

APOGEE



THE LITERARY JOURNAL OF HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY
SPRING 2004

APOGEE

THE LITERARY JOURNAL OF HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

Spring 2004

FACULTY EDITOR
Dr. Marion Hodge

COVER PHOTOGRAPH
David McKelvey

SPECIAL THANKS TO
Dr. Cheryl Harrison

CONTENTS

GENA SMITH	A Demon's Discourse to His Peers in Hell	5
THERESA CAMPBELLO	Votive	7
JACI CHEEK	Peter Denies Jesus at Jerusalem	8
ALEX SHEALEY	Murder	10
GENA SMITH	This Life	12
BRIANNE COONE	The Sign	15
ALICIA CALDWELL	Operation Freedom	17
ANGEL ASHTON	When	18
TRACY WHITMAN	Duty, Honor, Country	20
GENIEVIEVE DUNAJ	3 rd Floor Apartment, Downtown	22
ALEXIS WINNING	Trouble	23
ALI WASSELL	Rebirth	25
EMILY MILES	Pooling Mirrors	26
SYLVIA HARWOOD	photograph	27
JONATHAN KING	Overlooked	28
REBECCA M. FLEMING	A Quilted Life	29
KATHLEEN MARIE MCLEAN	At the Hillsborough Karate Tournament	36
KATHLEEN MARIE MCLEAN	Aphrodite Hears Psyche	37
JOSHUA RACHEL	A Night at the Blacksmith's	39
LATANYA WILSON	Sunlight	40
MEREDITH HENDRIX	On the Porch	41
MEREDITH HENDRIX	Over Pancakes	42
RACHEL MCSWAIN	Needed	43
MICHAEL MOORE MAYER	Less Than Me	44
PHILIP MULDER	Elegant Failure	45
CHRISTINE LEE	Abuela	48
MARY PUCKETT	Boys of Summer	49
ALEXANDRA BERRIOS	Stone	52
HOPE CHATMAN	Ms. Jazzy Davis' Band	53

TREVOR MCDONALD	Death and Self	54
ANDREA GRIFFITH	Tragic Art	60
ANDREA GRIFFITH	Sorrow through Music	61
CHILSEA GREEN	Who He Is	63
DEREK SHEALEY	A People's War	64
DAWN GLASS	Torn Apart	65
MARY E. SULT	I Miss You	66
BILL PISER	Tired of Empty	67
JACI CHEEK	Spaghetti	68
COURTNEY ABRAMS	Passion	70
PAULA HARTNESS	photograph	71
JACI CHEEK	A Walk in the Woods	72
ERIN HARDY	Perspective	74
MEAGHAN LEONARD	Freedom Rings	75
PAMELA HUBBARD	Angels	76
NORA ANDERSON	Bibliophile	81
GENA SMITH	I Follow You	82
GENA SMITH	That Night at Eight	83
GENA SMITH	Isaac	84
ASHLEY JOVAN CREEK	Tenses	89
KEVIN CIMINO	Second Communion	90
JOSEPH WAALKES	How to Find a Monkey's Secret	
	Watering Hole	92
ERIN PELLARIN	We Used to Climb	94
ANGEL ASHTON	Helen Jay	96
ANGEL ASHTON	Nation	97
IRIS TALEBI	No Point at All?	98
MARION HODGE	On the Faultline	99
JEREMY THOMAS LEMASTER	My Sick Rose	100
ALEX SHEALEY	Paint Unused	101
PAMELA HUBBARD	Shore Musings of a Child	103
SARAH CRAVEN	The Poison Cloud	104

CONTRIBUTORS	106
--------------	-----

GENA SMITH

A Demon's Discourse to His Peers in Hell

*FIRST PLACE, High Point University
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

You hateful messengers of vain temptations,
Damn your—I mean our—fuming sarcastic vows.
Cut those hideous smirks from your poisoned faces.
Is this vain life the Devil's approval?
I'm tired of flapping and fluttering
In an aurora of deceit.
God's power is too great, too magnificent.
His glory is too amazing.

I have given my soul too long for a fool's paradise.
This hateful home to choruses of vile demons
Will no longer be my resting place.
Fueled by revenge, we've poisoned innocent Minds.
In the name of envy I've despised creation.
Oh! Wake up from this aggravated slumber!
Open your hate-intoxicated eyes to the truth.
Can't you see? We are but whimpering pawns
Used by the Deceiver's clinging bait
By mocking, cursing, tempting—
We relish others' torment.
What pitiful existence we are engulfed in.
Appearing as angels, our sorry slander crucifies love,
But what for? Stop your wretched whispering.
Listen to me, you graceless idolaters!
Won't you cease the dismembering of the saints?

The Almighty has defeated evil already
And soon He will dismember you.
I am throwing away my wicked essence;
I cast aside all deceit and envy
And sprint hell-bent for love.
No longer am I Satan's fingers of allurement,
I am falling back in rank with the glorious army
From which I came—will you join me?

THERESA CAMPOBASSO

Votive

*FIRST PLACE, High School Poetry,
Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

When I was young, I went to a temple
For Buddhist monks with my father, in China.
I found a blue votive candle
Used and thrown away near the altar outside.
It went unseen into my blue pocket
On the cloudy mountain. Tian Tan, the temple of Heaven.
In my Pittsburgh House I lit the spiced wax
In my room with the painted red walls.
The shadows bright outshined the light
And the flame wrote stories on my walls.
Sitting in the center of the floor, quiet and watchful and
foreign.
Now only a bit is left, kept in a box, too small to light again.
The Greeting-Card sentiment, there is no more curiosity.
When someone, a monk, lit that candle for the first time,
Did he think about it afterwards?
Have his fingerprints burned away in my red room?
I'm afraid something has been used up.
I'm tired and frustrated, but I can't go home yet.
It's not like Keats, dying, in loves every instant,
On fire, bright until the last. Was I ever?

JACI CHEEK

Peter Denies Jesus at Jerusalem

*SECOND PLACE, High Point University
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

Listen, my God,
for I did not realize the crow of the cock
did surely mean the forewarning of my Messiah's death.
Christ's blood spilled for all to see. My wretched soul.

Three times of betrayal did He warn me,
Followed by the rapture of the cock.
But why did I bear false witness,
Ignoring the only being ever to admire me?

Biding by the fire, embers and the blaze,
a servant questioned His authority, I stood to agree.
How could I deny my Lord, a belief now in flames?
Tomorrow morning as the cock crows, just three times.
Actions foretold.

Why did He choose me?
Rather me to reject God's supreme shower of inheritance to
Jerusalem, confirmation that sin endures.
Denied once as would be thrice; a thousand times over I will
live the lie.

Thrown daggers—knotted blindfold
round the face I once could perceive,
as omens plague thee.
The hardest wood dragged with His shoulders,

yet I carry the weight, pain in multiples of three.

From Galilee did we come, yet I fail to worship Him.

My highest King is now Pilate's plight of pity.

My Lord glances at my fists—

the rusting steel digs into my bones.

Steel--the three lies.

I carry the burden upon my shoulders.

The sound of fury will blast from my tongue till I die.

ALEX SHEALEY

Murder

*SECOND PLACE, High School Poetry,
Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

Murder is the ocean;
vast in numbers and not completely owned—
but the crest is ours
in the sand
or in the closet
old, and still.
Because you can bottle the blue and salts
like making secrets safe forever.
Just don't forget
that these things spread with time.
Don't let the bottle break
or wait to see
if it comes back with the tides
and someone remembers her scooping
beneath seagulls, eating scallops,
seeing red
under eyelids from the sun.
Things will transcend to the sink,
the stain
and how the water looked dark today.
We will run out of mixed stories.
But this,
this is worth anything—
defeating the numbers, watching the blue
swallow.

Because murder isn't vast or numbered
when you realize
that no one will see
the red ring,
hidden by the sun,
underwater.

GENA SMITH

This Life

*FIRST PLACE, High Point University
Fiction, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

I think I bought them about five years ago. They were clean and comfortable then. But now, the soles are slippery, the white is gray, and the padding left about eight-hundred years ago. I walk a lot in a day; maybe that's why I'm so hungry. Sometimes I run because I have nothing better to do.

My backpack holds a sweater, a toothbrush, a copy of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and a notebook and pen. The sweater I bought at Goodwill for \$2.49 two years ago and the toothbrush was seventy-eight cents at K-Mart. I took the book from the library when a college-aged woman dropped it on her way to the book return. I said I'd take care of it since I was on my way inside the library anyhow. She thanked me, then turned to leave, and never saw me toss it in my bag. The notebook was in a trash can with only a few pages used. Even though the wire spiraling is all twisted, it's still paper. Paper is paper. That's what I say, maybe because I have nothing better to say. Maybe because I want to stay positive. Maybe because talking out loud stops my mind from analyzing every aspect of life. Maybe because when I repetitively say "paper is paper," people look at me as if I'm crazy, and some even have compassion in their eyes. If I said nothing, they wouldn't look at me at all.

I'm sad. I'm hungry. I'm annoyed by the life I live. All I want is a new pair of shoes. Well, that's not *all*, but it

would be nice to have a new pair. However, the Nike tennis shoes in the store windows are at least forty dollars. The store customers thinks it's nothing to pay that kind of money. If I get some new shoes, then I can walk to another town. I don't like this one; I've been here two weeks too long. The people are rude; the parks are overcrowded, and there are few sidewalks. But maybe that's just Michigan.

I walked into Faulise's newsstand last week right behind a middle-aged man in his over-priced, name-brand running outfit. Every day precisely at 2 p.m. he'd enter the newsstand, walk out with a Dasani water, then sit on the park bench one block away, and change shoes. So last week I followed him into Faulise's. I reached over him while he was reading *Newsweek*, pretending to be interested in *Outdoor World*, but before he had the chance to take a step back, with one quick glance at our feet, I saw they were the same size, and knew my plan would work.

So yesterday I saw him at the park bench. From the alley corner, I scrutinized his every move. It would take me six seconds to sprint to him. I hoped, if I stayed facing forward with the bench on my left and the stores on my right, he'd never see my face. He took three sips of water, then watched the consumption-driven pedestrians window-shop. I tightened the shoulder straps of my book bag so it wouldn't bounce when I ran. He untied the right one, then the left. Then he paused, his eyes again on the pedestrians. He delicately placed the first shoe beside him on the bench and then the second as if they were porcelain dolls or expensive glass vases. As soon as the soles met the wooden bench, I flew.

I ran on the balls of my calloused feet, grabbed them with my left hand and continued to sprint until I couldn't any longer. I heard nothing but the sound of my drum-like heartbeat in sync with my raggedy shoes against the concrete. Da Da Da. I ended up in the city park. Slowing my pace, I

said, "Paper is paper," over and over until no one else was around. I laced up my new shoes around my grimy feet, excited that they cost me nothing. I melted in their comfort. I laid down in the cool grass trying to justify what I'd done. I've gotta survive, don't I? I laid there wondering where these new pair of shoes would take me. Depression fell on me like a blanket of dew as I realized I'm still sad. I'm still hungry. I'm still fed up with life.

BRIANNE COONE

The Sign

*SECOND PLACE, High Point University
Fiction, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

She waited for her boyfriend to arrive. Still optimistic, she sat on the only step, which led to her front porch, staring at the stars. They sparkled in the moonless sky, like glitter had been sprinkled across the blue-black heavens. They gave off the only natural source of light that night. It was not eerily dark like some evenings during the new moon. No one could ask for a more perfect night for a picnic by the lake.

"Why isn't he here yet?" she wondered. He was already an hour late.

She kept the phone close because he might call. On the other side, she set a basket in which she had packed a blanket, a bottle of wine, sliced ham, steamed vegetables, her fine china, stemware and silverware. She wanted their four-year anniversary to be special. As two hours past their meeting time approached, she wondered where he was.

"Did he simply forget?"

She called his house. No answer.

"Has he been in an accident?"

She called his cell phone, but got only the answering service. She hated talking to machines, but worried, she left a message. "I was just wondering if we were still on for tonight. We were supposed to meet two hours ago. Did you forget? I hope everything's ok. Please give me a call and let me know something."

She hung up, knowing that he probably would not call back. He did not call her back when he stood her up almost a month before.

"Why did he do this again? Why did I accept his stupid flowers and lame excuse last time? He had to take his mother out because she was upset. Yeah, right. He could have called."

She cursed him and the day she met him.

She called his cell phone again and again, hoping he would pick up, but he didn't.

"Is there something wrong with me?"

She had no close friends, and she rarely spoke to her family. She felt alone and uncared about. She cursed herself and the day she was born. She wanted to throw the picnic basket across the yard. It hurt so bad to be rejected. Her chest ached and her heart pounded. She began to cry.

She prayed to God to give her a sign to show her that someone cared. She wiped the tears with her fingers, and looked up into the sky.

"Please, God, my faith is all I have."

As another tear dropped from her jaw, something moving in the sky caught her eye. A shooting star.

Streaking across the sky a little way, it burst into three pieces, and then one piece divided, making four flashes, which faded back to two sparks before fading away. It looked like a Roman Candle shot out across the sky, then fading into the firmament. She had never seen a shooting star branch off into so many pieces before.

She closed her eyes, bowed her head, and said, "Thank you."

Smiling, she picked up the basket and walked around to the back yard. She pulled out the blanket by two corners, whipped it into the air and let it float to the ground. She filled a glass with wine, set out a dinner for one and ate it under the starry sky, satisfied that she was not really alone.

ALICIA CALDWELL

Operation Freedom

*HONORABLE MENTION, High Point
University Poetry, Phoenix Literary
Festival 2003*

I had a dream last night.

I received a letter from the Middle East.
The message, though somber, was proud.
He stated that he was scared but ready,
 Angry but hopeful,
 Tense but encouraged,
 Homesick but committed.

The person once lovingly called Little,
As the younger, was now a man.
No longer was there the tone of adolescence,
Though still of childish age.
Circumstance has tainted his innocence.

When I awakened, the news was on and
Memories of my dream came to me.
I looked out my window at the mailman
Approaching.
I closed the blinds and prayed.

ANGEL ASHTON

When

*HONORABLE MENTION, High Point
University Poetry, Phoenix Literary
Festival 2003*

Warm clean water
So full of love
Now tinted pink
In my denial of your betrayal
As I tell myself
My pain does not exist
But huddling in a shadow of doubt
Is a child in the back of my mind
Who bites viciously
Living half starved
Believing trust is as real as Santa Claus
Shuddering in the burning cold
Only clothed in darkness
Because love is as easy as finding wealth on the street
And no one loves damaged goods.

But people carrying jade in used needles
Or lines for snorting
So this child feeds on pain
And red lines of blood
Because it's reliable as a sharp knife cutting flesh
And kissing Death
Trying to feel quiet bliss
Wondering what's left to hold on to
When one has nothing left

But a rotting childhood
Malignant tumor of memories
And the only pain relief is more pain
And the only dream
Is catching quick Death
Who's a rather giving lover
Always free of diseases
But very possessive after that
I wonder about my love for you
Knowing all about quick hits of jade
That reminds me of all the pleasure
And none of the pain
From the bleeding wound
Where trust used to be
Staining the water
Because I can't stop bleeding
Even if I let you go
And I won't because
Your novelty is something
To keep my mind off
Bleeding to death

TRACY WHITMAN

Duty, Honor, Country

*HONORABLE MENTION, High Point
University Fiction, Phoenix Literary Festival
2003*

I couldn't answer the phone. I knew it was him, and I knew what he was going to say. He was going to tell me that his unit had been activated and was going to Kuwait. I forced myself to pick up the receiver on the last ring. Sure enough, it was him, and he had to deploy.

I was aware that there was pending danger in the Middle East. After the September 11 attacks the previous fall, military personnel and their loved ones knew that, at any given moment, they might need to go. Nine months later, in February 2003, I was faced with the reality of military duty. Jack was on the phone telling me he would be leaving with his unit in two days. I couldn't think of anything valiant or intelligent to say, so I told Jack I loved him and used the excuse that I had to go so I could pack a bag, find my roommate and tell her where I would be, and then head north.

It felt strange to throw sweaters into my duffle bag. Looking out the window of my dorm room, I saw the Atlantic Ocean. It would soon separate my Jack from me for a year. The sunny Fort Lauderdale day was a joke—all I felt was coldness. Already numb, I somehow drove my little Honda Accord to Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Jack's last twenty-four hours at Fort Bragg were extremely busy, but I was able to steal a little of his time. He gave me a tour of the base and introduced me to other soldiers who were also spending a few precious hours with

their girlfriends and families. We walked by a table where Army moms were handing out yellow ribbons. I pinned one on, vowing to wear it every day until Jack came home. It was my reminder to be courageous. To others, it would symbolize my faithfulness to my soldier.

The next morning at 0600 hours, the Fort Bragg soldiers marched toward the jet that would take them to Kuwait. They were allowed to say a final goodbye to their loved ones. I held Jack's gaze for a moment, praying that I would see his green eyes again. They strangely matched the green in his camouflage. I could see in them that he was completely focused on this mission of American justice. When we hugged, I wondered when I would feel those strong, steely muscles again. He was a soldier. I had to let go so he could defend our country.

I held onto his mom as we watched every last inch of that camouflage-clad man board the drab, green military plane. I watched it taxi and take off, and fell to the ground, weeping. In spite of all my grief, however, I was so proud. I was proud to be the girlfriend of a man in uniform, a man brave and willing to give his life to defend his country.

I sat there for a while, not caring that the ground was freezing and I was sitting on a muddy field next to a military base. I knew that this was it. I reflected on the fact that I was now part of a special group of women—those who felt that “there’s just something about a man in uniform” and who had to let their men go. It would not be an easy year. I looked down at the yellow ribbon pinned onto my red sweater and somehow managed to smile. My soldier had responsibilities of duty, honor, and country, but so did I. My duty was to pray and be faithful. My honor was being the girlfriend of a man fighting for freedom. My country had been hit, and I had to sacrifice so it could be defended.

GENEVIEVE DUNAJ

3rd Floor Apartment, Downtown

*HONORABLE MENTION, High Point
University Poetry, Phoenix Literary
Festival 2003*

Here's a formal invitation to my madness,
With tea for two and chocolate-almond sweets,
As we lock out everything that's real and tragic,
To slow dance while they stumble in the streets.

ALEXIS WINNING

Trouble

*HONORABLE MENTION, High Point
University Fiction, Phoenix Literary
Festival 2003*

Her ex-boyfriend was away with his new girlfriend one weekend when D Girl, our Queen of Started Trouble, gets this hare-brained idea to toilet paper his house. Me and the girls decided it was justifiable because he had cheated on her, and it would be healthy for D Girl to take part in some innocent vandalism. So one weekend evening D Girl was beyond drunk, and had barely made it to her own "venting" party. Actually, she was never really "there," so wasted that she hardly remembers the night at all.

The night began, as such nights usually did, with an array of drinking games followed by D Girl's loss of ability to keep a beer bottle in her hand. For the girls, dropping drinks is a normal weekend activity, while causing a nuisance remains the most important weekend activity. By the time she had dropped a few drinks, we decided it was safe to venture out with our 24-pack of toilet paper. This wasn't going to be too risky an adventure, considering we only had to walk across the quiet street.

After turning off the porch light, everyone somehow managed to step gracefully into the night; well, everyone except D Girl, who rolled down the steps. She was just lying on the ground laughing about how it kind of hurt, then she struggled to her feet. Once we safely made it to his house, we dished out the packs of toilet paper among the six of us, and began to initiate the master plan.

Four girls tackled the two big trees, while one girl and D Girl worked on the smaller trees and bushes. We had so much fun. It was as if we were all twelve again, except it was a lot easier to reach the parts of the tree that were higher up, even in our tipsy states.

D Girl, three sheets to the wind (that's a nautical metaphor), had difficulties papering the bushes. She moved to one of the big trees, but every roll that she flung into the air either didn't come back down, or the three squares she would manage to get onto a branch floated back to her head before she could even find the original roll she had thrown. At one point when tossing a roll, D Girl tripped over a root and tumbled down the sharp drop to her ex's gravel driveway. The next day she wore a collection of bruises.

Although she never really "vented" and was hardly physically able to take part in her own plan, D Girl looked proud. The other five of us were proud; we knew we did a good job making that place look like Toilet Paper Heaven.

There's a picture we took that night with all of us under the trees streaming with toilet paper. We keep it framed in the living room as a reminder of some of the best trouble we've made so far.

ALI WASSELL

Rebirth

*HONORABLE MENTION, High Point
University Poetry, Phoenix Literary
Festival 2003*

Crystals of winter fall at my feet,
As the world becomes a homogenous mixture.
Frost-bitten body parts,
And grandma's hot cocoa,
Turn modern man back to the childhood
He forgot.
Surrendering to winter
Causes prices to climb, schools to close
And most of the world to shut down.
Like bears we hibernate,
And hide from the flakes
That bring on bad drivers and accidents.
But still the geriatric Sears and Roebuck drivers
With hats and gray hair fill the roads.
We all know where they go when the days
Get a little shorter and the night air gets colder.
Engraved on their minds are palm trees and Retirement,
Co-ops with a pool and the warm weather
They have waited 35 years for.
Like bees they swarm to their new homes,
As their bumper stickers state:
To Boca or Bust!

EMILY MILES

Pooling Mirrors

*HONORABLE MENTION, High Point
University Poetry, Phoenix Literary
Festival 2003*

I saw you as you were in beauty
And I loved you simply for that,
Legs dangling in the crystal waters,
Your line and leader dancing across the sky.

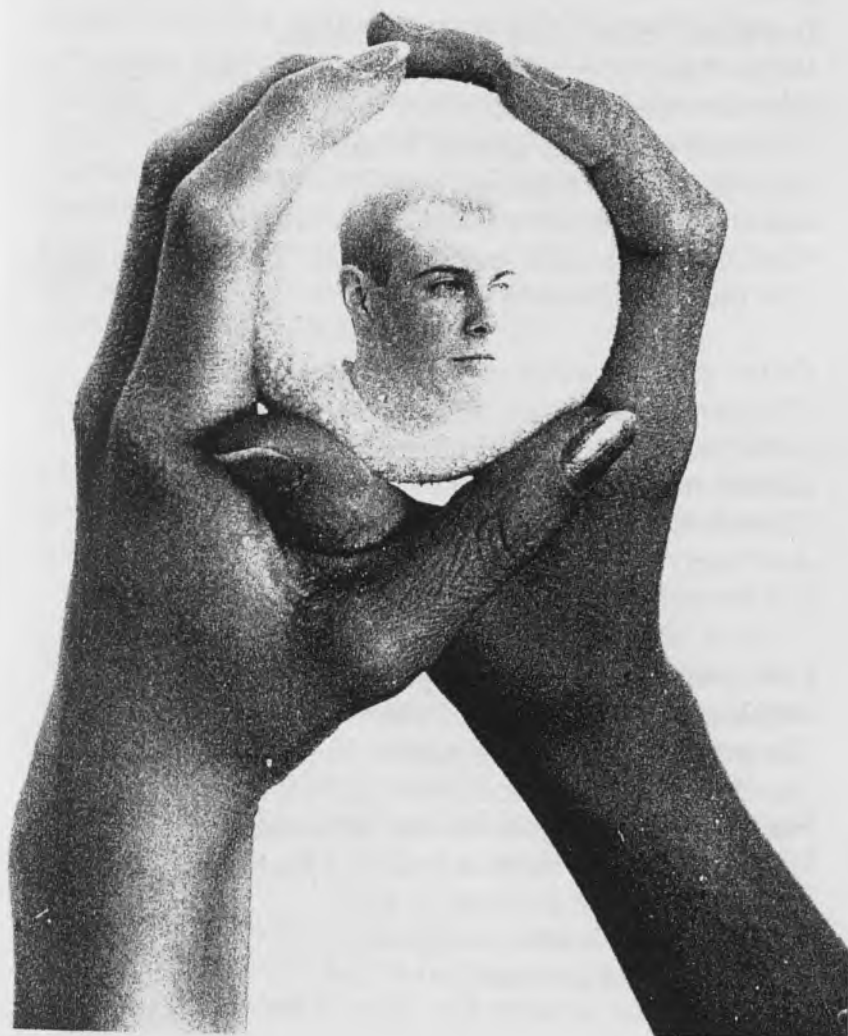
I touched the water with my hand, nearby
A fish broke surface, the water splashing my face—
You smiled and said I had better luck—my
Face became a reflection of your joy.

And you stood in your glory and broke
The surface of the water with your stride
And came across and took my hand without thinking,
placing it with care on the reel of your rod.

I caught a million fish that day, or
So the story is now told, how
Mommy met Daddy before things soured, before
The waters became polluted by love lost

And the rivers we loved have become
Pooling mirrors where we see
Ourselves as we are and
Cry for the lost days gone by.

SYLVIA HARWOOD



JONATHAN KING

Overlooked

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

In a silent temple under the leafy ceiling,
Where three rocky pillars rise up from the sandy altars
Of intertwining crevices, where from the three clusters
Of bushes emerge an array of trunks
Diverging from a common, unseen source,
And a root has drawn a fissure in the pillar
Pushing through solid rock. The water cascades from heaven
As a trio of ants wander home.

On the ground I watch as they step over stick-fences
With very little thought, shifting their legs
In the way most fluid and natural
As they wander home in wavy lines
Towards the archways which repeat
And barely touch the ground, which the ants
Fall through into their own world.

I see their magnificence as I pick one up
And know that his life is my hand.
The crevices between my fingers are his valleys;
Attached to me, my hand a new pink land;
His golden-black figure outlines with violet yellows,
His beauty, agility show as he arches his back,
Twisting to invert his view, to see
For a moment the clear perception
Of sky reflected in water.

REBECCA M. FLEMING

A Quilted Life

I

Stacks and piles of fabric cut in squares: white, red, yellow, blue, hot pink, green, turquoise, purple; polka-dotted, plaid, printed butterflies and teacups and rabbits; nothing dark—everything light and cheerful. Spools of thread in ordered clusters, a few merry-colored tangled knots in obscure places. Bright shiny needles and pins and great silver scissors. Amber-eyed kittens crouched watching, as the whirring machine pulls the fabric through—transforming shards of color into a timeless masterpiece. A quilt: conceived in the darkest of night—or perhaps in the laughing joy of noonday—being born in a pool of light.

II

"High school years at last! I'm well on my way to adulthood: I know a lot of things (maybe even as much as you 'adults,' maybe more), and these last few years of school will be a breeze."

Such were the thoughts running through my mind at the beginning of ninth grade; *before* I learned what my assignment was to be. As a key requirement for graduation, my mom expected me to complete one quilt for each grade of high school. That's four quilts. 4. Not just baby-blankets, either—we're talking twin and full bed-sized quilts. Help.

III

My granddaddy was turning 65; we wanted to do something special for him, but didn't have the money to go out and buy anything. So we had to work with what we had, which was

fabric. Lots and lots of fabric. Gathering the fabric into a pile on the kitchen table, my mom and I looked at it and considered our options. She wanted to make him a quilt, but not just "a quilt," something really special. A Life quilt: one that captured all the stories and memories and maxims and quirks and favorites and held them together in one place. A stack of white squares grew, awaiting the addition of segments of a life. But how does one take a single life and pull a comparatively small number of events out of it? We gleaned and pulled and took the comical and the sweet: the marriage dates of the three daughters; the hand prints of the seven grandchildren; the names of all the newspapers he read and loved; a pink elephant (so he'd *really* have one); "Old Blue" the Ford tractor; "Clear to Lee," "Goodnight and good luck," "Not the old barn, but the new barn." Fishing poles and peanut sacks. Pears and iced water. His wedding, his birth. The Florida Gators. So much. So many many memories went into the crafting of that quilt.

IV

The sun shone down, warming my young bones, the golden lights flooding my being. I set my book aside and flipped onto my back—staring up into the blue blue sky, as blue as only North Carolina's skies in October can be—and let my mind wander. The sky was fringed by a myriad of fall leaves: oranges and yellows and reds and browns. A few stray fluffs of clouds hung suspended in the blueness. Looking up, it struck me: the earth is a quilt that God is continually making. A great big quilt. A living quilt. Kind of gives new meaning to the traditional quilt pattern "Around the World"—one central "square" with concentric circles coming out to the border. I, lying on a quilt in the middle of a grassy hill, at the center, the world falling around me in ever-expanding circles—my hopes, dreams, family, friends, school, work, community, nation, world. I am *part* of a quilt!

V

My mom is a quilter by nature—the fabric comes together in a fluid, graceful obedience as her fingers pull here, push there. I . . . I am a writer. With words I am comfortable and at home. In front of a sewing machine I am frustrated, confused. I get hives. Yet *four* quilts I must sew in order to graduate from my home schooling and continue my journey into word-craft. In hindsight—four months after receiving my high school diploma—I can see what my mom was trying to teach me. It wasn't just a home-ec assignment or an easy way to fill my hope chest. The main point was not color-matching or sewing straight seams. No, it was something deeper than that. Quilts are more than just pretty blankets that Great-Grandma Annie made 50 years ago for *her* hope chest that we keep on stuffy spare-room beds. Quilts are a testimony of family history, tradition, heritage, memories; to be passed from generation to generation to generation. Telling the world a story, the story of Living and Laughing and Loving.

VI

Once more Momma and I were making a quilt for my granddaddy—this time a healing quilt. He had been diagnosed with CML leukemia and was in need of the covering of Scriptures. I spent many an hour in prayer and thought as I sat hand-embroidering the healing verses into pure, white squares. How different from the last quilt we'd made for him. That was a joyful occasion, this one was more solemn. Each careful, perfect stitch I put into the fabric—thread of purple and blue and red and green—was accompanied by a prayer. "He's my granddaddy, God, I need him," my girlheart whispered. "He can't die yet, he has to be at my graduation, at my wedding. Oh, God!"

VII

The thread jammed and broke, *again*. Frustrated, I threw down the square, tears in my eyes, my finger hurting where I'd slipped with the pins. I muttered under my breath that there'd never be another quilt, *ever*. I got up from the kitchen table, went down the hall and flung myself down on my bed, letting the tears flow and my anger blow over. I'm a perfectionist, and sewing is not my forte—I'd wrinkled and warped the fabric trying to keep my seams nice and neat and straight, and ripped out more seams than I can count. Was there never an end to it? Were tiny stitches going to be the keepers of my life for the next forever? Was I going insane? I rolled over on my stomach, to grab my notebook and pen. I stopped—on top of my notebook, right beside my bed, was a stack of fabric waiting to be cut into teacups for my quilt squares. Remnants of my old dresses—dresses I'd loved and outgrown far too quickly—stared back at me. A snippet of one of my mom's dresses, a short stack of scraps from a quilt we'd made my grandmother. As I looked at it, memories began to tickle my mind, urging me to continue my mission. I fought against it, turning towards the window instead, thinking to avoid the issue. I looked at the quilt on my bed, tracing the uneven stitches I'd sewn. There was no escape: quilts—and quilt anatomies—were everywhere! I relented, giving in and returning to the machine and my discarded square. It wasn't as messed up as I'd thought, not nearly as bad as the one I'd destroyed yesterday. Maybe I'm learning something after all.

VIII

The December night was cold, even for south Florida, it was cold. My teeth chattered as I walked across the parking lot into the hospital—whether it was from the cold or my own nerves, I don't know. The halls were quiet and deserted—why would anyone want to be there at 1:30 in the morning

anyway? Especially on Floor Five. The room was dim and restful. Under the quilt lay the thin, weak frame of my once-strong granddaddy. The healing quilt we'd made was spread over the hospital bed, still ministering in the last hours—ministering to him though he was asleep and to me as I sat against the wall in tears. The quilt moved gently as his gasping breaths shook his body. If the quilt stopped its shakily-rhythmic rise-and-fall. . . . A few hours later, as we all gathered around the bed, the quilt did cease to rise and fall. One last sigh and this man I'd loved for so long was gone, leaving us to join our Maker and Creator above. Tears fell on the quilt that'd kept us strong, an ever-present reminder that we were not alone in our struggles. There was no more we could do. We went "home." Taking the quilt with us, but leaving him behind. The next few days between his death and the funeral, I clung to the quilts. By day I curled up in his chair wrapped in the healing quilt. Reading the verses over and over, finding comfort in the recitation of the familiar words. Running my finger along the stitching, remembering the prayers I'd cried as I sewed them. At night, upstairs in the old farmhouse, I slept under the life quilt. Each morning when I woke up, I was greeted by the cheerful colors, the memories, the "being" of the man I so badly missed. At the funeral, I had to sit on the front row—the healing quilt was draped across the closed pine box, but I couldn't read it now—tears blurred the words and fabric until it was a colored mass, like a shapeless stained-glass window. I could not have reached out and touched it. I did brush against it on my way out of the church. I bit my lip to stifle the sobs, and walked on. There was nothing for me to do now but get on with life and somehow manage to live every day and get through the first Christmas and the first birthday and the first year, and curl up in the quilts and cry.

IX

Quilting is an art form, maybe not one you see displayed in galleries internationally, although there are quilt galleries. Nevertheless, it *is* a creative form of expression, an immortal form of expression that is vastly unappreciated today. People go to the stores and buy mass-produced quilts to put on their beds, never thinking that the "Tea Leaves" patterned quilt they just bought had a heritage as long as the Mississippi. So much is lost in these spat-out quilts: where did the creation go? The painstaking care to get the colors matched and coordinated? The personality? The memories? The stories? What has happened to them? Do we really care so little for the personal and the real? How sad our world.

X

Life is a quilt. It's what the Victorians called a "Crazy Quilt"—pieces of fabric, scraps really, in all shapes and sizes and colors sewn together to form a collage, a myriad of color and thought. There is no real rhyme or reason to the placement, or there doesn't appear to be, but once the quilt is complete it is obvious that every piece is in its place for a specific reason. There are the happy times and the sad; the times of joyful laughing and heartbreaking tears; of angry words and loving hugs. Patches of color. Quilted together to form a life, a quilt, a whole system of intricately orchestrated events that shape and mold us to whom we are. We are but fabric and thread in the Hands of the master quilter God the Father. . . . and while we mess up and sometimes have to have seams ripped out and re-sewn, in the end, we're a beautiful one-of-a-kind creation.

XI

Dust floats in the air—dancing down the sunbeams. The old steamer trunk lies open, exposing its contents to my hungry eyes. Momma gently lifts out old yearbooks and school

projects, photos galore, an old doll, a beloved stuffed dog, now ragged and worn—then, the quilt. Sitting on the floor, surrounded by pieces of her past, which has become my own. This piece: this fragile remainder of a quilt: the fabric once bright and cheery now faded, threadbare: the tiny stitches, each carefully hand-sewn, coming unraveled as thread gives way to age. Hesitant and, in a strange way, awed, I brush the fabric as lightly as a May breeze kisses the early roses. Something stirs within—this quilt, created long before I was ever born, the spark that kindles a slow creeping fire of memories, stories I'd forgotten, times of intense frustration, of joy, of agony. Tracing the path of the quilting thread with one finger, I remember. . . .

KATHLEEN MARIE MCLEAN

At the Hillsborough Karate Tournament

He sat among the young yellow and orange belts. A tattered black belt with threads of black and white fraying off the edges was cinched around his waist in a marbled black gi.

At first glance, I thought his face showed the age of the rocks battered by the ocean waves with beads of sweat engulfing the crinkles and creases of his face as he smiled.

At the call of his name, the old sensei rocked up and out of his chair and waddled across the squeaky wooden planked boards of the Orange High School gymnasium floor.

And although his hip could no longer whip out a kick as quickly as it could when he was ten, the stomachs of the under-belts twittered as the black rabbit strode into the ring.

KATHLEEN MARIE MCLEAN

Aphrodite Hears Psyche

How dare you desecrate this holy shrine
With your foul and ugly mortal presence
After ripping my son's heart from his breast!
You who my son gifted with paradise;
You who my son lavished with precious jewels;
You who my son loved against my wishes;
Now crawl on your knees for my forgiveness?

Because of your untrusting, evil heart,
My angel lies crying in agony.

Your tears are like those of a crocodile.
You weep and mourn for attention and love
And kill the first soul that comes to your side.
How can you expect this prey's wise mother
To forgive your sins? He is immortal
And will bear your scars for eternity.
But you, mortal, will only walk with guilt
For a fraction of Khronos's hourglass
Until you choke on your vomit at death
And are doomed to Tartarus forever.

However, as I am a fair goddess,
I will grant you the chance to prove yourself.

Take this pile of seeds and sort them by type
Into bags for my pigeons. Not one seed
Must be misplaced or you will have failed.
If this task is not finished by nightfall,
You must forever roam this earth alone.

Should you succeed, you may speak with my son.

Ah, your eyes widen upon this mission.
Do you not wish to see your precious love?
Hurry, little ant, and begin your work,
For Apollo is crossing the noon sky.

JOSHUA RACHEL

A Night at the Blacksmith's

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

A lantern on the ceiling glowed softly.
The blacksmith entered the room;
He put on his work clothes.
He first started up the fireplace.
Dark midnight coals all burst into a furious flame.
The room grew brighter.
He went through the pieces of steel;
He chose which one to work on;
He smiled and went to work.
He picked up a pair of tongs and the piece of steel with it
And placed it into the flaming coals.
The blade grew red.
He lifted it out and placed it on the anvil.
His hammer pummeled the red-hot steel.
He put it back into the fire, then returned to the anvil.
He made the edges sharp and the blade straight,
Tossed it into water to cool down.
He took it outside, where moonlight glinted off it,
Giving it a cold, steel-blue color.
The blacksmith smiled,
Returned the blade to the rack,
Put the fire out, went to bed.
The lantern on the ceiling still softly glowed.

LATANYA WILSON

Sunlight

When I see you, I see sunlight.
For a Black man,
you are all fairness and light colors.
From the green/gray of your eyes,
to the paleness of your complexion.
Like milk, with a drop of sweet chocolate stirred in.
My thoughts are of you all too often.
The line of your solid torso,
the bend of your capable arm.
Your athletic runner's body
always did call to me.
The length of your leg flexing.
The curve of that luscious lip
is sometimes all I can see.
Those riotous curls,
touching them, smoothing them.
All of you never far from the surface,
never far from me.
But, along with your magnificence,
the memory of my pain
you taught me. Taught me
Sunlight also burns.

MEREDITH HENDRIX

On the Porch

i sit on the porch
in the almost-darkness of the day
waiting for you
in that infamous summer dress
(sans the shorts and slip).
you climb up the steps
blue jeans secret smile
and sit down next to me.
we are everywhere and nowhere,
only this time
i can caress your behind the knees
and you can kiss my neck in public.

MEREDITH HENDRIX

Over Pancakes

i love the badboy look you get in your eyes
when you murmur "i shouldn't tell you this"
and then you do anyway

your mouth swirls and out bursts your laugh,
conspiratorial and knowingly inviting
with a hint of absolute seriousness

RACHEL MCSWAIN

Needed

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

The floor is hard as it meets my knees
I run, in tears, to the one place I can find order
Where I can be alone

I collapse in the scratchy-soft hay
The sweet dust is comfortable and familiar
Alfalfa blossoms tickly my bare shoulders

The radio plays Aerosmith in the background,
Combines with the steady munching of the horses
Almost enough to clear my mind

It seems like every day I end up here,
Cradled in the comforting hay,
Where the tangy-sweet smell of horse feed
Meets the musty scent of sandrock

Here, where I feel needed

MICHAEL MOORE MAYER

Less Than Me

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

I am what you didn't want
 A low growl
shut the world away
 so I can die inside
tick tock goes the song of nature
 yet lost am I
humming, not singing
 striving, not moving
can I help myself
 one last breath as I spiral downward
caught between a world of mine and what is
 wanting more and seeing less
 to be held is God's gift
I crave a cradling
 The attention of a disbeliever
Someone who tried, but failed
 Someone who wants to love himself
and breathe in and smile
 but can't and won't and hates himself for it
What's mine, what's yours, who can I cling to
 If I can just help myself
 If I can just help myself
Around the corner that comfort lies, and around the next,
 until a circle we form
 that starts a spiral, and goes down, down,
Down, dwindles to less than disbelieving, less than me.

PHILIP MULDER

Elegant Failure

Good historians, my brother the English major has told me, are not really historians but truly *writers* who happen to draw their subjects from the past. That was his point, but he rather enjoyed presenting it in a manner that would taunt his historian brother. Historians—or, for that matter, everyone with any thought or significant idea—would ultimately gravitate to the field of English, if only they had the ability to write well. Those who couldn't write would remain mired in their lesser subfields where they would merely *pretend* to communicate, but all substantive thoughts would be lost in garbled language and lists of footnotes. I would counter (in the spirit of the barb) that writers simply distracted their readers by masking their weak research with flowery words and metaphors. Now that I am older, perhaps wiser, and certainly a bit more generous, I will concede part of his point. Good historians must be instructive and enduring writers capable of conveying the language and ideas of the past to a contemporary audience.

People in the past spoke a language not our own, even if it was English. Their ideas, words, and perspectives differ from ours, requiring the historian to translate so that old words might reach contemporary ears. Recently an internet discussion list was alive with debate over the use of the term "fugitive slave," commonly used in the nineteenth century. Several participants argued that the phrase supported the bias of the slaveholders that the essential matter described was one of lawbreaking and lost property. Those ideas are reprehensible today, and a number of discussants proposed abandoning the phrase "fugitive slave" precisely because of its ugly assumptions. Others were

concerned with this reaction; they agreed that the term violated modern sensibilities, but they insisted that it be retained in some contexts so that people would have to confront the despicable notions of slaveholders. Most agreed, however, that the term was one-sided and should not be used exclusively, and work began on choosing the most appropriate alternative that could reflect the perspectives of those seeking their liberation. All sides in the debate illustrated the issue of translation: historians faced challenging work to make the many terms of the past appropriate and meaningful for the present, a task accomplished only by the most careful and thoughtful of writers.

Historians play with words for another crucial reason, durability. We are keenly aware that people and ideas are fleeting. Only a handful of the millions of people who have walked this earth have left significant records of their lives; fewer have left legacies that lasted in any obvious form more than a generation. Most historians would admit that their own scholarly contributions will not have a direct influence on more than a generation of scholars, if that. All our ideas and interpretations will be revised, most within our lifetimes. Only a few notions will endure. The most likely survivors are those that are not only wise and perceptive, but also accessible. "Elegant failure," a professor once declared in a class I attended, was the historian's highest aspiration. He succeeded, of course, in puzzling and provoking his students, who bristled predictably at the idea of failure. We were new graduate students, all quite confident that the dissertations we planned to write would transform our fields of study. Our protests perfected his point. Our very revisions would overwrite some past historian's brilliant conclusions, he noted, and although that might place us on a pedestal for a moment, soon enough another bright graduate student would topple us with another, grander theory. Every interpretation

will ultimately be superseded as each generation reinterprets the past. At best, one historian's work will linger as a partial influence, modified and adjusted, retaining only a portion of its original impact. If the work is well written, it is more likely to be read, and it retains value as an elegant statement of one stream of interpretation. The works of the most accomplished thinkers and writers will endure.

Presentation is crucial. Now, of course, in historical work, good writing does not diminish the importance of thorough research and precise analysis. The best history will have those qualities. Still, I will concede to my brother that good historians must be good writers. To check his victory, however, I'm considering writing another essay about how non-fiction is better than fiction, or, rephrasing the thought for the sake of my brother and all English majors: how real stories are superior to made-up ones, however well told.

CHRISTINE LEE

Abuela

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

In the passenger's seat is an extraordinary prune that inhales
oxygen
And exhales tunes. The prune is married to an assassinated
Governor, is the mother of six plums, and is grandmother to
twelve. No,
Eleven. She's survived both World Wars, and several more,
all on
Her own. The prune has spots of aging freckled on her brow
(the
Spots are too elegant to be mold.) Though she speaks no
English—
She sings. *a-b-c-d-e-f-g. London Bridge is falling down,
falling down.*
She taught me how to tie my shoes. *My faaiir laaaddy.
H-i-j-k-l-m-n-o-p. lmnop. Q-r-x-z. y-t-w. abc.*
"Grandmother, do you know who I am?"
She trembles.
"There's thieves in the refrigerator!"

MARY PUCKETT

Boys of Summer

Me and Christin sat outside her BMW fillin our half bottles of Sprite up with some fine Aristocrat vodka we had suckered some poor man into gettin us from the ABC store. We always had to take the Beemer to the ball field cause there's somethin irresistible bout two cute girls in a convertible—it turned guys, especially ball players, on. We was possibly the most eligible bachelorettes in town. We had the same name, but we spelled it different. We thought that was about the cutest thing. Our mission that evening, at the fine establishment of the baseball park, was “Meet the Orioles” night.

Throughout my years in this one-horse town I grewed up in, the ball park was a central meetin place for everyone. The mainstay for me, aside from the delicious hotdogs, was, of course, boys. Ever since we was little, I would drag my friend Christin to the field. First, to stare at the batboys, then, once we got older, to dream about the players. After we finished our senior year in high school, we vowed to pick up a player and enjoy our own summer at the ball park with the boys of summer, like so many other women in Bluefield had done before us.

I begun to ramble off to Christin as she topped off her vodka-and-Sprite after downin another mouthful. “Ya know, they say our field is one of the nicest ones of the minor leagues.” She nodded at me, obviously annoyed with the state I was in. In that state, I always talked useless knowledge. But it was true. From the stands behind home plate, fans could look out over the outfield fence and see a gigantic mountain of lush green maple trees that highlights the ball hit into the air, no matter how high it's hit. In fact,

it's been declared by a many that it's impossible for a outfielder not to see a ball comin if they just look towards the mountain.

So, as I was sayin, me and Christin decided to go to the baseball field on "Meet the Orioles" night to welcome the boys into our modest little town and to score a man to take care of us for the summer. We waltzed in just a little tipsy off our vodka-and-Sprite concoctions and turned a few heads right then. Now, me and Christin was both from fairly well-known families, so we couldn't make it out like we was buzzards circlin the prey. We graciously said hi to a few folks, and made ourselves useful in any way we possibly could. We decided to wipe off the picnic tables everyone would be eatin on, just so we could bend over in our perfectly chose jeans to draw attention to ourselves.

We had decided not to be too blunt at first. After lookin round, me and Christin had our choices lined out, and some alternate ones just in case some of them were unlucky enough to be married. We decided it would be easiest to work our way into their group by helpin out some of the less fortunate. Most of the American boys had nice big cars they had bought themselves with their signin bonuses, but we saw a good opportunity when it came to the poor Dominican boys that didn't have cars or licenses. After our first picks had all left, we offered to take the foreign boys home. Since it was their first night in town, we knew they all had to stay at the same cheap, rundown hotel up on Cumberland Road that we used to rent out rooms to have parties in and then leave the mess for the maids to clean up in the mornin.

We was right, and as soon as we pulled up we was greeted by various whoops and hollers from other boys standin up on the breezeway above the parkin lot.

We decided to play it cool, so after the guys got out of the car, we acted like we was leavin. Well, as soon as Christin put the car in reverse, one of the guys yelled down

and asked us to come up and visit for a bit. We acted like we didn't want to, but the guys couldn't see that me and Christin had each other by the hands, grippin them in. Wow, was we excited!

We called up our ol ladies and said we was stayin at each other's houses for the night, givin us the whole time to gallivant around with those beautiful baseball boys.

ALEXANDRA BERRIOS

Stone

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

Cool lemon drops of yellow filter down from above,
Casting shifting patterns of light at my feet.
The crisp fall air nips at my exposed limbs
As I huddle, hugging myself tightly with trembling fingers.
Silence.

In the constant hum of traffic.

Heavy in the fall.

Elusive spider webs glisten softly in the morning sun,
Delicate spun threads.

The weaving of the fates.

A squirrel rustles high overhead, no knowledge that souls
lie underneath my stumbling feet.

Drifting clouds painted on a surface of cool dark gray.

As I balance precariously on a ledge,

A quicksand of gravel eagerly awaiting to engulf me on
either side.

A familiar name etched in stone, vines wrapped around a
pillar,

Trapping, confining for all eternity 'til the stone crumbles
And nothing is left but the remains of the past.

The cold stone beneath me shifts, taunting

Daring in its knowledge that all things must end.

Heralded by the low grinding sound of stone on stone.

HOPE CHATMAN

Ms. Jazzy Davis' Band

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

Bang!
Bang!
Play that drum, Ozzy,
Belt out a tune for us, Jess.
Can ya scat?
Scat for us, Ms. Jazzy Davis?
We can feel the ripple of the piano
Wit' your voice.
We can see the notes rising:
Be bop.
Do wop.
Seeeeeeeee—
Bop bop.
Yeah . . . we feel it;
Ms. Jazzy, we see y'all moving,
Grooving—passing the night away.
Tunes just a-rising in the midnight sky.
Don't stop.
Keep on playin'
your, tunes. . . .

TREVOR MCDONALD

Death and Self

*To my grandmother, for the guidance she
gave me, and to those who died a little
inside grieving those killed on September
11. Blessed be, noble souls.*

I am one who thinks little about death, a trait not normally found in the inquisitive human species. I do not fear my own death, nor do I truly mourn the deaths of others. Am I callous? Am I cruel? Soon, all will be clear.

Perhaps it is not completely true that I think little of death; it is more accurate to place that statement in the present, as previously I thought of death constantly. Let me explain: the deaths of others often make one feel the weight of one's own mortality

My awakening began sometime before August of 1992. I can speak in relative terms of my half-sister's birth. The mother of my stepfather fell ill and passed away before she could see her granddaughter. It saddened me greatly; we were very close. I cried for many days. Indeed, her passing fell on my like a weight, and it would continue pressing on me. Death is a stream, you see. It is flowing, relentless, and unstoppable. My cousin's father was shot outside of a bar around the same time. That had little bearing on my life, since I hardly knew him, but in the eyes of those who knew him, I saw despair. I saw in their eyes that ever-elusive question that seemed to quench the spark of hope in so many: Why? I could feel the weight growing heavier, reminding me of my own eventual passing.

During the Christmas season of 1995, my father was shot in the chest with a shotgun. He was a taxi driver, and

knew the potential for burglary. His stubbornness had been his end. I do not know what saddened me more, the fact that I had not known my father very well, and I felt guilty at the anger I once felt at him, or that fate seemed to take him away from me before I could know him. I could feel that weight begin to strangle me, suppressing my once-happy, once-pleasant nature. I began to change. No longer was I cheerful, but rather my mood began to get a darker edge around it. I no longer carried a smile upon my face, rather I displayed a scowl, defined and sharpened by sleepless hours in the dark. I struck out at the people around me, hurting their frail emotions. I tried desperately to keep alive some part of me that enjoyed life, reminding myself that I still had many coming years. The promises of the church left me empty, and I questioned the Christian religion that would allow my father to be taken so close to a time of celebration.

As time flows, so inevitably did the stream of death. It swept into its slow, powerful, endless current my great-grandmother, and then the friend of my mother's mother, a man who helped raise me. Death used a weapon called cancer to claim them, slowly, painfully. I couldn't shed a tear. I was as though I had dried up inside. I could feel sadness, but it seemed beyond me, as though I couldn't experience it anymore. And then, that all-too-familiar symbol hung on top of the church, the cross, seemed to shrug off the memories we had shared, as though those who went before us were meaningless.

I requested an audience with the minister. He was taller than I, and the black suit he wore intimidated me, as young as I was at the time.

He said, "I understand the pain you must be feeling."

"Do you?" The sarcasm was almost tangible. How can someone understand the pain without experiencing it, without drowning in the sorrow? "Do you really understand what I'm feeling? So you, too, have lost many close ones."

"God tests our faith. . . ."

"God tests? GOD TESTS?" I rose up then. "It is hard to keep faith while my family dies, regardless of how much I believe." I couldn't believe that God would take away my loved ones to test me, or my faith. It seemed that the Church used this as way of blaming troubles on lack of faith. "Hide behind your tests all you like. I won't let *your* God hurt me anymore." I walked out.

Empty words, they seemed to me. And that savior stared at me with sad eyes that once knew the joy of the love that people felt for him. That spark of light and hope had been replaced by the hypocrisy of conformity, and the evil that had been done in His name.

I knew then that I wouldn't be the same.

I wouldn't be the pariah of cruel fate, and I wouldn't admit a deity into my heart who promised blessings in exchange for a life un-lived.

The march toward death is slow indeed, but we all make it. Some seem to make it faster than others, and we grieve for them, we suffer for them. I thought that I had found my answer by separating my spirituality from influences, but that weight still crushed me. Two of my friends were added to the weight, both by the killing weapons of man. One of them had this fate forced upon him. The other used it to speed his march—was I to believe that, because he ended his own pain, he would suffer more pain? Or that they both simply ceased to exist? I felt numb and confused at the same time. I needed an answer.

I began researching various religions from my Celtic heritage. The Druids were all but wiped out by the writing of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the Witch's Hammer, and the Inquisition that followed. Europe "purified" the indigenous religions, offering them a choice: the Lord or the sword. It disgusted me, knowing the cruelty done in the name of Christianity. It was then that I learned that parts of the old

religion still existed. In the 1950's a man named Gerald Gardner brought the religion, Wicca, to the public's eye.

As I stared at the star with five points, I felt fear. I had been programmed to think of the five-pointed star as a sign of evil. But enlightenment comes not to the weak of heart; rather, it must be sought out, at any cost. So I let go of my fear and delved deeper. The pentacle is an interesting figure when properly defined, representative of the elements worshiped in ancient times, by many religions: earth, air, fire, water, and spirit. I felt its balanced power. Nothing would be held above all others. As I read through the book, I felt foolish for fearing such a symbol. Indeed, I discovered that it was a symbol of the Christian Church at one time. And I felt bathed in its truth, its light.

Wicca has two deities, a Goddess and a God. The sister and brother, the wife and husband, the mother and father. Different, but equal. This gender equality was refreshing, as the holy book of Christianity contained stories portraying females in an unequal light. What intrigued me especially was the Wiccan law, and their idea of eternal life. "And it harm none, do as ye will." The Wiccan Rede spoke to me, and I felt that this was a perfect way to live life. Those who are part of Wicca try to do as little harm as possible, which cannot be said of the majority of people around the world. In Wicca, those who die go to the Summerland, which is a sort of resting place. There they reflect on their lives. If they choose, they can be reincarnated; otherwise, they can be a spirit-guide to those left upon the Earth. There is no reward for being good or punishment for being bad; the life you lived was your reward or punishment.

And the laws of karma ensure that people get what's coming to them. Indeed, in Wicca, karma is kept throughout a person's lifetimes. Those who were wicked in a previous life have a karmic debt in another. This means that no one is

beyond redemption; everyone gets as many chances as he or she needs to make up for wrong.

Never before had I realized a concept of true redemption; all along I had believed that certain actions couldn't be forgiven, that certain people were beyond redemption. I found that, no matter how bad, anyone could make up for anything. All it took was time, and the will to make up for it. It seemed as though the concept of forgiveness, which had been lost so very long ago, was finally close enough to give hope once again.

That night, I spoke with the nurturing Goddess, my Lady. It wasn't prayer; I didn't ask anything of Her—I simply told Her what I felt. The negative energy poured out of me as I told Her how death had haunted me, how I had hated everything around me. I had been afraid to die, afraid of inexistence, or that my loved ones would be tormented. I knew that She understood. She accepted me, not for my unquestioned, blind devotion, or for what I had done or might do or will do in Her name. She accepted me for who I was, an inquisitive person who dared to question injustice. And I accepted Her, not because of any reward She promised, not because She punished those who didn't believe in Her. I accepted Her because I felt a truth in the idea that it was all right to be who we were, that it was all right to question your faith, and that it was all right to confront those who would twist pure and true words. Anything wrong that I had done or might do can be forgiven in time, if I make up for it. It was all right to be human.

It can be said that my choice of religion was to redeem those who had fallen victim to the darkness, that I sought to redeem myself and my soul for the doubts I had. Those that I loved were not the holiest of people, and the corruption of the Christian Church gave many paths to eternal torment, and very few to any sort of reward. I felt in my being that this could not be truth, that no deity would

punish humanity for "flaws" in their nature. I refused to believe that a book, which had been interpreted and reinterpreted so many times in order to control others, such as during the Crusades and the Burning Times, could still have a truth in it that hadn't been twisted or marred by the darker side of the human race. I felt the presence of the Lord and the Lady around me, and knew then that we understood one another. Their spirits chased away the darkness around me, and bathed me in a light I had never known. Death, I knew for the first time, was merely a part of life, not some reckoning or agent of darker things to come. And it would never control me again. Death is not an endless, relentless stream, nor is life a march towards it. Life is a path through a beautiful forest, with many things to see and do along the way. Death is merely a fallen log to rest on before continuing your journey.

The weight had been lifted. I smiled at Death, and it knew that I no longer feared it, that I finally understood it. I no longer feared the deaths of those around me. Yes, I will mourn them. But it is only the physical loss that saddens me, for I know that they will guide me until they wish to return to life as another. I had given my answer to my lost loved ones, and felt their happiness. They weren't lost at all. I had given my answer to the Christian savior and God, my forgiveness and understanding; I let Him know that I understood that it wasn't Him that had done so much evil, but the people who chose to distort His image. I let Him know that, even if many were unwilling to forgive the past, an idea that He based his life around, I could still forgive. I had given my answer to myself, and smiled, in spite of Death and the hold it once had on me. Perhaps if I walk by a church sometime and gaze upon a statue of the Christian savior, I will see more life, more happiness in His eyes. And, perhaps, if I look in a mirror, I will see some in mine.

ANDREA GRIFFITH

Tragic Art

The grass wavers at the mild touch of the timid breeze
as the sun awakens.

Cars speed by, as restless children laugh and draw with
sidewalk chalk.

I observe and sigh; my existence in the grand world: obscure.
With the sternest of hearts it passes me by.

But good child, Beethoven only ruled the sonata upon his
cruel deafness,

And Sylvia Plath found her poems among utter grimness.
Her children crying at her feet for their neglectful father.
With the sternest of hearts it passes me by.

Worthy art evolves from a ruthless assortment of tragic
isolation.

A confounding paradox; the most beautiful stems from pain.
I do not wish to fall victim, but hope to create great art.
With the sternest of hearts it passes me by.

ANDREA GRIFFITH

Sorrow through Music

"When I was younger and thought of myself, I never dreamed I'd become like this."

Guster's words hit a nerve,
As I begin my journey to one of the hardest times in my life.
The 75 degree weather chills;
The fall leaves remind me of my tears,
Beautiful for what they represent,
Sad in their descent.
Rockingham County sees my unraveling.

"Everybody knows it hurts to grow up. . . . So where'd the years go? All the time we had. . . ."

I cross the Virginia line,
Each mile like ten.
My mind on the obligations I left behind,
And the sorrowful greetings ahead of me.
I think of fishing so many summers ago,
When childhood made everything simple
Through innocent eyes.

"Gravedigger, when you dig my grave, could you make it shallow so that I can feel the rain?"

Dave Matthews helps me grasp the timeliness of death.
I dry my blackened tears
And join the countless cars in interstate traffic.
At peace with the current events, for now,
I realize my true savior in loneliness

as John Rutter's lyrics emerge:

*"Eternal God, we give ye thanks for music . . . in times of joy
a crown, in sorrow consolation."*

My sorrow, like my life, shall soon pass.

CHELSEA GREEN

Who He Is

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

Misfit.

Combat boots.

Six-colored mohawk.

He's a punk by any other name, jet-black, steel-toed boots
slapping against the ground. In their own wonder, they say,
"I've been there, done that."

His torn, dusty jeans hang by a string around his hips—
"Holey, Holey, Holey" written on them.

His torn black Distillers T-shirt hangs lankly.

His black leather jacket screams,

"God Save the Queen!"

The white paint chips off as he struts down the street.

A chain dangles out of the pocket.

Punk is who he is. A smile creeps across his lips.

He smiles evilly as the giggling school girls cross.

"Rock and roll," his rough voice laughs.

The bull ring hangs from his nose.

Dark blue eyes laugh in the sun. Pounds of silver

Shake on his ears. The skull

Earring dances to the beat of its drummer.

His hair, six shades of red,

A beacon in the winter morning.

Rancid.

Spikes.

Anarchy.

DEREK SHEALEY

A People's War

The war is coming
The war is coming
Change is everywhere
Emotions are breathing
 Good or bad
 Right or wrong
Troops are leaving
The war is coming
 In a greater way
Than moral bullets
 Day after day

DAWN GLASS

Torn Apart

You stare into her eyes
An innocent little child
Her hair blowing in the breeze
As she gazes at the wild

She doesn't know her daddy's gone
Her family's torn apart
All she knows is mommy cries
And has a broken heart

Daddy is chasing crazy dreams
He'll soon see that's all they are
Mommy loves her tenderly
And just dreams from afar

She hopes the child will grow
And know she loves her so
For sometimes half a family
Can make a whole

MARY E. SULT

I Miss You

I miss you when I call your name
And you are not near.

I miss you when I'm in pain
And you can't wipe my tear.

I miss you when I cry
And you are not here.

I miss you when I'm confused
And I need to hear "you're right."

I miss you when I'm scared
And you can't turn on the light.

I miss you when I go to bed
And I don't hear you say "good night."

I miss your encouragement
Good day, bad day, every day.

I miss you all year
Especially in May for Mother's Day.

I miss your love most of all
But it's all right, you went God's way.

BILL PISER

Tired of Empty

I'm sick of soul mates and dream dates
And "he is everything I want"
Followed by heartbreak
It's all so empty, a shell of the love we need.
And after those expectations fall to the ground
You see who I really am
This other side of me that you've found
A little darker than you expected

I'm tired of sunsets and picture-perfect times
Grand distractions stalling an approaching conflict
Meaningless idols fashioned in your mind
The truth isn't so pretty, but at least it's real
And after the feelings are gone
(and believe me, they will leave)
We'll flee to other pleasures to which we will cleave
. . . for awhile, at least, but they won't satisfy
I want no part of it anymore

Give me the one who knows that I am not
Her hope, her dream, her fantasy
Show me the one who understands
This darker, hidden part of me
And we will be "real" together

Lewis was right:
Love is what remains after "in love" fades away
So let's skip small talk and shallow formalities
And open up your eyes and see
Me . . . all of me

JACI CHEEK

Spaghetti

I was on my way home last night, and for a whole hour, I didn't worry. I realized this because as soon as I went inside my home, I saw Mom standing in the kitchen, and heard the TV on upstairs. The only time the TV is on upstairs at six pm is when they are mad at each other, and then they both resort to a completely different floor of the house. So, suddenly, my peacefulness disappeared.

So, I walked into the kitchen and watched my mom try to be calm. This time I decided to be on her side of the argument. What Dad did was wrong. He always yells at her about dumb stuff. Her choices, her opinions, and the fact that she doesn't want to listen to his stories about women wanting him to do favors for them at work. Yesterday he had to fix a desk chair. She's heard this story before, but this time something just really got to her about the whole situation. I don't blame her. I know he doesn't mean anything by it, but he really should have thought about what he was saying. He fusses at me a lot, too. It seems like I'm never right. I'll cry a little, say I'm moving away the first chance I get, then the next day I've completely forgotten about it. Although in the back of my mind I don't think I'll very forgive him for being so hard on me and my momma.

So, here we are. A completely set table. Three-piece settings: mine, Mom's, and Dad's. She's made a big meal of spaghetti. I know that whenever she is mad at Dad, she makes my favorite meal. So, in exchange of her using my room, sleeping in my bed with me at night, and for leeching onto me at night causing me to get no homework done, I get spaghetti. I am thankful, though.

We know that Dad won't come down to eat. He'll probably come down later, throw a few cans around, break some glass dishes that I'll have to clean up, and go back upstairs. And later he does. So, after all of this, I play stupid and go upstairs and tell him supper is ready. No answer. No surprise.

I'm sitting at supper pretending that this is the best spaghetti in the world, and thinking about what I always think about when they fight. I remember in kindergarten when I was getting my very first school picture made. I had circles under my eyes from crying all night long. Mom and Dad had been up arguing, and I had been up sobbing. I wore a pink button-up sweater, and Mom had put a pink stringy bow in my hair. It had light pink hearts dangling from the end of the ribbon. The photographer from Lifetouch Studios told me to say "boys." I wouldn't say it. So my kindergarten picture was taken of me frowning. I wonder if he knew that kindergarteners do not know that they are supposed to be in love with boys at that age. No wonder there are so many teen pregnancies.

I went to bed that night, with Mom wearing a pair of my pajamas. I divided the bed in half, one side with five blankets, and her side with only a sheet. She says I make her too uncomfortable with all of those blankets. I told her it felt like we were having a slumber party. She laughed only slightly, but she smiled a great big smile.

COURTNEY ABRAMS

Passion

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

Poinsettias pop!
And burst; their flames mingling,
They bleed and spill over one another,
Soaking the room in their unbridled crimson,
Their excited chartreuse centers
Held captive
But untouched.

PAULA HARTNESS



JACI CHEEK

A Walk in the Woods

*HONORABLE MENTION, High Point
University Fiction, Phoenix Literary
Festival 2003*

Golden flares of autumn leaves trailed past the sides of his cracked leather cowboy boots, outlining a shuffle of short steps through the woods. He had greased his only pair of boots meticulously every day, yet it had slowly come to mind that the leather conditioner wasn't going to patch the deep tear he underwent with every passing memory of a life he once lived with a woman that he can still see in every glance he will ever take. As a stalking reminder of her, he puts detailed effort into things, not because he wants to, but because before she died he had never taken the time.

The last he had seen of this place, just six days ago, the ground had been covered by cheap Indonesian silk flowers, mostly decorated in shades of brown and gold. All of the flowers were now tossed erratically together, resting down by the rusted gate, near the north side of the hill. His devotion to the grave came in the form of a yellow type of flower, spiked near the end with bursts of red and gold, a standout among the manufactured designs. His flower was looming near death within a few days, he knew, but there would be a replacement in a week, a personal pick from some of the loneliest flowers that he would pass by during his walk in the woods.

Without bothering to uncover the site, he bent over at his waist and laid down his own share to the growing

collection of abandoned flowers, a thought which he detested, yet did so routinely.

A murmur of polite words, bordered by other thoughts that were never spoken, and he solemnly walked away. As he followed the same path home, he picked up a flower, similar to the one he left on her grave. He held it as a reminder of the walk he took through the woods every week of his life, moreso in thought than in body. They took quiet walks together every chance he had gotten, and now in some ways, he likes to suppose that they still do.

Crossing outside the rusted metal gate on the northern side of the hill, he clumped heavily through the golden embellishment of the season, feeling the soft wind brush the back of his graying hair.

ERIN HARDY

Perspective

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

Saltwater shoves against sand
and reflections are lost in it.
Overcast skies blanket the dunes,
ignorant of the fact that destruction
is growling on the horizon.
Wind troubles seabirds,
furrows the brows of the locals,
makes the palms restless.
Warnings clash behind plywood,
and the menace exhales.

MEAGHAN LEONARD

Freedom Rings

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

Now the Captain called me to his bed
He fumbled for my hand
"Take these silver bars," he said
"I'm giving you command."
"Command of what, there's no one here
There's only you and me—
All the rest are dead or in retreat
Or with the enemy."
"Complain, complain, that's all you've done
Ever since we lost
If it's not the Crucifixion
Then it's the Holocaust."
"May Christ have mercy on your soul
For making such a joke
Amid these hearts that burn like coal
And flesh that rose like smoke."

"I know that you've suffered, lad
But suffer this awhile:
Whatever makes a soldier sad
Makes a killer smile."
"I'm leaving, Captain, I must go
There's blood upon your hand
But tell me, Captain, if you know
Of a decent place to stand."

PAMELA HUBBARD

Angels

"Mrs. Hubbard, you are a goofball!"

"I know, Nicholas, that's the way God made me."

This is a special conversation between Nicholas, a student who attends the school where I work, and me. He thinks I am crazy. I confirm his thoughts on a daily basis. Nicholas and I share a very special relationship.

Nicholas is just one of the reasons this year has been a great experience for me. My role as a teacher assistant has changed dramatically. Nicholas and Natalie are two special-needs children, two little angels God sent for me to help.

Nicholas is a dimple-faced little boy who has been paralyzed since he was three. He came to us in the middle of the first nine weeks. His family had moved here from Missouri. His father was a farmer there. He was riding Nicholas on a huge farm tractor, when Nicholas slipped off and his legs were run over. From that day forward, Nicholas has been paralyzed from the waist down.

He is a trooper, doing a self-catheterization for the last three years. Someone has to assist him with this process once every day. Because the teacher assistant in his classroom couldn't help him, and I am in the classroom next to his, I volunteered. This task has been the most rewarding of my career.

I have always been blessed with a keen sense of humor which I used to break the ice with Nicholas. I am sure it is very humiliating for a young boy to have to catheterize himself in front of a stranger, and I was a little nervous myself when we first started, so I began to talk to him and make him laugh.

When we are in the bathroom doing his procedure, we clown around quite a bit. I feel this helps ease the tension. If the principal knew what went on in there, she would probably fire me! After we wash our hands, we use the paper like a basketball and aim for the trash can. The other day he taught me how to squeeze my surgical gloves to make "tooting" noises. Then I showed him how to hula.

I make Nicholas laugh as much as I possibly can. He told me the other day that if I were his mother, he would laugh the rest of his life. We both enjoy our time together and we are no longer apprehensive about catheterization.

We talk about everything. He even opened up and told me the heart-breaking story of his accident and paralysis. I just listened to him talk, but I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes. Then he looked up at me with his big brown eyes and said, "Mrs. Hubbard, I love my daddy, and it was an accident." All I could muster up to say was, "I know, Nicholas, and I am glad you love your daddy."

We even developed our own special language code. We came up with words only he and I understand. For instance, if we feel frustration, we say, "Fudge brownies!" For happiness, we say, "Chickenmabobbers"—silly words, but it makes him feel special. The other day he told me if he had to leave our school it would be like saying "fudge brownies" forever.

Now that Nicholas has come into my life, I've acquired some new skills; I have been trained how to assist in the catheterization process, how to drive a handicap bus, how to use the lift on the bus, and how to secure his wheelchair after we are in the bus. I learned how to operate the motorized bed that the county installed in the bathroom.

Helping this child has helped me to grow beyond my wildest dreams. I would not trade this experience for anything. To see his daily struggle with the simple things you and I take for granted is humbling to say the least. To

think I have had the privilege to make a difference in the life of this child is truly an honor. I believe God places people in our lives for a reason; Nicholas keeps me grounded to the things in life that are truly meaningful. The world could use more people like him.

Blonde, blue-eyed Natalie has cerebral palsy, but only on her right side. Every day I work with her right arm and wrist for a few minutes and then put a wrist brace on. If I get busy and forget, Natalie taps me on the shoulder and hands me the brace. Her speech is broken and she can't talk very loudly, but she will hand me that brace and smile really big. She doesn't have to say much; her smile says it all.

I have to help Natalie with several things throughout the day. She can't carry her lunch tray, especially if it is the disposable kind. She has trouble opening milk cartons and silverware packets. Her right arm is severely impaired. She holds it close to her chest most of the time.

Walking has proven to be quite difficult at times. Several times she has fallen getting off the bus. They always bring her to me and I clean up her scrapes, and love on her until she feels better. She falls out of her chair on occasion, and just yesterday she tripped over her right foot and fell in the hallway.

Again, my sense of humor comes in handy. I always make her laugh and she forgets about the embarrassment of falling. Bumps and bruises do not hurt nearly as much when someone who cares about you is there to ease the pain. She will put her arms around me and stammer the best she can, "I love you, Mrs. Hubbard." I always say, "I love you, too."

I know these children feel alienated by their disabilities. I have watched Nicholas on the playground, and I know he wishes he could run and play like the other children. Natalie tries to run, but it always ends up badly for her. It hurts my heart to see their struggles.

The other children have been great with both of them. They are helpful to them and they never make fun of them. They are concerned with Natalie when she falls and they always help her if she needs it during the day. Some of the boys in Nicholas' class love to push him around the playground. I am sure they think it is neat to be able to ride everywhere you go. That is the beauty of their age. First graders have a very untainted view of life.

My role as an educator has almost turned into the role of nurse. Although these children are challenged physically, they still deserve the opportunity for an education. State law now mandates that these children be served in a regular classroom setting. They may be physically handicapped, but they are not learning-disabled.

At first, the thought of all this added work was quite overwhelming, but now that I have had the chance to experience this challenge first hand, I have found it extremely rewarding.

This year has changed my life. These two little angels have opened my eyes to the needs of special kids.

Most people will never have the opportunity to have such experiences, and I feel sorry for them. I feel sorry for the teacher assistant in Natalie's classroom; she missed out on a remarkable chance to improve a child's life.

If you are one of the people with the ability to make a difference in another's life, please accept the opportunity. It might require stepping out on a limb like I did. I wasn't very sure about what I was getting myself into when I volunteered to help Nicholas, but it has been a blessing, not at all a curse. One of life's greatest rewards is helping others; most of the time, the one who gives is the one who receives the most.

Nicholas and Natalie have helped me more I could possibly help them. They have shown me that being in a wheelchair and having leg braces doesn't have to be crippling. They have incredible zeal for life, they thirst for

every possible bit of life. They make me ashamed of the times I take life for granted. I hope in some small way I have made a difference in their lives, because they have made a huge difference in mine.

NORA ANDERSON

Bibliophile

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

Pardon me, sir, I'm looking for a book to buy,
And I hope you can help me, or at least try.
What kind of book am I looking for?
Well, I guess a quaint and curious novel of old forgotten lore.
I want it to have about 347 pages
With some sort of story that stands the test of ages.
A book with princes and kings and an evil duke.
But it cannot have a character by the name of Luke.
(Luke? He's my ex-boyfriend who dumped me last June.)
Oh! And at night there has to be a silvery full moon!
There has to be a few pairs of star-crossed lovers
And a Gothic mural that spans both covers.
I want a book that is set in Edwardian Old Bay
Yet feels as though it could have been written today.
It has to show that the nadir of human declination is low,
But it can't be too deep because, uh, I'm kinda slow.
And I want adventure and action and pirates and such!
But no violence. For me, blood and gore is a bit much.
The ending has to be happy, I'll have it no other way
Because I throw books with unhappy endings away.
So, that's the gist of the book I want to read
And if you show me where I can find it, I'll follow your lead.

Pardon? You don't have such a book on your shelf?
Well, fine then, sir! I'll go home and write it myself!

GENA SMITH

I Follow You

The cold metal chains
Fall heavy upon the stone floor
Every thought increases their weight
The sights my eyes behold
Curse me even more
When all hope has been drained
From my lifeless body
When all that goes through my carnal mind
Are memories that nail me to my past
Mistakes and anguish are all I see
If I can really see at all
The door to my chamber opens
I expect another beating
More devilish torture from the enemy
But with all the energy I have
I awaken from my unconscious state
My eyes squint and then open widely
My bruised ribs no longer hurt
I can breathe again
You run in and grab me by my soiled hands
All the guilt disappears
As you take my hands in yours
My chains crash to the distant ground
You tell me "It's time to go"
And I take up my cross and follow You.

GENA SMITH

That Night at Eight

Eight was the hour by which he came
Thousands were the thoughts I had for him
A bundle of twelve reds he gave to me
Ten petals on each caressed my skin
Such beauty by here be told
The blossoming love bloomed fully for two
Where mortals live forever and sin is sold
The next morn we found land six feet deep
The sun arose, and so we too by eleven
Soaked in remembrance of love's embrace
That night at eight began my heaven

GENA SMITH

Isaac

His name is Isaac. Well, that's what I call him. I've never really met him, but I dream about him. Maybe I should say he is *my* Isaac.

I have read the story of Abraham and Isaac over and over again; that is why I call him Isaac.

And he said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one which I shall tell you." I read these words at church, at home, and whenever I see him.

My mom tells me all the good things I need to do in a day: homework, chores, and church. She reminds me every day. Constantly.

Homework gets old, chores are boring, but I don't mind going to church because he is there with his family.

My mom and I sit up in the back corner, talking to no one but Jesus. He sits up close to the front, and from our worn-down pew I see Isaac sitting tall, in an unnatural posture. Good posture. He sits proud, like someone in a Victorian portrait. His clean-cut, dark hair and khaki pants are similar to every other "man of God" in the church. I see him sing and lift his hands and fill the offering plate faithfully with his crisp twenty-dollar bills.

"How was your week?" he regularly asks those around him. Each replies the classic "Good, good, how was yours?" He replies, "Filled with the Father's grace, learning to fear God."

All the congregation knows him, and pretends to like him, but I hear what they say behind his back: "He thinks he's so spiritual." "Why does he always have to say that?"

He lets his children sit in his lap during the sermons, usually it's his blonde daughter, who I'd say is about seven. She often falls asleep on his lap and he strokes her fine hair as softly as his coarse hands will let him.

I dream of someone stroking my hair. My mom is too busy to do things like that. She works two jobs so I have learned not to expect it. She does hold my hand, but only when she's in a rush somewhere, like she's pulling me to go the pace she needs to go. We never walk slow together. Sometimes at night, since we sleep in the same bed, I'll comb my hands through her curly brown hair. I always hope she will feel it and return the favor. But for all fourteen years of my life, she has yet to do so. I doubt she feels it anyhow; she's too tired at night to feel anything. She's too tired at all to feel things.

"Feelings are the devil," she says. I don't believe her, and she knows it. I think that's why she repeats it to try to drill it in my head. But all that drilling only makes me disagree even more.

At church the pace slows down. Maybe not for my mom, but for me. I live another life at church. I'm Isaac's daughter there. I've got blonde hair and a pink bow that matches my pink dress and black-and-white saddle shoes. I hold my dad's hand during the whole service and when we leisurely walk out to our car. Or I jump on him for a piggyback ride. I pretend I am loved by an amazing father. At church, I have a loving mother, an older brother and sister. I don't go to church to worship God, I do that stuff outside of church. I go to dream about life with Isaac. Life with a father.

My mom never says why my dad left. I don't know his name. But the way my mom talks about him, I don't want to know. "Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac because God's blessing became more important than God," said the preacher one Sunday. I remember his words interrupting my

coveted daydreaming. I didn't know it would be the last time I'd get to daydream like that.

I know this passage all too well, and therefore I justify ignoring the preacher. I read my Bible at the library, a lot.

Since my mom works so much, I go to the library after school to do my homework and read. I don't always do my homework, though, and that's why she reminds me every day how "good" it is to do it. Whatever. I like reading at the library. My favorite spot is in the corner by a window that overlooks a field with a few large trees here and there, but mostly long grass that blows with the slightest whisper of wind. That is the back side of the library. I'm sure soon they will dig up the trees, bring in the bulldozer and construct a Food Lion shopping center. Because, Lord knows, we need more of those. If that seat is taken, I have to settle for one on the other side of the library where the windows face the parking lot. I don't prefer looking out at the Honda Civics and Ford Rangers, but at least there's a window.

I see other fathers at the library, and that's part of the reason I never do my homework. I'd rather watch people. None of the fathers I see in the library are as gentle and compassionate with their children as Isaac. Most of the yell or tell their kids to hurry up, like my mom does with me. Every so often, I'll see a father give his kid a shoulder ride into the library from the parking lot. And sometimes, I'll see one sit down and read with his kids. But not often.

The Sunday following the sermon on Abraham, Isaac and his family weren't there. My mom leaned over and, as I inhaled a whiff of her overbearing musty perfume (which she wore only to church), she said, "They must have moved."

"Who?" I had no idea she noticed me watch him.

"That man and his family."

It hurt to hear those words. Why would he have moved? Why would he leave a church he'd been attending

for at least five years? Did someone treat him wrong? Did someone say he was too spiritual? Did his "Filled with the Father's grace, learning to fear God" motto just make someone snap and tell him to leave?

The next three Sundays I actually had to listen to the preacher. But it wasn't too bad. I was frustrated with God because Isaac was no longer there, and that frustration led me to full concentration on what the preacher had to say. I wanted to fight God with His own words. I wanted an explanation, and I wanted to find out his reasons for taking away my joy. So I listened attentively. I read even more. And my mom yelled even more. The C- on my math test, and the D in history didn't please her. But I didn't care. I wanted answers, and there weren't coming from algebraic equations.

I was in the library reading after school one day. I got lucky. My favorite was open. I plopped into the big gray chair where I could pull my knees up to my chest, kick my worn Wal-mart flip flops off and wrap my arms around my legs while holding the Bible. Or I could sit Indian style, because the chair was wide enough. To the right were my window and my field.

While reading, I saw the little seven-year-old running through the shelves with her blonde curls bouncing up and down. When her pink bow fell out, I jumped out of my seat, grabbed the bow, and chased her around the shelves. She started giggling. Finally I caught up with her and she began tickling me. I couldn't stop laughing, and began to tickle her back. Those around us at first said "hush" and "shut up" but then they quickly hid their smiles, sticking their noses in their books.

Isaac, upon hearing his daughter's laughter, came to where we were. His son and older daughter followed him. They found their blonde-headed treasure with her delicate arms around my neck. Isaac told her to let go.

"No, it's okay," I said, standing up.

"No one has ever made her laugh like that. What's your name?" said Isaac.

"Grace."

"I'm Mr. Carrigan, and these are my daughters Rachel and Anna. Rachel's twelve and Anna's six."

Behind Mr. Carrigan stood a beautiful dark-haired, dark-eyed boy about my age. Long eyelashes. Curved full lips. Broad shoulders. Skinny, but not sickening. Athletic legs and skater shoes. Clean and pressed green polo and khaki uniform pants. I'd never seen him up close. Even Mr. Carrigan dimmed in comparison.

"And this," said Mr. Carrigan, "is Isaac."

"Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me.

"For now I know that you fear God. . . ."

I didn't realize that I was quoting the scripture out loud.

"That's my favorite story," said Isaac.

His name is Isaac. We've met, and meet again and again in the library at least once a week. I don't have to daydream anymore.

ASHLEY JOVAN CREEK

Tenses

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

She is alone, but that's the way she likes it
She prefers shadow to light
Detests day
Bathes in night
She is lost between sunrise and sunset
At dusk he appears in dimly lit cafes
Reading poetry that seduces the mind
Leaves people begging for more
She is addiction
With her innocence wrapped around streetlights
Or hiding around moonlit strolls
She is. . . .
That's just it
She is
And the world wants to capture her so she can teach them
how to be
She is all present and future tenses
And they need her to help them flee the past

KEVIN CIMINO

Second Communion

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

The usher at the end of the pew signals us to stand.
As I stand, the creak of the pew resonates, my eyes catch
Saintly stained window collages adorned
With bleeding hearts and gleaming halos.

(Hosanna in the Highest)

My loafers click down the tiled aisle.
I look up the line to Father Mark,
A bearded, gold embossed cloud.

(Grant us Peace)

My dad stands with cupped hands and shoulders back,
I mimic his readiness while I follow the priest's hand.

(The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)

My turn! Mouth open, ready to accept.

(The Body of Christ is broken for you)

A circular wafer of cardboard.

(Thanks be to God)

I must wash down this wood pulp Eucharist,
So I walk to the chalice bearer.

My lips meet the rim, the scent twinges my sinuses
As I drink after coughers.

(The Blood of Christ is shed for you)

Bitter Blood!

(Thanks be to God)

Munching coagulated flesh, my father bumps me
"Don't chew."

(Oh Merciful Father)

After genuflecting, I slide back down the pew,
Pull out the kneeler next to my mother.
Her pious smirk,
My sour face.

(Amen)

JOSEPH WAALKES

How to Find a Monkey's Secret Watering Hole

Ever been lost in the wilderness without any water? Then pay close attention. This may save your life.

First, you must find a monkey, which goes pretty much without saying.

If no monkey is in sight, look in places where monkeys like to hang out, such as up in trees. To gain its trust, offer it something like a banana, but any food item will do, maybe a burrito or some Chef Boyardee.

If no food is available, try to be one with the monkey. Swallow your pride, get on all fours, and speak to him; show that you understand him as much as he understands you. These steps should easily make the monkey warm up to you. That's when you grab him. Don't abuse the monkey's new-found trust, though. Be gentle. Be smooth, suave and sophisticated.

As soon as you have the monkey in your arms, tie him to the nearest tree where he can relax. Again, be firm, but not rough. If he gets sassy, tell him you need his help. Give your primate pal a bite to eat. Offer a monkey's favorite treats, salt rock. He will find it irresistible, and will munch it all, regardless of how hungry he is. Make sure to give him the largest salt rock you have—you want to make him very thirsty. He must eat all the rock before you untie him. He must be parched and ready for a big drink!

By the time the monkey has consumed the rock, you will both no doubt be eager to pay a visit to his secret watering hole. Don't make the little guy suffer any more than necessary. Untie him, but be ready to run, because, take it from me, once he is free, he will go straight for his watering hole traveling at full speed.

Being a monkey, he will surely have a secret cave or secluded spring which he frequents, the kind of cave or spring that only Boy Scouts or Navy Seals would have the survival skills to find on their own.

When you arrive at the water source, don't be too hasty to drink. While it's understandable that you may have run miles to get there, you mustn't get in the monkey's way when he's drinking. After all, it is the monkey's secret watering hole. Be courteous and wait your turn. When the monkey is finished, it's your turn.

Drink deep from the refreshing spring.

Enjoy!

ERIN PELLARIN

We Used to Climb

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

You asked me the other day,
Doubled over in pain—
If I remembered how, when young we used to climb
The tallest tree in your front yard,
Picking the toughest routes
To get to the top,
Reaching branches with just
Our fingertips and relying on
A jump to secure ourselves. . . .

I nodded then,
As I remembered.

You asked me, your hands trembling—
If I remembered how the breeze felt in our hair,
Tearing through messy bowl cuts,
Or how the bark felt against
Our smooth palms,
Stinging as we ascended. . . .

I nodded,
My mind on the highest branch.

You asked me, clutching my hand—
If I remembered how good, how free it felt,
Above everything,

Just looking down,
And if I remembered
Our belief that if we happened to
Fall, we would fly. . . .

I nodded. . . .
Then, seeing the tears in your eyes,
Led you to that old tree—
And grabbing your hand
I taught you
We could still climb.

ANGEL ASHTON

Helen Jay

I've immersed myself
in your thick honeyed memoirs
to salve, make sweet
bitter rigid exile.

Illusions rot
infected hearts.

ANGEL ASHTON

Nation

Toward snowing darkness,
freezing wind, icy road:
echoes of unborn republics,
the nation my love for you
would have founded
had you loved me back,
the nation my eggs
would have established.

IRIS TALEBI

No Point at All?

I kinda know what life is like
I guess it's like a movie
Aren't movies made from real life
Or are they all fake?
Maybe everything is fake
Why can't it be what I want?
Why does everything need to be hidden?
Is there any use for conflict?
It's just a conflict with no solution
Just pain without happiness

How can we be happy when we care too much
About how much someone has?
I admit, I do that
How can you trust someone
When you can't even trust yourself?

If we weren't so scared of others
Would they be scared of us?
I just see people who are panic-stricken

No use in anger, in vulnerability, in sadness
No use conjuring up these insecurities

If we can't find solutions to these wars
Why don't we just forget them?
There's no point in all this ignorant conflict
No point at all

MARION HODGE

On the Faultline

It shakes you from your solid sleep,
drives you shaking to the deep
crevice widening on this world.

To search laterally you can stand
steadily enough—any armed band
can aim well enough to wound—

but to peer into the growing depths,
to reach the sheer crumbling edge,
you have to get down and crawl.

It shakes you from your solid sleep.
It forces you to crouch and creep
if you are going to see at all

the separating Powers below,
Demons, Titans, or dim Ratios,
and learn which weapon to discharge.

In one hand you hold a ticking bomb,
in one an offering of geraniums.
If the faint ones, though—what discard

or save? The Cavalier at your side
demand of you loud sacrifice
as their half-span of paradise.

JEREMY THOMAS LEMASTER

My Sick Rose

I have attained Love
its ideal phase of perfection,
but perilous perfection,
for in constant reflection
I fear treason.

Plagues seem endless,
boundless, infinite,
my rose sickening,
cut by its own thorns,
stained by its own blood.

ALEX SHEALEY

Paint Unused

*HONORABLE MENTION, High School
Poetry, Phoenix Literary Festival 2003*

I remember watching the fingers trace
over the cloth
expertly as you would imagine
nuns crossing themselves to Mary.
And quiet
as his brush sinks into the paint
like black consuming stars into suction
twisting, turning. Making patterns into
constellations.

I remember asking him to stay
the night and watch—
just observe something,
anything with me
that could be kept
under his tracing because mirrors
would forget with time—
that turns things old—me.
These constellations never change.
But people, things—wither, harden like the old
paint
left on the brush.
Lighter, into older black;
but on the cloth
time dissipates and falls
from the skin.

I remember his fingers, stroking through my
hair, the paint
on the cloth that was tight and
sealed with forgiveness
quietly, knowing
intensely that only the paint unused
is what fades,
not the tracing on the cloth
where endings
can never be escaped.

PAMELA HUBBARD

Shore Musings of a Child

Sunlight and summer breezes—
sifting sand between my toes.

Waves roll up on the shore
again and again, like echoes.

Running and jumping in the waves
that return to the place they started.

Gathering seashells, building sand castles,
stringing seaweed like tassels.

Sunset. God shared his ocean
with a lonely little girl.
She gave him her heart,
He gave her a world.

SARAH CRAVEN

The Poison Cloud

With starched white table linens
and fine china rimmed with gold, circumstances
of a night that will be my last,
albeit morbid, seem quite laughable.
Summa Cum Laude in a corset, beside her husband
as if any simple-minded woman.

Believe it is a gray day in Germany,
and across this world, when a man
makes rank at the expense of thousands.
And I laugh and will forevermore
refuse to address you Captain;
your newly bronzed star tarnished
with the blood of men in trenches.

Men raise their glasses
with fat hands and evil hearts
to toast you, a patriot;
But I see not your patriotism,
only a murderer in my husband's flesh;
only a great mind. A fool.
You, Captain, a perversion of Science.

So with claims that your choking clathrates
show more humanity than bullets and shells,
I wonder if these words provide consolation
to the boys you killed at Ypres,
or to their mothers, or merely to you.
Shrouded in the darkness of your poison cloud,
and haunted by my Science gone quite wrong,

tonight, I will join the one-thousand boys,
and, fittingly, with your army's pistol,
your dearest Clara will make one-thousand-and-one.

CONTRIBUTORS

COURTNEY ABRAMS attends Page High School. Her writing teacher is Ms. Trail.

NORA ANDERSON attends Northwest Guilford High School. Her writing teacher is Ms. Rizzuto.

ANGEL ASHTON is a Senior from Oxen Hill, Maryland. She majors in English Writing. She is on the *Campus Chronicle* staff. She won First Place for fiction in the Phoenix Literary Festival 2002.

ALEXANDRA BERRIOS attends Berkmar High School. Her writing teacher is Mr. Stroud.

ALICIA CALDWELL is a Sophomore from High Point, North Carolina. She is a History major in the Evening Degree Program.

THERESA CAMPOBASSO attends Charlotte Latin School. Her writing teacher is Mr. Harris.

HOPE CHATMAN attends Page High School. Her writing teacher is Ms. Trail.

JACI CHEEK is a Senior from Yadkinville, North Carolina. She majors in Political Science and English Writing. She is an Honors student. She is a member of Alpha Phi Sigma, Phi Sigma Alpha, and the Pre-Law Club. She writes for the *Campus Chronicle* and works as a tutor. She is a Literary League Scholar and a Presidential Fellow.

KEVIN CIMINO attends Southeast Guilford High School. His writing teacher is Mr. York.

BRIANNE COONE is a Senior from Lexington, North Carolina. She majors in English Writing. She is a staff writer for the *Campus Chronicle*.

SARAH CRAVEN is a Senior from Winston-Salem, North Carolina. She majors in both Biology and Chemistry. She is Vice-President of the Biology Club and Vice-President of the American Chemical Society Student Affiliates. She is a member of the Alpha Chi Honors Society.

ASHLEY JOVAN CREEK attends Berkmar High School. Her writing teacher is Mr. Stroud.

GENEVIEVE DUNAJ attends High Point University.

REBECCA M. FLEMING is a Freshman from Greensboro, North Carolina. She is a Presidential Scholar. She has won writing awards in Randolph County Community College competitions.

DAWN GLASS is a Junior from Mount Airy, North Carolina. She majors in International Studies.

CHELSEA GREEN attends Page High School. Her writing teacher is Ms. Trail.

ANDREA GRIFFITH, a Junior from Lewisburg, West Virginia, majors in English Writing. She sings in the Chapel Choir, writes for and edits the *Campus Chronicle*, and edits the *Honors Journal*. She won Second Place for High Point University poetry in the Phoenix Literary Festival 2002.

ERIN HARDY attends Durham School of the Arts. Her writing teacher is Ms. Mulvey.

PAULA HARTNESS is a Sophomore from Greensboro, North Carolina. An Honors student, she majors in Art and minors in Philosophy.

SYLVIA HARWOOD is a Sophomore from Bowie, Maryland. Her major is English Media. She is a Presidential Scholar and a member of Kappa Delta Sorority.

MEREDITH HENDRIX is a Junior from High Point, North Carolina. She majors in English Literature. She is a Junior Marshal.

MARION HODGE is Professor of English. He has published poems in a number of journals.

PAMELA HUBBARD is an Elementary Education major from Sophia, North Carolina. She is in the Evening Degree Program.

JONATHAN KING attends Charlotte Latin School. His writing teacher is Mr. Harris.

CHRISTINE LEE attends Charlotte Latin School. Her writing teacher is Mr. Harris.

JEREMY LEMASTER is an English Literature major from Morganton, North Carolina. He is a member of Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity and College Republicans. He serves as Attorney General on the Inter-Fraternity Council.

MEAGHAN LEONARD attends Bishop McGuinness High School. Her writing teacher is Ms. Parrone.

MICHAEL MAYER attends Durham School of the Arts. His writing teacher is Ms. Mulvey.

TREVOR MCDONALD is a Freshman at High Point University.

DAVID MCKELVEY is a Junior from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He majors in Art and Philosophy. He is on the Dean's List, and is a member of Tower Players and the Art Club.

KATHLEEN MARIE MCLEAN is a Junior and Honors student from Eldersburg, Maryland. She holds the Brown Belt in Gensei-Ryu karate. She is on the *Campus Chronicle* staff. She is an Academic Service Center Tutor and Supplemental Instructor. She is a Presidential Scholar.

RACHEL MCSWAIN attends Southeast Guilford High School. Her writing teacher is Mr. York.

EMILY MILES is a Freshman from Gladys, Virginia. Her majors are English and Education. She is a member of the Odyssey Club and Campus Crusade. She is active as an ESL tutor and works on the *Zenith* staff.

PHILIP MULDER is Assistant Professor of History. He earned his doctorate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

ERIN PELLARIN attends Page High School. Her writing teacher is Ms. Trail.

BILL PISER is a Senior from Newark, Delaware. He majors in Political Science. He is president of Campus Crusade. He

is active as a Writing Fellow and as a member of Alpha Chi Honors Fraternity. He was a Junior Marshal.

MARY PUCKETT is a Senior from Bluefield, West Virginia. She majors in History

JOSHUA RACHEL attends Page High School. His writing teacher is Ms. Trail.

ALEX SHEALEY attends Page High School. Her writing teacher is Ms. Trail.

DEREK SHEALEY is a Junior from High Point, North Carolina. He majors in English Literature. He is a member of Black Cultural Awareness. He writes for the *Campus Chronicle*.

GENA SMITH is a Junior from Harrisburg, North Carolina. Her major is English Writing. She is active in Campus Crusade and the *Campus Chronicle*.

MARY SULT is a Freshman from High Point, North Carolina. She majors in Sports Medicine. She is a Presidential Scholar. She is active in Intramural Racquetball and the Sports Medicine Club.

IRIS TALEBI is a Freshman from Fairfax, Virginia. She majors in Business Administration.

JOSEPH WAALKES is a Freshman from Raleigh, North Carolina.

ALI WASSELL is a History major from Greensboro, North Carolina. She is active in the Association of Jewish Students and the Student Activities Board.

TRACY WHITMAN is a Junior from Jamestown, North Carolina. Her major is English Writing. She is active in Public Relations for the College Republicans.

LATANYA WILSON is a Sophomore majoring in Computer Information Systems.

ALEXIS WINNING is a Junior from St. Petersburg, Florida. Her major is English Writing. She served as a Freshman Class Legislator and as Sophomore Class Vice-President. She is now Junior Class Vice-President. She works on the Food Service Committee.



AbramS Anderson Ashton
Berrios Caldwell Campobasso
Chatman Cheek CiminO
Coone Craven Creek Dunaj
Fleming GlasS Green
Griffith Hardy Hartness
Harwood HendriX Hodge
Hubbard King Lee
LeMaster Leonard Mayer
McDonald McKelvey McLean
McSwain Miles Mulder
Pellerin Piser Puckett
Rachel Shealey Smith
Sult Talebi WaalkeS
Wassell Whitman Wilson Winning

A P O G E E