

# WRITER

# VOICES

of BHC • Spring 2014



Black  
Hawk College

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## **What I Know From My Part-Time Job**

By A. E. Wilson

I have seen  
the hell of  
getting old.

Some people  
do not age  
all that great.

The mind breaks  
to remem-  
ber details.

A woman steals  
silverware  
just because.

She is old.  
Ninety four.  
Hair all white.

She says her  
boyfriend will  
come for her.

Whisk her off  
from The nur-  
sing home here.

However,  
she says she  
will not have

sex with him  
because she  
is too old.

## **Poem Riddle 1**

By Nichole Lewis

My angles stand firm,	my core is frail
I stand high with pride,	in sizes of all
From the forest I stem,	the shore as well
Your heart in my heart,	I can't fall

## Poem Riddle 2

By Nichole Lewis

A journey we'll have	Harry and K
Corner to corner	I will take you
Your daringest dreams	We'll make come true
Escape your cold world	Hop in mine
Forever like Belle	Born for my world

## Forgotten

By Carson Nichol

The bright winter sun shined brightly through the big stained glass windows. The air outside was thin and cold. The house was quiet and empty; it had been for days, or was it weeks. Elizabeth looked around at the emptiness. She felt alone and had no sense of how long she had been here or where her family was. As she walked around the house, she had a strange feeling of lightness; a feeling of floating.

Where were they; Dad, Mom, Dougie and Eloise?

Going upstairs and into her room Elizabeth looked around. Things were the same and yet different somehow. Her favorite doll still sat on the pillow on her bed. Had she made her bed this morning? She wasn't sure. She sat down on the pink roses covered coverlet and felt the softness under her hand. She loved this room and had always felt warm and safe here.

The wind whistled outside her window and she felt a shiver. Elizabeth loved to read and had been reading; stretched out on the soft blue rug just last night, at least she thought it was last night. But where was her favorite book, "Little Women"? There were other things missing too: The blue dress that she had worn for her school picture. The picture was not there either. The last thing she remembered was pizza and popcorn and laughing at the old movie that they had rented for movie night. She needed to talk to Mom.

Elizabeth hurried out her door, down the hall, and down the stairs, calling for her Mother as she went.

What was that pounding? It was the door. Elizabeth's Father was at the door and invited a well-dressed lady into the hall. She ran to her Dad and asked where he had been, but he walked past her seeming not to see her. Hearing sobbing, Elizabeth realized it was her Mom crying. What had happened; what was going on? Everyone was so sad. She crossed the room and stood in front of her parents, but they paid no attention. She could not understand why; what had she done. Doug and Eloise came into the room with a picture and gave it to Mom. Looking down, Elizabeth saw that it was the picture of her. Slowly she was starting to remember what had happened.

They were outside. She and Eloise and Dougie were climbing in the big oak tree. It was cold but they were having fun together. Mom had warned them many times that it was dangerous and the branches were not strong and icy. But they were having fun. There was a sudden loud crack. Elizabeth felt a sharp pain in her head, and saw herself laying on the ground.

Elizabeth realized her parents were planning a funeral; her funeral. She sadly realized she was a spirit, a ghost. Never again would she feel the touch of her Mother's kiss as she tucked her in at night; or her Father's smile when he dropped her off at school.

She would miss getting into trouble with Dougie and Eloise in the old tree. She hoped they would not climb up in that tree ever again.

Elizabeth felt a deep sadness as she floated back up the stairs and into her room. Soon this would only be a memory.

## **Memories of My Awesome Dad**

By Molly Roland

I recall the crackling embers  
Dancing like fireflies in the late August night  
Sipping my Aldi grape soda you'd say-  
"Hey MollyWog, why don't you throw another log on the fire?"  
And we'd sit back and eat our flame charred hot dogs off of cattail sticks  
while you lined up beer cans on the railroad tie.  
Nine o'clock would roll around

And we'd point out Mars hanging low in the sky  
That glowing orange globe creeping across the Milky Way.  
Hey, those were the days, weren't they Dad?  
We would talk for hours, sometimes till the coyotes came home.  
We'd just let our minds roam  
discussing the deep dark heavens and all the mysteries held  
beneath them.  
The colossal pyramids in ancient Egypt  
with five thousand year old batteries churning up in the sands,  
Theories on whether they were ever built by human hands,  
we never quite thought so.  
Easter Island and its giant stone heads,  
Snakes formed from hillsides, hidden from our eyes,  
and only found in Time Life books.  
Spontaneous Human Combustion would be a horrific way to die.  
UFOs in the sky, and how old Bud Hoots must have missed his  
ride,  
forever phoning home.  
That strange man sold bicycles and built fires fueled by purses  
and shoes in his gravel drive.  
We often wondered who those purses and shoes belonged to,  
and what old Bud Hoots did with the bodies...  
but we never really wanted to know.  
I recall your laughter  
After every joke you ever told.  
I recall smelling the wet grass  
mixed with ash, and the musty odor of cows in the field.  
Little did I know, that time spent with you I would want to steal  
over and over again.  
You were more than my Dad, you were my friend, and you helped  
build me.  
I recall the crackling embers...just like the sparkle in your  
eyes...maybe it was pride  
As I blasted those PBR beer cans off that old rail road tie  
With your double barrel twelve gauge that was bigger than I.  
It bruised my shoulder and laid me flat on my ass,  
And you laughed  
until you cried.

Late summer nights spent by your side.  
Sure wish we could  
Just pack up your grey Ford pickup,  
and go for one last ride.

# Captive

By Nichole Lewis

My hands grip your heart-  
shaking it  
My heart holds your will-  
breaking it  
I cover your efforts-  
diluting them  
My body is paralyzed  
to deliver you

## Jar of Memories

By Hannah Pack

She sits at her vanity rouging cheeks that were once rosy with youth  
Her eyes slide from the mirror to the jar off at the side  
Into her memory she is seduced  
In this jar does reside  
The heads of numerous roses  
Each rose given to her by her truest darling  
Her hand lowers to the table top as her mind goes  
Deep into the past, pulled by every heartstring  
Her thoughts flood with reminiscences  
Starting at the acquaintance  
And leading all the way to the end  
She lifts her hand from the table to extend  
To reach for her jar so full of history  
With fingers that move shakily

She pops the lid to smell  
The scent of being held  
The roses a reminder  
Of Lithe bodies tangled together  
One quick blur of memories brings  
A smile to her face  
Past shakes off with a few blinks  
Gone with not a trace

### **Broken**

By Bailey Swan

Under my bed I hide.  
It is my safe place  
From the storm crashing through.  
I am not frightened,  
I am strong, I tell myself.  
Pictures whirl off the wall  
Crashing to the ground.  
A perfect family  
Broken and tattered to the floor.  
Thundering yells boom below  
Followed by a screech of lightening.  
My fingers clinch my soft teddy.  
I close my eyes and say a prayer:  
"Please, make it stop."  
A final slam, the storm moves out.  
I crack my door, looking out to see  
The final damage this one did.  
My mother sits at the kitchen table,  
Weeping tears into her hands.  
I cry inside, watching her pain.  
This is not the first,  
Or the second or third.  
A new one will come,  
When? I do not know

## Everything, And Me

By Andrew Doss

I stepped out of my apartment for a smoke. Only three flights of stairs and a large security door separated me from the outside world - the world below. Once I'd made it through the obstacles I crossed the threshold, and let the heavy illusion of safety slam behind me. I then piled myself down on the edge of the step, lit a cigarette, and pulled as much from it as my lungs would allow. The sun was gone along with my obedience to the clock, and to the calendar; so I knew that it was night, but that's about as much as I knew. The temperature was tolerable so I figured it was probably nearing the end of summer. As I sat on the edge observing what I could of my surroundings through the cloud of my every exhalation; I noticed a black smear on the sidewalk. I began to internally filter all the possible explanations for it being there, and then I stopped.

"What did it matter?" I thought.

I then remembered a similar marking; the deep black smear that covered my heart. I thought of Michelle; of the last time I saw her; of the only time I saw her for what she really was. From the addiction on my lips I drug enough to cover up the vision of her, and I held it in; I held it until I felt even worse than the thoughts of her reminded me I was. My head spun, and she slipped right out of focus along with everything else. I fell back onto the step in slow-motion, releasing the smoke I was holding, and just stayed there still with my eyes wide and disconnected. The rest of my cigarette burnt out in my hand; squeezed between the index and middle - blistering them. I just kept holding on until it stopped hurting because even though it hurt me, it equally didn't.

Then I let go; I let go and pulled a loose thread from my bathrobe, and I stuck one end of it in my mouth while holding the other straight up above me. It was the perfect length. My arm was stretched out as far as it would comfortably go, and I had just enough left on each side to hold it steady between my teeth and singed fingertips. I then reached up with my other hand and began strumming it, as if it were an instrument, and I started humming a desperate melody out of the corner of my mouth. The string didn't break but my interest in it did. I pulled my lighter out

and the thread burned quick and dim. I stared at my scorched appendages; discolored and bubbling. I was happy, happy to be lying there; just lying there as if maybe an insect, only insignificant.

I was invisible and perfect, and nothing at all. Before sitting up, I stared off into space, but could only see a few nameless stars dying above me. I said to them, "I'm with you" and paused to admire the complexity of the assumed connection. Then I lifted myself from the concrete, and was standing on the sidewalk. I said my name aloud. I repeated it, and followed up by saying, "I'm not you". I looked up again and screamed, "That's me - not this". I lit another smoke, and quietly said to myself between drags, "I'm one of them. I'm one of them." I remembered the thread, and said it again, "I'm one of them". My head fell, chin to chest and my eyes followed. Then I noticed that I was standing on the black smear, and I just repeated, "I'm one of them." My smoke was nearing the end; I flicked what was left of it away and lost myself for a moment in the cloud pouring out from my mouth.

I decided it was time to go; time to climb back up into my little comfort-zone. So I stepped up nearing the door, and reached out for the handle. With the nob in hand I began to turn it, but stopped for a second. I stopped and realized that I'd forgotten my keys upstairs. It didn't matter. I slumped back onto the edge of the step, and lit up yet another cigarette. The temperature was dropping, so every breath had a cloud in it. I curled up on the step, smoking again and again, and forgetting about everything. I started singing, just a few lines, over and over. Only pausing to take a drag or two, I sang, "I am just a man/ Living lifelessly/ I am less than them/ just dying on the doorstep". My voice was piercing through the night with its haunting honesty. I just kept singing, and smoking, and doing it all over again.

Morning was well on its way, and I had only one cigarette left. My song was fleeing along with the shadows that accompanied it. I lit my last smoke, and tried my best to make it last. I just sat there and stared at the black smear on the sidewalk – trying to avoid the obvious. But it was no use; as my last bit of distraction fell to ash; thoughts of her flooded-heavy the caverns of my head. It was too much, it was all so clear and simple, but it was way too much. I thought about the embrace, about the

lingering as she went to pull away. My head was riddled with every word she'd ever said to me. Every word echoed, begging to be heard and heard and heard, but not as much as the last ones did.

She said, "I love you, but we can't ever see one other again.. Well, at least not right now. I'm going through things you wouldn't understand". Of all the things she said, she never told me when, and if "not right now" was another way of saying 'never' she could have at least told me 'goodbye'. So I just waited and waited, and learned and invented new ways to torture and to hate myself. And she never came or called or wrote or spoke to me again. So I stopped waiting, and started trying to forget. But no matter where my eyes ended up; she was always right there in it. Somehow weaved into every aspect of.. everything. I thought I'd never love again, but I fell in love; in dangerously deep-love with the idea of dying. It became clear that once I was dead so would the memory of her be.

When day struck, I walked down the block and pay-phoned the super for the spare key. After I made the call, and knew the gal was on her way I walked further down to grab a pack of smokes from the discount tobacco place, whose products were priced contrary to the joint's name. The walk back to the apartment allowed two cigarettes gone and a third started. When I got back to the building, I again curled up on the step – puffing away. I was ready for the super to arrive. I just wanted to get inside since the streets were filling up with wanderers moving in purposeful rush. I was ready to pour some rum down the chimney, and slip into the nightmares that had become preferable to being awake.

As I finished my third smoke from the new pack; I lit another with the end of it, before smashing it into the edge of the step. I just kept smoking, and then I thought about that song, and said to myself, "just dying on the doorstep" cracking half a smile at the thought. As I was sitting there further numbing out from the useless society and their way of life; I saw a yellow bird zip by - a finch or something. I thought about Michelle again, blonde and perfect like the bird and such a sweet voice too. And just as the thought was twisting the wings off of the butterflies in my stomach; the super pulled up. She stepped out of her car, and smiled while walking toward me. I flicked my cigarette out, and thanked her for

coming. She apologized for the wait, and juggled the mess on her key-ring before finding the one that would let me in.

We walked up the stairs together. She was in a short skirt – black, her legs were shooting out the end like jet-streams. She talked all the way up the stairs, and I just muted her out and stared. When we got to my door she already had the key ready. She inserted it and gave it a slow turn. I thanked her again in the narrow hall, and pushed past her to get to the opening. She turned to leave. I swung open the door to my world, and it hit me. I spun around and said, “Wait a second.” She turned around slowly and asked, “Yes.. What is it?” I told her that she reminded me of somebody. She asked, “And.. who is that?” I didn’t answer. I just vultured my neck, and cut holes through her with my eyes. She said nervously while backing down the hall; smiling scared, “I hope that’s a good thing.” Still quiet, I walked right up to her; my breath probably killing her like pollution to a flower, and I smiled, (best I could) and said, “You almost forgot to say goodbye.”

## **Wicked Voices**

By Michael Baker

Sitting in the corner  
On pins and needles  
With nothing but my idle hands to comfort me.  
The floodgates open,  
And the voices rush in.  
I panic as they take control,  
Fighting the temptations that take hold.  
I feel different, not like myself  
As I begin to lose  
All conscious sense.  
The whispers grow louder,  
wrapping themselves around my virtues,  
Suffocating them like a furtive snake.  
I can't breathe, lying awake in bed,  
Not with the wicked voices inside my head.

## **Villiantry**

By Jonathan Guyton

The brain is a villain to the heart.  
A truth teller of the logic of the real.  
Just an aspect of true feelings from a distance.  
Placed to discover all thee disguises that will hide what is faux.  
Hard to deny, but love blinds and it shields the naive idea of a fairy tale.  
What is real? Is this real? What is love? Is this love?  
The heart is a villain to the body.

## **Between: Heaven and Hell; Life on the Edge of Self-Destruction**

By Brittany Berhenke

Yesterday  
I begged for forgiveness, tears flowing freely, hands clutching my head.  
So quickly; I'm quickly growing older; and oh, how I've wished I was dead.  
I've sworn it before, I'll stay sober.  
For my friends, for my family;  
This part of my life is done, it's over.

Today  
I woke up, face pressed flat against a bathroom floor.  
But where am I, oh why! I've done this all before.  
Caught between Heaven and Hell, in a limbo that I have created -  
I am nothing more than a shell, drifting waywardly  
through a town that I don't know the name of.  
The eyes of my mother haunt my dreams and I wish  
for once, that I could climb out.  
Climb out, and climb up, to the top  
of a roof and jump off.  
Because a day without a drink  
is like a breath without air –  
I can't take it.

## The Vase

By Allen Dullin

I was fascinated with the vase,  
Depicting an endless flight of stairs,  
Round and round it circled,  
And a creature climbed them.  
Grasping with broken claws,  
Snarling with filed down fangs,  
For what it would never find,  
Yet walked against the pale background.  
So pure is seemed.

Steps leading towards a blue border,  
Which wrapped around the top,  
And an innocent creature never stopped  
Climbing.

But it developed an odd smell,  
A rotting desperate scent from inside  
An unknown occupant  
Spreading his admonition  
Traveling on the winds of change  
Like old dust, yet it was masked by a  
Sickening sweet odor,  
As if hiding from the inevitable;  
Lurking in the shadows of fate.  
It was more fascinating,  
And sad to my heart,  
When the vase was bumped from its pedestal,  
Which was decorated with a myriad  
Of flowers and painted animals.  
A sickening thud and crash sounded,  
Crying for help, but in vain.  
Its porcelain pieces subject  
To life's fragility.  
No instruments or chemicals  
Could free  
It from being bound to  
The inescapable.  
The stairs now led to nowhere.  
All the fragmented paths,

With sharp edges stood,  
Like lonely cliffs overlooking dreary lands,  
And the creature forever lost  
Stared into nothing,  
Watching all he knew  
Being thrown into oblivion.

## Homecoming

By James Reyes

"There is nothing to be afraid of," I calmly whispered to myself. I threw the tie I held onto my bed. The old thing had too many strands loose to look decent, and that was ignoring the holes that laced themselves throughout the tie. Sighing, I grabbed my other tie and began the tedious work of slightly improving my look. Its bright red color had blue blotches smeared in random spots. There was some minor tearing on the ends of this tie, but at least there were no major holes.

"I should just go without a tie," I whined. I shook my head and gave my reflection a haunting gaze. A boy of sixteen stared back at me. There was so much wear on his suit. It was actually an older tuxedo, but with how damaged the tuxedo was, the name tuxedo should not be allowed to grace it. It was then that I noticed more white splotches and patches on the suit than I had seen earlier. My body collapsed backwards onto my bed.

"I'm doomed." Hands moving to my face I practiced a few breathing exercises I had learned over the years. I wasn't actually going to have a panic attack, but the exercises made me more relaxed. There was some light in this dark tunnel. At least my tie would match Juliet's red dress. Ok, only some parts would match her dress, but that was beside the point. I needed to think of the positive I had going on. Thinking back, it is still shocking that Juliet actually said yes when I asked her to homecoming two weeks ago.

*I had been walking home from class. My dad was out who knows where with the car, and my family couldn't afford the bus fee at the beginning of the year. The bus driver took me home in the winter sometimes, but my home was always the last stop so it*

*was usually faster to walk anyways when I didn't have the car. The weather was nice that day and there was some homework I needed catching up on. So I decided that rather than go home to finish my work in a very distracting environment that I would work on it where there was peace and calm. Once I made it to the park, which happened to be along the way to my home, I made a space under the shade of the gazebo and began to look over my notes from class.*

*An hour had passed I think. I hadn't been paying much attention to the time. I got so wrapped up in my homework to the point of ignoring everything around me. It wasn't until a small chocolate lab jumped up on my lap throwing my homework everywhere that I snapped out of my homework induced coma.*

*"Down, Scrier!" Juliet yelled after him. Scrier kept licking my face while sending my homework flying everywhere. My hands found his head and gave him a few pats on the head before he bounded off of me. "I'm so sorry Ian," Juliet apologized. She gave me one of her pretty smiles and beckoned Scrier to heel while she helped me pick up my papers. "I normally can keep hold of him. He went crazy and..."*

*I looked up at her, waiting for her to finish her statement and caught her looking at me. I couldn't help but notice her blue eyes. Sure I had noticed them before, but they sure were beautiful today! We held the gaze a moment longer before she turned away with her face brightening up. My smile widened and I opened my backpack, putting my papers away for now. Homework could wait.*

*"So..." I stammered to get out, "What brings you around here?" Stupid! I screamed inside.*

*That only seemed to make her smile even brighter. "Scrier wanted a walk and I needed the exercise." The obedient Scrier barked wagging his tail in rapid beats to an unheard song. His tail dragged the unheld leash around the wooden floorboards of the gazebo.*

*"He seems well trained," I commented. Scrier eyed me with no response.*

*Juliet ran her hand through her hair. "He has his moments. What about you, why are you here?"*

*I shrugged. "Was walking home from school. Stopped for some quiet." Juliet gave me a look, but said nothing. Things got around at a school of my size. There were no secrets.*

*Juliet stood up, prompting Scrier to do the same. "How about we walk home together?" She offered. Her hand held out in offering.*

*Oh how badly I wanted to take it. I shook my head. "I live completely out of the way, I'll be ok." I looked up at the sun to avoid her eyes again. It was getting late; Dad would be home soon. "I should probably get going. Take it easy Juliet!"*

*"Same!" She bounded off the other direction with Scrier in tow. I watched her for a minute. Maybe it was two minutes before I started walking the opposite direction.*

*I got about two feet before I said, "fuck it" to myself and ran the other direction. "JULIET!" I hollered.*

*She turned around, still holding on to that beautiful smile of hers.*

*I made it up to her, panting slightly. "Would you like to go to.."*

*"YES!" she interrupted. Juliet snaked her free arm around my side, and I held my breath. Her arm was gone too soon as she pulled out a pen and paper from the front pocket of my backpack. Jotting down some information, she handed me the finished paper. "I'll see you at class tomorrow," and she kissed me on the cheek.*

*I can still feel where her lips had pressed. I looked at the clock in the room. She was expecting me in an hour. It was about a thirty minute drive. Walking to the door, I realized that there was too much quiet in the house.*

*A door slammed shut somewhere in the house as vibrations knocked the clock off the wall. I quietly cursed. Dad was drunk again.*

*This time a panic attack did come. I practiced my breathing techniques. Not tonight I wished. Maybe Dad would go to his room and that would be the end of it. Moments passed, and nothing happened. Waiting a bit longer I relaxed. Luck was on my side. Panic attack subsiding, I opened the door to go get the car keys from wherever they had been thrown.*

*That was when the screaming commenced. Wind blowing full force into me, I forced the door shut. Ears shook with*

incoherent sounds. Heart pounded with the force of a jackhammer splitting into my skull trying to force all positive thoughts out of my body. My body trembled to the music of the rumbling dance floor as I fell onto my bed.

I tried to pace my breathing, but I was too lost in the violence of my own body to control it well. This would subside; I just needed to find comfort. I grabbed the pillow from the head of the bed and slammed it onto my face.

How long would the fight go on this time? In the darkness of the pillow I was able to regain my thought patterns. My body would still be panicking, but my mind was MINE! "Too long," I said if history was any indication. For all I knew, once they were done yelling at each other Dad would just run off with the car again.

Could something be done about this? No, Dad was just too strong for Mom to handle. She would, in the end, cave to whatever he asked and take all the blame for it. She would escape with just a bruise or two. It was best if I stayed out of it. There was nothing I could do about it.

I lay on my bed, drifting away into my thoughts. Finally my body relaxed to the tempo of the house and I regained control of myself. I went to recover the clock. The batteries had fallen out when it crashed. Who knew what the time was.

Did it matter? Homecoming was important to me. Well, Juliet was more important. Homecoming was just an outlet for that. It was possible that I would get another chance with her later. Yea, fat chance of that after stiffing her tonight. There was no way I could get a hold of her unless I drove to her house. Dad possessed the only phone in the house. I couldn't go to her place without the keys to the car. Maybe if I walked to the nearest gas station...

And then what?! I let my mind come up with the perfect excuse to not confront this. Too much time had passed I estimated. We weren't going to be doing anything tonight. I reserved myself to the bed. That's when I noticed the house had stopped singing. I opened my ears wide, and heard an ear piercing scream moments later.

ENOUGH! I thought. Homecoming was ruined for me. Juliet was no longer going to talk to me, but I would be damned if I didn't stop my Father from causing this family more pain. I bounced off of my bed and stormed down the stairs into the living

room. The scene should have shocked me. Somehow I knew to expect it.

My Father held a gun in his hand. Every family had one, but why he had it out was, well what did it matter why. The point was he held it in a threatening matter and that was all I needed. "FATHER, STOP IT!" I screamed.

I threw myself in front of my Mom, not dropping my gaze from my drunken Father. His gaze gave me one look of anger. He cocked his head back before saying, "What did you call me?"

"Father," I calmly said. There was no backing down now. It was time for this to end. "Leave mother alone and get out."

Slowly Father walked to me. I held my ground, returning his gaze eye for eye. My body screamed at me to run. He would hurt me bad. No, I told myself again. He will sense my fear. I drove all the fear from my body, as best I could at any rate. My feet still trembled slightly, but he wouldn't notice.

Father gave me one look, and pistol whipped me to the ground. I was dazed, and damn did it hurt. But I got right back up. I spat up some blood onto the ground.

"Maybe you didn't hear me," I told him. "I said leave this place. You have hurt our lives enough." I didn't see his pistol hand coming, probably because my vision was still blurry. I coughed up more blood before I stood up again. I caught my breath, and I was on the verge of tears, but keeping my voice firm repeated myself once more, "are you done with your fun, or do you need some more?" I turned my unharmed cheek towards him. More violence from me wouldn't end this.

I braced myself for impact. I closed my eyes. Could I take another hit? Footsteps falling, my Father backed away from me. "Disrespectful brat," he spat. "You all will be begging for me soon enough." With that he stormed out.

Shoulders sagging I let out a sigh. My cheeks were wet with more than just blood. I turned to face my mom and she collapsed onto my shoulder crying.

"Thank you," she wept. We stood like that for a while. My suit stained with tears, she broke from our embrace. "I'm sorry about your homecoming." She brushed off my face with a wet rag she was holding, cleaning off the dried blood. "I like your red tie."

I smiled at her. Classic Mom, trying to make the best of things. "Thanks," I told her. I looked at the clock. I was over an

hour late to pick up Juliet. "Will you be alright?" I asked her. "He won't be back." I knew this to be true. I was no longer afraid of him. He couldn't control us anymore. My mom nodded and hugged me goodbye. I went out the front door and just started to walk.

I wasn't sure where to go, so I just walked aimlessly. Eventually I found myself at the gazebo at the park I frequented. I took a seat and closed my eyes. Today was a victory. We were finally free. No more worries. I smiled a bit. Things would be more difficult without the extra income, but we would manage like we always did. That's what is important. Things get bad, but they can always get better. I realized something then: I must never forget that just a little hope goes a long way.

"You're late!" a beautiful voice said as it woke me from my light slumber. I opened my eyes, and I was dumbstruck. My eyes had never seen something more beautiful. The moonlight shined on Juliet's face perfectly illuminating her smile. Her red dress glistened in the night light refracting light this way and that. It was as if she was the light, and the moon only reflected the light shown by her. I almost thought I was dreaming, just almost.

I let out a small laugh before bounding over to her and picking her up, twirling her in my arms. That was a bad idea because I immediately fell backwards onto the ground. It did not matter. Neither one of us could stop laughing.

"I thought you ditched me," Juliet quietly said. Her hand brushed against my cheek, causing me to wince. Her hand pulled away, returning a moment later with a slower movement. My face relaxed as she rested the palm of her hand on my cheek. "I'm glad I found you here," she said.

I pulled myself off the grass and gave her my hand pulling her into my arms. I looked into her eyes. "What brings you to my gazebo?"

Juliet laughed and pointed a distance away. "Scrier wanted a walk."

I choked off another smile, barely spotting the lab laying down a distance away. His face lit up before returning to its resting place on his paws. "I'm beginning to like that dog." A thought struck me as that perfectly tamed dog lay quiet as a cat a distance away. "He seems almost too perfectly trained to just bolt away

from his master." I looked into Juliet's knowing eyes and pulled her close to me.

We shared that moment together, knowing each other's secrets. Our lips met, and we danced together in the moonlight to the tempo only our hearts could hear.

### **Old Dark Red Recliner**

By Allen Dullin

Your color is faded  
Your crimson cloth darkened  
Sitting lonely and frail  
Seating the gaunt shadows  
How hard it has to be  
Heartbreaking memories  
Those that slept in your arms  
They now can't awaken  
And yet you remain strong  
And await someone new

### **Monster**

By Jonathan Guyton

The World is in rotation.  
and WE are subject to it's changes.  
The Good.  
The Great.  
The Bold.  
The Beautiful.  
but WE are not blind to treacherous seductions.  
The Harmony of destruction is in Life's instructions.  
Bliss may be encoded.  
but IT will bypass mishap, Discover what was noted.  
The Weak.  
The Wounded.  
The Fragile.

The Frail.  
and IT will take Pride in igniting new productions.  
The Ignorance must not make deductions in Life's  
construction.  
The Body is a temple.  
and **I will Create** an example.  
The Image.  
The Intriguing.  
The Intense.  
The Invisible.  
but I will not forget pure thoughts abduction.  
The Mind will defeat the obstruction of Life's introduction.

## **Remember The Monsters**

By Brittany Berhenke

Remember, she says,  
Remember the monsters.  
The clattering voices inside of your head,  
who are watching as you're dreaming;  
screaming and shaking your wrists  
like paper sacks at the grocery store.

Remember the monsters.  
The friends who only pretend to be friends,  
and tying off all our little loose ends,  
and tossing them into the ocean;  
weighted down with regrets  
and the words left unsaid.

Remember the monsters.  
The ones we become when our worlds come undone,  
and the prisons we carry when we're on the run;

on the run from our own dirty dark secrets,  
those twisted and tattered  
like used paperback novels.

Remember, she says,  
The man who is hiding behind the monster.

### **Foam Cup Overflow**

by Andrew Doss

On the banks  
of poverty --  
I sit, and fish and wait  
for chips...  
for coins,  
and gifts...  
or... even those  
insincere compliments  
we sometimes get.  
Hooked, maybe benched  
perching patient to intercept  
just what the doctor ordered  
for lunch, or late breakfast--  
here, stationed to fend  
for anything ...  
for something,  
and, then, more of it.  
I'm looking  
for hand-outs  
and I'm only ever  
finding my own...  
dangling; hooked-open --  
wide-mouthed,  
and long-necked  
toward the streams,  
and schools of thought

rushing by, nearby me --  
so close,  
only... never close enough  
to touch...  
or to get me clean.  
Snag after snag,  
I become more  
an example of  
how elevation works...  
seated at the top  
of my lower-class.  
Reeling, thinking,  
rebellious and retreating --  
sinking in the silence  
of the hour...  
drowning at a distance  
just below... the supposed  
life-guarded tower.  
Business men,  
and women --  
people with no business  
having children.  
Auctioning off  
their offspring --  
for shares.  
Holding... holdings  
in a rock-a-buy  
posture --  
missing/  
misunderstanding  
the meaning  
of the word company.  
So, I just rake the gutters  
under night's darkened-cover  
with a whore  
for a former-self,  
and lover.  
I scrape every edge

of the abysmal free-world--  
fetching aliments  
for the wear...  
or purely for the fashion,  
of having...  
something of my own

### **Flight 307**

By Tamlyn Tinker

Needle in a hay stack  
Once aloft, only to be lost  
To sink, to drift, abducted by aliens  
Falling, dissolving to pieces  
Too miniscule for any eye to find  
Taken hostage, eaten by monsters  
Stranded on an island full of survivors  
Or none. They flew to the edge  
And off of the earth  
Out into space  
Swallowed by the universe

### **The Green**

By Hannah Pack

I walk alone in my tranquil forest  
Surrounded by green and peace  
I watch butterflies flutter past  
Hear birds trill in the tree branches above  
The sun sparkle filtering through the leaves falls on my cheeks  
Water tinkles through a brook off to the side  
This place seems to enswathe me in a loving embrace  
Enclosing me with its warm tree arms  
But the green gets tighter and more dense  
Soon I no longer can feel the sun,  
Hear the birds or brook,

Or see the leaves or butterflies  
All I see in deep green  
My previous serenity escapes me with the sweat that breaks out  
over my brow  
My pace starts to hasten  
Amongst the green I make out a dingy gray light  
I break in to a sprint as I head toward the gray  
It seems as though I fell in to an ocean of green  
The harder I push toward the gray the farther away it seems  
I thrust head first and finally reach my destination  
I fall through  
I land  
Hard  
People rush  
Around me  
They shout  
At me  
“Don’t forget”  
They scream  
I try  
To run  
No matter  
What way  
Shouting people  
They are everywhere  
I’ve forgotten  
Something important  
I can’t  
Remember, move  
I cover my ears  
and scream.  
I close my eyes  
and try to remember the green.

## Truly

By A.E. Wilson

It would be just truly  
Truly  
Truly  
Terrible  
To live in a musical.

At least for me because I truly cannot sing.  
Nor dance.  
Nor get into the spirit  
Of an impromptu performance really.

No, I would be one of the characters,  
Stuck in the background,  
While everyone else sings.  
And I would have no problem with that.  
Truly, it is the truth.

But I would be faced  
Everyday  
With people singing and dancing around me.

One second, everything is normal.  
The next someone is singing about how  
there is too much mustard on their burger at McDonalds:  
*This burger makes me sad.*  
*Too much mustard is always bad.*  
*Another taste will surely drive me mad.*  
*But if I got a refund, I would be glad...*

Or perhaps nothing quite so trivial.  
Perhaps a man exits a woman's apartment in the morning  
And he enters into song about:  
*I just had sex and told her I would call.*  
*But we both know I won't at all.*  
*She will probably start to bawl.*  
*With her self-esteem so small...*

I truly do not want to hear this as I am going to work.  
Nor see the man prance down the hallway to the elevator.

This would be  
Truly  
A hellish existence.  
Every day, waiting,  
And waiting,  
And waiting,  
For people to burst into song.

I would truly become a paranoid wreck.  
Singing could come at any time  
And I would never know when.  
Inappropriate times really  
Where you truly do not want people singing and dancing.

Like a funeral:  
*You dirty bastard, you are dead.*  
*Had a heart attack while you secretary gave you head.*  
*Just how many women while we were married did*  
*you bed?*  
*Just how many harlots' legs did you spread...*

No one truly  
Wants to hear this come from the mouth of a widow  
While she does the polka.

Or in an open heart surgery:  
*We must save this patient.*  
*We won't be complacent*  
*Till this tumor is no longer adjacent.*  
*We will bring this woman salvation...*

Reassuring truly  
That the doctor is committed,  
But not his break dancing skills while he should be  
operating.

Or in a public restroom:  
*My bowel movements take much too long.*  
*My colon used to be so strong.*  
*But now with it there is something wrong.*  
*So for now I will sing this song...*

So truly  
What you do not want to hear  
Coming from the stall next to you.

Or your boyfriend as he breaks up with you:  
*There is someone else I have met.*  
*A trim beautiful swan-necked brunette.*  
*My loins a fire she does set.*  
*But of our time together, my dear, I will not forget...*

Truly  
No sane person would want to hear this.

Because in a musical people are honest as they sing,  
Speaking their mind as the frolic about.  
Though they are honest,  
They seem like fools to me.  
Oversharing to such a vast over-extent.

I would truly much prefer not to sing.  
Nor dance.  
Nor join their merriment.  
Rather, I would  
Truly  
Wish to remain a liar.

And I can remain that way.  
For I  
Truly  
Do not live in a musical.

## **Same Road, Different Car**

By Ian M. Harris

A blank screen lay before John, as it had done many times before, too many some would say. If procrastination was an art form, then he could be considered the Rembrandt of this form. He consistently put off very important assignments until the very last possible minute. Many of these assignments required intense concentration and massive amounts of time to complete. John knew he was putting himself at an extreme disadvantage, and may have even known how to avoid these stressful and unnecessary scenarios. Still he always seemed to find himself sitting in front of a blank screen, being tortured by its vast emptiness.

He had sat at this computer screen for approximately one hour, and had yet to write a single word. Now that's not to say John hadn't done anything for the previous hour, in fact he had done many things. He browsed Craigslist for twenty minutes, searching for bentwood chairs and used musical instruments, finding out that in a town seventy five miles from here, someone was selling a rare Yamaha guitar that was manufactured for only three and a half years before it was discontinued. He doubted the seller knew what he had, as the price was extremely low at \$200. Granted, John didn't have \$200, in fact he didn't even have \$100 to his name. His boss had messed up his check and only paid him half the money he had earned. He would have made more of a fuss, but all of the employees had been stiffed on their check. The manager had assured them he would be taking care of the scenario as soon as possible. Regardless this had forced John to eat nothing but peanut butter sandwiches and pasta for a week, which no man should be forced to do. He spent the next twenty minutes looking up reviews of the new generation of games systems which had come out that week. He didn't have any money, and he didn't even own one of the previous generations of game systems, but for some reason he was still fascinated by the fanfare of these new systems. Oddly enough, no one else seemed to be excited about their initial offerings, many people stated the game systems didn't have enough good games to justify the price point.

The last twenty minutes of the hour were entirely wasted. John spent this time looking up critical writing on his favorite nineteen eighties television shows. He honestly thought looking up old articles reviewing the March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1987 episode of *ALF* was a good use of his precious and dwindling time till his deadline. For a moment John pondered if his parents would approve of such behavior if they could see him, but that moment was quickly forgotten when he read the author of the article bash *ALF*'s lasting ability as a television icon. John would have argued to this man, who surely is senile or dead at this point, that *ALF* season one does not even begin to develop the characters the way the subsequent seasons do.

Now he was back at the blank screen, contemplating what his very first sentence would be. He had heard someone say once that was the most important part of a story. If you had a lousy first sentence, why the hell would anyone read any of your other sentences? John wanted to be concise, so he decided to try to come up with the first word, as if there was a magical first word which would cause his essay to spill out of him like some sort of heavenly intervention.

He sat trying to come up with the first word for another hour. During this time he also began his venture down the rabbit hole that is the JFK assassination. One could go into intense detail concerning his experience, but does anyone honestly want to read about that? This kind of rational thinking was exactly what John loved to avoid. He was a firm believer in many other conspiracies, too many to list here for the reader.

He now realized he had wasted two hours working on this paper, with absolutely nothing to show for it. Not a single word. John was now alone in the once bustling computer lab, it was now 4:30 and the lab closed at 5:00 pm. Frantically John began to just start typing every word that came into his mind, and quickly erasing them, as none of them seemed to fulfill that high requirement he had set.

Apricot, every, now, medium, low, a, and, how, I, my, and water were all words that did not meet the mark for John. He kept trying to find this word, knowing deep down that he would never find the magical word that would solve his predicament, because he was the cause of his predicament. He never took anything in life very seriously, and that's why he had always had problems with

success, he was the master of his own fate, and he had fumbled it too many times to recall. He was a disappointment, in most facets of life; he was the poster child for the post high school, middle class, child struggle. He had no accomplishments to his name, he did nothing to help his community, and he still lived at home! Why was he doing this to himself, he used to be intelligent, he used to read books. He was always a bright child.

WHY, WHY, WHY!!!

And then it hit him, the perfect sentence for his essay, the glimmer at the end of the long dark hallway, the white knight to slay the dragon, and many other assorted over used metaphors and similes.

His first sentence was, "Anchovies are a fish my grandfather did not enjoy." Now to the attentive reader, this may seem like the dumbest first sentence you have ever read. One must trust the author of this anecdote; this was the perfect first sentence for what was to become John's Magnus Opus. And many readers of this story would have read John's masterpiece, which this narrator must note he finished in lightning fast speed, if it weren't for one nasty little detail.

As John was walking out of the building that housed the computer lab, he had nothing else on his mind besides the fact that for once in his miserable life, he was proud. He reckoned this would be the turning point of his life, the moment that later on he could say saved his life. He envisioned himself as an elderly man, with a sleeping grandchild on his knees holding onto him for warmth, while he gazed into the distance, thinking about this night and this paper, how it made him realize the exact goals he had been searching for in his long tenure at the local community college. How on the night after this, at a friend's celebratory party, he would meet the girl that would make him happier than he could ever possibly imagine.

How they would fall so madly in love, and never fall out like he had done in so many of his previous relationships. How they would live in a nice brick house and have several happy children, how his well-paying job with lots of benefits would allow them to retire out in the upper peninsula of Michigan, where he could spend the rest of his days enjoying the untouched natural world that many people had forgotten all about.

John was so focused in his daydream, that he failed to look both ways before crossing the street to his car, something he rarely did as he had this value instilled in him many, many years ago. At this very moment, a young teenager was driving a car on towards the exit of the facility. She was using her smart phone to find out what developments had occurred in the current Hollywood scandal between a reality television star and her cheating Rapper Husband.

She failed to see John crossing the street until the very last moment. She would never forget the look of absolute bliss on John's face, he never even looked towards her, he was so focused in that moment of his life, that he didn't even get a chance to be afraid of the impending collision. She struck him and he fell underneath the car, being trampled by the wheels. John didn't get a last word out of his mouth, there was no chance for a cryptic message to be spoken for no one to actually hear, as depicted in one of his favorite films, Citizen Kane. There was no Rosebud, and there was no sense of penance with the world in his mind. John never reconciled the ill feelings he had towards certain friends and family members. He never got his finances in order, or had a last will and testament. All John had when he died was an aspiration to succeed, something he had never felt before.

## **A Life Measured**

By Sarah Lawson

The tape. Outstretched and showing  
yellow skin and lines of black.  
Numbers dancing, rapidly increasing, faster and faster, until  
the end is reached and the numbers slow.  
Abruptly, the tape snaps, released by the hand that pulls  
Numbers decrease in the blink of an eye  
remembering the length of the journey  
and what is left behind.

### **Untitled**

By Sarah Lawson

Water rushes swiftly  
Among the craggy rocks  
Quickly twisting, turning  
Carving stories over time  
Walls of reds and oranges  
Rise against the sky  
Combined with heaven's  
Deepening blue

### **Untitled**

By Nathan Peterson

The words are soft, and my eyes are heavy.  
The more I listen my head becomes weary.  
When I'm asleep, my dreams are the best.  
There of the times back at home in the awesome Mid-west.  
I feel relaxed, comfortable, and calm.  
Especially when the Priest is reading in Psalms.  
I get poked in the side because everyone is quiet.  
I look around and even the Priest is silent.  
Both of my parents heads are shaking  
Because apparently I was really snoring.

### **Stargazer**

By Lauren Green

I was born on the streets, and they were where I grew up.  
The streets were a harsh place to live, and many of my brothers  
and sisters didn't survive through their first winter. I was a tough  
pup though, and I fought my way through the cold season and the  
ones that came after that.

To be honest, I was thankful for living my life on the  
streets. It might have been hard to get by, but I knew that I was

free there. I had heard far too many stories of dogs that weren't free, captured by people and taken away to places that nobody knew. Sometimes I even saw those dogs as I hid myself in the alleyways in daytime, attached to long lines that always ended in people. Every time I saw one of them I felt renewed gratitude for my situation.

There was also the sky that I was thankful for. Despite all of the unpredictability of living on the streets, the sky was a consistent thing. In the day the sun burned bright, and at night the moon watched over the city. When I was a very young pup, I had thought that even the sky would change forever. Sometimes there were black clouds poured rain and sent out bright bolts and the loudest noises I had ever heard, but that always passed in the end. At nights the moon would change its shape, first growing full and round, then shrinking into nearly nothing. That, I learned, always happened in cycles.

Imagine my surprise when one day the sky and my freedom were taken from me.

It happened late one evening when I was looking for food. I was waiting outside the back of some people-infested den, in one of my usual alleyways. Nearly every evening a person would come outside with a sack full of food and toss it into a bin. Goodness knows why the people would toss away perfectly good food, as they didn't seem to be storing it there to come back for later, but it meant a good meal for me.

That particular evening it must not have been dark enough outside, or I wasn't hiding in the shadows just right, because the person who came out of the den saw me. At first we just shared a moment of silence, staring each other down, but then the person jumped and waved their forelegs at me, giving me a shout.

"Hey! Shoo, mutt!"

He scurried back into the den, and I could hear voices inside. I waited there, frozen in spot, expecting a group of people to come back out. I was in for it now, now that they knew I was in their territory. However, moments passed with nothing happening, and I finally gathered up the courage to go to the bin of food. Just a few bites and then I'd be on my way before they could come back out and find me again.

My meal was so good though, and I ended up eating more than just a few bites. By the time I was done my belly was full to

the point of exhausting me. Thankfully nobody had come looking for me by that point, and the noises of the den had quieted down. I jumped down to the side of the bin away from where the people were, and being well hidden in the shadows there I decided to take a quick nap.

When I woke up again, there was the scent of people all around me. I hadn't noticed it in my sleep thanks to the food bin beside me, but now that I was awake I could smell it. I looked to one end of the alleyway and didn't see anything strange, then crept around the corner of the food bin to look at the other end.

Before I really knew what was happening, some sort of cold stick found my snout and wrapped a line around it. Right there in front of me were not one but two people, and the nearest person had me by one of those lines, only it was far stiffer than the ones I saw other dogs attached to. I wanted to snarl and struggle and run away, but there were two of them and one of me, and the line around my snout didn't seem to be going anywhere.

Shivering as they took me to some large shining box, I took what I thought to be my last look up at the sky. The moon was barely a cat's-claw in size, and shrinking. I figured tomorrow I wouldn't have even been able to see it, but now I didn't even know if I would ever see it again at all. The people lifted me up into their box and closed it up on me, and I was trapped inside. There was a loud growl, and then the world started to move under me, taking me far away from the life I had known.

...

The next few days, or what I thought were days, passed by in a haze. Every time I woke it only lasted for a little while, and in the moments I was awake I felt itchy and sore everywhere. I could smell other dogs around me, but with my drowsiness I didn't really get a good look at any of them.

When I finally was more aware of my surroundings, I noticed I was in some sort of small den with sides that let me see all around me, but no apparent way out. I tried digging under, but the ground was hard stone and my claws did nothing but scratch against it. What was left of my claws, anyway, as they were much shorter than I had remembered them. I couldn't see the sky from anywhere in the den either, so I had no way of telling what time of day it was, except that at some times there were far more people about, and at other times not even the other dogs made much

noise. Day and then night, I assumed, with just a different way to figure it out.

I noticed that sometimes people came in and took dogs out with them. I was afraid to think of where they were going, but the dog nearest to me assured me that it was good. He had told me they were going back out to their home, whatever that home was. The part I caught onto was 'out', so from then on I did my best to get someone to notice me.

It took time, as everyone who came in seemed the most interested in the youngest pups there. Every time somebody came in they would either leave with no dog or take one of the others with them. Often the same person, if the scent was any indication, would come back multiple times before they finally left with a dog. No one ever came to me.

Finally a young couple of people seemed to notice me, and came over to my den to peer inside. I did not growl at them, since growling dogs never got a second look, but I was wary of them. One stood outside the den, the male, and the girl crouched down. They spoke to each other in soft voices, about picking me over the others. I couldn't help a wag of my tail. Yes, they should take me. Take me out of here.

They left without me, though, and I felt horrible disappointment. Along with them went my chance at being free again, and I had to spend more time confined to this strange place. Something about the way the girl person had looked at me made me feel odd, though, like maybe that wasn't the last time I would see them.

...

I ended up being right, and before long I saw the same couple again. Just a few long rests later and they had come back, opened up my cage, and attached their own line to me. It wasn't so stiff like the last one had been, and I could move around with it. I thought about making a break for it there, but I didn't really know my way out of the place. Besides, the man held onto the line and he seemed to have a pretty strong grip. Every time I tried to go too far away, the line became stiff and I was stopped in my tracks. I would just have to wait for him to make a mistake and let go.

He never let go of the line, though, and after leading me out of the many dens place he put me into another one of the moving boxes. This one was a lot more like the small den I had

just been confined to, with a way to see out but no apparent way to get out. After it started moving I tried to peek outside, but other than determining it was the middle of the day I didn't see much. Everything moving like it was made me feel sick, so I tried not to look outside and buried my snout in my paws.

Some time later I was taken out of the box and led into yet another den. This one was a lot bigger than the last one, and didn't smell of any other dogs. There was only the scent of people and their things. The ground here was made of stone in some places and a soft and not-so-prickly sort of grass in others. There was room for me to run around, to play, but there was still no sky. I wandered around the place, getting a good feel of it, and finally decided to lie down somewhere to rest. Maybe I could wait this out too.

Some short amount of time had passed when I got back up from my nap, and I decided to look for the people. I was feeling a bit hungry, and maybe they'd be willing to feed me a scrap or two. I certainly wasn't able to smell any food anywhere else in this den.

I followed their scent to a back entrance in their den, left slightly open. They had gone outside. I realized this as my chance to escape, so I slipped out the back door, taking extra care that they didn't see me. It was thankfully dark outside, so I had shadows to sneak around in. The couple were sitting some distance away from me, their backs turned to the den, so for now I was safe.

I was met with a couple of obstacles. One was the fact the not far from their den was a wall that seemed impossible to climb. It wasn't like the ones in the city, made with many holes for a paw to slip into and get a hold. It was flat and made of wood, and I was if I tried to climb it I would end up slipping and getting splinters. The other obstacle was that if I tried to dig under it, I had no idea what was on the other side. I could just as easily dig into another place just like this.

Once again, freedom was out of my reach.

I looked over to the couple to make sure they hadn't noticed me. They still had their backs turned, and I wondered what they were looking at. Something above them, since their heads were pointed up. Maybe they saw something up in the sky...

*The sky!*

I looked up to see the moon, shining down as bright as ever. It was as full and round as I had ever seen it, and that made me happy. But what interested me the most were the dozens of tiny lights scattered around it. Those I had never seen before, and if anything they only made the sky look better.

I made my way towards the two people, head turned up to the sky the whole time. As I sat down beside them, the girl reached up to pat me, but I was too entranced by the sky to really care. She spoke to me.

"You're a stargazer too, aren'tcha?"

Stargazer? If by that she meant somebody who watched the sky, then yes, I was. Were those tiny lights around the moon the stars? I wondered why I had never seen them before. Perhaps it was because the city lights were simply too bright for me to see them. Or maybe the sky here was just different, changed.

If that was the case, and the sky here was different, then I decided I didn't want to go back to the city. Sure, city life was what I was used to, but this certainly didn't seem like a change for the worse. In fact, I welcomed it. If staying with this strange couple of people meant seeing the sky like this every night, then I was ready for this new life.

## **The Hammer That Fell**

By Jonathan Guyton

The hammer fell hard on the heart.  
But to who's demise? Who did it harm?  
Did it puncture the lust of true beauty,  
or shatter the trust of ones duties?  
No matter, the toll is great, but greater still  
the will to breathe, to live, to feel.  
A memory of symmetry and thoughts  
are brought forth from decay and rot.  
The mind can fathom the hearts  
desires and the body's will to act.  
The warmth comes from the winners  
grin, and the grace of what's humored last.  
A risky task for such an honest laugh.

A golden cast on the tongues of aristocrats.  
To purge true beauty in such a dishonest light  
is taking lambs, and raising them to fight.  
A sincerity that cannot be seen with clarity  
and to speak fairly, they may not be carefree,  
but they are guilty for the piracy of what's wealthy.  
As for the healthy... the check marks a maybe.  
Hands take hands that take hearts that take hands  
that make plans to make plans, but fall through if they can.  
Cling to the Sun that shines on a clear path  
and cripple the wraith of thee unholy mask.  
Take in all surroundings, and look deeper,  
because the hammer that fell, has made a believer.

### **Seemless**

By Andrew Doss

She fell asleep on my arm  
and soon, it followed her lead,  
and as much as I wanted to wake her  
I couldn't allow myself.  
I just stayed, still . . .  
memorizing her breathing . . .  
silently singing myself mad  
beyond-brink . . .  
I was lying . . .  
and from my back, I  
watched the ceiling fan  
kick shadows around the room . . .  
knowing that I was only, one of them.  
I replayed the evening, countlessly . . .  
the long-abbreviated physicality -  
the experimentation  
closing with unbalanced results.  
I was flickering fantasies,  
and in reflection  
found it all to be

near-equally pleasing..  
I was daydreaming even before  
the fine thread of morning light  
stitched its way through the window,  
and lovingly embroidered her delicate form.  
My pulse was reigning heavy,  
echoing around the tastefully decorated rental  
that she foolishly dragged me into.  
She was glistening  
from mostly those areas . . .  
the ones  
where pooling sweat  
used to be -  
she was as that bit of sequence  
shining-still, unaware of falling  
from the blouse . . .  
She was beautiful,  
she really was. . . .  
but now, not so much.  
She wore her nudity well,  
but as the light in the room  
swelled . . . her true colors surfaced.  
She was looking a little . . .  
Well . . . blue in the face,  
and, really, all over . . .  
I held her too closely  
I suppose . . .  
but sometimes love  
is just the noose  
we confuse with a necklace.

## **Partially Burning**

By Molly Roland

Through the darkness of what has been my life,  
I saw the light slighting through my last  
gasps of Earthly breaths  
In a moment of turmoil, as my skin boiled  
from the fires I had so naively set.  
Had I only known.  
So much time now left to moan...as they move through me.  
Lovingly filling their coffee, laughing, touching, and singing out in  
joy...  
hugging their girls and boys while breathing the air I long for.  
This is it.  
This is my prison for the things that I have done.  
Nowhere to run from the shadows that pursue me.  
Long fiery fingertips clawing for my soul...where can I go  
as this confusion closes in?  
The whiteness pours in through the windows of my dark and  
lonesome world  
Yet there is no escape.  
There are no playmates,  
only dripping bloody sin  
formed into the terror of disfigured demons that scream and groan  
my name.  
No one hears me.  
No one sees me.  
I am only partially burning,  
as I watch the light,  
outside of my window,  
yearning.

## **The Art of Life**

By Bailey Swan

With a touch of bright, hardened wax  
or streak of the graphite  
starts the beginning of something beautiful.  
Inside the mind of the artist unfolds,  
spilling across the page and outside the lines.  
The colour strokes of innocent eyes blend the canvas.  
Lines array, casting shadows of light and darkness,  
giving life to a depthless idea.  
With the grace of carelessness,  
before your eyes appears  
a piece of art from one eye to another.  
Creations from hand, heart, and soul  
frame and hung for the world to see.  
"The Art of Life" is your gallery.

## **A Mess Of Borrowed Material**

by Andrew Doss

Writing is  
a fecal form  
of artistry.

We consume  
influence,  
and engorge  
ourselves with  
pre-packaged  
ideas -- which  
only serve  
to bind us up --  
making for  
extended...  
periods of  
painful pressing  
when it's time

to try and pass...  
anything off  
as clever,  
or original.  
The necessity  
for substance  
is understood,  
but why must  
we waste away  
in convenient  
cravings.. satisfied -  
knowing that...  
it does little  
but muffle the  
intellectual appetite's  
perpetual growl?  
I'm starving,  
and simultaneously  
throwing up  
from...  
Yes, I have  
a reading disorder.  
But I won't let that  
(or much else)  
keep me from  
forcing out  
another  
lengthy digest.

## **Untitled**

By Jenna Berg

It was snowing on the day that my mother was buried. The snow that fell that day was honestly the most peaceful snow that I had ever seen in that part of Washington State. It was the kind that any other nine year old boy would go and make snowballs out of; the kind that you never wanted to stop. I wanted it to stop though because snow made me think of my dad's infectious grin,

my sister's loud giggles, my mom's rosy cheeks, and my carefree childhood. I didn't want to think of any of those things on that day.

I looked up and met eyes with the man whose grin was nowhere in sight. The little girl whose hand I had been gripping hadn't giggled in weeks. My mom had lost all color from her cheeks weeks ago. Finally I had looked down at the somber suit that my aunt bought for me and remembered the words my dad had spoken earlier that day:

"Suits were made for men, not for boys."

If the passing of my mother hadn't already changed me enough, those eight words sure did. I was no longer the carefree little boy who I had been before. I had to grow up fast for the sake of my father and sister. I would try to help them both as much as I possibly could because seeing them in the state that they were in then gutted me. I had to be a man about this. I had to grow up.

We left soon after all of the relatives and friends had given their last condolences; we were headed back to the house that hadn't felt like home for weeks. I remember looking back at my mother's grave plot and picturing the woman who had given me everything from hugs and kisses to stern talking-tos. She was always the rock in the family and I knew then that I would have to assume that position for her. It was going to be tough, but I knew that I could do it. I had to.

## **Untitled**

By Moira MacLennan

I miss the sun  
and the wind  
and the feeling of running barefoot on cobblestones  
and dodging through the cornstalks in jeans, playing hide and  
seek with my brothers  
nothing but fresh air around me  
I miss feeling free  
My memories are fleeting, but a few moments become vivid  
memories  
I relive the flashes and cry for the past  
Long to get away, to find my peace

Scared of the future, living on my own  
Mistakes and stress ball up  
I need to escape

Crawl out the window  
a pack of smokes and a lighter, maybe a jacket.  
find the darkest place  
the sky above me  
sit down, cross my legs  
close my eyes  
clear my mind of everything  
no cell phone with me  
no computer  
no music  
no noise but the sound of innocent lives around me  
no worries  
no problems  
no fears

it becomes overwhelming  
light a cigarette  
watch it burn  
look at the details around me, blurred in the darkness  
marvel at the beauty of nature  
look up

I am small  
look down  
I am significant

do something old  
something new  
clear my mind  
of everyone  
and everything  
and just  
breathe.

## **An Anomaly**

By Tamlyn Tinker

I feel a sticky liquid from the top of my head  
Hair matted with it, and as I inspect my fingertips  
They glisten red and wet with blood  
My chest starts to thump, blood pumping  
Lost, surrounded by towering trees in a creek  
Water up to my knees and nothing is familiar  
I crane my neck to see what flies over head  
Black flapping wings and a scream alert me  
The oscillation causes me to wince in pain  
I wrap my arms around my naked body  
Blood pumping, chest pumping harder  
The light is brighter than I remember  
It washes out the details in between  
I can't seem to hold my own weight  
The creek rushes around my skin  
As I fall, and my head finds its bloody rock  
Everything screams with white  
Then fades gently to black as I forget  
The time it took to drag me to my grave  
And why you must hide my naked body  
The evidence seeping from my pores  
They will wash down stream with me  
And you are the only one that hopes  
That I will never be found.

## Thomas Batell Essay Contest Winner

### It Gets Better by Change

By Bryanne Mary Trice

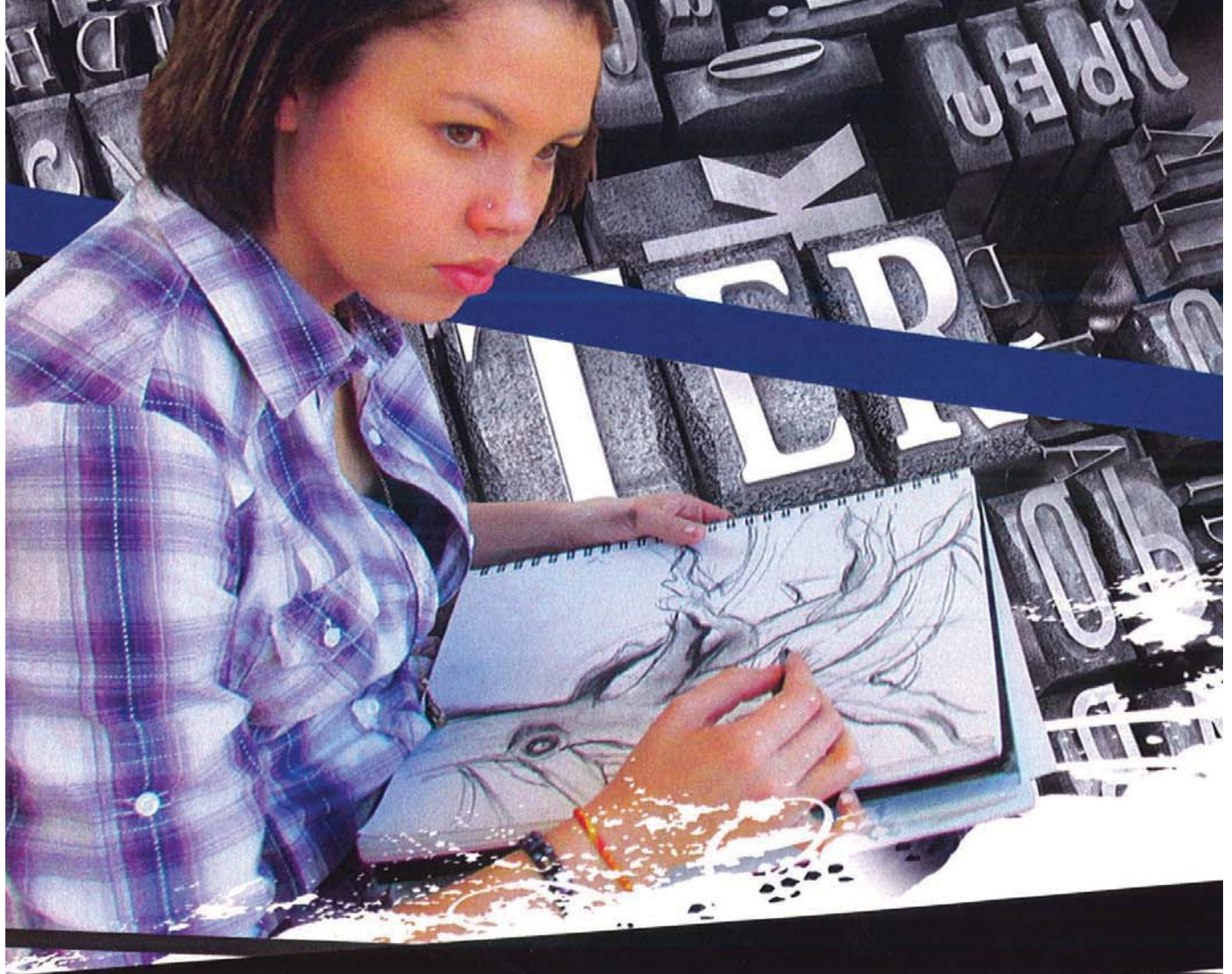
As Jim Rohn said: "Your life doesn't get better by chance, it gets better by change". I began my first semester on top of the world because I received a scholarship. I was naïve. I thought, "Black Hawk Community College? The 13<sup>th</sup> Grade? It will be a breeze!" My ignorance, or arrogance, or maybe even both, led to an over-indulgence in improper college festivities. Failing math was the consequence of my bad decision. Devastation followed. I realized that an immediate U-turn was crucial for my future. A change in time management was essential, as well as finding positive influences and activities that Black Hawk College offered. I sought out help and got involved.

I started with the TRiO Program which offers assistance to students who are in financial need, have a disability and/or are planning to transfer. I was assigned to Advisor Yen Dao. Her amazing knowledge assisted me in repairing the foundation I almost destroyed. She informed me of resources available such as free math tutoring. Social networking activities were also offered: Chicago trips and events which included student community fellowship and fun.

Favorable TRiO experiences resulted in my application for, and acceptance as Student Ambassador, better known as the "face of Black Hawk College". Student Ambassadors plan/attend College events, conduct facility tours, and give speeches for large orientation groups. This rewarding experience prompted me to apply for, and was promoted to, Student Ambassador Leader, a work study job. I was now getting paid to learn and have fun gaining invaluable experience and knowledge! Staff members then asked me to work in the Student Life office. Now I am involved with all campus events, 26 clubs and organizations, and partake in the Passport to Leadership Program. What next, you ask? I came to the realization that I now have a voice. Why not use it outside Black Hawk College and take it into the community? I was asked to be the guest speaker at the NAACP Student Recognition Banquet. Shortly thereafter, the NAACP invited me to be their Mistress of Ceremonies for the Local Chapter Annual

Awards Banquet, where I had the honor of introducing Congresswoman Bustos, Senator Durbin, Mayor Pauley, and the guest of honor, Hilary O. Shelton, Director of the NAACP Washington Bureau. It was with great honor that Black Hawk College asked me to appear in commercials and represent them in the RIHS Homecoming Parade. All of these opportunities have allowed me a chance to tell my story in hopes of inspiration, discuss quality education offered at Black Hawk Community College and, provided you learn, work and get involved, dreams can come true.

Community college has changed my life. How many people are lucky enough to say they learn, work, and play all in the same place – at the same time? I have not only gained an education, but life and work experiences. I will forever be a proud Alumni of Black Hawk Community College and always grateful for all that I have learned and experienced.



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