heavy course load and since I didn't have time to work, I began to deal drugs out of my dorm room. Mainly weed and pills, but ecstasy and coke every once in a while. Never heroin, though. I could never be the means for someone using needles. I made a ton of money that semester, more than I can even remember. You'd be surprised at the types of people that came to me all year; not just the artsy fags who dropped E at raves, but the honor students who wanted Ritalin to stay awake to study or sleeping pills to knock them out, the jocks who wanted weed because apparently it isn't as damaging to their game as cigarettes, and the RAs who wanted coke to break up the monotony of dealing with rich snobs.

Sometimes I feel like my life at that point can be summed up by what I did and didn't do.

I didn't use cocaine, just Ritalin so I could stay up and get my work done.

I did apologize to Bess Plum – I wrote her a letter, a long, emotional apology, and I told her I wasn't using coke anymore (not a lie, at that point). I got a phone call three days later and that was the first time I knew of Bess Plum shedding a tear. Over me. Of all the people that loved her, she cried over me.

I didn't go back to Lakewood. I took classes, had internships, dealt drugs and made a truckload of money. I had no loans anymore, and I paid for my last year of college in cold hard cash.

I did spend time with people that meant nothing to me, particularly my boyfriend at the time, a cokehead named Ben who had connections with a lot of druggies that I sold to. He was a music major, probably one of the most gorgeous men this side of Leonardo DiCaprio in *Romeo and Juliet* (1996, a stellar update and Baz Luhrmann's best film to date, four-and-a-half).

I did do coke a few times with Ben that summer, but Bess Plum's face was always foremost in my mind when I did it, and eventually I told him I was done. He broke up with me soon after.

I didn't realize I was pregnant, and when I did I didn't keep his baby. Gotta love those Ritalin-snorting Columbia Med students and their excellent connections.

I did graduate, but didn't walk. There was no one to walk for. At least, that's what I told myself.

I did get a crappy job at the New York Post and wrote online reviews for a popular website. I was done with school, so I figured I could have some fun, and sooner rather than later I got back into coke. And Bess Plum knew, she could tell from 100 miles away.

And then came rehab.

The service is over, blaring organ music snapping me from my reverie. Mary is beside me, crying, clutching my arm for support. I'm not crying, but I can't look at Bess Plum, lying there in the casket dead as a doornail, with the horrible clownish makeup and stiff businesslike clothes. I want to remember her in the colorful patterned skirts and white blouses, ever the Pollack. Or the tailored "trousers" she wore whether she was gardening or going to church, the halo-like babushka she wore tied over her snow-white curls.

"I can't believe you're not crying," Mary whimpers. "You were closer to her than anyone."

"She saved my life," I reply nonchalantly. I turn to look in the back, eyes scanning dozens of blank faces, and sure enough, I see Elizabeth's dark head streaking quickly out of the church.

The burial is a blur, again. I am trying to remember Bess Plum without remembering those hellish two years spent in a specialized rehabilitation center. She visited me there, and so did Mom and Mary, but no one else. Dad couldn't bear to admit that his firstborn was a coke-addicted train wreck.

I know I cried when I missed Mary's wedding. And I know I cried when I found out that Dad had killed himself and probably because of me, and they wouldn't let me out for the funeral.

But I haven't cried since then.

I'm in the car with Mom and Elizabeth, cigarette glued to my lips because I know Mom is too weary to scold. Elizabeth had taken my keys to the Prius and ran it into a ditch before she even made it out of the driveway. She walked to the church and made it for the end of the service.

"You're paying for the repairs on Alice's car, Elizabeth," Mom says calmly.

Elizabeth says nothing. I can see her reflection in the rearview mirror, and she looks extraordinarily like my father. The hair a light brown, flat like mine, but with Charlie Bishop's huge, saucer-like brown eyes and pointed chin, the forehead too large but hidden with bangs. The permanent crease between her eyes, that all the Bishops have – a tattoo of fucked-up family life, I guess. I fingered mine and absently tried to smooth it out.

"Mom, I have money, it's okay," I say, bored and apathetic.

"How do you have so much money?" Elizabeth snaps angrily. "You went to the world's most expensive school and worked the shittiest jobs until like, last year."

"I dealt drugs for five years, fuck face," I retort, but keep my composure. "And I was damn good at it, too."

Mom pulls over and bursts into tears.

I sigh, royally pissed that I had let Elizabeth rile me up. "I'm sorry, Mom, I'm sorry. Do you want me to drive?"

She keeps crying for a good five minutes. "Nice one, *Alice*," Elizabeth sneers acidly.

I feel the blood thrumming in my ears and I am ready to physically fight my seventeen-year-old sister, the bitch who is on the fast track to repeating every single mistake I had ever made. I force myself to squeeze the arm rests of the Volvo until my knuckles are blanched bone-white.

"Stop it." It's not me that says it, with the quietly menacing tone; it's Mom. "Elizabeth, stop it. Alice, stop it. *I – can't – take – this – anymore.*"

I can hear the desperation, the pleading, the years and years of pain practically shouting at me.

To my complete and utter surprise, Elizabeth hears it too.

"I'm sorry, Mom," she mutters under her breath

Mom regains her composure and pulls back onto the road. No one says anything for the rest of the drive, but I'm not sure we should.

Mary's car is in the driveway, which I immediately mark as strange. Todd and Mary have been trying to make a baby for about a year now, and they have been fucking at every open opportunity. Mary is probably too upset right now for babymaking, though.

When we get into the house, Mom goes to the phone and calls some place to get my car out of the ditch. Mary is wrapped up in a blanket on the sofa, Sox the cat curled up at her feet and purring contentedly.

"How's the procreation thing going, sis?" I ask, taking a seat on the La-Z-Boy across from her.

"I've had two miscarriages," she says. Her fingers absently stroke Sox's silky orange fur, and she's purposely not looking at me.

My eyes widen with shock, and my fists clench involuntarily. I never felt much remorse for my own "lost pregnancy" — the selfish part of me overwhelms much of the emotional part of my soul, if you want a self-diagnosis, plus I have never particularly cared for Ben besides his looks and lovemaking skills. But I *know* that if I wanted a baby, if I had been ready like Mary was and if I was absolutely crazy in love with the father, I would have been devastated.

"Have you — have you guys told anyone?" I ask, stammering. What exactly do you say to someone who drops an A-bomb like that?

"Just Mom and Elizabeth and Bess Plum," Mary says, still detached. "We couldn't bear to tell Todd's family."

Understandable, considering Mrs. Marlowe has given birth to seven kids, and Todd is the only one so far who hasn't given her a grandchild.

"I'm sorry, Mary. You could have called me."

It is now that her big brown eyes well up in tears, and she looks straight at me, her eyes looking more hardened and fierce than I ever thought she was capable of.

"You know what, Alice? I couldn't call you. That was the one thing that ate me up inside more than losing the babies, if you can believe that. I couldn't call you because I can't depend on you for any kind of emotional support. I know that you can give me money, and that you probably would. But you

wouldn't do it out of genuine care or concern for my well-being. You would give it because you had it, you don't use it, and this way you don't have to deal with *feelings. How can you not care about anything?*"

"You could tell Elizabeth, but not me?" It's not an accusation; I'm genuinely hurt. I'd always thought Mary was on my side.

"Isn't that sad? Elizabeth, the Devil's spawn. She actually cried. I don't know if it's because she felt sorry for me or because Mom wouldn't let her take the car, but she cried, which is more than you would have done."

She's right. I wouldn't have cried. I probably would have bought her a new TV. But I'm still hurt. I haven't felt anything this strong in a long time, and it makes my breath catch in my chest. I have to steer the conversation away from the pain.

"How did Todd take it?" I ask, always willing to talk about anyone but myself.

"He was upset," she says softly, tears now tracing intricate wet paths down her pretty cheeks. "But he said he was just glad I was okay. The second one was really scary."

I have an absurd mental image of Todd in tights, acting like Henry VIII in the laughable *The Other Boleyn Girl* with Eric Bana and Natalie Portman, 2008, two-and-a-half — enraged that his wife was unable to produce a male heir. I know Todd isn't like that, but I think every male probably has that thought at least once, no matter how fleeting.

"Is he coming to get you soon?" I ask, throat catching and rasping strangely.

"No, I'm staying here tonight."

Mechanically, I get up and go to my overnight bag in the hallway. When I said that I was sparse and didn't pack beyond the necessities, I wasn't lying. I reach into the Velcro side pocket and pull out a small plastic baggie.

I saunter into the living room again and toss it to Mary, who catches it expertly it as if she had been expecting it.

"Okay," she says, and strangely I'm not surprised by her response, despite the years of evidence supporting her refusal.

"Let's get Elizabeth," I suggest, and Mary nods.

In the upstairs bathroom, me, Mary and Elizabeth sit on the white tile facing the bathtub, neat little lines of angelic powder before each of us. I'm nervous and excited, because this has always been a solo experience. To my surprise, I'm not even mad that I'm sharing my score. I'll gladly take one hit over three, if a Bishop is partaking with me.

And then, just before I hit, a moment of clarity: for the first time ever, I think of why I'm doing cocaine. The only thought that floats through my head is I need it, the typewriter text burned into the scroll in my brain. *I need it. I need it. I NEED IT.*

Why is Mary doing it? The drugs are making me see my thoughts in words, and this is bothering me. Immediately the typewriter begins clacking out a response, bell tinkling pleasantly at the end of every line. *Mary shouldn't do it, she is the good girl, Todd will hate it, it would kill Mom, she wants to be reckless because she feels useless—she can't be a mother, the only thing she ever wanted. The pain must go away for a while.*

Funny how the typewriter can relate to my sister, but I can't.

Why is Elizabeth doing it? This response is easier and shorter. T*o keep up the bad girl image. Plainly speaking, she "should."*

Does anybody else think in typewriter text? I'm crazy.

This time, as I do another line, as I coach my younger sisters how to position their heads for the maximum hit, the searing pain hits. My chest explodes like my heart is made of nitroglycerine and the coke is the igniting spark. The grief wracks my body, the concrete weight of it compressing my lungs so I can't get a full breath.

Suddenly, I'm sobbing like I did when I was seven and Mary got the Barbie for Christmas that I had wanted. I'm crying for all the friends I lost from high school, for my lost little sister Elizabeth. I'm crying for Mary, the definition of a saint, and my lost nephews or nieces and I curse God for not giving her a baby — then I curse myself for giving her coke. I'm crying for my dad, who hadn't seen his Alice clean since she was eighteen, and yet I'm grateful he can't see me now. I'm crying for my lost baby, even though I would have definitely screwed him up. And then I'm crying for Mom, who even though she must have done something wrong to fuck us up so much, has always been a kind, caring, and strong woman, and she has done nothing to deserve these awful daughters.

Mary sneezes and I manage to open my eyes and stare at her vacant expression. I see Bess Plum's cold, freakish, clown-painted dead face instead of Mary's. It's like some fucked up scene out of that heroin movie, *Requiem for a Dream*, Jared Leto and Ellen Burstyn, 2000. Five stars.

Indian Lake Waterfall **Scott Schneider** Digital Photograph

Black Hole
Jordan Scenna

I live in a black hole.

A supermassive fantastic blackest of blackness

Black hole.

There is no light

And I can hear no sound,

so I hum out loud

I serenade nebular clouds

And pirouette across the Kuiper belt leaving stardust in my wake

So I can Hansel and Gretel my way back home;

A stone's throw from Pluto but nonetheless a place to rest my head and

Watch asteroids and comets collide

A soothing interstellar lullaby.

I live in a black hole.

A supermassive fantastic blackest of blackness

Black hole.

There is no light

And I can hear no sound

But I'm bound to discover another life form

So I wait patiently

to communicate

nonverbally that is

without words

with an alien being

Another lonely soul

A spaceman ripped, torn, and shredded across the heavens

So long out of touch because of a bad connection and the phenomenal
intergalactic roaming charges.

Jimmy Byrd

Jordan Scenna

This is the story of the always infamous, awkward unfamous Jimmy Byrd. His brown and black well worn hat cocked back and to the left, the brim beaming an unassuming smile straight up at the sun as if to say "Buddy, give me all you got." He devils the sunrays squashes 'em up and stuffs them in his pocket: "Devil ain't nothin' but a verb to me, I can pick him up or pay him no mind. I ain't got time for the devil and he ain't got time for me and that's the way we likes it." Jimmy strolls down city blocks shoulders slightly stooped dodging gutter sewer fumes that bubble up from the murky black bowels of a city that stinks of a poverty whose potency is enough to reach anybody who is paying attention. He walks past the deep rooted mother hens sitting on their porch sipping peach lemonade and gossiping about the goings on in the neighborhood. "Now take a look at that Jimmy Byrd just walks up and down the block day and night, nothing much to be spoke of right? Right." Now Jimmy just grins, his teeth white as fresh milk, tips his hat forward, "How goes it young girls? Fine day we're here having, you cookin' up a nice meal, I'm just now plain starving." The women all gasp, their fingers in unison pointing, "That there Jimmy's a bum always begging for portions." "Well if not right now maybe sometime hereafter you just give me a holler old Jimmy will catch you later my dears and sorry to have been a bother I'll head on to home now and see ya's tomorrow."

The always infamous, awkward unfamous Jimmy Byrd. Didn't know if he chose to be a ghetto poet or simply stole it from a long haired hippy who couldn't figure verse appropriately, born without a father an immaculate concept bred the thought in him "Man, humanity is nothing more than a sad accident of evolution; a minor confusion, a dismissed apparition. People sit together full of phony enthusiasm smiling fake in each other's company Gucci-stained agents plotting a networking strategy." So he walks alone hands held in his pockets no job to go to but the thought "The streets they're always hiring."

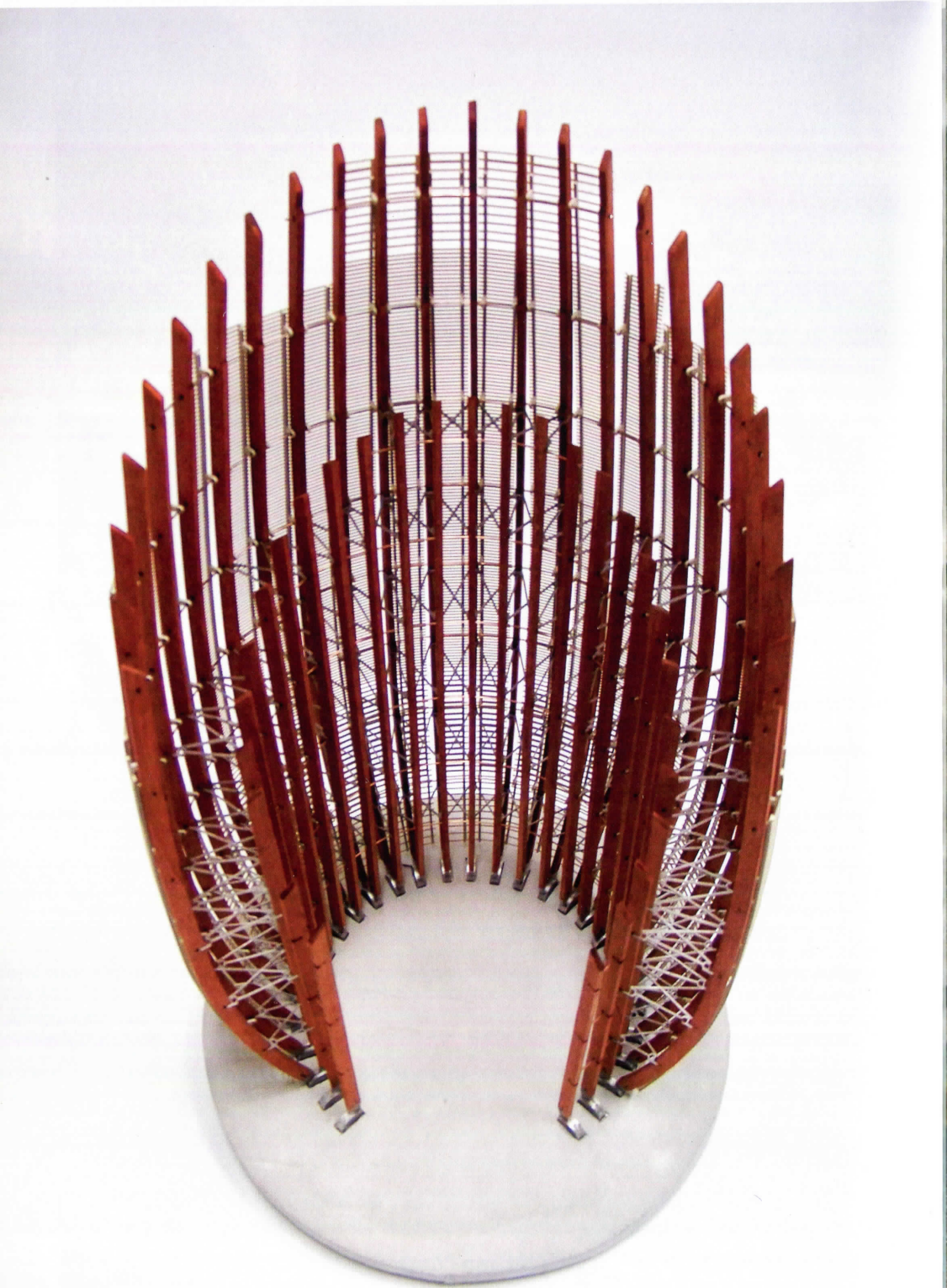
I'm Jimmy Byrd the one-man showboat, but I'm broke so you won't take me seriously, huh, not as funny as you thought it would be but for some reason you're still laughing at me. You turn your nose up to choke the rest of my integrity. Yes, I work the corner and you need permission to beg the block they search my W2 my 1099 where's it at so they can tax your hat, let me see two quarters and a dime they take half charge me interest on the rest.

String Flower & Orchid Jenny Smith HDR Digital Photographs

Arches
The Path Not Taken

Jenny Smith Digital Photographs

Boating Humor **Nathan Mattson** Gouache Painting



Tribute to Renzo Piano II **Grant McMullen** Physical Model

Strickland-Ferris Interior **Tyler Hays** Colored Pencil Rendering

Steps **Elsida Konakciu** HDR Digital Photograph

The Secret Garden **Jenny Smith** Digital Photograph

Reflected Fold

Nathan Mattson Physical Model

John Bigtacion Digital Photograph

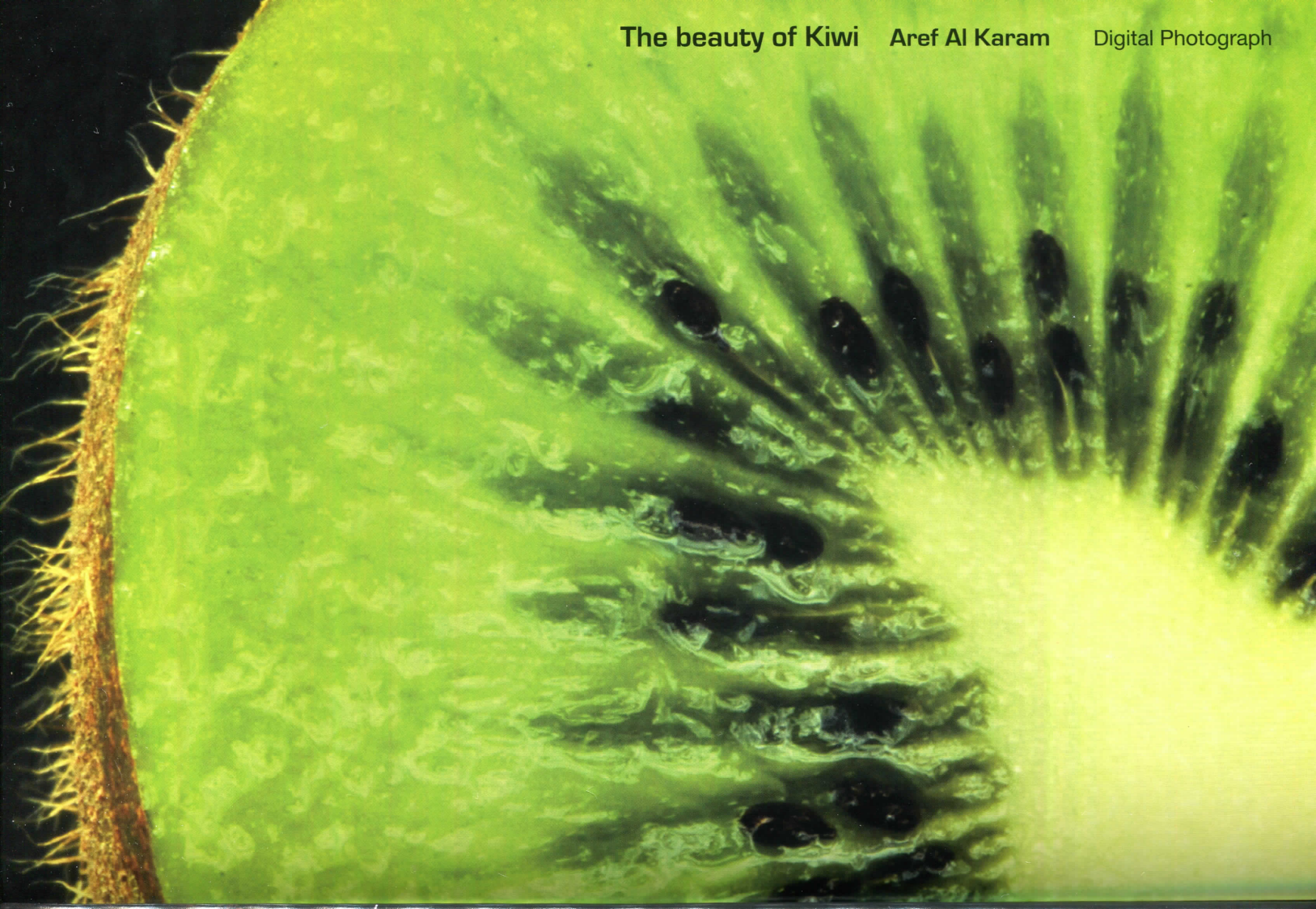
Tree City **Noelle Tatro** Ink Drawing

Flying Hell Fish **Avi Shayevitz** Digital Painting

City in Motion **Elsida Konakciu** HDR Digital Photograph

Tasty Treat — **Alec Sanger** — Digital Photograph

Basilosaurus cetoides in Bowler — **Avi Shayevitz** — Digital Painting



The beauty of Kiwi **Aref Al Karam** Digital Photograph

La Sagrada Familia **Cameron McLean** Digital Photograph

Carnation **Jenny Smith** HDR Digital Photograph

Juárez

Melissa Grunow

I was sitting in a little cantina in Juárez, Mexico on a Saturday, an empty margarita glass in front of me, leftover food resting on my plate. The intricate tile-covered table top was cool beneath my elbows. I hadn't planned to stop for lunch, but the waiter in his white shirt and black pants had approached me on the street, which is how they do it in Mexico. They don't wait for you to come inside; they go outside and recruit you.

"*Señorita*, come inside! Have something to cold to drink."

I paused, but only for a second. I looked at this man, his eyes squinting in the sunlight, his surprisingly white smile, and I felt instant trust. I had just left the *farmacia*, where the man behind the counter tried to sell me antibiotics because he didn't understand that I wanted birth control pills. My Spanish is terrible, but his English was worse. Restocking my year's supply was the only reason I ever went to Juárez. Sometimes I ducked into the little makeshift shops lining the alleys to look at the trinkets, the knick-knacks, the handmade jewelry, the serapes, and ponchos, and tunics, and cowboy boots. I even had a few Mexican souvenirs hanging in my apartment: ceramic, colorful hand-painted spur-of-the-moment purchases in which I had to haggle down to almost fifty percent of the asking price. Shopping in Mexico is an exhausting ordeal, and there are no rules except that they don't want you to walk away once you express even the slightest interest in something. I was careful not to do too much window shopping or to linger at the tables in the Mercado, lest I be hounded by the vendors. I had only been to Juárez a handful of times, even though I'd lived in southern New Mexico for four years. It was only an hour's drive and a fifteen-minute walk across the bridge away, but it didn't have much drawing power for me. I had gone there mostly on the weekends with friends between spring and summer before it got too hot to bother. The novelty of shopping in Juárez wears off quickly as you realize that the vendors pretty much all sell the same thing, and even the Mercado isn't worth the price of a taxi you take to get there.

This time, however, this time I went alone. It was May. I hadn't told anyone I was going, except my mom who calls me while I'm circling downtown El Paso, trying to find a cheap parking lot. She can't believe I'm going alone. "Be careful," she tells me. I look out the window, and I can almost hear daylight mocking her as the sky gets brighter. This time of year, the sun is unforgiving.

"The border isn't real," I say. I like to mess with her because after four years in the desert, she and my dad have yet to fly down and visit me. Her image of my home is one of desolation, cockroaches, *cholo* gang violence, and poverty. "This part of El Paso looks and feels no different than Juárez. Just because I pay the toll to walk across the bridge doesn't mean anything." I pause. "Besides, it's too hot for someone to bother killing me today."

She doesn't think that's funny, and I don't bother to reassure her. I had even considered lying to her about what I was doing and where I was going. I don't know where it comes from, but I still feel the need to lie to my parents sometimes, even about trivial things, sometimes about really important things. And if I don't lie, I delay the truth, which is what happened in this case. I had

been on the phone with my mom for at least ten minutes before I dropped it into the conversation that I was leaving the country.

It's at least a mile walk in direct sunlight from the parking garage at the El Paso Convention Center to the bridge. The buildings change from old, detailed architecture to concrete boxes with pealing paint advertising the services offered inside the gated door. The closer you get to the bridge, the more the retail moves onto the sidewalk, dusty tables piled with sunglasses, kitchen appliances, knit caps, shoes, clothing, perched on the sidewalks with handwritten price signs flapping in the wind in a kind of pseudo-open air market. The Spanish gets thicker, more common the closer to the bridge, and my white skin feels more obvious than ever.

The walk across the bridge is a long one, and it feels like the walk of shame. There I was, carrying my Dooney & Burke handbag that I bought for myself after I graduated. Inside, $100 in cash for pills, and plenty of zippered compartments to hide the packets that exceeded the border patrol's three-month supply limit.

Along the way, women are sitting on the filthy concrete, holding a plastic cup, or a basket, their hand out in front of them, muttering beggings in Spanish. Many of them have babies or young children lying across their laps. They look dirty and tired and poorly fed and tired. I give them money. I've been told that I shouldn't because it's easier to get robbed that way, but I always keep a small wad of one-dollar bills in my fist when I cross the bridge, and when I come to a begging woman, I give her a dollar without breaking my stride. I do this until I am out of money. I know American money is worth more to them, and a dollar means virtually nothing to me.

So, I give it away, because I can't not give it away.

There are two-foot-tall coils of barbed wire over the bridge wall that have caught shopping bags in their spikes and shredded them into plastic ribbons. I watch these pieces of plastic fight in the wind, and far below I see concrete irrigation ditches that once contained the Rio Grande and are now covered in graffiti. The poverty is everywhere. You need to go home and wash it off, along with the dust and the rancid smell that collects in the streets; it's syrupy and sour, like the aftermath of a carnival. But the circus never leaves Juárez. This bridge and the main road leading into the city are designed for one thing: to entice Americans with churros, and cab rides, cheap birth control, Viagra and Vicoden that you can purchase without a prescription, and handmade silver jewelry that you have to store in plastic bags so it won't tarnish.

I see through these vendors. Although I have a modest collection of Mexican jewelry, I've learned how to not give in to their hustling. But it's the women whose begging sounds like chanting, who are wearing clothes that are dirty, clothes that are too small, too tight, don't match, women with babies on their laps, who don't notice the spilled soda when they sit on the concrete or the cockroaches snacking on discarded gansitos, women who look sad, who never smile, it is these women that I give money to without thinking. I ignore the middle class pessimism and give in to the working class guilt. If I had my camera, I could document the poverty, offer the women with babies a dollar to take their picture, then tell their story later.

But I'd have to make it up, because the only thing I understand is when they said *muchas gracias* as I drop money in their cup. They don't even flinch at the amount. They don't seem to notice the difference between a dollar and a dime. Their eyes have already moved on to the next American who they hope has loose change in their pocket and altruism in their heart.

This trip to Juárez was supposed to be a short one. I had to go to two farmacias to get the pills that I wanted, the pills the first one claimed they didn't make anymore. I knew better. He wanted to sell me the packets that were $20 for a month instead of $5, and I wasn't having it. So, I left and went into a different one. Every third storefront or so is a farmacia and the men behind the counters stand on the sidewalk and hustle when business is slow, advertising Viagra mostly, in quiet, pushy, accented voices. I ignore the hustling and some men whistle, which always makes me laugh because sweating under that sun, my body supported by heavy legs, and concentration rivered on my forehead, I am not sexy. They must not, I think, have very high standards.

After I got my twelve packets of pills, I stand in front of a trash can and take them out of their boxes, stashing the packets deep into my purse and discarding the containers. I would only have three in my bag to show the border checkpoint agent. I learned during my first trip to Juárez that they only become suspicious of you if you don't have any shopping bags, and so I made sure to claim my limit on the birth control. I felt sweat roll down the back of my neck and my jeans clung to my warm thighs. I was ready to go home. I had crossed the street and was starting to walk back to the bridge to cross back into the United States when the waiter in the white shirt approached me. "*Señorita*, come inside! Have something to drink."

While I was sitting there, a musical trio walked in and approached tables, asking if they wanted to hear a song. A woman, a waitress in the restaurant who was on her break, requested them to play while she sang. She was sitting in a different section of the restaurant, but her voice lifted above the cigarette smoke toward the back where I was seated. It was beautiful. Rich and colorful and pristine, as if singing was what she did, not waiting tables.

I sat there and listened. I can't remember if she sang four songs or five, because I got lost in the music. I looked around the restaurant. The waiters were busting their asses. I never saw my server stop moving once, even though he only had three tables. The rest were the same. They worked hard for their money, which is why when it came time to pay my $6 tab, I left a $4 tip.

My margarita was finished, but I wasn't being rushed out. I looked through the front door and saw two men sitting on the street, bandannas shielding their heads from the sun, their boot-covered feet stretched out in front of them; their hands brown and weathered and dirty. Outside, people don't move very fast in Mexico.

My waiter asked me if I wanted anything else, and when I told him no I reached for my purse.

"Relax, *Señorita*. Relax."

So, I did. And as I was sitting there, I felt tears, actual tears, fill my eyes to the brim until they overflowed and I let them roll off my chin and drop onto the table. I don't know why it happened, but sitting in that cantina with my hustling waiter, the beautiful music, my super-cheap, semi-illegal birth control in a plastic bag next to me, I felt sad.

I had forgotten how much respect I have for those living in poverty. There are no jobs in this border town, so men with engineering degrees have to resort to selling snack-sized bags of chips off a cart on the street just to house their families. There are some men who have worked hard enough to buy their own cars, and they use them as a taxi service to take American tourists to the Mercado. Some men become waiters, others sell wares in back alley shops. Those who don't know English are left begging in the streets, because they can't cater to American tourists; people with money.

People like me.

But, not really me. Part of my guilt when I come to this city is knowing what I fraud I am. That it wasn't so long ago that I wasn't very different from the dirty children who roam the street without supervision. That my American dollar is not forgettable to me. I know what it's like to not have those excess dollar bills that pass from my sweaty hand to a dirty one. In Mexico, and really in other aspects of my adult life, I masquerade as something other than how I grew up, somebody else. I've learned to pass, to blend in.

I brush the tears away and dab under my eyes, checking for smudged mascara, when a child wanders into the restaurant, dark straight hair, big dark eyes, dirty clothes, no shoes. In Mexico, I rarely see the street children wearing shoes. This child who has just entered the restaurant is just one of many who are shameless beggars. She walks up to tables with her hand out. Some people give her quarters. Some people shoo her away. When she comes to my table, I see my waiter from the across the room. He starts to walk toward her to kick her out of the restaurant. She is muttering something, her words are quick and quiet, and she takes a dirty, grubby finger and touches the leftover food on my plate.

"What are you doing?" the question is almost a shout. Horrified, I raise my hand as if to strike her, responding the way I would to a disobedient dog that was audacious enough to eat off the table. She never looks up at me, she never flinches. She moves her fingers away from the plate, but keeps her eyes focused on the hamburger. Something shifts inside me, and I lower my hand to my lap. I sit back in my seat as my heartbeat begins to slow to normal, pick up the half of my hamburger that I haven't touched and I offer it to her. She takes it in one hand and the quarter I give her in the other. I was going to use that quarter to pay the toll to cross the bridge. I would have to remember to ask the waiter for change before I leave. My heart softens a little more as I see ketchup sliding out from under the bun and about to land on her dirty frock. I point to an empty chair, "*¿Quieres sentarte?*" I ask her. Would you like to sit down?

The gesture surprises even myself. This is someone else's child eating my leftover food, and I just invited her to join me at the table. She reminds me of my sister as a child in some ways. I believe that of the five of us siblings, my sister was, by far, treated the worst. We would bully her, my brother and I. She had a "blankie" that she would drag behind her all over the house when she was about three or so, shortly after my mom left. She would sleep with it, eat with it wrapped around her shoulders, wrap her babies in it, use it as a towel after she took a bath. It was woven with satin trim that eventually started to unravel and fall off. My brother and I would pull on it and make it rip more, tearing the satin trim off in pieces, pieces my sister would grab out of our hands, put in the middle of the blanket and fold the edges over it, as if that would put it back together. We would laugh. We were mean. We *liked* to make my sister cry. It was fun because it was easy and we didn't have cable. We ganged up on her for years. If something was broken or missing, we blamed her. Our faces somber, our heads nodding together, "Mary Beth did it," we would lie. We let her suffer the spankings, even if my dad whipped her in front of us. It's not right, but that's what you do when you are only a child yourself, and you're scared, and you're angry with and envious of everyone around you.

This child has my sister's countenance and some of her demeanor. She's quiet, but not shy. She's a little sneaky. She's skinny and tan. Her dirty feet are narrow and her toes are long. Her eyes are big, but she doesn't look at you with them. Instead, she keeps them focused on what she wants to get from you. She makes you feel bad for her, but she stirs in me the same desire for violence that I felt toward my sister growing up. It's as if this child, my sister, had crossed some unseen, unnamed, and until that moment, unfelt boundary that teases the very primitive aspect of your nature, the one that makes you flare up with irritation and the irrational desire to strike another human being, even if that person is a hungry child who only wanted a quarter or a little bit of affection or to keep her blankie together.

"¿Quieres sentarte?" I ask her again. I don't know if she understands my question until she shakes her head and is off, sauntering toward the door, her bare feet silent against the cool tile. She's gone before my waiter makes it to the table to scold her. My plate is empty now except for a few undercooked French fries. I don't eat them.

I think of my mom sitting on her couch in Michigan and wonder if she's worried about my afternoon in Juárez. Sometimes I think my parents have forgotten what it was like for me, my brother, and my sister to grow up the way we did. My parents are so happily immersed in upper-middle class life now that I think they've distorted every memory of the past, *my past*. I find myself, still, telling my parents little lies, or not telling them anything at all. I don't know how to be honest with them. And maybe that's why New Mexico had become home for me, even more so than any other place I've lived. It got me out of Michigan, around new people, the chance to try new things knowing that they would never get back to my parents if I didn't want them to.

When the waiter brings me my change, he brings me all American quarters and a two-peso coin, which is the equivalent of about 20 cents. I now have my coin to cross the bridge, enough leftover to do laundry, and now these two pesos which are basically worthless. I don't correct the waiter. I don't ask him to bring me a regular quarter.

Instead, I take a final sip of my margarita that has melted into only a slightly green, warm liquid in the bottom of my glass. As I make my way to the door, the waiter doesn't say goodbye to me. He's already moved on, already recruited a few more people, some couples this time, to come inside and have something to drink. I'm just another American on her way back to the bridge.

Just outside the restaurant, a child walks up to me, steps in my path and breaks my stride. He doesn't say anything, just holds up his small hand, palm open, his fleshy brown face squinting under the sun. I step around him and continue on my way. I feel guilty for only a moment until I see others like me ignoring children like him who block the path with their hands out.

The bridge looks almost the same on both sides. As always, there is a line of cars waiting for their chance to return to or enter the U.S. Vendors weave in and out of traffic, making one last effort to sell their wares before the cars are no longer within the Mexican border; on the U.S. side, peddling and j-walking become illegal.

I make my way across the bridge, my calves starting to burn and quiver from the uphill climb. My quarters rest comfortably in my jeans pocket, against my thigh. As a woman, I'm warned about Juárez all the time. Too many women have disappeared in this city, murdered, their naked bodies dumped and forgotten. There are faces of these women printed on fliers and posted on pillars all along the walk back to the border checkpoint. I'm not really afraid, but just in case, I keep walking. I've been told to never stop along the bridge and rest, to never draw attention to yourself as a person someone can take advantage of, especially if you're alone. There's dirt in my nostrils and in my teeth from the dust that is always blowing, blowing, blowing, the desert sands as ruthless as the sun. Up ahead of me, I see the same woman from earlier with the child lying across her lap. I look at this child and realize that he's incredibly still, his eyes a little vacant, bored, and staring up, over his head, just out of his line of sight. I wonder if it's the heat or if he's hungry, or if he's just a quiet child. It doesn't seem simple to me, though.

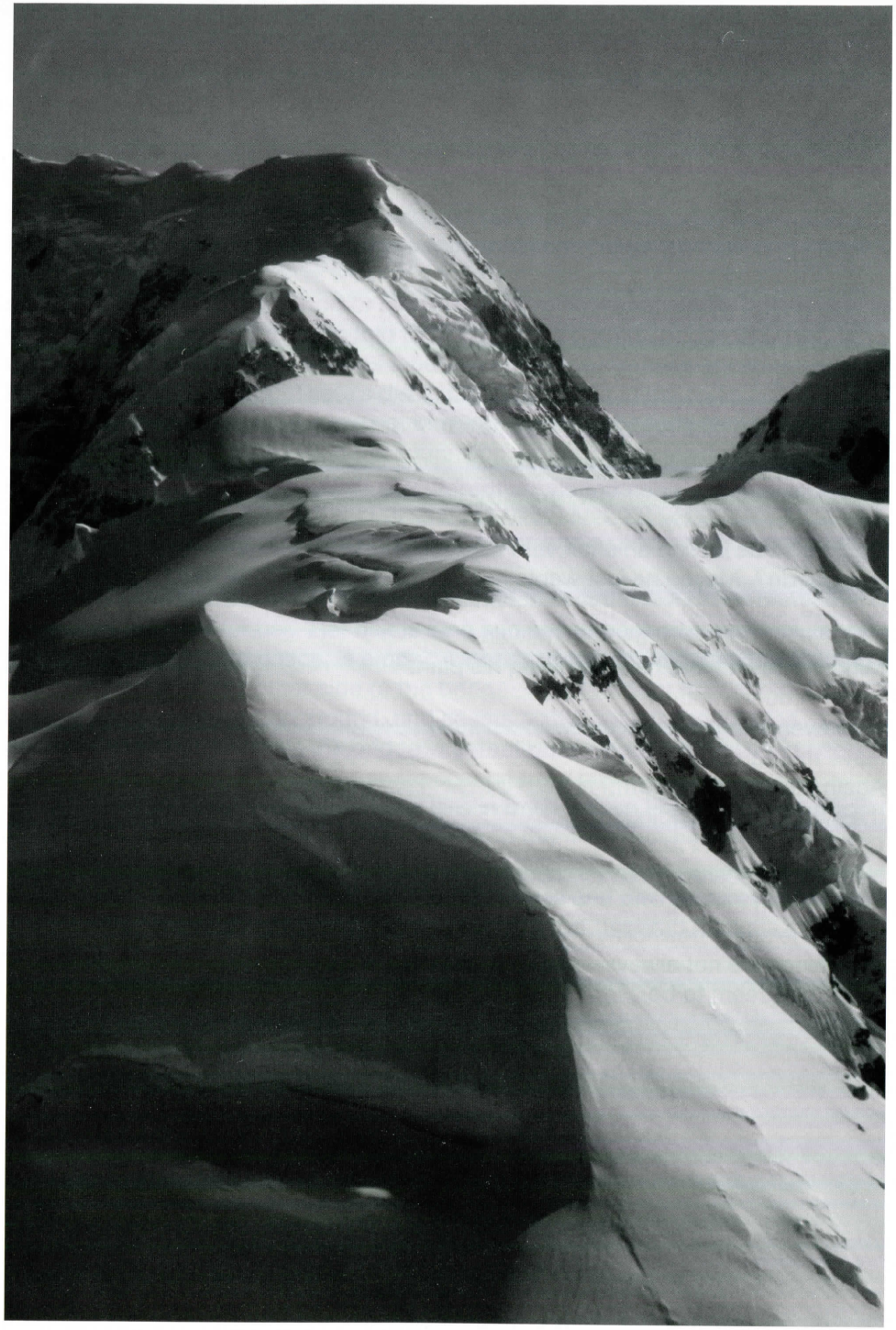
The woman's stretch-marked belly hangs over the top of her pants that are simply too tight for her. Her hair is long and pulled back into a messy, frizzy ponytail. Her basket, I notice, is empty. I wonder what she did with the money she collected from the other side of the bridge. And I wonder how she got over here. It's a long walk to go around, and seems a little unnecessary to me. I hope she didn't try to cross the bridge with that quiet, motionless child in her arms, braving traffic all to collect spare change from passersby.

I realize I don't have any dollar bills in my hand, so I reach into my pocket, wrap my first around four quarters and drop them into her basket. I don't hear them land. I only hear her quiet, tired *muchas gracias* as I make my way to the customs checkpoint, hoping my shifting eyes and distracted expression won't give them good enough reason to search in the zippered pockets inside my purse.

Lawn Ornament

JC Anderson

Who is the creepy guy behind the bush?
He's been there all morning,
his bowler hat and wool jacket
colored identical shades of gray.
Is he watching someone?
Or waiting for something?
The row of evergreen bushes
makes it hard to tell, exactly.
Perhaps Lisa — our neighbor — is
undressing in her window again:
what voyeuristic creep
wouldn't get a kick out of that?
His hand moves to his hat and
he ducks, almost imperceptibly, as the
mail truck passes by.
Could Lisa be having an affair with
this weirdo? Maybe he just wants her
to leave, so he can steal her
Van Gogh prints and made-in-Taiwan
Ming vases? I'll bet he's reviewing his plan:
Enter through window,
grab everything you can carry,
leave through door.
Again, he moves his arm,
the signal for "I'm going in."
But the man can't move.
He must be scared, even terrified,
not of being caught,
but of the sheer possibility
that things are not always
what they seem to be.



Mountain Top **Tracy McGhee** Digital Photograph

Loki

Cameron McLean

saturday afternoon, serene. Loki was almost five years old now. she sat quietly in the backyard. she was tired, and listened to the wind in the grass and the birds above. the sun had become uncomfortably direct, and after a few minutes, she moved into the shade of the single enormous pine in the center of the yard. there was a ring of large stones around the tree, dividing grass and mulch; she sat herself down beside it and found an interesting-looking twig to play with.

over her shoulder she glanced at the gate beside the house, wanting to leave the yard and see who else might be around to play with. but the gate was shut and latched, and the latch was too tall for her to reach. she could climb it if she wanted to, but it was difficult, and it rattled, and she would be caught and yelled at. she lost interest in her twig.

there was movement and laughing two yards off from the Landis children. but they were cruel and she didn't want to play with them.

she yawned and stretched herself out in a little ski-slope arc, clawing up a bit of grass and earth. there was a spray of hyssop bending over one of the stones. it smelled nice. she ate the flowers and purred contentedly.

a chipmunk hopped up onto one of the stones. Loki froze, low to the ground, pupils wide and muscles like springs. yellow eyes followed each movement intently.

it dropped behind a stone. a sliver of mulch flew up, and there was digging. a moment later it came out from behind another stone.

she tracked it, side-to-side-to-side, and sprung.

the animal darted, but she landed squarely atop it, pressed it to the earth and sank her teeth into the back of its neck. a violent shake to snap the spine, and it was still.

from the kitchen window, Erland watched with alarm. he turned and shouted to someone.

the back screen door clattered open, and Ingrid raced out shouting Loki's name. yellow eyes flitted to the woman and watched her.

'Loki! what are you doing!' Ingrid ran out onto the grass, awkwardly dainty in high heels.

Loki tensed. out here there was no furniture to hide under. she let herself be caught rather than give up her snack.

Ingrid grabbed her and lifted her clear. most of the chipmunk between head and tail was already gone. she kicked the shredded carcass under the pine tree.

'bad!' she said between clenched teeth.

she carried Loki back toward the house, with a single glance toward the Landis children, who stared at the scene in confused silence.

'damnit, Loki!' she hissed, 'we've told you not to! and you've got blood on your dress!'

'i was hungry,' was all the girl said.

'we have food inside. normal food. why do you do this to us? why do you always do this?'

Ingrid hurried her daughter into the house and shut the door with a bang.

Pier
JC Anderson

Our tools lay scattered about, half submerged
and already showing signs of rust.
And that rickety ladder with the splintery
rungs has fallen over, forming a sort of pier
off of the dirt pile it was leaning against.
My coworkers stand around, glaring
at the mess, but their shapes are nothing
more than splashes of blue-coveralls and
yellow-hardhats.

I remember the pond at my parents'
summer home, and those hot days when
my sisters and I would dash down the pier
and leap into the water a thousand times
in an afternoon. How we would laugh!
And mum would always say that
our smiles out-shined the sun
when she brought out a plateful of
peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches
for lunch. The sandwiches we always left for
later: until the sun set, we had not a care
but to jump from that pier, again and again,
determined to keep the backyard alight
with our grins.

Sunlight streams through the iron fence
along the eastern edge of the site,
reflecting off the rainwater that has
flooded our work area. I have a PB and J
in my lunch pail today, I muse,
as I leap from the fallen ladder and
splash into the muddy rainwater. A broad
smile plays across my face. I think I'll save
my sandwich for later.

There are 24 Hours in a Work Day
Joshua Maddox

2 a.m., time for a break
from the sting of paper cuts, the aroma of glue.
Amazing, isn't it, that the smell of
basswood whets your appetite in
the dim hours. 2 a.m. is feeding time, it is understood
by the aspiring architects who surround you, monks who
sit, stare, hold chipboard to chipboard,
wall to balcony, praying for glue to set –
the moisture escaping like the soul from a body.

Everyone piles into a car and you are on
the road before the windows can shed
their drowsy, cloudy coats. The road shimmers
with rain or dew. Oil mixes in the puddles and bubbles
like Coca-Cola. The exhaust smells
like fried food, more so than wood or glue ever could.

The menu lights are an oasis in the darkness. One hundred
combinations of beef, cheese, tortillas, all with names
that at 2 a.m. are sexual, exotic, like reassuring
words from a forbidden lover. Enchirito, Gordita, Bell Grande.
They woo you and your breath quivers. It is feeding time.

The food passes from window to car window, through
the cold. Get it, hold it tight, protect it. Wrapped in elaborate
paper, and beneath it, warm beef wrapped in delicate tortilla.
How economical – food wrapped inside food.
But you spend so much time pondering
form and function, this is about pure lust.
Physical needs overpower reason. You tear through
taco after taco and feel satisfied. The shells crunch
when bitten like you know your model would
if it were crushed and left as a pile of crumbs in your lap.

Seared Flesh and Zack Morris

Charlotte Bohnett

The summer before my fifth-grade year skin stuck to everything and barefoot trips to the curb-side mailbox had to wait until dusk. Waves of heat radiated from the asphalt making watery mirages in the distance. It was 1996, and while temperatures broke records, I struggled with pre-adolescence.

With my parents and three brothers, I lived in central Phoenix — blocks of termite-infested, sixties-style ranch houses atop yards of irrigated, splotchy grass and towering trees. Packed with the lower-working class and the impoverished, central Phoenix was an eyesore compared to the rest of the expanding city with its stucco, adobe-tiled, gravel-landscaped gated neighborhoods, private golf courses, newly-booming Starbucks-infested shopping plazas, organic grocers, exotic-atmosphere restaurants, six-lane freeways, and winding mountain roads decked with the homes of the rich and the fabulous.

Our house sat on the east side of 28th Place with its faded turquoise wood-siding and vast front yard. It was late July and the monsoon thunderstorms had blown through, leaving cloudless days and a beating sun which baked grass white and split patches of earth. Air-conditioners hummed, exoskeletons of cicadas clung to trees, and I, a scabby-kneed girl of eleven, was hardly a lady. I ran around with my brothers, racing up our front yard's two massive pine trees and wrestling on top of the exhausted Slip-N-Slide. I was every boy in my grade's best friend and yet, I struggled to hang out with the cliques of girly-girls with their Babysitter's Club books and fluffy-top pens.

So amongst the dry, sweltering heat, I wore flip flops and gym shorts, scratching at the sweaty, suffocated skin under the trainer bra I insisted on wearing. I wasn't developed yet, but some of the Mexican girls I knew, with their rapidly developing, thick bodies, already had their periods. And some of the older girls in the clique, with their purses and Walkmans blasting "The Macarena," were wearing actual bras. The trainer was supposed to be my ticket into the realm of womanhood, but instead it was simply a burden — yet another layer of clothing collecting one-hundred degree heat onto my flat chest. Still I wore it, hoping it would soon validate me. I had to be in the game somehow.

Every afternoon when the heat blurred the air and the sun beat down directly upon the cracked asphalt, kids coated with dirt and perspiration scurried indoors to the comfort of central-air. While my brothers beat the daylights out of the controllers connected to their Sega Genesis, I became engrossed in cable-television reruns of *Saved by the Bell.*

Envious of life at Bayside High in breezy, beautiful California, I immersed myself in the life of Zack, Kelly, and friends on my teen soap-opera. Each half-hour episode I watched the quirky, sparkly-teethed, clean-faced teens get into problems and cleverly, as well as comically, get themselves out. The canned audience laughed when Screech misunderstood the "Cali" slang and oooed-ahhed when Zack and Kelly locked lips. When I saw Zack Morris with his gelled-back hair, sly smile, and confident demeanor, I'd feel my skin tingle and my stomach tighten. He was unlike my brothers and the rest of the boys in the neighborhood. He was pure lust-worthy excellence, and I was smitten. Zack Morris was my guilty-pleasure.

Of course, Zack was fictitious and that's what made him glorious. I could simply admire him from afar. Sure, all the girls at school in their cliques dished about the biceps on A.C. Slater, Zack's bad-ass friend, as well as all the local boys' levels of attractiveness, but I couldn't talk about Zack Morris. I didn't even know how to express what I was feeling. To everyone, I was simply a tom-boy, not "going" with anyone and too young to anyways. Beyond Bayside High, I knew nothing of sexual attraction.

That was until my eldest brother Tim's best friend, Brian Lee, showed up in the last days of July, home from a Mormon-style manhood retreat in Utah. Tim and Brian had been best friends for what seemed like forever. He had left for the retreat under demands from his parents to at least prepare for his Mormon mission of preaching the Word and converting the willing, all while riding a mountain bike and wearing a suit. Brian wasn't much of a fan of the strict religion that he explained spoke of giant lizards crawling about the desert and a man finding tablets buried in the ground. Therefore, Brian spent a greater portion of his days at our residence. I had played dodge ball, gone Salt River tubing, and eaten plenty of taco dinners with him. But that early-evening weekday when he walked up our driveway, as I climbed one of our pine trees humming *Saved by the Bell's* theme song, something was different.

His hair had grown out of the boyish side-part into a wavy, chestnut mane that he tucked behind his ears. His skin was bronze and moist as if the Mormons knew the secret to a lasting, hydrated tan. The chub of cafeteria food had been chiseled away revealing lean, cut muscles. He had gotten taller, taller than I could remember. His swim trunks hung low on his torso, and his legs were hairy. He made his way to the porch and leaned against the frame of our house as cicadas screamed into the setting sun. He and Tim laughed and kicked at ants haphazardly darting across the sidewalk from one patch of dirt to another.

Caught up in his presence, I forgot about the exhausting feat of reaching the top, skinny branch of the pine tree. I peered down upon them as they chuckled, talking in newly deeper tones. I was out of sight's way, like the documentary folks on *Animal Planet*, getting the best shot of nature's recently discovered finest specimen. I licked my lips as I lowered my head towards the porch, tuning my ears to get the inside scoop.

"Man, am I psyched to be home," Brian brought his hands together behind his head, lacing his long fingers together.

I stared intently. I watched Brian shift his weight from foot to foot. He tipped his head back just slightly as a smile of white, straight teeth allowed a manly chuckle to flow into the dry air. He was radiant, an Arizona version of the handsome Zack Morris that starred in my mid-afternoon program.

I repositioned myself, attempting to get a better view. Doing so made the branches ruffle; the boys turned their attention towards the canopy of the tree. I scrambled to hide in the bristly branches of the dry, sharp pines, but found myself tangled, exposed through a clearing.

The two boys smiled, as I waved bashfully. "Uh, hi guys."

"Covert Ops?" Tim leaned against a column of the porch, smirking. He was my big brother, my go-to-guy, but that didn't mean he'd ever stop teasing.

"Um, no, I—I wasn't listening to you guys." I twisted out of the piney snare and began to climb higher into the tree. "Just, uh, trying to get to the top. You know?" My face was burning red, and I felt my insides shake with embarrassment.

"Yeah, sure." Tim winked exaggeratedly towards Brian, who chuckled softly. "Did you notice Brian was back?"

"Oh?" I called out, my back now towards them. "No, I—I didn't. Brian, how are you?" I looked over my shoulder, attempting to sound nonchalant. Here I was in the company of exquisiteness and I was coated with sap and needles, pawing up a tree in humiliation.

Brian held a hand over his eyes and peered up towards the tree top. "I'm fantastic!" he called out, the gleam of his white teeth about blinding me.

"Yeah, you look it." I felt the words escape from my mouth before I had the chance to stop them. I turned and quickly began to climb again. It was one-hundred-plus degrees and my insides were burning hotter than my sticky, sun-burnt flesh. What was wrong with me? I was around boys every waking second and this type of mortification never occurred.

I heard laughter erupt from the boys and the slapping of their knees.

"Do I really look it?" Brian asked Tim.

"It appears you have an admirer," Tim chuckled.

"Nah, not Char, she's one-of-the-boys."

The words stung my ears. Brian was oblivious to my racing pulse, my blushing countenance, and my sweat-soaked trainer bra. I turned back towards the porch only to see the boys head indoors. Even from high in the trees, as the front door swung shut, I felt a small escape of cool A/C tickle my face just briefly, before the heat consumed the air again.

The next evening I sat on the dead, splintering olive tree stump between the two looming pines in my front yard, digging into the parched dirt with a tree stick. The drunken neighbors across the street were having yet another summer blockbuster of a party. Tejano music engulfed the atmosphere and echoed into the dusk. They drank Budweiser and the smell of fried bread and beans devoured the sweet cacti-coated air. The bass rumbled the ground. My mother had warned me not to stay out long; towards the end of these intoxicated fiestas, someone also got the wise idea to shoot their gun into the dirt. I suppose everyone else always got turned on to the idea as well, because it had become the ceremonial closer to these summer revelries. My mother wasn't a fan, but the parties provided viewing entertainment from my lonely stump across the road. Plus, it's not like they were shooting their guns into the air.

I continued digging into the dirt, glancing up occasionally to view a group of drunks sing beautiful, harmonious renditions of Selena ballads. Then I heard it, a roar that deafened the throbs of the guitars, trumpets, and the slurry, song-singing tres compañeros. A motorcycle — shiny steel and a low-slung seat — rolled up against our curb. Our neighborhood had seen plenty of jalopies, mud-coated dirt-bikes, and black-smoke-spewing four-wheelers, but never a brand new cruiser. Leather chaps smacked onto jeans and a white t-shirt, the image of Zack Morris in the episode where he tried to impress the

biker chick Tori popped into my mind. The rider pulled off his black helmet and shook the mass of brown waves away from his face — Brian Lee. He looked in my direction and charmed me with a grin. I shook off my gaping stare, hopping off the stump. Kicking up dandelions and pine needles, I ran over to the motorcycle which purred and sputtered as Brian adjusted the round, side-view mirror.

"What do you think?" He asked as he wiped his forehead with his arm. Up close, he was coated with sweat, making his tan glitter in the setting sun.

I fought back the recent humility from the day before and tried to imagine Brian as any other schoolboy. "Your parents were cool with this?" I breathed, imagining my own mother's reaction to such a dangerous toy.

Brian stepped onto the grass and let out a pshh. "I'm eighteen now." And that was that. He walked towards the front door, chuckling at my foolish question.

I scrambled for a rebound, anything remotely cool to say. "W-well, hey! M-maybe you can take me for a ride." I tried to say it as sexy as I knew how, emphasizing "ride" like Kelly, Zack Morris' usual main squeeze, might do.

Brian turned around, still laughing and raised an eyebrow at me. "A ride?"

I smiled, wishing I had applied my cherry lip balm that the girls at school claimed boys loved. "Sure," I leaned slowly against the bike, trying to seem comfortable and smoldering. I pouted a little and batted my eyes—Kelly's move that made audiences swoon.

The smell came first and fast — a combination of melted plastic and fried lard. As I shifted my weight harder into the bike, focusing on my batting eyes and full, but chapped lips, I felt a pinch or an itch. Perhaps my trainer bra was irritating me yet again. But then it felt hot and sharp. The smell made my muscles twitch, and the scorching stab twisted up my lumbar into my head and behind my eyes. I felt a pounding that muffled the Música Norteña melodies cascading out of the neighbor's stereo.

I saw Brian's hands fly up and his feet move into a sprint towards my direction, "Not the engine! Don't lean against the engine!"

It was too late. The smell of seared flesh blended with the stench of the fiesta's beans and beer and motorcycle exhaust. Pain ripped through my body. Knees giving, I fell from the bike, feeling the back of my thigh cling to the engine, tearing and sizzling. As my face smacked against the rough, weed-infested grass and everything went black, I wondered why this sort of thing never happened on *Saved by the Bell*.

I awoke on my stomach. My mother was brushing hair away from my face. A damp washcloth cooled my hot neck. The back of my thigh felt sticky, and my nose stung with the scent of burn ointment.

"I can't believe you let her in proximity of that thing," my mother barked in a half-whisper. I then noticed Tim and Brian standing behind her, their gaze fixed upon me.

"I thought an eleven-year-old girl wouldn't even go near it!" Brian stammered, clutching his motorcycle helmet. "Why wasn't she scared?"

"It was my fault," I croaked. I must have been wailing in pain, because my voice was shot. My eyes felt droopy and I knew my mother had popped me full of extra-strength pain killers. "I just wanted to look good."

"Well, now you look doped up and burned," my mother shook her head.

I wet my lips. The pain-killers had stunted my inhibitions. "At least now I'll have a cool scar on my ass." My eyelids fell.

As my mother softly scoffed at me using a curse word, I heard Brian laugh, "Man, she is going to be one hell-of-a catch come high school!"

And while high school was a long way off, it did come, as did the abandonment of tom-boy life and my home in Arizona. In the flat, seasonal land of Northwest Ohio, I discovered female adolescence. Boys of my own age soon noticed my blushing, and the melodramas of high-school relationships became an all-too-clear reality. But even with womanly hips and dating experience, there are still uncomfortable bras and awkward moments of unreciprocated attraction.

But then, before love, responsibilities, and an obsession with *Grey's Anatomy*, I laid on the cool cotton sheets of my mother's bed, drowsy and on display, but validated. My head grew heavy on a sweat-covered pillow as the ointment soaked into my stinging, blistered thigh. I felt my onlookers admiringly watch me stumble out of consciousness. And I mustered a smile, collapsing into slumber with the assurance that one day — come high school — I'd be someone's catch.

Clouds **Tracy McGhee** Digital Photograph

Why Do People Wear Crocs?

Courtney Bufalini

Answer me this-
Why do people wear Crocs?
the uber hard plastic of bandwagon shoes-
Is it the feeling
of plastic
molded to your feet?
like Saran Wrap clinging to a bowl
The cool feeling
your foot gets
when slipping on a pair?

The sweat
that builds up
underneath your foot
as you make your way throughout your day?
The array
of obnoxious
colors to choose from:
- electric yellow -
- fluorescent green -
- too bright pink -
- heart attack red -
- poo brown -
- over the top orange -
- throw-up khaki -
that show off your so called "taste?"
Or
is it 'cause Crocs
are the "hip" thing to wear?
Whatever
your excuse-
color
comfort
style
fashion...
If you're not a chef
a nurse
or a hygienist...the peeps Crocs were designed for
you're a lemming with too much walking cash

Silent Killer
Brad Allen

It breaks the
water like a
fighter jet breaking
through the clouds
into clear sky.

Its teeth like shards
of glass cutting
darkness, bared in a
silent snarl as its
harpoon nose shoots
skyward.

The sea lion floats
above. Wanting desperately
to grow wings and
fly away instead of fall
into the black water like
it's been fitted with
concrete flippers.

Its attacker's
Great White
belly reflects the
moonlight with a
pearlescent glow as

Deadfall Marsh Moose River Pan

Scott Schneider
Digital Photograph

its whirlwind tail
splits the surface like
a newly sharpened
axe splits a log
sending white splinters
of water in all directions.

The predator twists
in mid air as it
succumbs to gravity's
pull and slams into the water
like a torpedo blasting
the hull of a ship.

Seconds later returning
to paint the canvas of the sea
red.

I watch from shore.
My camera forgotten
like so much garbage
on the rocks beside me
as I stare in wonder
into eyes as black and
bottomless as the
sea itself.

The American Plains

Ryan Stibich

Two trunks towered towards the sky
Trees that grew up together.
He on the east, and she on the west.
It was an unnatural event, on the plains of Kansas
For two trees to grow so close together.
But together they did,
At ten feet high they could brush each other in the breeze,
With their leaves.
At twenty feet high he could caress her and she him as they leapfrogged into the sky.
To them, it seemed, they were on top of the world
For while they live in the rolling hills and grassy plains
They teetered on the edge
Of storms and tornados, those twisting terrors.

With the passage of time their limbs intertwined
Soft sapling branches wrapped together, bark hardened the exposed sides.

Their tale is untold

Over one hundred years ago these two trees sprouted above the earth
The odds of two trees growing so close to each other in the plains is astronomical
Let alone both growing to be so tall.
After only 30 years (that's 15 human years) these trees had spread their leaves far enough that they could touch each other in a breeze.
And after only 70, these trees had branches intertwining with each other and hardening in such a position that they became inseparable.
It was only a matter of time, however, until one of those infamous storms came along. The American west has a tornado season, and for over 170 years these two trees had managed to avoid all sorts of twisters.
Lightning is a tree's worst enemy. It split the trunk of the western tree clean through.
The branches that had grown together were pulled down by the weight of the upper half of her trunk, and the eastern tree lost all the branches he had when west pulled him down.
Someone came by to claim the fallen wood, it's not there any more.
West was left with a single strong branch that made it look like a low and sweeping wisteria for awhile.
It was only a matter of time before the insects got into the open wounds though, both trees were killed.
Wood is rather remarkable when it sits for awhile after dying, it becomes so much more valuable.
No doubt the deadwood in this pair has marbled and grown dense.
It would burn 20 or 30 times longer than a fresh tree.
No one has the time or money to bring these trees out from the sticks to somewhere useful.
They will probably stand here, a tribute to their time together. The only trees for a hundred miles, and within feet of each other at that.

Humiliation
Charlotte Bohnett

We made a game of taking new toys to our sandbox.
We buried action figures. Barbie went off-roading
in her 1950s Pink Cadillac. With Legos and Lincoln Logs,
we tried to construct a desert-city, only to discover
that there was a reason stable civilizations
did not reside in the heart of the Sahara.

One day, you led me to our sandbox, shiny scissors:
your new toy. We sat on the grimy, hard sand.
I wondered what action figures were buried beneath me.
"We're going to play Barbershop," you said
with a high-pitched crack in your voice.

My hair was gold and glowed in the sunlight.
Curls tickled the nape of my neck and chin.
I was only a toddler and you, my brother.
At first, the ends were only snipped and then
small locks of curls floated down to the sand.
Soon the cold metal of the scissors pressed my skull.
You sheared my hair to the roots, assuring me
that this was "the hairstyle of the century."

Tears warmed my cheeks as the Sahara
became a carpet of sunlight, dancing softly
in the afternoon breeze. We walked away from our sandbox,
hand in shaking hand. Behind us, the prize of a baby-girl;
Tonka Trucks, Barbies, and action figures buried under a new deposit.

When Mother came home, she wept as if at a funeral
over the sight of my mutilated scalp and your boyish cruelty.
Coated with sand, our toys were brought in for a mournful cleansing,
and our sandbox was dumped behind the house,
allowing the neighborhood cats to christen
the dirt that still held my radiant curls.

Sightless
Samuel Sinnamon

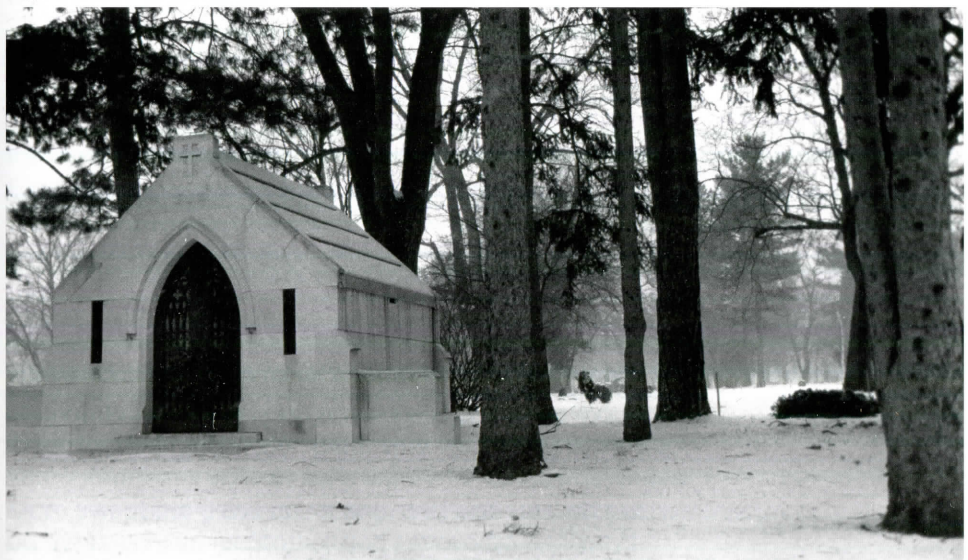
Our darkness is a dazzling brown-black or deep space,
but what is his, the blind man's?

He peers through a table to the dirt floor,
hearing the stranger's hum, and a sound-shadow cast by the wall,
crickets from behind a hood.
What are his dreams like?

The stranger's ground wheat, olive oil, and fire in the next room give way
to a meal of flat bread that is sweeter somehow today,
a scent of grass and leaves in autumn.
Can he fall in love?

Though his thanksgiving to Yahweh is given,
the loaf slightly sour hangs on his tongue till evening,
as do a few under ripe grapes.
Is he bitter?

He traces the shape of one hand with the other,
the wrinkled scab over his middle knuckle peeling off,
bark from the trunk of a dying olive tree.
How is this sensation better than a phantom pain?



Silence **Nathan Mattson** Analog Photograph

Why My Father Is Sober
Charlotte Bohnett

In the photograph my father is passed out
belly down on the peach bathroom flooring
in a ratty green button-up and beer-stained jeans,
and we're all smiling. We've inked a blue mustache
over his stubble and used Mom's cosmetics
on his sagging ruddy skin. In the photo,
my brother Pete, still in training diapers,
digs his fingers into Father's wild, thick black hair
while my brother Johnny, cool in his Converse sneakers
and Charles Barkley t-shirt, shoves a handful of Camels
between Father's limp, spittle-coated lips.
John's eyes water slightly though he's laughing.
Atop his back and sitting Indian-style in my Rainbow
Bright pajamas, I brandish the blue Sharpie in one hand
and clothes-pin my nose with the other. He smelled
like the aluminum recycling station downtown
where we sold bags of his discarded cans, rancid
beer clinging to the bottoms. A surplus of empty
Coors cans that Mom and I had assembled
for photographic purposes rest in the photo's foreground.
Mom snapped the picture and left it on his recliner
when we went away a couple of months later.
A decade sober, and still without his family, the photograph
lies between translucent sheets within my father's wallet.

Hallway Interstate
Joshua Maddox

This hallway is the outside world.
People pass en route to bathrooms, vending machines, loved ones.
Their new commute. Cars on a freeway.
A man, husband
of Room-225 Bed-B. The denim jacket,
his weathered paint job in need of waxing.
The stained gray T-shirt, pocket torn,
his cracked windshield, foggy, defroster needs fixing.
His chassis tired, body worn, yet still
reliable enough for the daily grind.
As human as you, yet anonymous like
vehicles, moving along to destinations you choose not to imagine.

A Scene
Charlotte Bohnett

When Dad chucked that black brick of phone at Mom's head,
Brother and I were building a town out of Lincoln Logs.
The town rested upon a braided area rug, and we used
the clear plastic base of a Tupperware container
filled with tap water as the townspeople's lake.
Then he threw the cordless phone at her head
and we stopped building. She ducked, and the phone
smashed into her antique looking glass. The glass
cracked, loosened, and dropped like glacial sheets
in summer from the mirror's gold frame. Mom crawled
out of the way as the glass shattered upon the tiling.
Though Brother and I had never seen snow, we thought
the shattered glass resembled what we'd seen in movies
and noted that it was an early winter for the townspeople.
Mom swept the glass up, crying, and Dad passed out
on the couch, while Brother and I shoveled walkways
in the snow and fished out ice from our lake.

Artists' Biographies

Alec Sanger is in his 4th year at LTU striving to achieve a BS in Computer Science as well as a BA in English and Technical Communications.

Aref Al Karam has been in the U.S. since 2006 and studies Computer Science at LTU. He is 28 and married. His first camera was a gift from his father when he was 9. His work can be seen at www.sarabphotos.com.

Avi Shayevitz is a senior Chemical Biology student with keen interests in both chemistry and evolutionary biology. Much of his inspiration is taken from fossil records, often favoring the more obscure and outright bizarre life forms from life's rich two billion year history. Yet, for all his schooling and sophistication, complex ideas still elude him and he tends to fall over a lot.

Brad Allen is an Architecture student in his senior year at LTU. He enjoys reading and writing in his free time. Favorite authors include Jeff Lindsay, Robert Jordan and Stephen King. He hopes one day to design a high rise condo tower and perhaps become a published author as a hobby.

Cameron McLean is not on Facebook, a social utility that connects people with friends and others who work, study and live around them. Cameron is due in Belfast later to address the Ulster Unionists' annual conference.

Carrie Rasak is a junior in the Information Technology program. She is also pursuing the CCNA certification. Her other interests include local history, amateur psychology, and translating her thoughts into English whenever the opportunity arises.

Charlotte Bohnett. Currently pursuing a Master of Science in Professional and Technical Communication from Lawrence Tech, Charlotte Bohnett, a Summa Cum Laude graduate with a BFA in Creative Writing from Bowling Green State University, oversees the development of audio book covers at a media distributor in Ohio.

Courtney Bufalini is a senior at Lawrence Tech, majoring in Media Communications. She lives in Berkley with her husband, Drew, and their dog, Harlo. In her little "spare time," Courtney enjoys spending time with her husband, their seven nieces and nephews, catching criminals on crime shows and collecting vintage audio and video equipment.

Elsida Konakciu, when not editing PRISM and InsideOut Detroit books, spends her free time designing clothes, producing short animations and photographing. She believes that most people view clothing as just threads of material. She sees it as an extension of self, a representation of abstract art.

Grant McMullen is a 25-year-old Architecture major. When he's not designing, he enjoys snowboarding and disc golfing.

Janelle O'Hara is an aspiring actor, director, screenwriter, Broadway star, and queen of Narnia. When she's not busy being the resident troublemaker on HogwartsLive.com, she majors in Media Communication.

JC Anderson is a Computer Science major with a lifelong interest in the literary arts. JC will graduate next year.

Jenny Smith is in her senior year dual majoring in Imaging and Graphic Design. She is very passionate about design and has recently been into creating 3D animation. Taking pictures has always been a good pastime, and traveling always induces new and better photos.

Jordan Scenna - rogue students of an infinite universe and forever a late entry.

Joshua Maddox is a senior in Lawrence Tech's Architecture program and a native of Rochester Hills, Michigan.

Melissa Grunow is responsible for developing, implementing, and assessing the curricular objectives for the leadership. She also does work with study abroad, service learning, and teaches for the Department of Humanities each semester.

Nathan Mattson is going extinct; there is only one of him left.

Noelle Tatro is a 22 year old Graphic Design/Imaging major. She is planning on graduating in the spring of 2010. In her free time she enjoys drawing with ink, sketching, reading, playing with other people's pets, and plotting to take over the world.

Robert Fletcher is a faculty member in the Mechanical Engineering Department. He grew up in Seattle and earned his PhD in Engineering from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Ryan Stibich is a junior in the English and Communications Art program. He also attends flight school and is an aspiring professional pilot.

Sam Sinnamon is an ME major graduating this May (2009). He's lived in Birmingham with his family all his life and graduated in 2004 from Bethany Christian High School in Troy.

Scott Schneider - While waiting for the LHC to create a mini black hole that will engulf the Earth... Dr. Scott spends up to minutes a year of free time taking digital photos – here and in the Adirondacks of NY. For possibly the first time in print, Dr. Scott announces that he probably wants to be a fireman when he grows up.

Tracy McGhee is in her senior year and will be graduating in May with a BFA in Imaging. She enjoys taking pictures in her spare time.

Tyler Hays thinks that camping is intense...