
Janus 2002 Staff

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Table of Contents

Poetry

<u>Category Winner:</u>	
<u>Its</u> by Shannon Edwards	4
<u>Moths</u> by Rebecca Birke	16
<u>Untitled 1</u> by Rosie Mistretta	16
<u>Drunk on the Lake at 9 p.m.</u> by Ashley Hoye	17
<u>Lover</u> by Kurt Pankau	27
<u>Forty Weeks</u> by Anonymous	28
<u>New Year's Revolutions</u> by Kurt Pankau	33
<u>The Bell Tower</u> by Vincent Spezzo	34
<u>Family</u> by Rebecca Birke	36
<u>Her Eyes</u> by Vincent Spezzo	39
<u>Impromptu Moment Haiku</u> by John Hensley	40
<u>Discovered in Minnesota</u> by Katie Kramer	40
<u>One Day</u> by Stephanie Cook	41
<u>Untitled</u> by Darcy O'Hanlon	50
<u>The Day America Cried</u> by Glen Frerichs	58
<u>Analogy</u> by Ashley Hoye	60
<u>Daddy</u> by Amy Edgar	62
<u>Sorry</u> by Maryann Hon	69

Prose

<u>Category Winner:</u>	
<u>An Angel in the Outfield</u> by Corrie Anderson	5
<u>Fire and Ice</u> by Erin Luke	13
<u>Kinship 101: Mothers and Daughters</u> by Debi White	19
<u>Holland</u> by Darcy O'Hanlon	30
<u>Evidence in a Journal</u> by Nate Mendenhall	31
<u>The Streetlight</u> by Jennifer Riebel	37
<u>The Withdrawal</u> by John Hall	44
<u>A Purse for Ella</u> by Kurt Pankau	51
<u>Where Have You Gone Miss Monroe?</u> by Kurt Pankau	64

Graphics/Photos

Cover: Ginger King

<u>Category Winner:</u>	
<u>Harrison Stoneham</u>	12
Wes Philpott	18
Molly Duncan	27
Julie Slisz	29
Julie Slisz	34
Ginger King	35
Jon Todd	42
Wes Philpott	43
Dave Norman	49
Amii Etheridge	53
Julie Slisz	56
Ginger King	57
Kristy Halverson	59
Julie Slisz	61
Kristy Halverson	63

Poetry Category Winner: Ifs

If I were to proclaim my love for you,
It would not be
Screamed from the top of the Empire State Building,
From a random street corner at the top of my lungs,
Or written in the sky,
It would not be
Sung in lyrics,
Or written in ballads,
If I were to proclaim my love for you,
It would not be
Shouted over the rooftops
Or heard on television, movies, radio,
If I were to proclaim my love to you,
It would not be
Above a whisper of four words in your ear,
"You know I do."

Shannon Edwards

Prose Category Winner: An Angel in the Outfield

Every holiday season, our church youth group puts on a play for the whole congregation at the Christmas program. This year, my friend Mandy's senior year of high school, she's playing Gabriel, the angel who appears to the shepherds in the field to announce the birth of Jesus Christ, the savior of the earth. We've made our way flawlessly through the majority of the play, and now we're in position for the final scene. The curtain opens. I shield my eyes from the blinding spotlight and try to make out the hundreds of faces I see in the audience. Wow. I haven't seen this many people in the church auditorium in years. And then I hear it. We've practiced this scene a million times, but there's something different, something captivating and moving this time about Mandy's rendition of "The Baby Sleeps Tonight" to the tune of "The Lion Sleeps Tonight." As I stand behind her in my cheap supporting angel costume, its wings limp and halo twisted from years of Christmas programs just like this one, I listen to her strong, clear voice belting out the words as the spotlight illuminates her tinsel halo and gossamer wings and lights up her dark, glistening eyes and radiant smile. I pan the audience. All eyes are glued to the magnificent angel, appearing as entranced with her song as I am. I look down at Alyssa, my little cousin and one of the many "baby angels" surrounding me in the manger scene. I gaze up at Mandy, raised on her platform, high above anyone else in the auditorium, and an indescribable sensation washes over me. Alyssa turns to me and whispers, "Corrie, she's the most beautiful angel I've ever seen." I squeeze her hand and think that this little girl, this child, has put into words precisely what Mandy and her song were

making me feel at that moment. I feel more overcome with the Holy Spirit by the vision of that angel than I have by any Sunday morning sermon in a long time.

* * *

We take the field for the bottom of the ninth inning. My stomach feels tight and uneasy. I grab my glove, sweep my sweaty hair into a ponytail, and trot to the outfield huddle. Just three more outs, I think, and we've done it. Just three more outs and we've accomplished what we've been unable to do all season—defeat our longtime rivals, the Jeff City Heat, and their ace pitcher Alicia Bonno. "Three up," we hear from the infield huddle, and then comes our characteristic reply "three down!" from the outfield. We slap our gloves in the practiced pattern—me to Amanda, Amanda to Denise, and Denise to me—and assume our positions. I can sense the tension in the air as Sara rears back and hurls the first pitch. The first out comes quickly—a shot right back at her. Whew! I can see our coach pacing in the dugout. The count runs to two-and-two on the second hitter, and on the fifth pitch, she smacks a screaming grounder straight to our shortstop. Kelly scoops it up and fires to Misty for out number two. Just one more and it's over. Oh-and-one. One-and-one. Two-and-one. Come on, Sara. Two-and-two. I see her release the next pitch. It's a drop ball, I think. The Heat hitter takes a huge swing, and the ball nails Theresa's glove. "Striiiiike three," the umpire bellows. It's finally over. We did it! We finally defeated the Jeff City Heat! But something in me just couldn't experience the elation that would have normally come after a win like this. I glance across the outfield to left and see Denise standing there, pulling her visor down and shielding her eyes from the sun. Suddenly I am overcome with emotion. I stare at my cleats as the first tear begins to trickle down my cheek. A week ago Mandy would have been the one standing over there. A year older than anyone else on the team, we teasingly called her "mom," and we were all softball sisters, inevitably bonded through the countless games, grueling practices, exhausting weekend tournaments in the blazing

summer sun, seemingly endless van rides, and unforgettable hotel room conversations. She was our emotional leader, a figure to admire, to rally around, but most of all, to love. A week ago she would have cheered her characteristic Mandy cheer, jumping and shouting with the thrill she was experiencing deep in her bones—a thrill she felt each time she set one of her huge Nike cleats onto the sweet dirt of a softball field. I can see her trademark brown bun and its pink ponytail holder bouncing as she screams, "Three down!" and turns from our outfield huddle to hustle to her position in left field. I can just imagine how excited she would be right now . . . But that was a week ago.

* * *

A week before, on the third of July, after our last league game in Kansas City, we all climbed into our cars—some with parents, some with teammates—and headed for Sedalia. We were all exhausted after a long day and the grueling doubleheader, but it was a satisfying exhaustion that comes only after a big win. Kelly, our shortstop, and I made our way to my mom's car, and on our way we talked about how well everyone had played and how we were finally coming together as a team—one single cohesive unit, working together at every step. Since it was after midnight, once the car started moving and we stopped, we both promptly fell asleep. I was awakened about an hour later by my mom's gasp and the excited conversation between our parents. "Oh my gosh, that's Tiffany's van!" Kelly and I peered out the bug-splattered windshield and off into the trees at the side of Highway 50. There it was. Tiffany's enormous blue rusting van, circa 1970, was rolled on its side well off the edge of the road. We pulled over and jumped out of the car, barely noticing the other members of our softball caravan as they came upon the accident. Nevin and Larry, the doctor parents of the team, barreled into the brush with our coach trailing at their heels as my teammates and I crowded into a circle attempting to comprehend exactly what we were experiencing. Confusion arose as everyone began to speak at once.

"Beth and Mandy were both in there with Tiff."

"They had to've been flying. They left after we did!"

"You know, that van only had two seats. Mandy was sitting on a bean bag."

"Tiff shouldn't have even driven tonight. She showed up late and everyone had already left for the game."

"Guys? Will somebody please tell me this is all going to be okay? That we're all going to go home, shoot some fireworks, and play softball again this weekend?"

We gathered hands and begged the Lord desperately for our teammates to be okay. We prayed that our three softball sisters had a guardian angel looking over them at the instant of the crash. Moments later, the lifeflight helicopter was screaming overhead, and we were all forced to leave the scene of the accident. Somberly, my softball family climbed into their cars and headed home.

The night that was to come was anything but restful. While I should have been thinking about our church Fourth of July party that was to happen the next day or the softball tournament that we would play in that weekend, I could think of nothing but my teammates. My mother and I made our way into the house. She headed immediately to the bedroom to wake my father, and I went through the motions of undressing and placing my dirt and sweat stained uniform into the laundry. I kept thinking, if only Tiff would have shown up to meet earlier, she wouldn't have driven and everything would be okay. If only we'd waited for her. If only Tiffany had driven slower. If only I could rewind to yesterday. If only . . . I spent most of the night sitting wide-awake on the couch, pleading with the Lord for everything to be okay. Prayer calmed me. I convinced myself that things would be okay.

The phone rang. It was six a.m. Maybe they were able to stabilize them all. Maybe everyone's okay. Maybe I've been worrying for nothing. But from the look on my mom's face, I knew that I hadn't. I could sense immediately that one of my

teammates, one of my softball sisters, had died.

"Tiffany and Beth are in Columbia. Tiff has severe brain trauma from when her head hit the concrete, and Beth has broken several vertebrae, an elbow, her thigh bone, and a few ribs," my mom explained, although she couldn't even bring herself to look me in the eye.

"And Mandy. . . .She's gone, honey," she whispered, unable to hold back the tears that had been pooling in her eyes.

I felt numb at first. Am I dreaming? I just saw her a few hours ago with a softball glove on her hand. I forced myself to believe what I'd heard, and the tears began falling. Slowly at first, then the floodgates opened and I couldn't close them. We just stood there for a long time, holding each other in our kitchen. My mom didn't say anything, but I knew exactly what she was thinking. Initially, she thanked God it wasn't me, and then her thoughts turned immediately to Dwayne and Tina, Mandy's parents, and like Mandy, longtime members of our tiny country church. I'm not sure exactly how long we remained hugging in the kitchen, just crying on each other's shoulders, but suddenly I felt overwhelmed and claustrophobic, and broke loose from my mom, running outside. I remembered Mandy's overwhelming enthusiasm at our wins just hours before, and struggled against the idea that I'd never see that huge, beautiful smile again. Never hear her fists banging against the dugout fence when someone belted a screaming line drive. Never see her legs fly up as she dove head-first into second base. Never feel her glove smack mine after our ritual outfield cheer. Never again would I experience all the excitement and everything that was Mandy.

* * *

I deliberately remove my muddy, worn cleats and place them in my softball bag that's decorated with a sunflower and a tiny six (Mandy's number) on the strap. I wonder if there's a softball field

in heaven, and I hope that Mandy never has to remove her cleats. Even though we've just defeated our long time rivals, the dugout is uncharacteristically quiet. I know that everyone's thoughts are filled with nothing but her. I look up, and I can see Alicia Bonno handing our coach a note, wiping her eyes, and slowly turning back to be with her own team. Strange, I thought. What does Bonno have to say to us? The team begins to gather around our coach, and he simply opens the letter and starts to read. Bonno is simply expressing her condolences, telling us how proud of us she and the rest of her team are of the Sedalia Chics for playing our hearts out for Mandy. They admire us, and have always taken note of the vocal, hyper, unwaveringly enthusiastic left fielder who is now gone. As I walk away from the dugout, a few steps behind the rest of my team, I remove my number six wristbands, stop, and gaze up at the sky, then wistfully into the outfield.

* * *

I walk through the receiving line at her visitation, and I'm thinking about everything that was Mandy. I can see the casket with its satin lining ahead of me, and I spot Mandy's ragged old softball glove and her trademark cat's-eye sunglasses laying in the raised lid. How perfect. She's going to her final home with everything she needs to play the game she loved for eternity. I look around the funeral home while I stand in the mile-long receiving line, impatiently waiting to talk to Dwayne and Tina, and I notice the tables stacked with albums and frames full of images of Mandy when she had slowed down long enough to be captured on film. I run my fingers over a framed photo of the softball team piled into the back of her truck, just before we paraded it through the 1996 State Fair Car Craft. I think about the things in Mandy's life that represent her best, and I know that not much can capture her personality, her character, like that truck. It was a 1968 Chevy that she and her father had attempted to restore. I remember its dull gray body, its custom red-splatter painted gas and brake pedals, the bed lined with two-by-fours, and its horn. No one that knew her could ever forget its horn.

Awwoooooogaaa! It had so many problems—the truck had a bum driver's side door, it didn't start in the winter, and occasionally the engine caught on fire. But that old truck was Mandy, one hundred percent. I move slowly toward the casket, and I hear a beautiful voice over the low din of the enormous, somber crowd. "*The baby sleeps tonight. . .*"

"Mandy!" I think, and a sensation overcomes me that I had not experienced since before her death. Then I see the television. And I remember that she really is gone, but just for a moment I stand staring at the television screen and the tape of Mandy singing at the church Christmas program, and I can pretend that she's still here, that she never left us. Kristy, our second baseman, puts her hand on my shoulder and says quietly, "Corrie, she's still an angel, and she'll be looking down on us forever now." I listen to her angelic voice singing about sleeping, but I know that Mandy's not resting up there. I wipe the tear from the corner of my eye, and, as I stand transfixed by the tape, I think that if Mandy's an angel, there *must* be a softball field in heaven.

Corrie Anderson

Photo/Graphics Category Winner:



Harrison Stoneham

Fire and Ice

During my adolescence, I lived in Arkansas. I, along with many Northerners, harbored many preconceptions about the South. My childhood mind pictured a land infested with alligators and mosquitoes, abundantly populated with hillbillies, and miserably, hideously, swelteringly hot. Surprisingly, the only cliché that turned out to be totally true was the last. Arkansas is not balmy, or warm, or toasty. It's an OVEN! Stepping out from an air-conditioned room into the wild outdoors of Arkansas is like belly flopping into a pit of boiling magma. It's so hot that your skin becomes inflamed as soon as your hand touches the door-knob. And when it's about to rain, the searing heat coupled with the drenching humidity makes you feel like you're deep-sea diving in a vat of coffee.

Needless to say, I never wanted to go outside when I was growing up in Arkansas. "It's too hot" was the standard reply to an annoyed mother who wished her children would enjoy the beauty of "The Natural State" instead of knocking over the cat litter box for the millionth time. One day, a serious bout of roughhousing provoked immediate action by my mother. Though, as always, I brilliantly protested against frolicking in nature, Mom launched me out the door, promptly following my dismissal with a flying bottle of water. The inhumanity! I massaged my bruised posterior and indignantly retrieved the precious vessel of water from the gravel driveway.

I plopped down under the slightly more bearable shade of a fir tree and stewed over my unjust eviction. *It's no fair*, I thought. One hundred and five degrees of muggy, oppressive, Southern summer was no place for me. I was a girl raised in the land of ice. Who was she to throw me into the fire? The land of ice . . . I had almost forgotten about it. Silly, since we had only left it and come to America two years ago. With those thoughts, as I baked in the unforgiving Arkansan afternoon, I found comfort in the vividly cold memory of my life in Iceland.

When I was six years old, my father was relocated from Baltimore, Maryland to an Air Force base in Reykjavik, Iceland. It was the end of summer when we flew to Iceland. We arrived during the summer solstice, when the sun would just slightly dip below the horizon before beginning another unending day. I remember my parents collapsed into bed, exhausted from the eight-hour flight, while my brother Duncan and I excitedly viewed our new, alien world through a window. Though it was probably ten o'clock at night, the landscape was still colored afternoon orange. There were no stars in the sky, and no moon was necessary, for a huge, bulbous sun flooded the Base with light. It was a balmy fifty degrees outside, a glorious summer day for native islanders (and a climate I wished would visit Arkansas a little more often). I remember seeing the two-story barracks of the residence quarters, formidable dwellings designed for efficiency and built to withstand harsh winters. Despite the strangeness of my new home, I had no fear of Iceland. I felt more at home there than I have anywhere else.

I was shocked that my memories of Iceland were so vivid. Though I was only in second grade during my father's term in Iceland, I could still picture the volcanic boulders of "The Rock Field" where Duncan and I played house. Fresh in my mind were the frequent trips my family made to the inland. I could practically feel the boiling heat and smell the sulfuric stink of the volcanically heated springs we used to visit. I remembered the horrific winters we endured when wind gusts often reached 140 mph, which once knocked over a metal dumpster. Many times our apartment was banked in twelve-foot high snowdrifts, which provided excellent sites for tunneling and burrowing. I recalled fishing trips with my dad. Duncan and I would watch him intensely as he baited his hook and cast his line into the green-gray Atlantic waters. Sometimes he would catch jellyfish with his bare hands and plop them onto the deck for our amusement. Dad was a decided favorite with all the neighborhood kids when he skinned freshly caught flounder on the back porch. It was deliciously disgusting!

I took a gulp of water to appease my parched mouth. How I wished for the snowflakes and flurries of Iceland. As imaginary relief, I thought of another memory from Iceland, one of snow and cold and darkness. My family was on a trip to see the sights of Iceland, as was the custom of Air Force families stationed in foreign lands. We were headed to Vatnajökull, a large glacial/volcanic site occupying the southern half of the island. While we were traveling, a blinding snowstorm engulfed our muddy van, camouflaging the road. With a stroke of luck, we happened upon an A-frame guest lodge where we sought welcome relief from the blizzard. The inside of the cabin was wooden and bare. Uncomfortable bunk bed planks lined the walls and the only piece of unbolted furniture in the dwelling was a small table in the middle of the room. On it lay an old leather guest book. The wind howled outside as we examined the artifact. It contained pages upon pages of names and short dialogues written by other weary travelers of the island. My mother read some of the names and stories to us while we waited for dad to hear the weather report on the radio. After the storm died down, we signed the guest book and wrote something about ourselves in it.

I wondered, as I broiled in my backyard, if the guest book was still there, sitting on a table somewhere in the wilds of Iceland. A sense of uniqueness rushed over me, feeling like the hot wind of that Arkansan summer day. A part of me is in Iceland already. I can always reach out for the cold and frost of that bare island. I can feel the snow on my fingers and taste it on my tongue. I imagine that my hair is tousled not with the fiery wind of the Arkansan summer; but blown by the arctic wind of my unlikely home. And I am comforted that, though my memories might fade with time, there will always be proof that I used to live in the arctic land of fire and ice, where the days go on for days.

Erin Luke

Moths

Nights at my grandparents' farm,
after my sister and I had our baths,
we would turn on the porch light
and play hopscotch
on the cool sidewalk
in our white, cotton nightgowns.

Rebecca Birke

Untitled 1

a little tiny space,
inside a bigger place,
concealed.

there is a door,
behind which no one dared
explore,
forgotten.

life goes on simple and small,
no thoughts dwell upon
the door in the wall,
afraid.

small space,
big place,
new thoughts,
unsought.

Rosie Mistretta

Drunk on the Lake at 9 p.m.

Behind me on the lake are blues
Of every hue, indigo, violet, steel,
Lapis lazuli and cerulean, plastered to
The cliffs and caught in the giant
Glazed doughnut of late-summer foliage.
The water is cornflower and grey,
Like crushed ice over boulders.
And our boat is a pencil on a photographic plate.
The waves, like negatives that develop immediately,
Vanish instantly.

I am drunk and gleeful in the bow,
And Lake Ozark is one massive simile.
Metaphors popping up like full moons
And words spelled in white foam
Vomited by waves kissing the stern.
The rapture of the night makes me happy;
We pass a smooth sandy beach,
And I think about making love there,
Twisting in the sand with a man
Whose name I don't care about.
I imagine the topographic lay of the lake,
Forking and snaking, little watery tongues
Sloshed over the thick of map-green
Like ribbons of Blue Curacao
Drooled off the back of a spoon.
The boat saunters into one such tongue now,
Oozing by a darkened dock spiked with
Sultry blues and the voice of persuasion.
Blurry people mill on the dock
Like a frat party in slow motion.
The windows of the nearby floating bar
Are festooned with glass tubes filled with

Colors that seem pornographic.
Las Vegas crayons smearing Frank Lloyd Wright
Over the template of the water.
The wake bubbles and fizzes,
And I would love to simply fall off
The boat into it, like diving into
Blood-warm champagne, and swim
Until my head buzzes with pleasure.
But the driver must lead the boat home,
And the bright lights of the condo
Burn my eyes and make me cringe.
The lake is intoxicating at night,
And I am more than happy to oblige.

Ashley Hoye



Wes Philpott

Kinship 101: Mothers and Daughters

Unusual. I hadn't seen my mother in twenty years. And how eerie that the place we would at last meet would be in a graveyard. Why--after so many years--a graveyard? And, most odd, this place, where the past lay buried with so many stones, was actually most fitting.

The last time I saw her was through the back glass of my father's rumbling '67 Mustang. My four-year-old body was just tall enough to catch sight of her sitting on the curb, running her fingers through her thick red hair. As the car inched away from the curb, she dwindled, growing smaller and smaller until finally she disappeared from my sight and from my life. For years, this parting scene would rewind and play in my mind the most when I tried to remember her.

That red hair haunted my childhood. Every petite woman I saw with matching hair was an instant candidate . . . a runner-up to the woman on the curb who gave me up to my father. She never called, never wrote, and never visited me again. No birthdays, Christmases, graduation, wedding, or birth of my children. That last time was the *last* time, until—the graveyard.

I had spent my high school years searching for my mother, gathering clues from people and relatives my dad knew when they were married. Not until I was twenty-four did I find her. I had located my grandmother through leads picked up along the way. Initially we talked on the telephone. When I asked about my mother, my grandmother empathized with me and didn't understand why my mother hadn't kept in touch with me all of these years, yet she offered no help in finding her. Then, a year later, she called to tell me that my mom was coming for a visit to her house, and that she had agreed to meet with me there. Finally, after twenty years, just a five-hour drive separated me from my mother.

* * *

This would be my first road trip alone. Not knowing exactly how to get there, I pulled out a map and decided the quickest route. After three hours of driving, I was drained by the uncertainty of all of this and nauseated by the endless miles of curvy roads leading to the boot-heel of Missouri.

Finally, I arrived in the small town of Steele. Moments before finding the right street, I imagined myself pulling into my grandmother's driveway, wondering if my mom would be watching me anxiously from some secret place in a window of the house. Would she dread my visit? Would she study my expression for any hints of bitterness as I approach the house? I didn't know. These thoughts, and others, plague me as each passing block draws me closer and closer to the long-awaited reunion with my mother.

Arriving a little early, I feel anxious and nervously fumble with my keys. I pull and pull to release them from the ignition. They won't budge. It would help to shut the car off first, I suppose. I throw the keys with disgust into my purse and open the car door, not daring to look at the windows in the front of the house—just in case. "Breathe in, breathe out," I coach myself.

Opening the door of my car, I slip my foot out of my world and into the unknown.

Slowly, I approach the front door. I knock and wait. As my grandmother opens the door, I see a petite woman with red hair on the other side of the house with her back to me. This is the real one, unlike the imposters of my childhood. What a greeting, I think. Regardless, I am drawn to her and walk to where she is standing. Coolly, she turns around as I move closer. Spontaneously, I embrace her stoic shell only to find her arms seemingly glued to her sides. She isn't as thrilled with this meeting as I am. Feeling foolish, I release my hold.

My grandmother senses the growing tension and leaps into the

scene, telling me about her garden. She asks questions about my drive, questions about the weather, and well—more questions to cover up the obvious stone-silence from the corner my mother occupies. I just want to hide, or rewind what just happened; leaving sounds pretty good at this point. I don't respond to my grandmother's questions; my reasoning is blocking me from her with confusing thoughts "stay or leave—stay or leave." These thoughts and the force of my emotions (between acting like nothing is happening and crying) are pinging in my head back and forth, back and forth until I think the walls of my skull will burst. My attention is on my mother. She is looking at me. Yet, when I look her way she looks intently at my grandma who is gabbing a mile-a-minute. We are playing a game—she looks, I look, she looks away, I look away. Why won't she say something? Why can't *I* say something? Why the silence? Is she scared, too?

Grandma suggests that my mother and I go for a walk. I know I need air—or maybe just a clue to what is going on inside of her. My mom takes the bait and heads for the door, and I follow. We intend to go for a walk, I think, but somehow we end up in my car. The silence from the house follows her into my car—and *I* certainly don't know what to say. Here is where I come face-to-face with my assertive nature. I'm not in-your-face assertive. It's just that when I want something and set my mind on getting it, nothing stops me until I have it—many times at all costs. Well, this one is really costing me in the pride department. How could I be so naive as to live in such a fantasy world? How could I even allow myself to consider that she would ever want me back? How could I be so bold to think she ever wanted me?

* * *

Thoughts of my childhood flood my mind as I drive in the sustained silence.

"I hate her," I told my father. I was eight years old, and tired of waiting and wondering about her. The mystery of her perpetual

absence dumbfounded me, and, I think, my dad too. Yet the years kept slipping by, digging an empty place in my heart until I thought I would never love another human, except my father, again. Not until I was well into my teens did I discover that life was livable without her. I no longer clung to the momentary hope signaled by women with red hair—so many came in and out of my view.

Life became busy with responsibilities, and the vacant place in my heart gradually became occupied with the present and hopes for the future . . . my father made sure of that. He never bad-mouthed my mother, but gave me the facts only. When I was young, he planted seeds of compassion and mercy for my mother. He encouraged me to be thankful for my life and my experiences, good and bad. Stupid—yet how could I be thankful for bad experiences? It wasn't until after junior high that his words melted my cold and bitter heart opening my mind to forgive. He was right. He nurtured my thoughts all the way through high school.

Still, my father wasn't perfect. His childhood was just as twisted and complicated as mine, and he took to alcohol to deaden the pain. It is strange, but I never held his undesirable habits against him. My father always wanted to talk to me. He was always concerned with how I was dealing with my life without my mother. With time, the bitterness gradually dropped away, replaced by a curious desire to become acquainted with my mother, to know where I came from, to see if I looked like her, and maybe . . . to feel like her daughter again.

* * *

The silence is broken by my mom's voice, "Let's stop here."
"Here, at the graveyard?" I ask. She nods. I steer the car slowly into the narrow graveled path where the wide swaths of earth are broken by various sizes of erect stones casually introducing those who had gone before. I stop the car wondering who will initiate

the next move. She grabs the door handle and gets out of the car—I follow her lead.

Not only does her choice of location make me uptight, but the uncertainty of her mood unnerves me. My anxiety results in words spilling from my unthinking head to my unguarded mouth, rehearsed and re-rehearsed lines escaping my grasp. I find myself trying to put her at ease for some reason. Strange, for I am the one needing to be put at ease. In a cut-and-dried fashion, I blurt out, "Life's too short to be bitter about the past, I hope we can piece together a new future." As I listen to my own words, I'm thinking where did *that* come from? Here is a woman barely in the mood to deal with the present, yet I feel compelled to babble about the past and the future. I don't even know her, and I'm trying to replace history with some dreamy future.

At first, I don't think she has heard me. Her response is odd. She blurts out, "Your dad was in the Service when we met. I looked eighteen. He didn't know I was fourteen at the time."

Suddenly, I begin wondering if I really wanted to know this story. Evidently, my dad left this bit of information out. "Debi, we hit it off right from the start and got married . . . too soon. "You were born a year later. Your dad drank and spent his paychecks away most of the time—so, we didn't agree on that. Your brother, as you know, was born fifteen months later. Despite your dad's bad habits, I could always talk to him—he was pretty good to me and seemed to care about me."

I can't help but think if he was so good to you then why didn't you at least try—or even after the divorce . . . drop a note, call, or visit? Why the vanishing act?

It is as though she can read my mind. She pulls a one-liner on me as if mounting a defense against my unspoken thoughts. "Debi, if I had it to do all over again, I wouldn't change a thing."

I am not only confused but becoming pretty emotional leaning heavily on the 'just kill me now side.' Twenty years of torture was enough—then she pulls this? I hold back, emotionless, wondering if my response is genetic (she was doing a pretty good job herself of hiding her real emotions). What a picture. Like mother, like daughter I thought. Then there was that stupid silence again! We just walk. Both of us are quiet. "The ball's in your court," I decide. The result is silence.

I'm trying to regain my inner composure so that I can say something . . . anything—without quivering or crying. I try so hard to think happy thoughts but they just won't come! "If I had it to do all over again, I wouldn't change a thing"—echoes over and over in my head. How can she say that to me? She's so heartless, I thought. The tears begin to well up. Don't blink or you'll blow your cover, Stupid, I say to myself. Blood is thumping in my skull so hard I think she must be able to hear it. I don't dare swallow—there is too much backed-up emotion looking for an escape.

A mental break finally comes as we have miraculously circled back to my car. She asks, "Are you ready to go?" I reply, "Uh huh." I think—*that* was a productive visit! No longer weepy but bordering on the angry side now—we get in the car and drive back to my grandma's. The voice inside of me keeps yelling, "Say something, Idiot! Don't let it end like this!" My inner voice allows my anger to control my mouth—which allows me to speak with confidence, without the 'boo-hoo' routine. "What did you mean by—you'd do it all again?"

"There are things . . . things about me that you don't understand," she replied. I can sense agitation rising in her voice, and then after a few moments she says, "You were just better off with your dad than with me."

Maybe it's nature, stupidity or just raw fear—but, I decide to leave it alone, buried as deeply as those anonymous people who are below the ground we walk on. It is getting late, we get into

I am not only confused but becoming pretty emotional leaning the car and head back. Grandma opens the screen door; her eyes reveal concern for me. I try to reassure her by hugging her before leaving for home. After the goodbyes are said, I begin my five-hour journey home.

During the silent drive, I wonder if my mom really meant what she said. Was I better off without her during my childhood? Hard to say, but a big part of me has to agree. I turned out okay.

She, on the other hand, has not. The winding roads encourage winding thoughts as I think about my mom and my relationship with my own daughter, Tara. Could I ever say that she was better off without me?

* * *

Instantly I am transported to the sound of the clicking of the nurse's heels under the healthy wails of my firstborn. Somehow, I knew that cry belonged to me. As the clicks slowed, the bundle of urgent cries finally rounded the corner to the room where I was waiting expectantly. The nurse handed her to me. I held her in my arms, knowing I would be providing her very first meal. It all seemed so strange. She knew instinctively what it was all about before I did. She caught right on. As she lay nursing in my arms, I gently pulled one little arm out of the tightly, wrapped blanket and lifted her little fingers to my face. I inhaled her baby smell and bathed in the touch of her skin.

That image is different now. My little baby has grown into a beautiful, secure young woman; I made sure of that. We have a special bond, the kind all mothers dream about. We have what my mother and I never had, and, most likely, will never have. Tara, my first-born, has her father's disposition and my drive. We rarely disagree. She is wise and I am open-minded—most of the time. I can't imagine leaving her, never returning.

It saddens me that my mother couldn't hang tough so many years ago. I am certain that there are things I don't understand about the woman who gave me life; her words still mull around in my head in an unusual way. I must agree with her though, for, if I had my life to do over again, I wouldn't change a thing. I wouldn't change my life with my mother for it would have affected my life with my daughter. If my life hadn't been jerked down the path it did, I wouldn't have been the person my daughter needed—to become who she is today. No, Tara wouldn't be better off without me.

Walking through a graveyard with my mother was odd, yet at the same time I see now that my mom fits there. She presents herself like the gravestones. She offers only a compacted view of her life revealing only tidbits of information. Just like the hundreds of stones, marking the final resting place of these people who grew cold so long ago, with minimal information listed in the etched epitaphs. Visiting a graveyard, you don't know exactly how everyone dies unless it is etched on the stones, you can only know what the stone reveals. Just like my mom—I don't know how or when she died emotionally. All that is left is a cryptic monument of herself, a marker of what must once have been.

A graveyard is certainly most odd for a twenty-year reunion between a mother and daughter—but not unlikely.

Debi White

Lover

She was a dish
best served hot

She was a tall cool drink
on a hot summer night

She was a chariot
to take me away
to our special place, other side of yesterday
a million miles away
behind the sun

Kurt Pankau



Molly Duncan

Forty Weeks

week one

Everything is changing,
but I don't really know that yet.
I suppose on some distant level I notice something.
Is that something? or am I crazy?
Nothing really seems different, but yes, I can sense you.
I sense a difference, but not with my senses.
Does that make sense?

week five

Everything changed, yet everything appears the same.
I am officially terrified, what will happen?
Am I ready? What if I am not good enough to take care of you?
I am truly excited, but incredibly scared.
Or is that truly scared but incredibly excited?

week twelve

You are but a knot in a belly, sometimes I can feel you.
I saw you today you were dancing--arms this way, legs that way.
We laughed. I wasn't even completely positive that you existed
before today, but now I know.
We love you so much.

week twenty-five

You are starting to grow. I often wonder who you will become.
I got to see you today. I am getting to know you.
I see you, defiant from the start, you won't let anyone see unless
you want them to.
That strength is a virtue I hope you keep.
Now we know you are a strong boy, we often think about
names.
"What's in a name?" A lot, I think.
We want something to convey strength, yet unique. You aren't
just any other person, don't you know?
We love you. I tell you often, but do you recognize my voice?

week forty

This week is still three months away, but I can't wait.
Excitement overtakes me. But this is not about me; this is about
you and your incredibly strong mother.
I don't know how either of you have done this.
I will get to know you today, you are my baby son.
I have waited forever for this moment. It will be here some day,
I suppose.
Until then, just know that we love you . . .

Anonymous



Julie Slisz

Holland

"SHOES!" I breathed.

I remember my grandmother chuckling and holding me tighter against her chest while cautioning my small and clumsy hands to be gentle. One by one she took those glittering treasures off their pedestal and gave them to me to lovingly hold. My grandmother began to tell me every story behind each of the beloved shoes. There were shoes that had been her mother's mother's, and she had shoes that she brought back from all over the world! My favorite stories were the ones where she bought the shoes; I had never imagined in my little girl mind that money other than the dollar existed. That was the day I learned about rubles, francs, pounds and many more.

You see, I shared my grandmother's passion for shoes. My favorite game as a little girl was to dress up in her shoes – she had hundreds. I would wear shoes from the 30's then the 50's and then evening shoes from the 80's (they were my favorite). In regard to shoes – life was never boring.

As we sat on the wooden floor that day, I traveled to all of the wonderful places my grandmother had been. Someday, I told her, I'm going to go to all those places to buy shoes, too! I must have amused her, for she then asked me where I would go, all the while smiling as if she knew the greater meaning of life.

I told her that I wanted to go to Holland more than any place in the whole wide world! I liked the wooden shoes the children there got to wear, and I wanted a pair of my own to clomp around in.

Darcy O'Hanlon

Evidence in a Journal

My soul is full of liquid boiling to explode in the face of friends and enemies. My soul is full of liquid boiling to explode in the face of existence altogether. Anger is the carrier of disease, and I am the host of anger. I only possess this anger because I was led into the tunnels of love. Love, the joy keeper, showed me my soul. I did not know where or who it was until she showed it to me. Love I let fill my soul. For I felt I owed it to her. For it was she who helped me discover my soul.

She waded in me, and slept with me. I say she was like a hibernating bear living in a cave. But this was no ordinary cave because it was my soul. I suppose the bear must arise as the grass awakes the soil. The smell outside is good. I understand why my love must wake and leave me here in desolation. I am a true desperado.

I even said to her, "Promise me you will come back." Like the flashing goddess she was, love vanished and left my soul empty as a river that once ran through a desert. That old crumbled ground of the desert is likened to that of my soul. I feel poor.

Love I say was a host fit for a king. But what is a king without a queen? Empty. I had to find something to fill me up. Only because I was vulnerable and weak, and I knew love was never to return. So I dreamed and cried for anything to fill my soul. The bidders took the table and the highest bid went to evil and hate. Evil is opposite of love, which I despise for her torture. I live in evil. I wish to neither see nor hear from any person.

So enter the dragon with boiling red liquid to fill me up. A fire burns inside me now like the one Prometheus brought to man. The fire owns me. I want to burn existence altogether.

Existence is curious. What is existence without love? It is Hell. I feel there is no me. Without her there is no me. I saw it and I did it. I figured without my existence there must be no love. She was love.

Tonight she saw the last moon of her life. I tell the cruel truth of a cruel crime by a desperado. By the fire in my soul and the blood on my lips I shall join her in her death. I know now where she sleeps. Forever in death with me my love can never escape.

November 11, 1863
Edward Creighton
London, England

Nate Mendenhall

New Year's Revolutions

Quit smoking
Quit drinking
Quit eating meat
Diet
Exercise
Write a novel
Build a house
Better yourself
Get a tattoo
Remove a tattoo
Find Mr. Right
Destroy all evidence to the contrary
Burn down the empire
Damn the man
Fight the system
Take back everything
Everything we do
To feel alive
To put off dying

Kurt Pankau

The Bell Tower

The bell tower bings and bongs,
Forever it seems to ring.
On and on, again and again,
Never stopping for a moment's rest.
It rings for those who have died,
It rings for those whose would mourn.
Yet the ringing will never stop until
Vengeance has been satisfied and justice scorned.
Ask me when the ringing began,
And I shall tell you before I was born.
Ask me whose was the first name to be rung,
And I shall tell you it was mine.
For I mourn my own passing into this world,
And seek justice for the lies I was promised.
Again the ringing goes on. It only seemed to stop.



photo by **Julie Slisz**

In truth, it has rung all along,
Throughout the life of man.
In the past it rang for the Christians
Fed to the lions great and small.
It rang for those burned as witches,
In a free country long ago.
It rang for those born Jewish,
Into genocide they marched.
It rang for those born black,
Beaten to death in a place where every man is created equal.
It rang for those who would be different,
Every time and everywhere they showed.
The ringing has yet to stop,
And I fear it never will.
For the ringing is of no mere bell tower,
That lay upon this earth.
The sound we hear comes the saddened heart,
From which all that is man was given birth.

Vincent Spezzo



Ginger King

Family

My sister is as insecure as the leaves in early fall.
The minute she receives an ounce of criticism,
She detaches herself and blows away.

My brother is as social as a butterfly.
He parades and poses with the big wigs,
And when the day is done he shines their shoes.

I am as indecisive as a feather in the wind.
Big decisions never ending,
I am always floating, never landing.

My mother is as fun loving as a kitten in summer.
She pauses to admire the simple things;
when faced with a problem, she is sure to overcome.

My father is as solid as an old oak tree.
He is always blowing his own way;
words of intelligence are often lost on his ears.

Rebecca Birke

The Streetlight

I'm living on borrowed time. I have been for awhile. I know this is a sure sign of paranoia, and I am quite aware of the can of worms that that leads to, but I can tell. The streetlight tells me.

There's this streetlight down the street from my dorm. It's a streetlight I'm well acquainted with. Last year, I'd pass it almost every night during nightly walks around town. And this year, it lies straight on the path that takes me from my dorm building to basically anywhere on campus. I have never done anything to that streetlight. I wouldn't dare to. I pass by it multiple times a day, and I make a habit not to annoy inanimate objects that I have so much personal contact with. On my way to and from classes, on my way to and from visiting friends. You would think that streetlight and I would be friendly with each other. I have never committed a sin to that streetlight, but, still, it hates me.

I have never done anything to anger it. It takes a lot to anger an inanimate object. Still, no matter what I do, it still hates me. It tells me every time I pass by it in the dark.

You would think a streetlight would be considerate to a slight female figure, quietly walking, or manically dancing, under it in the dark. But no. Never. For every time I pass near its cone of light, imagining for a moment that I would be illuminated by its soft glow, it goes out. Before I can get to the edge of the kind, peaceful light, it disappears. And each time, each and every single time, I pause. I glare. Sometimes I speak, oftentimes in hurt yet soothing tones, but sometimes with harsh, abrasive words. And sometimes, yes, sometimes, while I stop, and glare, I let that dark diamond-hard ice enter my eyes, and I silently rage at it. I tell it everything I think of its selfishness, its uselessness, and even

while it rejects me, I tell it that I reject it, I tell it I don't NEED its light. It is only a calm distraction. And with my iced-over eyes, I scream these words and thoughts. My lips remain still. My voice remains silent.

And with defiance breaking through the diamond brittleness of my stare, I continue on my way. I try to take no notice of the flush when the streetlight comes back on. Yet, every time, my step falters. The streetlight's rejection cuts. What does it mean that the streetlight refuses to shine upon me? Is it refusing to shine upon a dead woman walking? I don't want to be dead. I want to live, I want to be bathed by that light, that single light I've dreamt about. The single light I've been denied.

Jennifer Riebel

Her Eyes

Her eyes
called to me
through the tiresome haze
of the blurry day.

Her eyes
called to me
like a lighthouse beam
to a sailor's ship.

Her eyes
like blue drops
of rain, lovely and
intriguing, called me.

They called
with their song
like that of a Siren
grasping my heart so.

Her eyes
faded away
leaving only a hint
of her angelic soul.

Her eyes
are all I
know of her and of
that hazy day long ago.

Vincent Spezzo

Impromptu Monument Haiku

awry roadside cross
bright faded plastic flowers
watered by their tears

John Hensley

Discovered in Minnesota

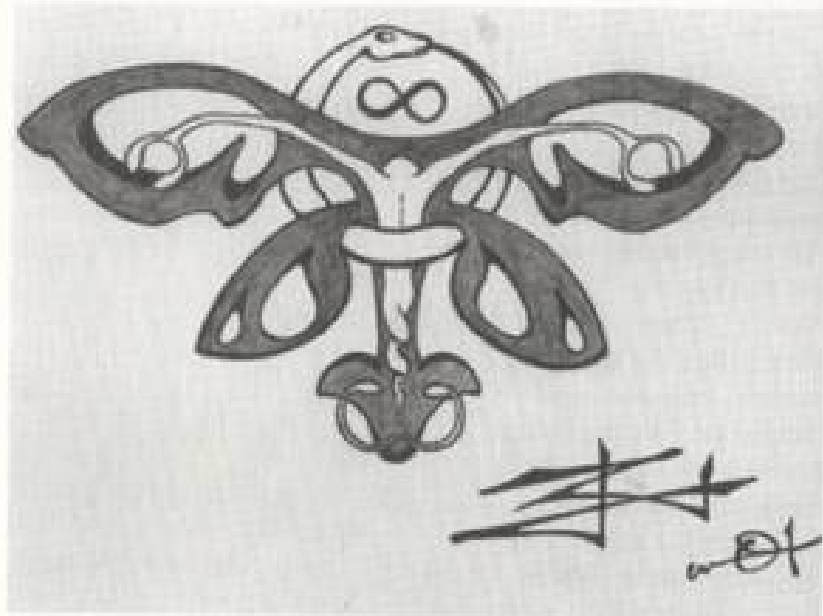
Solitude . . .
Rolling wave, lonesome cloud,
Whispering pine, calling loon.
A haven for self-discovery,
Here I learn to appreciate
the moment I'm living,
yet I'm also given the promise of a new day.
Nature's wonders soothe my soul
and redirect me on the path of life.

Katie Kramer

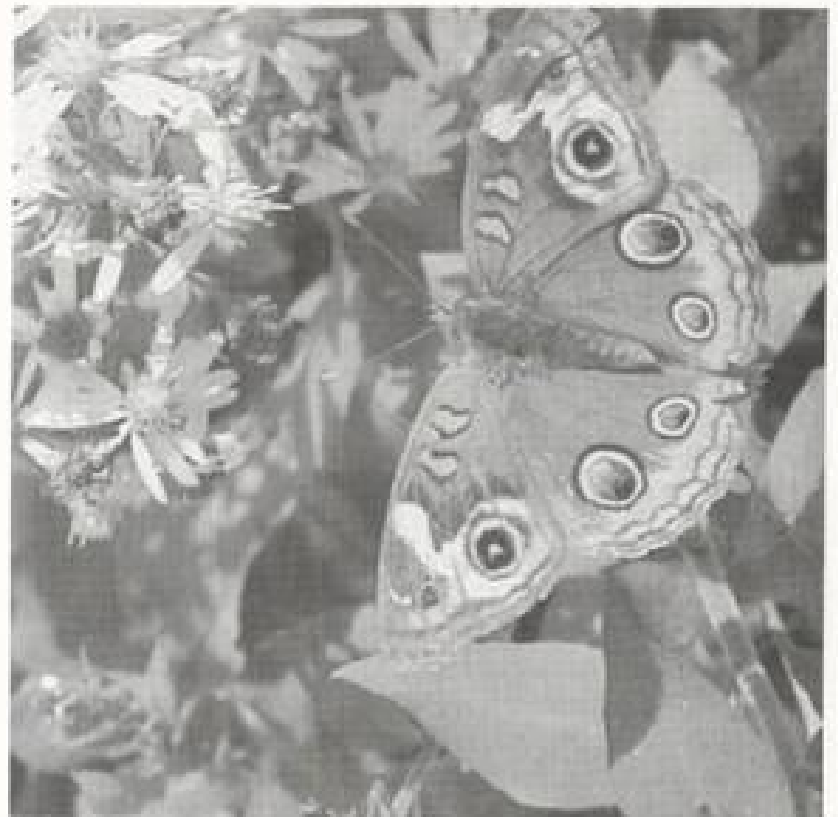
One Day

Calm and quiet was the night
when came a noise that gave a fright
Twas the lonely howl of the Timber Wolf
The trees quivered and the branches shook
as the lonely gray
sang his song of a joy-filled,
long-ago day.
The day when nothing was built
to destroy other men.
All was peace and happiness . . .
but that was then.
Now is the time of fear and war
Now is the time of hatred,
sadness, pain, and more
Now is the time of courage
and brave boys off to fight,
for lives on the edge,
for something much more
than applause or rewards
But for the beautiful, great shore
we call America, U.S.A.
Soon it will be again
a calm and quiet day.
Calm and quiet was the night
when came a noise that gave a fright
Twas the lonely howl of the Timber Wolf.
The trees shivered and the branches shook
as the lonely gray
sang his song
of the soon-to-come day
when the fighting
truly, actually may
cease, stop, come to an end
maybe . . . one day.

Stephanie Cook



Jon Todd



Wes Philpott

The Withdrawal

Jack Johnson hung up the phone, rose slowly from the couch, and stood in the middle of his small living room. He took a deep breath and decided to go to the kitchen. After impatiently drinking half a cup of coffee, he turned off the radio and all the lights, and put on his coat. His green-eyed, black and white cat darted in, meowed a few times, and disappeared to the back of the house again.

"Oreo, you jerk," Johnson called out and went to the door.

Stepping outside, he pulled his dirty gray baseball cap out of his pocket, put it on, and locked the door. He made his way down to the sidewalk and turned left towards downtown. The sun was bright, but the air was ice cold. Johnson laughed to himself and picked up his pace. He was sober.

He walked the five blocks to the bank branch on Third Street with his head down, passed under the small green awning and through the heavy glass doors. The interior was dim, the ceiling lofty. With each of his steps, the wooden floorboards complained a bit. The warm, stale air tickled his nose.

Johnson sneezed and stepped into place at the end of a short line behind one man and two women, all elderly and slow—they shuffled like game pieces—but looking content enough.

The obese, young black man tending the only open window leaned over to a microphone to talk to an old woman through the glass. He had blonde hair.

Still looking at his feet, Johnson suddenly began thinking about his childhood and in particular the time he went to the bank with his grandfather when he was seven years old. He just tagged along and when they left his grandfather, whom he called 'Pappy,' gave him a crisp dollar bill and said, "for anything you like," and Johnson had gone home that day and contemplated hard, and finally after three weeks he decided to spend his dollar on a boomerang, which he purchased timidly at a corner store for ninety-five cents. The wooden boomerang was lightweight and tan with a pair of red stripes on each tip. The thing was sturdy, but

when he went to the park by himself that sunny, yellow day with a nickel in his pocket, he bit his bottom lip and threw and threw the boomerang, and it never came back to him, not one time, and Johnson was recalling how he'd tossed it in the creek behind Pappy's house that evening and watched it float away when the bank teller smiled and said softly:

"Afternoon, sir. How can I help you today?" He had a gold tooth.

But Johnson didn't hear. His feet were itching. He considered going outside, sitting on the steps and taking off his boots to give the arches of his feet a good scratch and think the whole plan over twice or three or four times, but his boots were tied in double knots and now it was his turn to step up to the tall, shiny window and do as the people had done before him—give or get money.

"Sir? Would you like to make a transaction today?" he said, his voice a little deeper this time, his eyebrows lifted.

"Yes, I'd like to do a withdrawal," Johnson said, staring at the teller's blonde hair, "today."

Johnson forced a plastic smile and took a step forward, leaning with his left shoulder against the window, his mouth an inch or two away from the circular, silver microphone that filtered scratchy sounds into and out of the teller's booth. The bank was empty. Angular beams of sunlight slid down to the floor from the high, high windows. Johnson reached under his green coat and slowly pulled his handgun from the waist of his jeans. He held it unsteadily below the counter.

"Okay, do you—"

"Actually," Johnson interrupted, "I'll be frank." His calm, ensuring blue eyes dropped to the teller's nametag, which read 'Benny.' Then his gaze moved to the ceiling, as if what he was about to say was written there.

"Well, Benny," he continued slowly, "I'm thinking about holding you up."

"What?"

"Yeah, I think I might rob you."

"Oh," Benny said, shaking his head. "I don't get paid until next Friday."

"No," said Johnson, looking down. "The bank. Holding up the bank."

"Oh."

"But I can't decide. What do you think?"

"My manager won't be in 'til noon."

"Benny," Johnson smiled, "I think you can handle this."

"Oh my." Benny lumbered backwards a step or two and slapped his chest, holding his hand over his heart.

"Well how much money could I get? Very much?"

Benny's eyes sprang from Johnson out into the empty lobby and back to the robber, who showed him the gun.

"I've got this old gun. It might not even work. I haven't fired it in, gosh, well over fifteen years."

"This is a joke, right?" Benny said, trying to smile. He wanted so badly for this gun-toting man to smile back, to laugh and slap the glass with a grin and tell him he'd be on his way, having finished with his joke. Benny puffed on long, loud breaths into an invisible paper sack now and dots of sweat appeared between his nose and mouth. "Right?"

"Benny, now just calm down. I'm not going to harm you. I just need to hold you up and take some money with me." He set the gun down on the dark wooden counter. His beard was black stubble, gray around the chin that he scratched with a finger. His face appeared to be permanently sunburned, shiny and red—medium rare and smooth except for the train track creases running across his forehead. "Can I please have the money?" If the glass wasn't between Johnson and the teller, Benny could've easily grabbed the weapon.

"Can you have the money!" Benny gasped. He talked very fast now. "Holy shit."

"What is the big deal?"

"Please put that gun away. Go and—"

"Benny! Look. Is this glass bulletproof?" Johnson said, flicking it with his fingernail.

"I'm not—yes," he said. "Yes."

"Stand back." Johnson grabbed the gun, stepped back, and fired at the glass.

And what a big sound the gun made. Johnson approached the window with his mouth hanging open. He examined the hole with a wiggling pinky finger. He hit the glass near the hole with the butt of the gun and watched it fall in slow, clumsy pieces to the floor inside the booth. The round metal microphone clanged and rolled to a stop.

"Benny," Johnson yelled. "You lie to me?"

There was no answer.

"Get up, Benny."

No answer still.

"What the hell," said Johnson as he reached around to unlock the door. He turned the bolt with his right hand and cut the inside of his elbow on a remaining piece of glass. With drops of blood following him around like a child, he painfully dipped his arms into drawers and bags, grabbing for fistfuls of bills, which he stuffed messily into his pockets and his socks. He turned to go and one fell out. He stopped.

A car passed by the front of the bank, splashing reflected rays of rolling light across the ceiling. Johnson knelt carefully down. The teller's neck fed blood into a growing puddle. He folded the note, a one hundred-dollar bill, twice in half and slipped it into Benny's shirt pocket. Then he removed his hat and bowed over the blonde-haired boy, resting his forehead on Benny's monumental belly.

"Holy God," he began, his head rising and dropping slightly with each of Benny's wheezy breaths. "Forgive us please. This boy's dying and I sure ain't sticking around to see him off. Help us. And thank you for my health and such beautiful weather. Amen."

He said 'Amen' with a loud, long 'A.'

Johnson quickly lifted his head, and he stood up. His hair dangled in sweaty cords. A patch of blood stained his left cheek but was barely noticeable against the red of Johnson's aged face, a neutrally expressive terrain overflowing with potential for a smile, or for a frown. He put his hat back on.

When he got home, Johnson locked the door behind him and walked to the bathroom. After he gathered all the money and

counted it, he put it in a small box under the sink. Then he washed the dried blood from his hands and face, shaved, and brushed his teeth. He took off his shirt and walked down the hall into the living room.

Oreo was sitting on the windowsill, watching the leaves blow down the street.

He picked up the cat and scratched its neck. The phone began to ring, and the cat jumped out of his arms and left him alone in the room. Johnson rubbed his eyes and then looked out the window. The pine trees across the street struggled to keep their balance in the wind.

John Hall



Dave Norman

Untitled

I don't like
Pickles
Onions
Sleet
And lumpy
Mashed potatoes

I don't like
Poetry
That is ALWAYS
Depressing

I don't like
People
Who are ALWAYS
Off key when they
Sing

I don't like
Wishy-washy
People
Who WON'T
Make a
Decision

And you
Know what
I don't like
MOST OF ALL?

People
Who DON'T
Wash their hands
After
Using the
Potty.

Darcy O'Hanlon

A Purse for Ella

I do not have the time or knowledge to go into exactly why or how the Earth broke in two, but I think it is safe to say that about half of the species on the planet died out that day. I'm sure most scientists would agree with me, although there are precious few of them left. Science does not ensure survival, so they died out too, mostly.

Needless to say, things that were once unlawful to own, like gorilla palm ashtrays and elephant foot garbage pails, became of infinite value now that there were no laws to govern their production. Those who found the value in such things were those who had not yet abandoned the old life, and were willing to trade great quantities for the opportunity to find one.

Gary Rice had not abandoned the old way of life, and when rumors of kangaroos being alive in a desert across the chasm floated his way, he jumped at the idea of appropriating a kangaroo-pouch purse for his new fiancé. It was a mere 80 miles from one hemisphere to the other, and since there was still air between them, it was short enough for a plane to make the journey.

The plane was some fifty feet behind him when Gary lost consciousness.

Daylight was creeping through the corners of his eyes.

"Where the hell am I?" he said out loud. He had to assess the situation.

Bars.

There were bars in front of him. Why did his head hurt so much?

Oh, because he was inverted.

Gary looked up to his feet. His feet were tied to the cage bars across the ceiling. There was light above him, and trees.

"Wait a minute. I thought I was in the desert." Gary closed his eyes and tried to remember what happened before the blackness.

The plane landed. Yes, it landed in the desert. There was a flat stretch of sand. There was an oasis just over the dune. He must be in the oasis.

"I'll set 'er down right there," the pilot had said.

The cage opened, and Gary was thrust back to reality. Two black men in gray suits approached him, one large and one small. They spoke to each other for a few minutes.

Gary strained to hear them. He felt like he could almost make out words, but he wasn't sure if the two men were speaking in a foreign language or just mumbling. Gary finally gave up and took to remembering.

Oasis.

Plane.

Looking for kangaroos.

The slamming of the cage door broke his concentration. The two men were walking away, still talking to each other.

"Pssst!" came a hissed whisper from off to Gary's left.

"Gary!"

"What?"

"Wake up."

"I'm awake. What happened? Where are we? Should we be quiet?"

"I don't know. I don't think they can understand English. They don't respond."

"Good, so we can talk."

"Right. We have to get out of here."

"Agreed. What do you think they want with us?"

"I imagine they're selling us for slaves."

Gary chuckled under his breath.

"You think this is funny?"

"Well, there is a certain historical irony to this. Us, two white Americans, made slaves to black men."

"All right, we'll try and make a break for it as soon as possible and get to the plane. I've got enough gas to get back."

"Some plan. Have you thought about how we're going to get down from here? We are tied up within my belief."

It was true—Gary's hands were tied together, even though they hung below his head.

"You work on that, okay, Gary?"

The pilot's cage opened. He was cut down and dragged away to somewhere Gary couldn't see.

Gary had his gun in his hand. He was approaching the oasis. He was sweaty and sticky, but on the hunt.

Gary awoke violently. It was night.

There was screaming in the distance. Was that what had awakened him?

"Fantastic. I am in my own personal hell."

He slept again.

It was morning.

Gary was starving.

There were people walking all around him.

"Hey!"

If they couldn't understand him then there was no use in watching what he said.

"Hey! I'm sorry. I just wanted to kill a kangaroo for my fiancé. I was going to make her a purse. Can you understand that?"

No one responded.



photo by Amii Etheridge

"You are all ugly. You are all stupid. You are ugly and stupid!"

Nothing.

"I am a giant cheese danish."

Nothing.

"My hair is pink and I like to dance. I am a sissy. I am a very girly man. I have no balls. None whatsoever."

Nothing.

"You people have no sense of humor. Did you know that?"

Finally a man came and cut him down.

"Oh thank you. You're coming to rescue me. Aren't you? You're going to set me free to live like an animal in the desert—most kind of you."

Gary was dragged by his feet across the oasis to a tiny building. Inside were the two men who had examined his cage earlier, and they were deeply engrossed in conversation.

"Ahh, you two are the ones who saved me. That was very kind of you. If you could just untie my feet and hands I'll be on my way. My firstborn child is yours, if you like."

The larger of the two men stopped and looked at Gary. He spoke to some of the men in the room who promptly hoisted Gary up and tied his rope off to a chain hanging from the ceiling. Inverted again, Gary noticed that the floor was painted with splotches of blood.

"I see this is where you killed my pilot friend. I suppose you're going to kill me here too."

The smaller of the two men pulled out a knife and approached Gary.

"Here it comes. The end. Amazing grace . . ."

The small man began cutting off Gary's clothing.

". . . how sweet the sound . . . Hey, I was just kidding about that girly-man thing. I don't know what kind of impression I gave you."

Gary was rotated on his chain and then allowed to hang freely.

"that saved a . . ."

Having forgotten the words, Gary began to hum.

"hmmm hum lost, but now am—"

"Silence." It was the larger man that had spoken.

"You . . . you speak English."

"You pale demon. First you invade our camp, then you ramble incessantly, and now you force me to speak in this barbaric tongue just to quiet you. I should have killed you first."

"Pale demon? Wait a minute."

"I thought I told you to be quiet."

"Wait. You're killing me because I am white?"

"More to the point, you have fine skin, and white leather is rare in these parts. I'm killing you, because you are profitable."

"White leather?"

"Ella will be most pleased at her anniversary present."

"Ella?"

"My wife."

And with that, the smaller of the two men cut a line down Gary's front and he bled for several minutes before he finally stopped screaming, much to the relief of Ella's husband. After all, a scream makes sense in any language.

Kurt Pankau



Julie Slisz

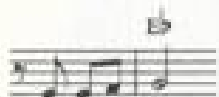


Ginger King

The Day America Cried



1. It was September eleventh
Two thousand one.
A day like any other
At least it seemed like one,
But before it was over
America almost died.
It was a day like no other
The day America cried.



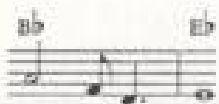
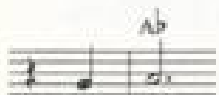
2. When American flight eleven
Departed from its gate
No one could have imagined
What would be its final fate.
It was headed out to L.A.
Before it turned around
And changed its destination
To the Towers of New York town.



- Chorus. It was the day America cried.
It awoke a sleeping giant
And restored our nation's pride.
It was a day like no other
The day America cried.



3. Before the day was over
Three other planes turned around.
One aimed its deadly cargo
At the mighty Pentagon.
And in the skies of Pennsylvania
Was heard the cry "Let's roll."
This valiant act of courage
Saved our nation's Capital.



4. The world will long remember
What happened on this day.
Twas the bloodiest day in history
For our good old U.S.A.
It was a day of terror
On this we all agree
But also a day of heroes
Who died to keep us free.

- Chorus. It was the day America cried.
It awoke a sleeping giant
And restored our nation's pride.
It was a day like no other
The day America cried.

Glen Frerichs



Kristy Halverson

Analogy

Once there was a poet who had asthma. It seemed to her that she had twin afflictions—breathing and writing. When she was writing, she was breathing, air slipping in and out of her like a half-born idea. When she didn't write, she could feel her throat closing very slowly, until the last gasp of air lay trapped in her chest. Everything turned raspy and brittle, her skin, her eyes, everything she touched or did was as papery and dry as her desiccated lungs. She tried to write but it was artificial respiration—a warm plastic tube jammed into her mouth by a stranger. Often she didn't breathe for weeks.

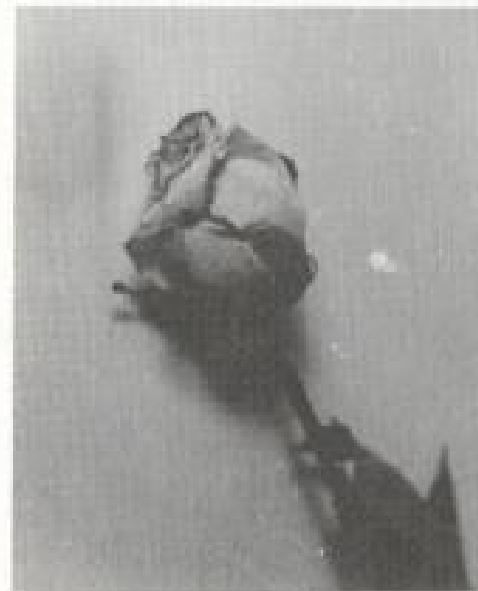
And then, suddenly, the words were there again, just like that, and the stale air in her lungs burst out in a great, wheezing sigh and she was writing and breathing again. It was so fast, so quick that she immediately forgot what that endless suffocation felt like. All the burning and searing pain that doubled her up like a reed in the wind—gone.

At night, in those times when she was writing and breathing, she would have stunning, crystalline visions of her lungs, moistly pumping air through her body. Sometimes she would dream so vividly that the words weren't enough anymore and then the breathing vanished too, and she found herself panicking, struggling, wanting nothing more than to drive her useless hands into her chest, smashing past the ribcage, and squeeze the pulpy alveoli, hearing the blood sucking between

her fingers, pinching and pulling the bronchioles just to keep the air moving. Then, suddenly, the words were back and the breathing followed.

They both threatened to kill her, night after night, but she kept writing and breathing, writing and breathing as though it were the only thing she could ever do.

Ashley Hoye



Julie Slisz

Daddy

The logo from the local feed store has almost faded from his old,
blue cap,

A solitary piece of hay sticks out of the side of the cap, near his
ear.

His 5 o'clock shadow is tipped with gray,
giving his face a soft glow that contrasts his sharp features.
He smiles and tiny wrinkles form around his pale grey eyes that
match his hair.

His teeth are tarnished light yellow from years of coffee and
tobacco abuse.

The sleeves of his red flannel shirt, covered in hayseed, are rolled
up to his elbows.

Callouses and liver spots compete for space on his large, rough
hands.

One hand clutches a Milwaukee's Best can
while the other rests on the beer belly he's been growing for the
past fifty-two years.

His faded Levi's have a small tear in the left knee,
courtesy of a stubborn barbed wire fence.

His ten-year-old brown leather boots look as if they had once
been

wadded and un-wadded like a piece of paper.

He smells of a combination of beer, bacon, and horse feed.

He reaches for his cap, pulls it off by the bill,
and wipes the sweat from his forehead with the back of his arm
all in one movement.

He puts the cap back on his head and then, with the other hand,
lifts the Milwaukee's Best can to his lips.

He tilts his head back as far as it will go and his Adam's apple
moves up and down as he pours the last of the beer down his
throat.

When the can is empty he sets it on the counter, making a hollow
clink as the thin aluminum hits the Formica.

He walks closer towards me and reaches out an arm to rest around
my shoulders,

I turn towards him, stand on my tip-toes,
and stretch my neck to give him a kiss on the cheek.
His skin feels like, and slightly resembles, the leather of his boots.
I return to standing flat-footed and lean into his body, resting my
head on his chest.

His grip around my shoulders tightens as he hugs me.

Amy Edgar



Kristy Halverson

Where Have You Gone Miss Monroe?

I haven't thought of her in years, and when I thought I suppose I really mean remembered, and when I say her I mean Alicia Monroe. Of course, I think I'm getting ahead of myself. This story starts with a picture of me, Jeb, and Ronnie standing in front of the old barn by the Windsor place five miles out of town. I forget who took the picture, but no one was quite as close as Jeb and Ronnie and myself. We were three peas in the same pod, so to speak, and nothing or nobody was ever going to come betwixt us.

Jeb's real name was Jebadiah Malcroft, son of Heath and Gloria Malcroft, the former of whom was dead and gone five months that May. Needless to say Ms. Malcroft was still a bit broke up over the whole thing, but Jeb seemed to take it well. It was a strange way to go—a hunting accident right after Christmas. I think that was why she took it so hard. I mean, if I was an old lady and my old man up and kicked it right after Christmas, I would think that it would suck some of the holiday spirit right out of you.

Ronnie was a miller's son, christened Maynard Ronald James, but calling him Maynard was a sure-fire way to take care of a loose tooth and start two or three new ones a-comin' out. I always thought Ronnie James was a good name for a folk singer, or maybe a politician. Ronnie would have been content to never get off his duff, but just to sit around his parents' house and smoke grass all day. I don't rightly remember what ever happened to him.

But back thirteen years ago there was not a thing that could keep the three of us apart. We did everything together. There was one time that we all spat on the stump in my back yard and pledged our undying devotion to the fruition of our friendship. We each in turn pronounced our names and promised that we were ready to kill and die for each other. We would fight off a hundred Commies, or a herd of mad bulls if it came to it. Yes, sir,

we were inseparable.

On Tuesdays and Saturdays we would go down to the bowling alley and try to break a few hearts and records. We always sat together in school and told jokes about Mrs. Tennemin's hair. In fact, when Ronnie realized that there was no way he'd be able to pass algebra, Jeb and I tanked our grades so we could retake it with him. Ronnie seemed to appreciate that. He thought it made up for all the times Jeb and I tried to hit on his older sister.

In fact, Ronnie seemed too scared by the idea of dating for a normal person. A few folks might have thought he was queer, but we were all young, and then in 1978 Ronnie hooked up with Alicia Monroe, and any rumors questioning his masculinity were quickly dispelled, especially after they exchanged cherries on the football field after the Bubbles of Love Dance. In retrospect it was both sweet and sickening, although at the time I'd have settled for the latter, and Jeb didn't like it nearly as much as I did.

"Skank-ass nasty-haired bitch," he said to me in the halls outside our lockers. "Why the hell does she have to come and relieve us of our best bud? There's a hundred other guys in this town better looking than Ronnie."

"Love is an ugly thing," I said trying to console him.

"Oh, what are you happy for them?"

"What if I am?" I asked.

"Then maybe I'll have to kill you."

"Kill me? I thought you were going to kill for me. Or don't you remember our pledge?"

"I remember, but I think you should be a bit angrier that one of us has chosen to break it."

I paused. Truth be told, we hadn't seen much of Ronnie since prom. Ever since he'd bumped uglies with that gal he'd been glued to her hip during the day and glued to I don't want to know what during the night.

"What exactly are we supposed to do about it?" I asked.

"Grin and bear it, I suppose," said Jeb.

And so things went for a while. And then Jeb's Dad passed. And it was when Ronnie didn't make it to the funeral that

we decided Li'l Miss Monroe had gone too far. Ronnie claimed that he had car trouble, and that's what kept him home, but we could hear her laughing in the background when we called from the funeral home.

I remember Jeb standing over his father's grave after the burial.

"He's supposed to be here," Jeb said. "He shouldn't be back home fucking his whore. He should be here with me. He's my friend. He should be here."

"He had car trouble, Jeb. There's nothing can be done about it."

"You fucking believe that? You would. You're so damn naïve."

"Hey, I'm here for you. We'll get through this, and then she'll break his heart over some flea-bitten football player and things'll be back the way they were. You'll see."

"I wish she were in the ground instead of my old man."
I believe that he meant it.

Seasons come and seasons go, but grudges are forever. Five months after Heath Makroft's funeral Ronnie missed a day at school. He normally drives out there, but some one had slashed his tires that morning, so he was unable to attend. Jeb saw an opportunity and seized it.

"Alicia," he shouted from down the hall. She approached us.

"Have you guys seen Ronnie? We were supposed to hang out before first hour, but he's not here."

"Somebody slashed his tires, so he won't be able to make it. God forbid Ronnie ever set foot on a school bus," chided Jeb.

"Oh, that's so bad. Now my day is going to be miserable. So what did you call me over here for?"

"I have a message for you from Ronnie. He said that he's going to get his tires fixed today and he'll meet you at eight o'clock at the Windsor's barn. You know where it is?"

"Do I?" she asked. Apparently this would not have been their first meeting in that particular barn. I wanted to vomit.

"Anyway," said Jeb, "will you be able to make it?"

"Of course I will."

"Wonderful," said Jeb.

"And you know, I'm really glad that you talked to me. My love-muffin was under the impression that you two were angry at me and that's why you weren't hanging out with him anymore. I'm glad we're all on speaking terms again."

And with that Alicia flipped her hair and bounced down the hallway towards her locker.

"I'll kill her," I said.

"Watch and learn, friend," he said to me out of the side of his mouth. "Watch and learn."

Jeb and I spent the entire lunch hour giggling like kindergartners. The plan was simple. At eight o'clock Alicia would arrive at the barn and wait for her lover to drive up. At nine o'clock a dejected Alicia would be met by Ronnie's friends who would explain why he decided not to come. She would then break off all ties and we would get our friend back. It couldn't be simpler. We even started waving to Alicia as we passed her in the halls. She probably should have been suspicious because of the lack of grimacing looks from Jeb and I, but I think she genuinely was happy that we were "not mad" at her. I almost might have felt guilty for the ridiculous prank we were preparing, but the fact that she blamed us for the extraction of Ronnie from our lives was infuriating enough for me to see it through.

So at a quarter to nine I pulled up to the barn and turned off the lights. Jeb's car was already there, so I walked on up to the barn. The door was shut, so I slowly pulled it open. It was an old barn. The walls were rotting. The paint was chipping off the walls. There was hay hanging from the loft and legs dangling from the ceiling.

Well, that part was unusual. I stood there a full five minutes staring at the legs. They swung gently from the skirt that connected to the body that was slumped from a makeshift noose tied to the hay loft.

"Hey, you're early," said Jeb. He was climbing down the ladder. "I didn't hear you come in."

I stared at him silently. I was dumfounded.

"What have we done? We killed her." I don't know if Jeb heard me say that or not. I'm not even sure I said it myself, but there were no other seven words in my brain.

The sound of a motor sifted through the slits in the walls and then stopped. Jeb and I ran outside.

"Hi, guys. Where's Alicia?" asked Ronnie not three paces from his car.

"Hi, Ronnie," I said, attempting to change the subject.

"Good to see you got your tires fixed."

"How the fuck did you know about that?" asked Ronnie.

"Where is Alicia?"

"She's in the barn, waiting for you," said Jeb.

"What the fuck have you done?"

"Calm down, Ronnie."

"What the fuck?"

"I said calm down. This was nobody's fault. Love hurts. I'm sorry. But at least we still have each other."

I just stared at Jeb. I still hadn't quite regained my power of speech. Ronnie started to rush at Jeb but then changed his mind and made for the barn to meet his Juliet. The last words I ever heard out of Ronnie's mouth was the sound of a man whose soul had been tossed to the wolves. Now that I think on it, I don't know that he ever came out of that barn under his own power. He chose.

And I chose. To forget. I'm not sure why I decided to omit that night and that barn from my memories. I guess sometimes it's just easier to forget. I mean, when your best friend offers to kill for you, how do you say no?

Kurt Pankau

Sorry

I'm sorry!

Sorry is not enough.

You forgot your careless ways hurt.

Your lies too long to bear.

Stepping out from your shadow,

I, for the first time, see you.

A coiled snake strangling its prey.

Rough scales indenting the smooth flesh of its victim.

No movement, no joy, no challenge,

It slithers away dissatisfied.

A second strike.

The taste of blood.

Fangs savoring.

The slow digging into the flesh.

Blood sucked from the body.

The snake loses its grip.

The victim revives.

The snake stunned.

The victim escapes.

No longer am I sorry.

Maryann Hon

Some Notes from the Editors

First off, we would like to thank everyone who submitted their work to Janus. We were all very happy with the submissions and regret only that we could not fit all of them in this year's edition.

We would also like to thank Margot McMillen, our advisor, for the time that she spent with us in the Pub room, editing page after page, sacrificing the safety of her chickens to make sure that everything was finished on time.

We would like to thank Brenda Gibbs-Brown, our representative from General printing for working with us to stay within our budget and helping motivate us to stay on deadline.

We would also like to thank the college, and especially Dean Seelinger for allocating the funding for this edition of Janus. We appreciate your generosity and hope that your investment has fulfilled your expectations.

Another big thank-you goes out to SGA for providing additional funding to reward the winners in each category in appreciation for their hard work.

Most of all though, we would like to thank you, our readers, for picking up Janus and creating the audience for artists and writers in the Westminster Community; you are the ones that keep us going year after year.