Conjuring

Literary Magazine
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St. Louis College of Pharmacy

Spring 2003

To call or bring to mind.
To Evoke To imagine
To Picture

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Tom Mengwasser
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STLCOP Morning

The girl from STLCOP awoke with a start;
She heard a sound that could stop a heart;
Peering out the window to see
What that awful noise could be,
Of course it was only the security golf cart.

Schuyler Gerard

My Morning Inspiration

Ring! Ring! Ring!
My alarm clock sounds,
But wait, one more thing;
A whistle coming from the ground.

Good grief, at 7:30 A.M.,
A man with a tutu and a baton;
We rush to stare at him
Across the lawn.

He marched and danced
To the beat of his own drum;
For him to prance,
Has he had any rum?

He walks the streets
At all times of the day,
With boots on his feet
And a little gay cape.

To whom do I speak?
To whom do I refer?
Of course he walks the streets,
He’s the flamin’ baton twirler!

Eboni Jones

The Night

The man got up and went to the store,
Because his love-life was a bore;
He bought his wife a lily
Though he thought it looked silly
For he knew it she would adore.

That night he took her to dinner,
To show her he was a real winner;
The night was fun,
But far from done,
For the kids were with the sitter.

As they arrived at the house
He said “I love you” to his spouse
She took a seat;
He began to rub her feet
And unbutton her blouse.

Then the man went to get his blue pill;
When he swallowed it he got a chill;
He ran and crawled into bed,
His wife said “Oh my, is that you Fred?”
The rest of their night was a thrill.

Brian Morris
Melancholy

Down this fathomless abyss I fall,
Wondering why I exist at all.
Feelings of dread fills my soul,
So many things we do not know.

All of humanity falling apart,
Shredding the fabric of my heart,
So few that seem to really care,
I'm consumed with fear and despair.

Charlatans abound all around,
Answers they claim to have found.
False promises given to so many,
Sensible minds...are there any?

When will humankind ever learn?
The other cheek we have to turn.
If we care about finding truth,
Reject their lies we must do.

While in the cold, like a warm sweater,
False hope makes them feel better.
They persist in this fallacy,
Why not prefer reality?

The next evolution in thought will come,
Then my work here will be done.
Enlightenment we all will see,
And better off we all will be.

Jean-Marc Bovee

Terre Haute

The door opens,
And I await to see.
I walk into the hallway,
And all eyes are on me.

People are everywhere,
And they start to yell.
I begin to get light headed,
Because of the horrible smell.

Some were there for rape,
And others for killing.
Then hurt the families,
And took lives of the unwilling.

They seemed cold hearted,
And had no sorrow.
Now they were being punished,
And one would be dead tomorrow.

They made their choice,
It was a bad intention.
Now they will face the facts,
When they receive the lethal injection.

Nick Bruggerman
The Lonely Night

As I sit here on this lonely night
I begin to think of your face so bright;
My mind begins to wander, what shall I do?
I cannot stop thinking about you.

Sometimes you’re cold, but that’s okay;
Sometimes I like you better that way;
Sometimes you’re sharp, like mean words from a child;
Other times you have a form that’s mild;
Your persona doesn’t bother me because I can slice what makes you whole
And make you fit into my mold.

So as I sit here on this lonely night
Thinking of your face so bright,
I wonder what I’ll do, I’ll open the door and there with a face so bright
You’ll be smiling your brilliant yellow light.

Bianca Vance

Sonnet

The green grass slowly creeps between my toes;
I lie on the ground and begin to roll,
The soft grass often tickling my nose;
I feel as if I am the only soul;
White clouds meander across the blue sky,
I lay and watch as different shapes form;
I close my eyes tight and pretend to fly,
Just then I feel the first drop of a storm;
My eyes open and see dark clouds above,
I run for a nearby tree to save me;
Just then I feel consumed by the storm’s love;
The storm had not hurt me, but set me free;
The trickling music came down in May;
All it wanted to do was just play.

Susan Flaker
The Clock Ticks On

I wake with the sun
   And the clock ticks on;
I drink my coffee and eat my bagel
   And the clock ticks on;
Sitting in traffic, my patience withers away
   But the clock ticks on;
At work my mind is bombarded with facts and figures
   While the clock ticks on;
I pick up the children from school and head home to fix dinner
   And the clock ticks on;
I help Molly with her project and Stephen with his math
   While the clock ticks on;
Before tucking Molly into bed she asks me how I manage to make it through a day
   Without daddy;
I respond
   The clock ticks on.

Krista Crump

Spring Morning

I could smell the dew on the green grass as I walked outside;
   I could see the warms rays of sun.
I could hear the wind as I felt the leaves shake.

Macey Murphy
ARLINGTON ROWS

HIGH
UP IN
THAT
SKY U
SAID U
WOULD
WATCH OVER ME LOVE ME AND TAKE CARE OF ME
BUT THAT WONT HAPPEN NOW LOOK AT ME AT ME
WHAT
TO DO
NOW I
SAY U
WAYUP
THERE
THUS
HERE
I LAY
BENEATH U FOREVER
LOST WITHIN A SEA OF WHITE

Allyson Harvey

The Trip

Summer is almost here, time to travel,
Not time to set aside and take a nap,
Because sleep is for those tired of life,
Move, get ready for the trip—get a map,

It will last longer than you can believe,
Traveling down the lane, can you feel it?
Wind at your face, slip through cars in a weave,
Almost there, closer, now, it’s hard to sit,

The sun rises and sets, and we keep driving,
Taking turns, the wheel everyone’s best friend,
Life without sleep, now this is true living,
Closer to that X, trip reading an end,

The lights on our backs, flashing, what is that?
Too fast says the trooper in the brown hat.

Alan Seaton
The Evil Puppy

The puppy gets her loud dinosaur squeaker
And barks at her mother to throw it;
The puppy gets her pink golf ball
And barks at her mother to throw it;
The puppy gets her half-eaten stuffed dog
And barks at her mother to throw it;
The puppy gets her ugly yellow pig doll
And barks at her mother to throw it;
The puppy gets her old chew bone
And barks at her mother to throw it;
The puppy gets her Billy bunny
And barks at her mother to throw it;
The puppy lays down to go to sleep
And her mother barks at the mess she has made.

Schuyler Gerard

Cat Haiku

You never feed me;
Perhaps I'll sleep on your face;
That will show you.

You're always typing;
Well, let's see you ignore my
Sitting on your hands.

My small cardboard box;
You cannot see me if I
Can just hide my head.

The rule for today:
Touch my tail; I shred your hand.
New rule tomorrow.

Anonymous

List Poem

She puts on her comfy tee shirt,
Folds up her favorite pair of jeans,
Throws her hair up in a bun;
She ties the laces of her tennis shoes,
Zips up her duffle bag,
And heaves it over her shoulder;
She puts on her sunglasses;
She says goodbye to her Dad,
Her Mom,
Corri,
Anne,
Kaye C.,
Lauren, Lauren always last;
She gets in her car,
Pulls out of the drive;
A tear rolls down her cheek.

Susan Flaker
Today’s Forecast of the Perfect Man

A scorching hot body
Voice as soft as morning rain
Touch like warm winds through the desert
Passionate as a thunderstorm
Kind as the first snow
And sweet as a spring breeze

Schuyler Gerard

Two Servings of Love

Take an unhappy young girl
And add one attractive young boy.
Stir for one evening.
Watch love grow.

Becky Lich

To My Woman

We stand there just the two of us,
Both fighting back tears.
All I can think of is our good times over the years.

It’s a beautiful day, on the outside;
My mind is blank; I cannot find the words to say;
I long to know the words that would help,
But I don’t;
Now I am sitting here in this pew, fighting back tears;
Great memories run through my head;
It feels as if my heart has been ripped in two,
And I think that you took a part of it with you;
But that is good, because it will aid my memory;
You were and are my best friend,
You’re my woman until the end.

Tom Mengwasser

Cancer

A bomb of despair
It explodes and ill winds blow
Waves of fear begin

Becky Lich

Theme Park

Junk food, rides, games, smiles
The theme park flooded with joy
Memories to last

Becky Lich
One Crazy Summer

I bumped into a girl with my cart,
While trying to find my favorite Pop Tart,
Home for the summer,
She gave me her number;
It was awhile before we were apart.

When we went out we had some fun;
Our days apart totaled none;
We had a blast,
Thought it'd last,
For I really thought she was the one.

When it came time for her to go,
I thought I hit an all-time low,
For it was a ball,
Until I got a call,
And I found out I have a son named Joe.

Joe T. Buchanan

Stop Sign

It's been
so long since
I've been there.
Hope it's not changed
I know it goes on w/out me but I don't
know how. For two
days it'll be again
the only thing
is I hope.
I
Still
Know
How
To
Get
there

Stacey Phillips

A

I saw you
For 12 years
But now
never
come around
What happened?
I'll never
know
but
I'm sure
gone
good.

Stacey Phillips

The Ring

The day will
Never come.
I've be
Come

Stacey Phillips
Limerick

I adopted Checkers with a number of nine,
And at first she seemed to be fine.
          But with the swipe of her claws,
          She shredded like saws,
Now the only life left is mine.

*Allyson Harvey*

The Real Story of Creation

God parted the clouds
Light sparkled down on the world
A new beginning.

Beasts of every size
Were scattered on the land
God created more.

God created man
He watched his creation grow
At first he was pleased.

But his man was dumb
He decided to fix him
He made a woman.

*Becky Lich*

Untitled

There once was a guy named Jake,
Who liked to spend time at the lake;
He liked to catch fish
To make a special dish;
Too bad he did not realize his fate
Concerning a girl he would date;
Her name was Anita;
He thought she was muy bonita,
So he asked her out to dinner;
She thought he was a winner;
They dated for awhile,
Then got married and had a child,
But then things turned lame;
Anita wasn't the same;
One day he came home,
And found the baby alone;
Anita had run away on a train.

*Bianca Vance*

Repetition Poem

All of the money in the world can buy me trips to France, London, and Australia;
All of the money in the world can let me parade around in a Versace gown, Gucci
stilettos, carrying a Kate Spade purse clutched in my Harry Winston-enhanced fingers;
All of the money in the world can let me cruise down Rodeo Drive in my one of a kind
personalized Lotus convertible;
All of the money in the world can allow the envy of all people to rest on my shoulders;
Yet nothing can cure the blindness caused by all the money in the world.

*Allyson Harvey*
MYSELF

I am a person within myself,
Who looks around without one word;
I see things all around me,
And I wonder how it came to be.

I am not many things;
I am not my possessions, or my appearance;
I am what is inside of me;
I am a heart that beats.

A heart that loses faith in other people,
Who lie and cheat for their own deeds,
Who care only that their feet
Touch precious ground.

I am a gift from God's own hands,
Who brings my own silver lining;
I know there is more to my existence,
More than this world can give.

I am my own evil doing,
Who never loses sight of my wrong doings;
I stand strong in times of weakness;
I am my own wings at flight.

Wings that soar high above the clouds;
Looking down at the world,
I realize one thing;
I am just one person, one being.

I am myself;
Who could I be,
Not putting all these faces on?
I am a wave that changes the current.

Rene Thomas
Who am I?

As I peer onto the glimmering waters
Staring back is my own radiant reflection;
As I peer across the great ice caps,
I see my crystallized reflection;
As I peer across the massive deserts,
There is my arid reflection;
As I peer into the purest mountain stream,
There too is my reflection;
But these ever-present beams are not mine own;
Second in nature, a borrower of sorts, since the greatness of creation;
Who am I?

*Tom Mengwasser*

Ballad

Tears run down her face
As she reminds herself of the pace
Her weary life has taken;
She wraps herself in lace.

Sitting in the dim-lit room
She embraces her hairless cat
Wondering why no one loves her;
The girl wishes she wasn't fat.

She probes at her protruding tummy,
But those chocolates do look yummy;
The girl wonders out loud if she should dare;
The cat just looks at her funny.

Until the day she meets a man,
Richard Simmons, who told her "you can!"
He taught her to dance and dance she did.

*Rene Thomas*
Sestina

A child is born and life begins;
The baby girl will need her mother as she too will need her;
She requires so much care;
Mother is so happy to be there;
The bond is so strong
The two seem to be inseparable from one another.

She is growing fast and now spends her day with another;
Elementary school begins;
Mother is sad to loose daytime together but stays strong;
She misses her;
The girl wishes her mother was there;
She hopes she knows how much she cares.

Once again the girl falls into others care;
She now is in junior high, yet another
Step. Mother now gets to be there
For her daughter even less. After-school activities begin;
The girl’s mother comes to all of her
Sports. Mothers little girl is growing so fast.

Now in high school the pressures are strong;
The girl must now make decisions with great care;
Mother is so proud of her;
The girl now chooses to spend free time with yet another,
Her boyfriend. Mother sees the girl’s independence begin,
But she knows her daughter will always want her there.

Summer ends and they’re
Off to college. Feelings of loneliness are strong;
Neither wants classes to begin;
Mother wishes the girl to take care;
When mother leaves they greatly miss one another;
Mother is immensely proud of her.

Mother always receives letters from her;
The girl writes and asks her mother if she’ll be there
For her wedding. She said of course, she could hardly wait another
Minute. Their love was still very strong;
They both still shared a loving care,
But now her daughter’s family begins.
Mother was there to be strong,  
When her daughter brought another  
Generation into the world to begin new life with so much care.

*Cara Chaplin*

**SONNET 7**

Deciduous lover, thou know my pains  
What makes you live on, longs the world to know;  
You long withstand the flagrant tempest rains,  
The heat of summer and treacherous snow;  
Arrayed with life, now fading ever quickly,  
No more is childhood; Near are Death’s vague cries  
They whisper falsities of destiny,  
Those seeking whom they may entrap with lies.  
In Eden, Death’s vile fangs do prick my heel,  
I’ll stand, as festive saplings remaining tall;  
Eternal truths are sought now, shall we kneel?  
Ever whence we conform, peace will show in all;  
If ‘tis not true, they know not what they say,  
Inside the bible proven true today.

*Tom Mengwasser*

**English Sonnet**

I like to look in your green eyes,  
To hear you laugh makes me smile;  
I love to believe your funny lies,  
Just to be with you I’d walk a mile.

Can you believe we’ve been together so long,  
So many memories we’ve made,  
Fifty years have come and gone;  
My love for you will never fade.

Together we have grown so old,  
Aging gracefully we’ve done best;  
You keep me warm when I am cold,  
And together have grown a happy nest.

Now it is my time to go,  
Please remember I love you so.

*Schuyler Gerard*
The Angel at the Window

I lived on the inside and never looked out,
Fearful of my surroundings, more afraid of the other side.
On the inside was my world of hurt.
It was dreams, trusts, and promises,
Only, every one was destroyed.
Upon glancing out the window one day,
I noticed an angel staring in at me,
Offering hope and love above the bleak inside.
In fear, I ran, praying the angel would too.
Yet, everyday, upon my passing, he stayed.
With every glimpse, I felt the warmth in his stare.
I closed my eyes and imagined his touch.
With resistance in my heart, I could only walk to the window
To gaze longingly through the glass.
As time raced by and our hearts grew nearer,
He gained my trust, hoping to get in.
I finally opened that window
So we could unite.
He entered with great love and filled my heart with joy, unconditional joy.
He fit into every place and completed my empty space.
The inside was suddenly consumed with the love I had so desperately needed.
In the same instant, the window slammed behind.
His warmth faded and he suddenly became the same.
He joined the darkness that had always distinguished the inside.
The angel at the window gave me something I’d never had.
But was the happy worth the hurt?

*Erica Tenholder*
Love

Some say love is a beautiful thing,
Yet others find it to be tedious;
In my heart, love has taken wing,
And it has been an adventure continuous.

Through many twists and turns I have gone;
Many questions I have asked of myself;
Though at times there is a pain, my love goes on;
This love, so precious it is, belongs on no shelf.

It must be nurtured and shown to all;
It must breathe and live and give strength and hope
In order that I may not miss its gentle call;
For then I may falter; how could I cope?

Love is such a marvelous wonder;
Without it, the world would go asunder.

Shelly Jones

The Garden

Our garden is a very lovely place;
It is awfully peaceful and full of life;
Birds sing, bugs chirp, spiders weave webs of lace;
It’s a magical spot to lose your strife.

A small, calm, two-tiered pond sets in the back;
A waterfall trickles over flat rocks;
Living there are goldfish orange, white, and black;
Many little frogs and toads come to talk.

Deep within the woods lies a man-made path;
The air is cooler with sunlight peaking through;
Lining the trail are birdhouses and baths;
A crafted bench provides a gorgeous view.

The garden was formed with much love and care;
Someday I hope my kids can visit there.

Cara Chaplin
**Trapped**

There was a time
I fell from the sky;
The time I was there
To watch you die.

Memories remain,
But my broken body still moves;
In my heart,
My love keeps flowing.

Thoughts pour out
From deep within my soul;
These are the times I fall,
From the sky to the sharp gravel ground.

Walls trap me now
That seem unable to destroy;
It rips my heart
Without even knowing.

I fell into your eyes,
Through your sacred lies;
You made me believe
You’d never leave.

*Rene Thomas*

**Carnival**

The smiling clowns with their funky hair make the kids laugh.
The lines for the rides fail to move quickly.
The people eat their cotton candy.
The muscle man with very tan skin amazed the crowd.
The brightly colored tissue paper decorated the game booths.
The carnies excited the people by yelling loudly.

*Macey Murphy*
Marla

Marla is fancied by many men,
   And very rightly so;
She’s young and fair and wild,
   As all of her gents know.

   Jason mayors the city,
   Is rather obese and large,
But he buys her anything she likes,
   So she tolerates the bardge.

   Matthew’s quite the charmer;
   Most women will faint for the sir;
Marla hardly gives him a glance,
   So he’s madly in love with her.

   Philip fell in love with her
   The very first time he laid eyes;
His boyish innocence moves her,
   So she makes him happy with lies.

   Stephen loves to play and sing;
   He’s loved her all his life,
Though he would rather die than tell
   He wants to make her his wife.

   Andrew is a charming count,
   Who loves to play Marla’s game;
And though he does not love her,
   Her mind is quite the same.

Marla is fancied by many men,
   And it’s very plain to see;
This young girl’s a prostitute;
   This young girl is me.

Christina Curtis
A Time to Fly

When is it time to say goodbye,
To spread my wings and learn to fly?
All the years of joy so hard to let go,
But when is it time? How will I know?
I sat there in all my loneliness,
Until, you showed up, determined to fix
All the damage I had been dealt.
With every look you made my heart melt.
We grew as close as two can be,
Through thick and thin, just you and me.
All around me turmoil swirled,
But I was okay, because you rocked my world.
Each day that arrived, another moment to see you.
Each kiss that we felt, another moment so true.
Problems came, but always went away,
Forever mad, we could never stay.
Two hearts, conquering the world together,
Able to survive all the stormy weather.
But what if we are only pretending?
And all the wrong messages we have been sending?
Are we only being something that we’re not?
To fall in love, is that something we forgot?
Or is saying goodbye simply giving in
To a world that says it must end?
For we are too young to truly know.
The time has come to let the verdict show.
Was it only just the first love of many?
Or is what we have stronger than any?
Was it fate that brought us to each other?
Or is that just a story with a fairy godmother?
If I go, will it be too late
To ever get back my perfect fate?
So is it time to say goodbye?
I’ll spread my wings, but should I fly?

Erica Tenholder

Grandma

Don’t cry for me
For I have no more pain
Don’t cry for me
For much love I gain

Don’t cry for me
I live in a dream
Don’t cry for me
For I’ve seen God’s light beam

Don’t cry for me
I wear a smile of my face
Don’t cry for me
I’ve joined a new race

Don’t cry for me
I’m an angel now
Don’t cry for me
I’ve taken an eternal vow

Don’t cry for me
You’re life I’ll help save
Don’t cry for me
My sprit is not in a grave

Don’t cry for me
I am finally safe
Don’t cry for me
I’m in a better place

Don’t cry for me
Now heaven I roam
Don’t cry for me
I am finally home

Cara Chaplin
Lay You Down

Hair of rich ebony and lips of red silk,
Roses are of no compare, when in your presence
Legs of strength and mind of wisdom---
All covered in the skin of pure silk;
The birds envy your voice and long for your song;
Only if nature knew of our love she would beg to know the secret;
The flowers of spring would pay for your scent;
My body yearns to be in sync with yours;
It is essential for life that I am with you, and that I am yours, every minute I long to lay you down.

Tom Mengwasser

State of the Bird

O enchanted Robin thou dos’t mock me;
Awakened by your lovely song,
I yearn for the sun to see;
For I know truth, this cumbersome walk is made long;
As the illustrious wooden hatch I fling,
There is nothing special to view;
Through this portal which I spy, I hear you sing;
My spirit darkened by the dark exterior dew;
This state could be called misery,
For now it shall be called Missouri

Tom Mengwasser

Formula Poem

I pledge indulgences to my mouth,
Of the sweetest taste in America.
And to the factories which make the treats,
One almond, under chocolate, irresistible,
With coconut, and flavor for all.

Allyson Harvey
The Long Hall

The long hall darkened as the doors slammed and locked.
I continued my walk, all escape routes now blocked.
I wandered through space in a sleepy daze.
How different, how strange in so many ways!
I paused outside with an anxious stare,
Door number one or two: which do I dare?
I picked a room and sealed the day’s fate.
Glancing at tiny faces, so impatient as they wait.
The look in every eye, a window to the day,
Clearly bringing to view, any troubles on the way.
But somewhere between reading, writing, and arithmetic,
Their so-called problems appeared only a trick.
As tempers flared, I headed to the dungeon for a quick break,
It has been so much, it is all I can take.
Hakunamatata echoed paradoxically from the room.
Despite impossible dreams, progress still loomed.
Playing the games, trying to brighten a day,
Eyes, aged beyond their years, are begging me to stay.
Realizing how swiftly my time had gone by,
I wandered out the building and started to cry.
The long hall shortened as the doors slammed and locked.
I continued my walk, all return routes now blocked.

Erica Tenholder

Vanished

It’s a long dark stormy night,
And almost everyone is sleeping.
Under the door you see a light,
Where a young boy is weeping.

He lays on his bed, head down,
And terrible thoughts run through his head.
The only facial expression is a frown,
Because his mother can’t be back from the dead.

A light on the desk shows her facial features,
And in his mind he sees her blue eyes.
She was there for him; she was his teacher;
For family matters she was there to compromise.

She was taken away by a car crash,
And all he has left is an urn with her ash.

Nick Bruggerman
Low Voices

Low voices, you don’t know what they say,
Drowned out by the day to day,
Enough to make one man mad
Or cry in pain.
A little break, the world is sad,
Because you don’t know what you can achieve,
That one break is all you need;
Ten seconds with that world weight lifted,
You can think with your head.

Footsteps down the spiraling cage
Sound distorted;
The voices back,
Bury your head,
Try and hide;
Maybe they’ll pass over,
Leave you behind.
Wrong,
Better run;
They’re after you.

Alarm goes off to wake you
From your sleep;
Times ticks on
Along with the drum beat.

Irregular at times
But eternally steady,
Just need one person to show the way
Before your heart shrivels,
Falls away.
Clock winds down
Into Fatal Ground
Of undisturbed sleep.

A thousand things left to do,
No one more important than you;
I don’t know and never will
That perfect person;
There’s still time to kill;
In a world where money paves the way,
You’ll buy yourself love in the material way.

Ethan Wilson
The Vacation of a Lifetime

Samantha was coming home
From a week of vacation;
If she had only known her future
She would have stayed at the train station.

She sat in the cab and reminisced
About her adventures in Hawaii;
How she enjoyed island hopping
And swimming at Waikiki.

She had bought souvenirs for her entire family;
A sand dollar for her mother,
A t-shirt for brother,
And a ball cap for her father.

She had the adventure of a lifetime
On this particular trip;
She had mastered the art of surfing
After a handsome guy gave her a helpful tip.

As she thought of the beautiful sunsets
She began to smile;
She had so much to share with her family
She could not wait another mile!

It was a rainy day
And the pavement was slick;
What happened next
Transpired all too quick.

The taxi skidded out of control;
Samantha was thrown from side to side;
When all had settled,
She was found on the road, her head gaping wide.

Her family and friends gathered
To remember all the times they had had;
As they left the home
Some were sad, others mad.
She had been gone
For only two weeks;
She had explored new cities
And climbed mountain peaks.

My selfish tendencies
Want her here with me;
But I know she is in a place
Where she can be truly free.

She lived a life of faith
And never sacrificed her integrity;
She is now with the Lord
Exploring life in eternity.

_ Krista Crump_

**Refuge**

You are always around for me,
Even during uncertainties;
Sometimes you are too busy,
Without food I get dizzy,
But with my friends I walk with glee.

In and Out we walk,
Loud and fun we talk,
Down your long bright-lit halls,
I hear your silent calls,
To move pack and stalk.

Even after hours,
You supply the power
For late night entertainment;
We all meet and pitch our tents
And wait by the Bauer.

_Eboni Jones_
Pencils

As I tiredly packed my book-
Bag, I told the girl
Across the room to remember her pencil.
On my way to school, I thought of the boy
Who had told me of his big test.
Maybe I would see him at school.

As I arrived at school,
I pulled out my big book
To study for my test.
Just then a girl
Told me she had seen the boy
And that he was looking for his pencil.

I had forgotten his pencil
The day before at the library at school.
I didn’t want to tell the boy
I had lost it, so I had to book-
It to the library in hopes of finding it. The girl
At the counter had not seen it, but had questions about the test.

As I reached for my notes to help her study for the test,
I found the missing pencil.
I handed over my notes and the girl
Was grateful. I proceeded over to the school’s
Student center. As I walked through the door, I dropped my book.
Just as I had picked it up, I heard a voice. It was the boy.

As I looked around, I saw the boy
Who seemed to be test-
ing me to see if I could find him in the crowd. I picked up my book
And walked over to him. I gave back the borrowed pencil
And wished him a good day at school.
It was then that I saw looking at me, the girl.

Just smiling and laughing, the girl
Said good morning to the boy
And continued to discuss her upcoming day at school.
As the test
Approached, I found my own pencil
And began to review the material in my book.

As I finished skimming over the book, the girl
Borrowed a pencil from me for the test and the rest of her day at school.
That night we studied for the next day and I thought about the boy.

Macey Murphy
Untitled

You came into my life,
Like a dream come true;
Just what I needed
To turn my topsy-turvy world
Right again.

You were the answer
To a prayer
Sent up to Heaven
By a torn heart.

You were the sunshine
Breaking through the storm
To heal my broken soul
With your rainbow of love.

You were an angel of God,
My knight in shining armor;
You understood my pain
And took my hand
To lead me home.

I love you so much;
You are my hero,
My soul mate,
And my best friend.

Shelly Jones

Untitled

Slowly teardrops fall down my face
from these lonely nightly cries,
sobs of anger and of pain
from living these horrible lies.

Pretending to be someone else
I’m an actor on the stage
hiding the way I truly feel.

My heart’s locked in a cage.
These thoughts floating in my head,
I know that they are wrong;
living with one while loving another
I can’t keep this up for long.
He deserves to know the truth
but I can’t handle the fight
So I continue my heartbreaking act
night after miserable night.

Erica Kellerman

The Club

The music pumped
the beat so loud.
As if a jack
controlled the crowd.

Up and down
and back and forth,
the sea of bodies:
hands raised North.

Never stop,
ever tire.
Dressed to kill
in new attire.

To live this life
you must have love.
Love of life
in the club!

Ben Calcaterra
Where Is Andy?

Andy, Andy, oh where could he be?
Is he in the old farm house; is he climbing a tree?
Is he in the field running through the corn, or is that Andy, honking the tractor’s horn?

Maybe he is playing in the dirty pig’s pen, or maybe he is chasing the squawking chickens.

That is not he watching Uncle Tom milk the cow, and that is not he petting Mr. Meow.

Is he hiding in the great haystack and does not want to come back to the house to eat his dinner?

I made his favorite, chicken noodle soup, but he must not want to eat for he has flown the coop.

It is getting late, and I am getting worried. I wish Andy had not had left in such a hurry.

When he gets home I will send him straight to his room. Later I will declare his future doom. Maybe I will ground him for a week or two. Maybe I will take away his TV privileges and his Game Boy too.

Andy, is that you coming through the door? Are those your footsteps I hear on the hard wood floor?

Andy, Andy, let me be frank. If you were hiding then I do think that this was a mean and ugly prank.

I’m sorry Mom for staying out so late. But as you know tomorrow’s a special date. I wanted to get you the perfect birthday gift. But you will have to wait until morning to see what it is, to see if it fits!

Mom, you are really the best, I apologize and promise next time I will not leave unless I tell you first.

Well Andy, it seems you have learned your lesson. The next time you leave you will not keep me guessing!

I am glad you made it home safe and all right, but to your bedroom you go for the rest of the night.

Krista Crump
Best Friends

Feelings shared silently between us two;  
How much longer can I pretend  
I think the other is simply a friend?  
The very moment you come into view,  
I see a love so true, I never knew.  
Many broken hearts you helped me to mend,  
But my thoughts I keep with me till the end.  
You have mistakenly found love brand new.

Sadly I will keep my deep dark secret.  
I call to hear your voice, to say hello.  
The power you provide only on the phone;  
You’ll never know the way you make me glow.  
Whisper your secret thoughts as I set  
Dreaming on my own, dreaming all alone.

Erica Tenholder

Church Tales

Doing our routine on late Saturday nights,  
We laid out our dress, a bow, and pink leotard tights.  
We carefully select which dress to wear  
For Easter Sunday we take much care,  
To look our best that next morning.  
So we set our alarm for an hour warning  
For an early rise the following day.  
We pull down the covers and kneel to pray.  
Tucking ourselves in and closing our eyes,  
Going to sleep for tomorrow’s surprise.  
The alarm started screaming at five till nine,  
The primping began so we’d look fine  
To enter the church and meet everyone  
That’s gathered to celebrate the risen son.  
As we drove down the road we both agreed  
To tell two tales of what we’d seen.  
Agreement was made that after church,  
We’d find a special place to relax and perch.  
We decided to have lunch at Vickie’s Bar and Grill
And share our stories over a strawberry chill.
The plans were made; the date was set,
We entered the church and the people we met
Were all very different in their own way,
In both our stories there’s a part they’ll play.
We’ll tell the tales later, but first we must
Hear of the sins like killing, lies, and lust.
As the sermon began we looked around,
To observe the different people that we found.

First, there was the Preacher, a red-faced man,
All his screaming made him appear burnt and not tan.
He struggled to reach the microphone in spite of his belly,
He looked as if he enjoyed peanut butter and jelly.
Most of the time his nose was in the Bible,
He had nothing to do with slander and libel.
To the unfortunate souls, a hand he leant,
Powerful words and visions convinced them to repent.
This was the pay he got from the Lord,
The most expensive thing he owned was a 68 Ford,
For the money was scarce but he didn’t care,
He had the reward from God that he knew was rare.
The people loved him all through the town,
And no one around him ever wore a frown.

Sitting in the front row was his only child and only son,
Every scripture he heard he had a sarcastic pun.
He could barely walk straight from the previous night,
He had two black eyes from a bloody bar-fight.
He was attired in Abercrombie and gold,
He got his money from the grass he had sold.
Respect is not a part of his plan
To rebel his father and the holy-man.
Even after he had stole from the local K-Mart,
Everyone knew he hid his good natured-heart.
One day he would show the kids at school,
That even a preacher’s son can be cool.

Coughing in the middle was an old man and his wife,
Who had seen many hardships all through their life,
But had managed to get through it together.
They were always at church permitting the weather.
She had thinning blue hair and he had none,
There was always a glare off his head from the sun.
They remember the day when they weren’t so holy,
But they can smile with satisfaction at their grandson goalie.
They came bundled up in mismatched plaid,
Totally unaware of the out of style fad.
The length of their life is in the arms of the Lord,
Hope its not based on the way they sing a hymnal chord.

The song-leader stands on center stage,
Her goal is to keep the old couple on the same page.
The deep strong voice comes from her giant diaphragm,
She doesn’t realize she eats daily a thousand fat gram.
Her voice sends chills all over the crowd,
The medals and trophies give her the right to be proud.
The songs she sings have a personal force,
It was today ten years ago she got a divorce.
She tries to be religious but the pressure is strong,
The curse words fly when she finds her son’s girlfriend’s thong.

Getting up for the fourth time in a row,
This college graduate shakes her hips and puts on a show.
She heard that a church is a good place to meet men,
She smirks at the thought of her devious sin.
Wives cover their husbands’ eyes as her legs pass
For her two inch inseam reveals no class,
But she doesn’t mind for their attention she gets.
The Preacher pauses and his heart has pounding fits,
For he knows the deep trouble she’ll be in
If she doesn’t quit her ways, she’ll have a premarital baby within.

The little girl that runs from her mom
Has no care in the world, not even the prom.
She devotes her time to a world of play,
She’s too young to know what the Preacher will say.
She can’t wait till the time she can leave,
The Children’s Church treat line she does perceive.
Till that time she’ll do her best
To be cute, funny, and full of zest.

The rough looking man always saying Amen,
Was once a guy living in sin.
He gives his testimony at every chance
Of his changing of life and his victory dance.
Beginning in grade school he got into drugs,
He lived on the streets and became one of the thugs.
Every word out of his mouth took the Lords name in vain,
He abandoned his parents and drove them insane.
During his teenage years he had many court dates
And he contracted AIDS through one of his many mates.
To deal with his pain he turned to heroin injection,
Everyone around thought of him as a rejection.
But as he watched his friend die in the hospital room,
The Preacher came to talk to him of his fore-coming doom.
From that day on he changed his way,
To repent of his sins and to the Lord he must pay
All of his dues and the remaining of his life,
Then the Lord will take care of his suffering and strife.

The newlywed couple that had walked in late
Were trying hard to keep good fate,
For their marriage they knew would be pure
If they attended church and avoided tempestuous lure.
They were new and felt out of place,
They fumbled with their bible and mumbled words of grace.
The one thing they were sure they had done right
Was giving a token of their richness with a check out of sight.

In the back pew, the teenagers sat,
Keeping each other awake with a gentle face pat.
When they were awake they talked real soft,
Of gossip from the party up in the loft.
They listened enough to seem like angels,
When their parents ask questions, they used all the angles
To act like they listened to what the Preacher said,
But actually they had been sleeping as if they were dead.

As the church came to a close and the people walked out,
The politician smiled and shook hands all about.
He made sure to greet each and everyone,
He acted like a friend and poked and had fun.
Each smile he received was a vote in his book,
That’s why each hand he carefully took.
Everyone he met he was sure to be nice,
For if he was rude it would be his career price.

We left the church to go eat,
And went into the restaurant and took a seat.
Since we have described the characters themselves,
We will now begin with our two tales.
The waitress came up and we ordered the main feature,
We’ll both now begin with the tale of the Preacher.

Stacey Phillips
The Trip
By Susan Flaker, Shelly Jones, Becky Lich, and Alan Seaton

Tom Langdon’s eyelids crept open and he peered around the large, white room. It was difficult for him to scope out the entire room because he couldn’t get the rest of his body to move. The white walls, white floor, and the white paper gown that he was wearing made it obvious that he was in a hospital room. A steady beeping noise seized his attention. It was a tall, wiry IV stand hooked up to some kind of machine.

“What am I doing here?” Tom mumbled to himself. Even after that short phrase, Tom’s mouth was exhausted. His dry lips surrendered and they quickly closed. They were sticky and it was too difficult to hold them open.

Tom had no idea why he was laying in the hospital bed, unable to move his legs or arms. He had completely forgotten the night before.

“Hey! Wait for me!” Tom yelled at his friends while running to them. They were a close-knit bunch and had been since high school. They had been the typical attractive football-playing clique and got all the girls. After graduation, their lives quickly began to change. A couple of the young men enlisted in the army and one of them moved away. However, it was their last summer before college and the remaining group was determined to make the best of it. They were up for anything, so they thought.

That night was going to be different than any other Tom had experienced. Because it was Tom’s twenty-first birthday, his friends decided to take him out to a local bar, The Alleyway, for a few drinks and laughs. They also had a few plans for Tom later that evening.

One of Tom’s friends, Craig, worked on the set of a popular local soap opera, called “Valley Hospital.” Craig knew that tomorrow was Saturday and that tomorrow the set would be vacant. This worked out perfectly since Craig and the rest of Tom’s friends had made a few arrangements for Tom’s birthday. After drinking most of that night, something that he was used to doing, Tom staggered out of the bar with his friends. They piled into a taxi to go home, or so Tom thought.

At about six in the morning, a searing pain in his head, which could only be a hangover, woke Tom. He was laying in a white room, strapped to a hospital bed with tape around his head. He was frozen and didn’t know what to think. “Am I dead?” he wondered. “What happened last night? What did I do?” As he lay frozen, a very attractive woman dressed as a nurse came to his bedside with sadness painted on her face.

“It doesn’t look good,” she said. “We’ve done everything we can, and it doesn’t look like you’re going to make it.”

“What! What do you mean?” Tom screamed with a stunned face. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Shh. Don’t get excited. You’ll only make it worse,” the nurse said in a consoling voice as she held his hand.

Feeling like he was falling into a nightmare, Tom didn’t know what to make of the situation. “Well, let’s get back to this whole I’m-not-going-to-make-it thing. Where am I and what happened?”

“You’re in the hospital. There was an accident after you left the bar. The driver lost control and slammed into a tree.”
“Is everyone okay? Where are my friends? Why isn’t my family here?”

“Your friends are fine and they’re out in the hall. Your family is on the way. You were the only one hurt and there’s nothing we can do to help you. I’m so sorry.”

“What do you mean you can’t help me? What happened? What’s wrong with me?”

“Well, the paramedics brought you all in to be checked out and you all appeared to be fine. The doctors took some x-rays to make sure there was no internal damage. Everything came back fine, except for your x-rays.”

“Well, what’s wrong?”

“It seems your internal organs have begun to liquefy.”

“What?!? How is that possible? Car accidents can’t do that!”

“Please calm down. Yelling is not helping your situation. We don’t know what has caused it. No one has ever seen anything like this before. The doctors are doing their best to find some way to stop this, but they are running out of time.”

“How much time do I have?”

“We’re not sure, but it doesn’t look like much.”

“Will my family be here soon?”

“We called them as soon as we knew what was happening to you. However, you boys made it a pretty fair distance from home.”

“Where am I?”

“You’re in St. Louis at Barnes-Jewish Hospital.”

“What? How did we get this far from home? What day is it?”

“It’s Sunday. It seems your friends decided a road trip would be fun. You kept sleeping and they just figured you were really tired, so they didn’t bother to wake you.”

“How long have I been here?”

“It’s been about five hours now. Your parents were going to try to catch a plane, but with it being the holiday, there aren’t a lot of open seats. On top of that, we’re having a record-breaking snow storm.”

“It’s the middle of the summer!” Tom shouted in disbelief. “How could it possibly be snowing?”

“Shh,” the nurse said. “Save your energy.”

Just then, Tom’s friends burst through the door. “Good dude, you’re awake,” Joe said as he crossed to Tom’s side.

“How in the hell did we get to St. Louis?” Tom asked.

“Well, ya see, Mark thought it would be great if we took a cross-country trip. I said no, but you were so into it. Don’t you remember at all?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Yeah, you said it would be great to see Will in St. Louis and then we would drive to Georgia to see Tony before he’s shipped over seas,” Mark chimed in.

“I remember saying that, but then you guys shot me down, saying it was stupid and we should just stay in L.A., right?”

“No, we just went,” Mark said.

“But how did you drive across five states without waking me up?”

“Dude,” Joe answered, “you went into this coma-like state. It was weird, man. I thought you might have been dead.”

“Yeah, right guys,” Tom said. “This is all a good one and everything, but come on.”

“No, we’re serious,” Joe replied. “You really don’t remember any of it, do you?”
“Come on, we’re in Hollywood, where stories are made. You guys, this is too much.”
“Joe, I don’t think he believes us,” Mark said.
“If you guys were telling the truth, my parents would have been here by now. Hired a plane or whatever.”
“Where’s my son?” a voice bellowed from the hallway, almost on cue.
“Dad?” said Tom. Just then his father burst through the door, followed by a stream of what appeared to be nurses and guards, all shouting for the man to turn around and come back. “What are you doing here?” Tom asked in a confused manner.
“Please, did you think your mother and I could stay away? Our only son is on his deathbed in St. Louis and we should stay home? Please!” Just then, Tom’s mother entered the door with tears streaming down her face.
“Mom? Don’t cry! What is this?” Tom’s voice cracked. It couldn’t be true. It had to be a joke. But his mother and father? They didn’t joke. “What is this?” he pleaded.
His mother quickly turned around. It had almost looked as if she was smiling, but she was wiping her eyes. She couldn’t bear to look at him. He looked from one face to another, but no one would meet his eye. They all turned away. Maybe he was dying. No. It had to be a joke. Internal organs liquefying? Really. He tried to move his leg. He couldn’t. His arm. No. Sit up. No—but he didn’t feel weak. He felt tied down. It was a joke. And a Jewish Barn? Who would name a hospital that? But why? And his parents? He decided to play along. See what they said. What could he lose?
“Dad, please tell me what’s going on.”
“Son, no one knows exactly. Apparently the situation started a long time ago and who knows? Maybe the drinking binge made it suddenly critical. We’re doing everything we can. We’ll hire the best doctors. We’ll try to save you.”
No, his father did not sound convincing. No panic. Somehow his friends had conned them into going along with this gag. Well, he too could act!
“Oh, I know you will Dad. You and Mom have always done everything possible for me. Far more than I deserved. At least, knowing I won’t live long, I can thank you. You’ve been wonderful parents. How I wish I could repay you. You deserved so much more than me.”
His father said, “Huh?” and his mother stared in blank-eyed astonishment.
This was getting good. He was about to pour on more when his mother shut her mouth and said, “The gig is up. He knows.”
Tom wanted to protest, but he smirked too broadly. His friends cut the duct tape. They all laughed, and Tom demanded to know why his parents went along with such a rotten joke.
“Well, my son, you’re twenty-one and a man now,” his father answered. “We wanted to see if you really had matured. And I must say, you succeeded.”
Putting Sarah in her Place
By Cara Chaplin, Krista Crump, Macey Murphy, Stacey Phillips, and Erica Tenholder

Millie never really liked Sarah. Sarah was tall and skinny. Her hair was blonde and curly. Sarah was also considered the most popular girl in school. Not only was Sarah considered model material, but she was also athletic and musical. Just last summer Sarah toured Austria with a select continental choir. Already this season, it looked as though Sarah would be receiving the Most Valuable Player award for the volleyball team.

So when Millie discovered her new lab partner was going to be Sarah, her stomach turned upside down. Of all the students in the class, she had to be paired with Sarah. Millie had already come to the conclusion that she would probably have to do all of the lab work, because Sarah would probably not know what to do. Also, Sarah would probably not want to get her hands dirty or ruin a new blouse.

Millie’s worst fears had become a reality. Sarah was exactly as she thought. Sarah refused to help with any of the lab work. She was very snooty and rude to Millie during their time together. Sarah made it very clear that she did not want to work with Millie. She made cruel remarks about Millie’s clothes and hair, all the while making the insults pretty audible for the other students. Millie wondered how Sarah had ever become so popular. Were looks really all that mattered? Did personality not matter at all? Millie was dumbfounded. She couldn’t understand. Finally, Millie could not take the abuse and anguish; she had to escape. Tears started to pour out of her dull brown eyes. She turned to run out of the room only to trip over Sarah’s purse. Millie fell flat on her face in front of the entire class. She was so embarrassed she couldn’t even muster up enough courage to get up. Luckily the bell rang, and the class scattered. Millie decided at that moment that Sarah would have to pay.

That evening, Millie was lying in bed staring at her popcorn ceiling. She could not fall asleep. Her mind was racing over the horrifying event that had taken place earlier that day. She was disgusted that Sarah was not even sorry for what had happened. It was Millie’s goal to make Sarah sorry for what she had done. Then it came to her. Millie’s brother was the star football player and he could surely ruin Sarah’s life. Without another thought, Millie jumped out of her bed and rushed to her brother’s room despite the fact that it was 3:00 in the morning.

It did not take Millie long to convince her brother, Jeb, that Sarah was deserving of a punishment. They began plotting. They decided Jeb would go on a date with Sarah and get to know her. This way, they could get some dirt on Sarah.

On the first date, Sarah wore a stringy black dress and black heals. She looked like an actress. As dinner progressed, Sarah’s cruel personality began to shine through conversation. She talked bad and poked fun of almost everyone in the school. Even her so-called best friends were cut down because of their clothes and hair. Jeb just continued to eat and stare in amazement at her cruelty. Then she did it. She began to tell the story of Millie’s trip and fall. As she continued making fun of Millie, Jeb turned bright red and his veins began popping out of his forehead. When she finished, Jeb politely asked, “Do you know what my last name is?”

Sarah replied, “Well, of course. It’s Pierce.”

Then Jeb asked Sarah, “Do you know Millie’s last name?”
Sarah began to turn red. She then dropped her glass of tea down the front of her dress. She had never realized that the hottest guy in school was related to Millie. Jeb got up and began to leave the restaurant. Jeb decided to let her find her own way home. Jeb was so excited to tell Millie the news that he had finally put Sarah in her place.

When Jeb got home, Millie was standing outside waiting with the phone in her hand. Her friend had called to inform her that Sarah was telling everyone that Jeb tried to rape her. Jeb laughed and opened his jacket to reveal a tape recorder. "I knew embarrassing her would not be enough," he said. Sarah was going to be surprised when everyone heard the conversations of the night. Millie was so excited that she ran and jumped into the arms of her brother and began to cry.

The next day at school, Sarah came dressed to perfection as always. She was in the office most of the day discussing what had happened the night before. She explained that she had only gone on a date with Jeb because she wanted to be nice. Sarah went on to explain that the dinner was awful because Jeb was being incredibly obnoxious toward the waiters and other customers. She then began to cry, and say that Jeb raped her.

The next day, Jeb was called into the office. He told his side of the story, and the office staff had no hesitation in believing Jeb, especially after hearing the tape of the dinner conversation. The superintendent returned the tape for Jeb to "do with as he pleased."

Jeb knew of the perfect opportunity to give the entire school the chance to listen to the tape. Tonight was "Pack the Stands Night" at the football stadium. Before the game, Jeb usually gives the announcer the team’s warm-up tape. But tonight, he slipped the announcer the tape of Sarah talking about her friends and other student’s. The tape began to play, and a hush fell over the stadium.

The crowd was first confused by the tape, but their confusion soon turned to anger as they listened to the conversation on the tape. Sarah, shocked and mortified, stood on the side line where she was anticipating cheering on the team. She did not know what to do. She looked around the stadium, and felt all eyes glaring at her. She began to plead for mercy, but no one showed any sympathy. Sarah turned to run off the field. As she ran up the stadium steps, she tripped and fell. The stadium fans began roaring with laughter. Sarah lay there sobbing.

Suddenly the football team’s music came on, and everyone ignored the sorry mess that Sarah had become. Their focus turned from Sarah and onto the football game. Sarah never returned to school after that incident. The next day, however, students began noticing and appreciating people for who they really were, especially people like Millie. The students finally understood that personality really did matter. Without Sarah, the school was a much friendlier place, and everyone had Millie and Jeb to thank.
Family Resemblance
By Cara Chaplin

Close to seventy years ago, a baby boy was born. He was named Richard. Ordinarily, the birth of a son would be a joyous occasion, but not in this case. Eunice Barnes was a lovely woman. She stood about five and a half feet tall with soft, dark brown hair and gentle brown eyes. Most people considered her pretty, but she always thought of herself as plain. She was quiet, sweet, and a wonderful listener. She was always very conscious of herself and her decisions. She lived life by the book and liked it that way.

At the tender age of twenty, Eunice met Robert Allen at a church social. He was a stunning man with a handsome six-foot frame. He also had deep brown hair and eyes to match. He was a very intelligent man; in fact, he was the founder of a growing drugstore chain. Above all Robert’s dazzling qualities, the most appealing aspect to Eunice was his close relationship with his family. His mother had grown ill with cancer so he and his brother, Donald, had both moved back home to care for her. Eunice could not help herself. Over the next few months, she fell madly in love with Robert. Even more amazing, as much as Eunice thought she loved Robert, he loved her that much or even a little more.

Just shy of one year after Eunice and Robert met, they got married. It was a beautiful ceremony, comparable to the perfect wedding every little girl dreams about. Eunice could not believe her good fortune; she had never expected a life of that caliber. She moved in with Robert and his brother, sharing the task of caring for their terminally ill mother. Though Eunice did not wish to live with his family forever, she was very happy with the temporary situation. She liked tending to Robert’s mother and his mother adored Eunice. Eunice grew very close to Robert’s mother and greatly admired her for all her emotional and spiritual strength.

Everything was perfect until Roberts’s business picked up and required him to travel across the country to expand his chain. He knew he would be gone for a long while, but he was unsure of the exact amount of time. Eunice was saddened by the news and initially wanted to travel with him, but she knew she needed to stay and care for his mother. Besides, she would have waited forever for Robert. Days became weeks, and weeks faded into months and still no Robert. He kept telling Eunice he would be back any day, but was still uncertain of an exact date. Eunice was spending a great deal of time with Robert’s brother, Donald, those days. They actually had grown quite close. Donald and Robert resembled each other so much in appearance that sometimes Eunice pretended that Donald was Robert. This eased the pain of separation she suffered, but often left her feeling confused and conflicted.

Almost six months had passed and Robert had still not returned. Eunice was becoming very unhappy. She missed him terribly. Then one lonely night, at one of her most vulnerable moments, Donald leaned in and kissed her. Eunice was shocked at first, but was so lonely for Robert she actually convinced herself it was him and not Donald. One thing led to another and the unthinkable happened.
Immediately after the act, Eunice and Donald were guilt stricken. She could not believe that she had been unfaithful to the one man she loved with her entire being. Donald was full of remorse, for he had never planned on hurting his dear brother. He had no idea what had come over him. Eunice and Donald both agreed that they would never breathe a word of the forbidden act to Robert. Neither one of them could bear the thought of the emotional suffering it would cause their beloved Robert.

The following week, Robert finally came home. Eunice was overjoyed, so much so that she had simply convinced herself that the incident with Donald was just a dream and had never actually occurred. About two months later, Eunice discovered she was pregnant. She was horrified. She had been with both Donald and Robert so close together that she couldn’t be sure who the father was. She was convinced it was Donald’s but would never tell a soul of her concern.

Seven months later, Eunice gave birth to a beautiful little boy, whom they named Richard. Robert was ecstatic at the arrival of his son, but Eunice was noticeably troubled. She was certain Richard looked just like Donald, which was absurd since Robert and Donald were so similar in appearance. Eunice was sure Robert would eventually notice too, and she couldn’t risk losing him.

Eunice could not love Richard because of the fear he inflicted in her heart. Over the next few months, she persuaded Robert that their timing was all off and she was not ready to be a mother. Robert very reluctantly agreed to place Richard up for adoption. Eunice never told Robert the truth and never had another child.

A lovely couple, John and Mary Chaplin, adopted Richard. They gave him a wonderful home full of love and care. Richard finally received the love he rightly deserved.

Captain Redbone
By Shannon Gergen

As Keith drove down the road listening to a Bobby Darin CD, he tried to block out all thoughts of work. He had been planning this weekend for quite some time, and he wanted to enjoy it as much as possible. Fishing was never all that enjoyable to him, but he liked to spend time in a boat, floating serenely on the lake, which was why he was spending a couple days at the resort. The fresh air blowing through the open car window made Keith think that the trip was already worth the three hour drive.

Instead of staying in a nearby hotel, Keith had decided to bring a tent and stay on the campgrounds. He spent enough time indoors while working at the office, so he wanted to take advantage of everything he could. As he parked in the lot not too far from the camp area, he noticed a building near the lake that served several purposes. The sign that said “Ahab’s Grill and Live Bait” caused Keith to mentally scratch off at least one option for dining. Behind the building were numerous boats, some of which could be rented. Since he’d be going that way anyway, Keith decided it couldn’t hurt to at least see what kind of drinks Ahab had to offer.
After pitching his tent and unpacking some of his stuff, Keith strolled to the building and went inside. There were several people sitting around a small bar, so Keith took a seat near them and ordered some iced tea. As he slowly drank it, one of the nearby men stood and approached him. Keith was prepared for a friendly conversation when, to his surprise, the man grabbed him by the shoulders and said, “You must listen to me! None of them will! It’s horrible! Don’t go on the water!”

Unsure how to respond, Keith glimpsed at the bartender, who merely shook his head and rolled his eyes. Deciding to humor the man, Keith asked, “What’s wrong with the water?”

“It tastes like colon and stinks like Russel Crowe on a Friday night, but that’s not what I’m talking about.”

At first Keith was going to defend the aforementioned actor, but he could think of few positive things to say. “Then what are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about the scourge of the lake, the tyrant of the waterways, the prince of tides… no wait, scratch that last one. I’m talking about the man known only as Captain Redbone.”

“Redbone?” Keith questioned. “As in Leon? Are you sure it isn’t Redbeard?”

“I’m positive! He’s so devious, he doesn’t even go by a respectable, traditional pirate name! He’s mad, I tell you! Many a sailor has suffered dire consequences for their water faring ways. Dire consequences!”

It had become apparent to Keith that the man was a few chimps short of a monkey house, so he decided to be agreeable. “Well, thanks for the warning. I’ll be sure to be cautious.”

“You best be,” the weird man responded. With that, he strutted out of the bar. Keith looked to the bartender, hoping for an explanation.

“Sorry about that, sir,” the bartender said. “That nut has been hanging out around here for a week now, always going on about some pirate.”

“No problem,” Keith answered. “I’m not about to let anything ruin my weekend, be it pirate or lunatic. By the way, how do I go about renting a boat?”

“Just go around back. You can’t miss it.”

After finishing his tea, Keith walked to the back and rented a small rowboat. He had considered something with a motor, but decided he could use the exercise. Keith soon found himself rowing away from the shore. Upon finding a nice, secluded area, he stopped paddling and sat back to relax. The sky was blue and the wind gently caressed his skin, luring him into an almost meditative state. Without realizing it, Keith slowly fell asleep.

The nap was cut short when the sound of a piano blasting from a speaker startled Keith to consciousness. He sat up and quickly looked for the source. It didn’t take much to locate it. About twenty meters away, a pedalboat approached. The man peddling the boat held up a stereo to be sure it was aimed at Keith for maximal effect. Keith wasn’t sure which was more unusual: the fact that the man peddling was dressed as a pirate, or the fact that the music traveling across the water was the theme song to “Mr. Belvedere.” The music abruptly ended as the pedalboat stopped. “Prepare to be boarded!” yelled the pirate.

Thinking that the bartender must have put a little something extra in his tea, Keith examined the man in the other boat. He wore a patch over his left eye, a black hat with a
skull and crossbones, and had a stuffed squirrel upon his shoulder. A white, bushy beard covered his lower face, which seemed somewhat contradictory to the man’s brown hair and eyebrows. Finding himself clueless for the second time that day, Keith struggled to find the right words. “Um, can I help you?” Something about that didn’t seem right.

The pirate looked at him. “As a matter of fact, you could. Would you be so kind as to help me with this plank?” The man lifted a long piece of wood from his boat and rotated it so that one end was within Keith’s grasp. “Just take that end there and set it securely on your boat.”

Not wanting to disappoint the man, Keith promptly did what the pirate asked. “Like that? Will that do?”

“Oh yes, that’s quite good, thank you. I’ll be right with you.” He set his end of the board down on his boat and began walking across it. “I’ll tell ya’, if I’d known where I’d be today, I would have spent a bit more time on the balance beam back in gym class, but I was just so sure I was going to be an accountant, or perhaps the assistant manager of a dance club.”

Keith simply nodded. The man had a point. Keith often thought back to how different things were from what he had expected as a kid. He was about to tell the man that he had wanted to be a professional rugby player, but the reality of his situation smacked him across the face. Before he could ask the man what he was doing, there was a new passenger in his rowboat. “Hmm, not too bad if I say so myself,” the pirate said. “Now where was I. Let’s see, boat, plank, accountant….oh, of course! I nearly forgot!”

He cleared his throat, squinted his eyes, and said, “Grrrr!”

Keith blinked.

“Oh wait, that wasn’t right. That sounded like a small poodle. Let me give it another go.” The pirate took out a small canister and sprayed some into his mouth. Expecting it to be breath freshener, Keith looked at the container. It was pepper spray. The pirate cleared his throat again and said, “Arrrr! Hey, I got it! I think that first time I didn’t open-wait, I’m getting off topic. Arr, I be the saltiest of the seadogs and the rowdiest of the rapscallions. I am Captain Redbone!”

For what felt to be an eternity, the two men just stared at each other. Finally, Keith decided that he’d had enough craziness. “What are you doing? Did you get lost on the way to some costume party? Get off of my boat!”

“That be no way to talk to Redbone, landlubber! I’ve pillaged villages for less! Now do what I say, or pay the price!” The captain then pulled a toy sword out of his belt and looked as if he was going to attack.

Without hesitating, Keith pushed the man into the water and kicked the plank in after him. “I said to get out of my boat!”

A wet Redbone stared at Keith from the water. “Actually, you said to get off your boat, not out, but that’s neither hear nor there. You have made the biggest mistake of your life this day. Of this, I can assure you! I’ll get my treasure yet!”

Keith grabbed one of the paddles in case he needed a weapon, but the man swam to his own pedalboat and got in. Keith wondered what treasure the man was referring to, but just assumed he meant Keith’s wallet. The pedalboat turned around, revealing a bumper sticker that stated “My Other Ship Is A Steamboat.” Slowly, it floated out of view. Keith waited a bit longer before rowing back to his campgrounds.
By time Keith got back and started a fire, the sun was setting. Instead of eating at some restaurant, he decided to make dinner himself. He had brought some hot dogs with him, so he found a long stick and began heating a couple over the fire. As he ate, thoughts of the day buzzed inside his head. Did this lake just naturally attract crazy people, or was it him? In retrospect, the pirate probably wouldn’t have actually hurt him, but what was wrong with that guy? Besides, if the “treasure” he was wanting wasn’t money, what was it? Keith decided that there was no reason to worry about it since he’d likely never see the man again. Tomorrow, instead of going somewhere isolated, Keith would stay near other people, just to be safe. Feeling a bit more at ease, Keith enjoyed watching the stars appear in the sky and, after a couple hours of gazing upwards, went inside the tent. He took his shoes off and placed them at the bottom of his sleeping bag because he was afraid that a spider or some other creepy thing would get inside of the shoes during the night, and he didn’t feel like sticking his foot in the next day to be surprised. He soon fell asleep.

Daylight was already shining through the tent canvas when Keith awoke. He wasn’t surprised that he had slept all night without waking, since he had always been a very sound sleeper, when given the opportunity. After stretching in his sleeping bag a little bit and allowing himself wake up a bit more, the groggy camper stood up and slowly unzipped his tent. He was still fighting the last remnants of sleep from his eyes as he took a few steps outside of his tent. Keith went from sleepy to fully alert in the space of about a second. His surroundings could not possibly be right. When he had gone to sleep in his tent last night, he had been near a dying fire and in viewing distance of other campers. This morning he was completely surrounded by water. It took a few seconds of disbelief for Keith to notice that his tent, along with him, was now floating in the middle of the lake on a raft made of logs.

The stranded camper realized what was wrong. He had gone insane. That was the only way to explain all of the previous day’s misadventures and his current predicament. Or perhaps he was dead! If so, he didn’t think Heaven would be like this, and he was afraid of where that left him. He shook his head and decided that he couldn’t be dead, so he must be crazy. “Well, I suppose there are advantages to being crazy,” he said out loud. “Like talking to myself. Everyone pretty much expects it. I wonder when it happened? Hey, maybe I’ll get some sort of discount at the petting zoo! Unless they think I’ll eat one of their guinea pigs. I’ll just get a cattle prod shoved into my backside instead.”

“Do you always talk to yourself this way?” asked a familiar voice. Keith turned around to see a pedalboat nearby and Captain Redbone standing on the raft, nibbling on some jerky.

“What are you doing here?” Keith asked. “Can’t you at least let me go crazy in peace?”

“Come now, you’re not crazy. You’re just as sane as myself and Petey here,” Redbone said, patting the stuffed squirrel.

“Well, that’s reassuring. For a minute there I-wait a minute, wasn’t your patch over your left eye yesterday?”

The patch was now covering Redbone’s right eye. “Of course it was. I have to switch it every day or else I might develop some sort of ocular problem. When you get your own patch, you can wear it as you please, but some of us prefer proper eye care!”
Keith felt like an idiot for not thinking of that reasonable reason for the switch, but he decided not to apologize when he realized that he may not be crazy after all. “Did you do this? Put me on this raft in my sleep?”

“Yes, I did, and unless you hand over my treasure, you’ll rot out here!”

“You do realize that the shore is easily within swimming distance, correct?”

Redbone looked disappointed. “Arrr! So you see the loophole in my plan. My, but you are a sharp one! Shiver me timbers!”

“What does that even mean?”

The pirate’s mouth opened, as if to answer, but then closed. “Hmm, to tell you the truth, I don’t know. I’m still kind of new at this whole thing, and there aren’t that many pirates around, so I didn’t get a proper apprenticeship. Frankly, I’m kinda making these things up as I go along. Give me a second though, I’ll figure it out.”

Redbone scratched his beard in thought, but apparently too hard, because it fell off in his hand, revealing it to be fake. Keith noticed a tag that said “Santa Beard: $2.99.” He then noticed something. “Hold on, aren’t you...” Keith grabbed the eye patch and yanked it off. The pirate’s face, now fully visible, was that of the man from the bar the previous day. “It’s you! What is your deal? What kind of scam are you running?”

Redbone looked upset. “No fair! Why’d you go and ruin all the fun? Can’t you let a thirty-two year old man live out one of his dreams? You monster!”

Noticing that Redbone was mumbling to himself in despair, Keith took his chance to get away from the nutcase. He ran across the plank that was connecting the raft to the pedalboat and jumped into it. He pedaled as fast as he could, but found himself somewhat limited since he had left his shoes in his tent and was now barefoot. At one point, Keith turned around to see the pirate dancing around the raft. Redbone made eye contact with the fleeing camper and yelled “Sucker! I got the treasure!” This didn’t even slow Keith down.

After reaching shore, Keith rushed to his campground spot and picked up all the belongings he had kept outside the tent. Fortunately, there had only been a few things in the tent with him the previous night and he could leave without them. He packed all of his stuff into his car and put on a pair of sandals which, as luck would have it, he had brought in case he wanted to change from his tennis shoes. Before leaving, Keith quickly walked to “Captain Ahab’s” to get a snack for the road. As the bartender poured some tea into a paper cup for Keith, he looked at the sandals. “It’s a good thing you’re wearing those.”

Not knowing what the bartender meant, Keith asked, “Why is that?”

The bartender shrugged. “It’s the strangest thing. All this week campers have been saying that they wake up in the morning to find that their shoelaces are missing. We still haven’t figured out why.”

Filled with some sort of understanding, Keith went to his car and began driving away. Before losing sight of the lake, Keith took one last look out his side window. Not far from the shore was a steamboat, and swimming in the water near that steamboat was a man holding what appeared to be a stuffed squirrel and some shoestrings.
Marie walked slowly through the city in which she had once lived. With each step she took in the winter-crisp air, she wondered why she ever left St. Louis. The sky was growing dark and most of the small shops by the college were closing. She smiled as she smelled the familiar scent of all the coffee shops around. Marie always traveled back to St. Louis about this time of year just to remember all of the wonderful times she’d had at college. It seemed just being there took her back to those seven years ago.

All of the sudden she saw him. It happened so suddenly. She had just looked up, and there were those familiar blues she had looked into so many times. It was at that moment she recalled why she had not stayed in this city. All at once memories came flooding back to Marie. She thought of the love she and Michael had shared. What a wonderful romance they had together. A smile came to her face as she recalled all of the times he tightly held her hand so she would not fall. The times he had made her laugh so hard that tears had sprung to her eyes and how he gently wiped those tears away. Marie winced at the pain she felt in her stomach when she realized the love she’d lost. Marie knew Michael must have broken her heart, but that was the one thing she couldn’t recall. Astonished to see Marie, Michael gave her a big hug and told her of all the times he’d thought about her since the years they’d been apart. Marie’s heart pounded as she smiled sweetly and told him about the places she’d traveled to and the fun times she had experienced while living in Las Vegas. As she spoke, she began to feel a sense of hope that she had given up on a long time ago. It came to her that maybe there was still a chance for eternal love and happiness. That maybe she could still have her first love.

However, she must have gotten lost in the moment, because she looked down and saw Michael holding the hand of a small boy. This small boy had those same beautiful blue eyes that pierced her soul. Marie quietly excused herself and left the two as calmly as she could. With one last tearful glance back she knew her heart would never be happy. Michael would always be the one who got away.

It’s Nothing
By Rene Thomas

Jane quickly hopped up the steps to her house after school, pulling her keys out of her pocket. “Thump, thump, thump,” a noise like someone was coming from behind her; Jane turned her head sharply.

“What was that?” Jane asked herself. “Nothing,” she concluded, and opened the front door and kicked off her shoes.

“Hello,” she called down the hallway. Nothing. She made her way into the kitchen where her mother had left a note for Jane on the refrigerator. “Jane, I’ll be back around seven. Don’t forget to do your homework and to do your laundry. Love, Mom.” At that moment, she heard a door slam shut upstairs. Startled, she dropped the note on the kitchen floor. Jane crept slowly into the
living room and peered upstairs. Suddenly feeling ridiculous for being so frightened, she laughed at herself.

“It’s nothing,” she said aloud, and walked heavily up the stairs to her bedroom. As she entered her room, she walked over to her bed and laid down closing her eyes. Almost immediately, she heard voices coming from the other room.

“That’s strange, I didn’t hear anything before,” Jane said to herself. Curious and nervous at the same time, she timidly looked out of her door and down the hall, towards the direction of the voices. Staying close to the wall, Jane crept silently down the hall. She cautiously opened her mother’s bedroom door and found the television was turned on. Puzzled, she went over to the television and turned it off. Once again, she realized how unreasonably she had behaved, and returned to her room.

“Nothing, gosh it was just nothing,” Jane convinced herself.

Jane had been lying down for more than five minutes, when she started to hear the sound of footsteps on her stairs. Suddenly stricken with alarm again, she leapt up from her bed and flung open her bedroom door. Nothing.

Now, by this time, Jane was getting quite anxious. She glanced at the clock: five o’clock, only. Sitting on the edge of her bed, she waited, in silence, for something, anything to be heard.

“This is crazy,” she thought to herself. “It was nothing…nothing.”

As soon as the words left poor Jane’s mouth, as if in response, there was a knock at her front door. A wave of relief washed over Jane as she ran down the stairs. She was glad for any company at this point, even if it was the annoying neighbor from next door. She opened the door. Nothing.

“How strange…” Jane commented as she shut the door behind her.

At this moment, a sense of dread poured over her; she remembered she had to do the laundry, or her mom would definitely be mad at her when she got home later that day. The very thought of descending to the basement with all these mysterious events happening today was enough to make her sick. Jane slowly made her way to the basement steps. She quickly turned on the lights at the top of the stairs, illuminating her way down. Gripping the railing the whole way down, she quickly walked to the middle of the room, where her basket was sitting on the top of the washing machine. While hastily throwing her clothes into the washing machine, she heard a quick tapping at the basement door. Shaking, she turned to look at the door. Nothing.

Now white with fear, she threw her last blouse into the machine, poured in the detergent, and turned to leave. The door at that moment slammed shut, and the lights flickered and blacked out, leaving Jane in absolute solitude and darkness. Screaming with horror, she ran to the door blindly, and pulled it open so hard it hit the wall and ricocheted, cutting her leg as she stumbled up the staircase, tears streaming down her face.

“It’s nothing, it’s nothing,” Jane shrieked in an attempt to convince herself that it was just nothing that was causing her to rip out her own fingernails as she tore up the stairs and up to her room.

Jane reached her bedroom door, which was now shut. A sob escaped her throat, and she choked it back as she threw open the bedroom door. Everything went black as Jane screamed in absolute desperation.

“IT’S NOTHING,” she wailed.
A tiny beam of light poked through the opening between the cabinet doors. I peered out and admired my bookstore. As usual, the store was filled with people. They filed through the aisles like busy ants. Large glass windows lined the perimeter of the store, filling the room with bright rays of light. The store looked beautiful.

Just then, my boss’s hand reached toward me and plucked me off the shelf. She was an older lady with a short, round body, and had been working at the store for years. She was a bubbly person, always smiling and friendly. She set me on the counter and held a pot of coffee over me. “Ouch!” I muttered, as the piping hot liquid poured down my sides. You never quite get used to the initial shock, but it’s the price I have to pay. Don’t worry; being a coffee cup isn’t all that hard. I get a lot of appreciation at our store, and my boss takes really good care of me.

“Thank you,” the boss said, passing me to a customer. He was a tall, slender man with bold, green eyes and sandy brown hair. He carried me to a booth in a corner of the store and handed me to a beautiful girl who was already sitting down. The light from the windows was bouncing off her skin and the table.

“Thanks, baby,” she said sweetly as she held me to her lips. I looked around at the two of them. They looked so happy together! They talked for a few minutes, but then something began to happen. The light from outside seemed to get brighter! However, the couple didn’t seem to notice. In fact, they hadn’t been paying much attention to me, either. They were enthralled in each other. The man continued to speak, but then his voice began to quiver. What was wrong with him? Maybe he needs a cup of coffee, I thought with a chuckle. Then, I saw him pull a small, black box out from under the table. The light continued to grow brighter, but he didn’t seem to care. He looked longingly at the woman and began to open the box. Her eyes began to flood with tears. By now, the light had grown so intense that the couple seemed to be glowing.

“You are my best friend and the best part of me. Will you be mine forever?” the man asked. He opened the box to reveal a sparkling diamond ring.

“Yes!” the woman exclaimed as she embraced him.

They held each other for several minutes in the spotlight of the bookstore. Giggling like children, they linked arms and headed toward the door. I noticed that the light seemed to follow them out of the store, but the people continued to shop and the couple continued to smile. However, I was left alone on the table for the rest of the day.

I guess my boss was really busy, because she usually cleans the tables thoroughly during the day. Eventually, it was closing time and the store began to empty. My boss made her rounds around the store and began organizing books and cleaning up the kitchen. The store looked so different at night. It was darker, quieter, and very calm. I always miss the people when they leave, and I think that my boss does, too. Tonight, she seemed to be in her own world. In fact, she had completely forgotten about me! I was still sitting on the booth, half-full of cold coffee.

Suddenly, the mood of the store began to lift. The bright light appeared
and soon flooded the store. There were only two people left in the store: my boss and an older man with a short, round body. Neither of them noticed the light. The old man headed toward the door, but then he stopped and picked me up. He carried me gently toward my boss and set me gently on the counter.

“I think you forgot to pick this up,” he told her.

I watched as the light became brighter and more intense. It again became a spotlight and began to focus on my boss and the old man. They talked for a few minutes and then headed toward the door.

I couldn’t believe it! She was leaving the store without washing any of us dishes. Maybe she’ll turn around and come back, I thought. But she didn’t.

Followed by a beam of light, the old man helped her shut down the store. When they finished, they turned off the light and headed toward the door. I watched them as they exited the store, and I became extremely confused. They had just turned off the light switch and most of the store was filled with darkness. Actually, the only area that was lit up was where they were standing.

That night I thought about the light and how it had appeared earlier that day. It was so odd that nobody noticed it, not even the young couple or my boss and the old man. After thinking, I came to a conclusion. I don’t think the light followed them at all. Actually, I think they were creating their own light. Their happiness and love is what made them glow, even if they couldn’t see it.

**Untitled**

*By Schuyler Gerard, Alyson Harvey, Eboni Jones, Rene Thomas, and Bianca Vance*

It was a beautiful day. Tiffany and John decided to take a walk along the path in the forest. The birds were chirping, the sun was high, the air was light, and they were in love. Tiffany thought the setting was so romantic. She had been going out with John for about three months and she couldn’t have been happier. They held hands as they walked amongst the trees. A bunny rabbit jumped out of a nearby bush and startled Tiffany. John put a protective arm around her and laughed. How could she be scared of something so cute? They continued walking. As they walked for what seemed like hours, they came upon a little cabin. It looked old and deserted. The windows were dusty. A few of them were even broken. The front door was boarded up. Some of the floor planks were missing from the porch. The place looked like it had been unoccupied for years. There were some old, rusty tools lying in a pile near the porch. John wanted to look at the tools. Maybe he could find something worth salvaging. They walked to the pile. The leaves and twigs cracked under their feet. In the pile, John saw an old, rusty saw and some screwdrivers. Then, he saw a hammer and an ax that didn’t look so bad. He lifted them up to show Tiffany. Something bright caught her eye as she watched him picking up the tools. It was small and it gleamed a bright, red color. John saw it too. He picked it up. It was a ring.

John slipped on the unusual looking ring. It had a thin band, orange in color, and a large stone sitting atop of it that was red, not a bright ruby red, but more of a fiery earth red. It looked to be at least two hundred years old. As soon as the ring got past John’s
knuckle, he felt a deep electric impulse that shot all through his body. It was so powerful it threw him onto his backside. Tiffany screamed and rushed to his side with concern. He was out cold, so Tiffany lightly slapped his face and called his name, but there was still no response. Tiffany decided to leave and go get help. She cautiously walked over to the cabin to look for a telephone. Using the hammer from the tool pile, Tiffany easily pulled the rotted boards away from the front door. She pushed the creaky door open and noticed a bright light billowing through the ceiling. She looked up and realized she was no longer in a cabin, but a huge, gorgeous mansion. She called out, but her voice only echoed through the enormous home. As she turned to leave, a door at the top of a grand, spiraling staircase opened slowly. Setting her fears aside and putting her love for John first, Tiffany started up the staircase. With each step reaching higher, her heart beat louder. So loud it seemed to echo through the halls, along with her voice. Finally, she made it to the top of the staircase and into a grand foyer. The door that had opened was at least twenty feet high, ornate with gold trim. She peered through the doorway and saw what appeared to be a child’s nursery.

With much curiosity, Tiffany stepped inside to get a closer look. As soon as she stepped in past the large door, it slammed shut. The face of the door nearly knocked her onto her ass. She turned around to get out, but there was no exit in sight. What she once viewed as a nursery now looked like a graveyard. The room had no sort of dimensions. It was cool, dark, and the smell was strange. It was certainly like no other she had encountered. Standing alone, Tiffany felt like a fish in a fishbowl. The hair on her neck wouldn’t lay flat as she stood there motionless. She could hear faint noises coming from all sides of her, yet nobody was there. The only thing she noticed was a faint light ahead. She thought that surely it was a way out. Carefully, she approached the light, putting one foot in front of the other. She held her breath with each step, hoping to find solid ground beneath her. The light grew brighter as she neared it. Yet, it seemed to be contained. The light was coming from within a small, clear ball. The ball was quite small, almost the size of a ping pong ball. It seemed to hover there. It was not attached, hung, or placed on any sort of stand. Underneath the glowing ball was a scroll. The paper seemed to be rather old. The ends were tattered and yellowed by age. It was fastened by a large lock of hair. Tiffany’s heart skipped a beat as her trembling hand glided over her own hair. Not many people are blessed with hair the color of gold. The hair around the scroll was an identical match.

She reached for the scroll, untied it, and glanced over the script on the aged paper. The handwriting was identical to her own. When she began to read, she was surprised to find out that it was addressed to her. It was written by her in the future, hoping she would change the future events and save herself in the process.

When Tiffany was done reading, she was so overwhelmed by her emotions that she fell to the floor and began to sob. Somehow, she found the strength to get up and find her way back to the cabin. This time, she was motivated by anger. Leaving the scroll behind, all she had to remind her of the letter was the lock of hair in her tightly gripped hands.

As she found the door back to the cabin, she stopped a moment and collected her thoughts. All that ran through her head were questions, and she wondered what she was going to do. She opened the door and found detectives that were searching the cabin. They stared at her in amazement. Within seconds, John was there holding her and telling
that she had been missing for days. He continued by saying the search party almost gave up hope, but he wouldn’t have it. John then cried with relief and hugged her more tightly, but all Tiffany could think about was the letter she had found in the mansion and how angry and scared she should be. She began to review the contents of the letter in her mind, going over it detail for detail.

The letter stated that a great misfortune would overcome Tiffany, and in a stupid riddle the letter included love, man, and death. This was weird to Tiffany because the only man that she had ever loved was John, and where did death fit into the equation? Tiffany went to see a psychic for answers.

The psychic wore a head wrap, had an island accent, and wore one dangling loop earring. Tiffany had come across Ms. Cleo, who told her she would meet a mysterious character whose name began with a letter in the alphabet. Furthermore, Cleo demanded another $19.95, plus tax, for more information. Tiffany realized Cleo was a fraud and searched for another fortune teller.

She came to an old, rundown shack on the corner. An old, skinny man appeared in the shadows of the dimly lit hall. His voice was deep and scratchy, and he smelled of incense. Before Tiffany could speak, the man said, “I know why you are here, child.” The old man sat down on the floor, lit a candle, and showed Tiffany what would happen to her in the future. To her surprise, John had invited her for that long walk to murder her. He was going to use the tools that were in the woods. Hysterical, Tiffany returned home.

That very same night, John called and asked if she wanted to go for a walk. Enraged by his disregard for her life, Tiffany agreed to go. As they walked in the woods, they came upon the tools. Before John could pick up the tools, Tiffany snatched them from the ground. Screaming at him, she said “I know you want to kill me, but I’m going to kill you first! Die! Die! Die!” She stabbed John multiple times.

“Cut! Cut! Cut!” said the director. “Repeat scenes 13-17. There’s not enough blood.”

O-Christmas Tree!
By Macey Murphy

The day had arrived! It was the Sunday before Christmas, which meant the Murphy family was going to brave the cold temperatures and drive 45 minutes from home just to walk through three feet of snow, all to find the perfect Christmas tree. It was ten o’clock in the morning and everyone was awake and getting bundled up with layers of socks, carhartt coats, stocking caps and snow boots while mom was making hot chocolate for us. That was, everyone except Autumn, my brother’s girlfriend. She was a cosmetologist who made sure she looked just perfect for every occasion. Dad had started a fire in the garage to warm it for when we got back so we could melt the snow off our tree before bringing it into the house. I was putting Meg, our dog, into the truck as I heard Autumn come out of the house. As I looked across the driveway, I saw her getting into my brother’s car in her black leather jacket and 4 inch high
boots, her makeup perfect and hair all done up. My dad chuckled and said, “This is going to be fun!” My dad, mom and I all piled into my dad’s truck and my brother followed behind us the whole way. My mom and I, of course, sang every Christmas song that we could think of which, annoyed my dad, who in turn turned up the radio.

As we arrived at the run-down farm, we saw that his drive hadn’t been plowed, so my brother parked on the road and he helped Autumn into the back of the truck. As we drove down the winding path to the man’s house, we passed the same rusted out old cars that were stuck in his yard the year before. The farmer came out of the house and pointed us to the same area as the year before. Dad let Meg out to run around the fields and we began our long walk across the snow-covered cornfield to the hill of trees. Mom was taking pictures every ten feet with our new digital camera that she really had no clue of how to work. Dad and I were becoming annoyed with that so we sped up, and Michael and Autumn slowed down because she couldn’t keep up in her heels.

We reached the hill, and as I looked out at the sea of trees, I almost felt dizzy because I knew of the long hours my mom would spend analyzing and debating about which tree to pick. I thought of how when my brother and I were younger, my mom would let us pick the tree, but somehow we never came home with that one, and now that we are older, she asks for our opinion, but never values it too much when it comes to her tree. We were all there for the simple reason of a family tradition. My dad was playing with Meg while Michael was trying to keep Autumn warm and I was supposed to be making sure that mom didn’t fall down the hill. (I didn’t do a good job of that myself the year before, so I don’t know why they put me in charge of that again.) Meg, of course, was excited, so she was jumping and getting mud and who knows what else on Autumn, which in turn got my brother in trouble, which in turn made my dad laugh. Mom was getting frustrated because she couldn’t find a tree she liked, so dad thought he would help. He was pointing them out left and right and up and down the hill, but she didn’t like any of them. At that point I was tired of walking up and down that stupid hill, so I just stood in the middle. Finally, after an hour and a half of searching, she picked one. Dad told Michael to cut it down and just then I heard an obscene word come from Michael’s mouth and he started to climb the hill. I couldn’t believe he forgot the saw. Dad whistled for Meg, and as she came running past us, she knocked my mom’s feet out from under her, and she went down. Not just down to her butt, but down to the bottom of the hill. Instinctively, Autumn ran after her and caught her heel on a branch and rolled down the hill a ways. Dad and I went after them to make sure they were okay, and they were. It was then I realized we had another task ahead of us: Finding that same tree. I still don’t know if we ever did, but after Michael came back with the saw, we cut one down and drug it up the hill. We paid for our tree and had a very quiet ride home. It ended up being a beautiful tree, but a very frustrating afternoon. I hope this year things will go better. I know I will not be in charge of keeping mom on her feet.
Blue Whings  
By Allyson Harvey

I am known as Sally Aloe Pweshus Yalloo, and I have the answers for the imaginative few. All the questions that start with "Why" hold simple secrets, which can only be seen through the special eye. My stories can be told to everyone, but the keeper of the gift has the only key, to see what I see and agree with me.

Why is the sky blue? That’s the one I hear most. It can’t be the fumes from my grandmother’s roast. So, what can it be, you’re asking me? I’ll tell you why, just listen to me. The sky is blue due to one thing. It is the main color of paint inside the house of the Whings. The Whings is a family that lives in the sky. And we watch them each day as time flies by.

So, why does it get dark when the day turns to night? Well, that’s when Mrs. Whing turns off the light. But sometimes the children are afraid of the dark. There’s something in the closet, or they heard something bark. It’s okay, assures Mrs. Whing. She knows what to do when the sky isn’t blue. She reaches down next to the little one’s bed and plugs something in to rest their heads. Sometimes we can see the entire light, shining down from the sky so bright. But other times, the light is quite pale, and often the shape of a fingernail.

Why is the sky sometimes red, orange or pink? That’s when Mr. Whing makes such a stink. It must be cold in the house of the Whings. And Mr. Whing hates to be cold of all things. So the color will change when the fireplace is lit, to warm up the house and Mr. Whing just a bit. The gleam of the fire can been seen up above. The sky is a window into a house that I love.

Most don’t know that the Whings live there. But I have met them, I know they’re there. Lots of things happen in the sky, but I don’t have enough time to tell you why. I have told you a few things about the Whings, now it is up to you to think of why; certain things happen up in the sky.

Whispers in the Woods  
By Ethan Wilson

Leaves fall to the ground all around the pretty dame. Dressed in her royal cloak of pink and green, she sits and studies the books of old, required to be read by all the daughters of the royal family. Time spent so that she, too, will sit on the throne, as her mother did before her unfortunate demise. As she reads on in a strange tongue, the scurries and sounds of the forest begin to die down and a hush falls over the Natural Kingdom. The animals about turn their eyes and ears to the amazing melodies that emanate from the princess’s mouth. They seem to be almost uncontrollably drawn to the song she weaves from the words of the book. After reading for some time, her studies stop and reading ceases. Boredom overcomes her eyes as she begins to doze off, left to sleep on the floor of the forest. Blackness overcomes her consciousness and the world of her dreams takes over.
She sees herself in third person, twirling in circles as if an axis runs longitudinally through her body. She begins to glow with a haze around her body. She cringes in pain and feels something growing inside her body and trying to get out. Eventually, her eyes open and the pain resides just enough for her to concentrate. She sees her arms become brown and thick, striate, and harden, taking form of the bark of an old tree. Her feet grow together and extend into the ground, taking root. She changes to nothing more than a simple tree. She resides as a tree in the void for some time, still able to see and hear, she thinks, for there is nothing that she can see or hear. Other trees illuminate and are visible as though they have always been there. She examines the surroundings as much as possible, which is hard to do when you cannot move. She pauses her thoughts and actions for a second and she begins to hear voices all around her. They are whispering, but she cannot quite understand what they say. Confused, she tries to think of who or what the voices could be coming from. The voices get slightly louder than before, and it seems they are talking about different things of new and old that have happened here in the area where her body is laying asleep. In a stroke of enlightenment, she realizes that the trees are having these various conversations. At that very moment of enlightenment, she awakes, sprawled in the soft green grass with her face gently laid upon the book she was reading before her nap.

She thinks to herself for a second and recalls the dream she had been a part of for the last while. Feeling strange about the whole thing, she considers she is in a forest, and with the amount of time that she slept, it will be dark soon. She gathers her book in her arm and heads with haste toward home. She had come some way out. It is her favorite place to study, but it is unfortunate today because there is no way she can make it to the castle before the dark sets in. She continues on, undeterred, as the sun slips below the line of trees and darkness sets in, allowing her to only see dark outlines and shapes. Getting a little scared, she slows her own pace so that her own sound does not drown out the sounds around her. She can hear things moving and scratching all around her and this makes her very uneasy. She thinks to herself, “Someone will be along shortly if I just keep on course.” Coldness of the night chills her body and a growing uneasiness begins to take her better judgment. She turns, trying to find the origin of the sounds that drive her insane. Now confused of the direction to travel, her heart begins to beat rapidly, and fear and uncertainty becomes the focus of her mental energy. “Where to go? Should I wait? Will someone be out looking for me?” is all that runs through her mind. Clusters of the voices begin to fill her mind, all telling her places to go. She can’t see anyone, but she knows they must be there. “Do they mean me harm?” she wonders. Getting jittery, she runs as fast as she can through the thicket, picking her first instinctual direction. She feels her lungs tighten and ache as the cool air fills her lungs repeatedly and gradually closer together. The further and faster she runs, the more she realizes that she cannot escape the voices. Not being able to continue any further, she stops and bends over, trying to catch her breath.

Having a few seconds to think about what is going on, she remembers the dream she had earlier. Thinking herself silly for even considering the possibility,
she yells, “WHAT DO YOU WANT?” All the voices say without unison and in various tones, “Stay here with us. It’s where you belong.” They say this over and over, not stopping for anything. She yells with all her breath, “Quit! Stop! No!” to no prevail. Scared and exhausted, she falls to the moist ground and curls herself in a ball and starts crying. Confused, not knowing what to do, she just lays there. The voices get louder and angrier. She feels the ground under her moving as if something were poking and prodding, trying to get out. Roots shoot out of the ground and grab at her, holding her arms and legs as she kicks and strains to get away. Another shoots out, blocking her mouth and nose from much needed air. She feels herself expend all of the air in her lungs as she struggles. Her lungs feel as though they are on fire and are being ripped out of her chest. As the last bit of life leaves her worn body, she awakens on the green grass with her head rested on the book that she was reading before her nap.

She looks around as the sun begins to fade. She thinks to herself, “This is going to be an interesting walk home.”

My Summer Vacation
By Susan Flaker

It all started when my dad got the idea to take my family to Disney World. We were all very happy to go and the day we left we piled into the car with everything a human could possibly need to live in the lap of luxury for the next three weeks. Each member of my family had at least one pillow, a blanket and a back pack filled with “necessities.” My bag was filled with CD’s, makeup, magazines, knitting needles and my teddy bear. My father had crammed all that he could into the carrier on top of the van and the overflow then flooded into the car. There was just enough room for one person to take off their shoes without the car bursting open. The seven members of my family traveled closer than we ever have before when the car started to shake. We had just gotten into St. Louis when we had to pile out of the car to see that the tire had blown out.

“Let me change it.” I screamed over the traffic.

“No, no, you’re just a girl, you can’t change a tire.” My father made me so irate with his last comment. I was ready to go into a whole speech about how women can do everything a man can when I remembered that he was my father, and I would have to live the next three weeks in very close proximity.

“But Dad, I just changed the tire yesterday.”

“No Susan,” my dad said, “Stand back with your sisters.”

So there I was, standing on the side of I-70 during rush hour while my dad emptied our perfectly packed car: to change a tire.

“Dad you don’t have to do that,” I said.

“Susan, stand back with your sisters.” My father’s voice was very agitated.

“But Dad, the spare isn’t under….”

“Susan, Stand back. It’s far too dangerous for you to be out here.” After hearing the anger in my father’s voice I conceded to his wishes and stepped back. Meanwhile, all of
our luggage had flown all over the interstate and my mother was trying feverishly to
gather it all up.

“Where’s the tire?!” I heard my father bellow. I watched for a minute as my father
tore apart our car, then I motioned him to underneath the car. There was the tire,
perfectly put away under the car. My father removed it and started to jack up the car.
His frustration must have gotten the best of him though, because before he could get the
car off the ground he started to walk away. I saw this as my big chance, so I sunk over to
the car and changed the tire. By this time my father was on his way back, so I stepped
away from the car, trying to obey his earlier command.

By now my mother had gotten everything in order and was repacking our suitcases.
My father came back and looked at the tire and pride beamed out of his face.

“You see, I told you I could do it.” He said.

“Yeah dad, sure,” I thought to myself.

We threw everything into the car and then went to the nearest Sears to get a new tire.
My dad had insisted that we go to a Pizza Hut and have some dinner while the tire was
being changed. My family is notorious for never being able to decide on a type of pizza
and for some reason we all found ourselves sitting around a table trying to do the
impossible.

“I want Cheese,” my youngest sister said.

“No, let’s get pepperoni,” Anne, the 4th one said.

“I hate pepperoni, you know that,” I chimed in.

“Why did we have to come to this place to eat; you know I only like organic food. I
don’t let anything that isn’t completely pure enter my body.” My oldest sister, Corri, said
as she lit up a cigarette. My mom, fed up with it all, ordered two, one with just cheese
and one with everything. She claimed that we could pick the toppings off. As we waited,
we started to play random games of tick-tack-toe and hangman on the placemats. Our
stomachs had just started to digest themselves when my 2nd sister, Kaye C. said,

“Where’s the pizza?” We looked at the clock and realized that we had been waiting
for two hours for our pizza. My mom went to investigate and came back with the
solution.

“They forgot to put our order in,” she said with a twinge of anger. My mom never
seems to be mad; she almost always has a smile on her face and a positive outlook to
match. “They’re going to have it done in a few minutes, but they gave us free bread
sticks.” The bread sticks were able to survive on our table for about a minute before the
circling vultures devoured them.

By the time our family’s ravenous appetites had been soothed, we got on the road
again. By this time it was nearly dark and my father didn’t want to drive for much
longer. We decided to stop as soon as we got to Illinois.

“Greg,” my mom said, “you do realize that this is East St. Louis and it probably
wouldn’t be the best place to spend the night.”

“Sondra,” my father said, “I am a very tired man and I really need some sleep.” So
my family pulled over to the nearest hotel and my family checked in. The hotel itself left
a lot to be desired. Right when we walked in the door, we were hit with the scent of
cheap perfume and relationships that people don’t like to speak of. There were dead
cockroaches lying on their backs sprinkled on the floor, and the bathroom had been taken
over by fungus. Tired, exhausted and afraid to sleep, I went to lock the door. That’s
when I realized that the door had no lock. In desperation, I shoved a chair in front of the door and called my parents room.

"Mom, I can’t stay here," I plead.

"Your room’s just as bad as ours?" she asked.

My mother and I discussed our tribulations, but we were unable to persuade our father to leave his bed. So my older sisters and I sat there, too afraid to sleep, waiting for the roaches to approach us. Eventually sleep managed to find us.

In the morning, we went down to the car where my father was sitting wide eyed and bushy tailed. "How’d you sleep girls?” he yelled. We responded with a groan of discomfort. We drove, unbathed, all day that day until we got to Georgia, and then we decided it would be a good time to stop. We picked a hotel much better than the one we had stayed in the night before. To us it felt like the Ritz.

That night we all drained the water from the Mississippi to bathe. We ate a fantastic supper provided by room service and slept in nice warm beds. In the morning, we awoke to find our car in shambles. Our carrier had been broken into and all of our luggage was all over the place. Luckily, we had taken all of our valuables into the room with us, but that is nothing compared to the insecurity we had for the rest of the trip.

That day we drove to Disney. Every one of us, even my father, was like a kid in a candy shop. We darted around from land to land trying to soak all of it in. At one point in time my little sister and I wandered off. I had told my mother than I was leaving, but I forgot to inform her that Lauren was coming with me. When I returned to the family, my mother was frantically searching for Lauren. My Father was trying desperately to calm her, to no avail. We decided that the park had grown too, crowded so we choose to go over to Epcot. We went around from “village” to “village,” and that’s when it happened.

In German town they were having a dance contest. The people would teach selected men from the audience to learn a dance and then perform it. My Dad was one of those people. My dad has never been known for his grace when it comes to dancing, but he is well known for his competitive spirit. The men taught him the dance, and then it was his turn to perform for everyone, alone. At first it looked like everything would be okay; all of the men were about the same as he was. But then, the gentleman who performed right before my dad did blew the audience away. We thought there was no hope whatsoever for my father, but as they say, where there’s a will, there’s a way.

My father started off just fine then he got lost. He wasn’t sure what part of the dance was next. So in an act of desperation he took his shirt off and started twirling it over his bare-chested body. While he did win the contest, my family walked away in shame.

The next few days were marked by people coming up to my father and saying how well he danced. We had never been so happy to leave Disney World. Thinking that the embarrassment on this trip would finally be over, we started on our drive home. We were half way there when it was time to stop for the night. My mother was tired and so was my little sister, so they stayed in the hotel room while my Dad took myself and my three other sisters out to eat. Everything was fine until the waiter said, “How are you folks doing tonight?”

“Just fine” my father replied.

“Man, why is everyone just fine?” the waiter queried. It is then that my father slams his hand down on the table and screams at the top of his lungs.
“WE ARE GREAT. WE ARE SO GREAT WE HAVE NEVER BEEN BETTER IN OUR ENTIRE LIFE!!”

“THAT’S PERFECT,” The waiter shouted back. They continued this conversation in the same manner all throughout dinner. Needless to say, the entire restaurant knew we were there. Once again, my family left in shame.

The next morning we left, and that night we got home. I was never so happy to put my head on my own pillow in my own bed in my own room.

**Sharla’s Escape**

*By Christina Curtis*

Sharla sighed as deeply as her bonds would allow her to. She still couldn’t believe how easily they had captured her, but here she was, surrounded by three of her greatest enemies. The wizard, the demon, and the lizard. She was suspended in air about two feet off the dark, cavern floor. Her arms were bound tightly behind her and held in place by seven cyclics, magical bands that horizontally wrapped around her torso. Most cyclics that had ever been used to trap her required little, if any, energy to find the clasps and undo them. These, however, were designed especially for her and were virtually unpenetrable, and not surprising, considering the engineer. He stood four feet on her right. He didn’t have a long white beard, he didn’t wear robes or a large hat, he didn’t carry a large wooden staff for walking with, and by looking at him, you’d never have known he was a mage, the title held only by the most powerful of wizards. As far as she knew, he was the only mage on the planet, save for herself and the other.

“Thank goodness that one isn’t here,” she thought. What hope of escape would she have then? As it was, having to deal with Mallen would be no picnic. He had said little during her capture and remained silent ever since. He was a very imposing figure, wearing nothing but black that resembled a piece of the night sky laced with stars. If you stared at his outfit for too long, it would mesmerize you. This was Mallen’s greatest talent. Illusion. He could make a man believe he was lost in the desert when he was really in a rain forest. That was how she originally walked into the trap.

Behind her, she could hear Roc pacing impatiently from side to side. He used to be a simple minded Velociraptor, but Mallen’s magic had turned him into an intelligent and deadly creature. Originally, he was created to be Mallen’s personal body guard, as well as an educated conversationalist, but his plan backfired on him, and Roc, after attempting to kill him, abandoned his maker. Sharla’s only problem with Roc was his occasional visit to a town or village to eat a few humans. That she would not permit in her world. He hadn’t attacked any towns recently that she knew of, and she wondered who could possibly talk him into helping with her capture. Whoever it was had chosen well. She could still feel the gash in her side starting from the upper chest and going all the way to her right hip. Fortunately, the cyclics that held her
placed enough pressure on her side to stop the bleeding.

"Why can’t we just kill her now?” Roc asked.

"Not yet,” said Mallen. The lizard roared at this reproach and glared at the illusionist.

"Is that a command?” he growled as he approached his maker.

"Oh, what’s wrong Mallen?” All eyes turned on Sharla. “Is your little puppy disobeying you again?” Roc screamed and charged. His claws went straight for her and slashed air a mere two inches from her throat as Roc was pulled back by a huge, muscular arm. Standing seven feet tall, the Drake was the stuff that nightmares were made of. His whole body was pure muscle, apart from his huge bat-like wings. Two bison horns crowned his head and he had fangs longer than a wolf. The very sight of him could terrorize, yet his true power lay in his unparalleled strength.

"Patience, Roc,” he said in his inhuman voice as the Raptor struggled and strained to free himself. “You’ll get your chance. We all will soon enough.” Roc stopped struggling and the Drake released him.

"Good dog,” Sharla said. This sparked his rage all over again, but the Drake’s final words were just that.

"You know what will happen to you if you so much as touch her.”

"What?” Sharla asked as Roc left the cavern. The Drake simply smiled at her and returned to his original spot four feet on her left.

"You know,” the prisoner began, “they say if a pet is disobedient, it’s due to a poor trainer.” Mallen glared at her.

"You think you can anger me as easily as that stupid lizard?”

"Well, the apple doesn’t fall too far from the tree.”

"If that scaly mess was even remotely a spawn of mine, I’d kill him myself. He’s a lab experiment. Nothing more.”

"Did your father disown you too?” Mallen’s anger swelled in him, but he held his tongue. He hated being reminded that Roc was his own creation. It reminded him of his failure.

Sharla winced in pain as her wound again made itself known. Roc returned still agitated, but under control.

"Well, where is the mastermind behind all this? The one we’re all getting old waiting for?”

"Are you in a hurry to die?” Drake asked.

"Besides,” Mallen remarked, “what makes you think it wasn’t one of us?”

“Oh, please,” she said, insulting all three of them at once. “It took all three of you combined to ensnare me. We all know Roc would rather die than work next to you, Mallen. And you’re too arrogant to ever admit to or ask for anyone’s help. And when was the Drake a hired hand? I ask again, who is the mastermind?”

“I am,” said a voice in the darkness. The voice belonged to the only man on the planet she feared. The third Mage. As he stepped out of the shadows, what strength Sharla had seemed to abandon her. To look at him, one would think he was an ordinary man. He was six feet tall with black hair and brown eyes. He looked about 25 or 27 years old as Sharla was. He wore a white shirt with loose fitting sleeves and black slacks. He was extremely attractive and his voice could charm nightingales. All of Sharla’s guards went up as he approached. This was pure evil walking toward her.
“Hello, Sharla,” he said. “I hope my friends weren’t too rough with you.” Her only response was a glare. He began examining her as he walked around her levitating form.

“Hmm, nothing too serious. A few cuts and scrapes, and oh my! Who put that horrid gash in your side?” He slowly turned and stared at the dinosaur.

“I told you she was to be unharmed.”

“That’s no harm for her,” Roc defended. “Besides, she would have escaped.”

“You fool,” he said calmly. “She’s still human. It’s a wonder her innards weren’t spilled all over the field.” Roc backed away and cowered slightly.
Sharla never recovered from the shock of hearing the Mage’s voice and now her whole body began to shiver. Drake and Mallen noticed at once.

“Master,” the raptor spoke weakly.

“I told you not to hurt her.” Sharla floated in and out of consciousness.

“You’re your own master now, Roc.” The Mage reached out his right hand and the lizard was instantly sent hurtling out of the cavern. When he hit the cave wall, he was simply used as a battering ram to plunge through the dense rock. When he emerged, he landed sprawling out on the ground. He would not rise again.

An odd gasping noise brought the Mage around just in time to see Sharla go into convulsions.

“No!” he yelled. “Remove her bonds, Mallen.”

“But she’ll escape.”

“A dead woman can go nowhere.” She stopped convulsing and completely lost consciousness. Mallen grabbed the long key hanging from his belt and released it into air. It landed vertically on the cyclics, touching each one. They began to glow, the key was absorbed, and they unlatched one by one. As the Mage gently lowered her on the floor, the cyclics shrank and flew to clasp on Mallen’s upheld wrist.

“Master,” Drake said. “Did you not want her ultimately dead?”

“If you had the last unicorn, what would be the greater trophy? It’s lifeless head mounted on your wall, or its living form alive and well in a cage for your own delight?”

“We did not think the wound was so deep. It barely penetrated the hypodermis, and my bonds…”

“You idiot!” the Mage yelled, for once showing anger. “He sliced through her stomach and the acids are pouring into her body!”

“The wound was not so deep, lord,” Drake said. The Mage ignored his words and frantically began trying to heal her.

What none of them knew was the real Sharla lay hidden in the shadows from which the mage had earlier emerged. Mallen wasn’t the only master of illusion in the cave. In one instant she was able to teleport herself to safety and create a duplicate that smelled, felt, and looked just like her. This she did as Mallen freed her of her bonds. Any magic she released then was hidden by the cyclics glowing. Now she waited for the right moment to escape. Perhaps if she stopped her decoy’s heart?

“Sharla, no!” screamed the mage as he felt no pulse on her neck. He straddled her and began pumping her heart.

The sound of falling rocks came from the mouth of the cave. Drake went to investigate, but didn’t get far.

With her right hand on her unsheathed sword, Sharla sprang out of the darkness and ran at her first victim. Before the Master of Illusion had time to
register pain, she swung her sword and sliced his arm in one motion. The blade ripped from elbow to hand as well as slicing through each cyclic. As they clattered to the floor, Mallen screamed and grabbed his bleeding arm. The Drake had time to dodge, but not avoid her onslaught. His chest was sliced open, though not mortally, as she ran past him and to the cavern entrance. As Sharla raced from the entrance and sheathed her sword, the figure the Mage was trying to revive disappeared. Realization came to him as he slowly raised his head and watched her run out of the cave. He glanced up at the Drake, who instantly ran after her. Mallen was trying to regain enough control to conjure a healing spell.

“Come when you can be of use,” the Mage told him as he walked toward the exit.

Just as Drake emerged from the cave, he felt a searing pain go through his chest. On his left he saw Sharla release the handle of a knife that was lodged in his heart. He hit the ground in no time. In front of her lay the field she had earlier been captured in, and beyond, about half a mile away, was a forest. She would be safe there, and started running as fast as she could for the trees.

“A unicorn, humph,” she thought. “I’ll be dead before I’m ever his unicorn.” Sharla suddenly slammed into iron bars that appeared out of nowhere. Her head banged against one of the bars and began throbbing ruthlessly. Fortunately, she was still conscious. Looking around, she seemed to be in a giant black bird cage. She turned around. Standing right outside her new prison was the Mage. The pounding in her head increased and she fell to her knees, holding her injured head.

“You are clever, Sharla, but this hunter will have his prey.” He unlatched the lock.

“My prize.” He turned the lever, almost quivering with anticipation.

“My unicorn.” He swung open the door.

Roc instantly jumped on him, digging his back claws deep into the Mage’s side while his front claws went for his throat. The impact sent them rolling as the mage tried to defend himself. Sharla, with her throbbing head, ran out of the cage and on to freedom.

As she ran, her mage sight allowed her to see what concluded. Mallen, after saving the Drake, stood silent at the mouth of the cave, watching a figure run into the woods. His patient flew to his master’s aid and a new fight began between the Drake and Roc. The Mage was badly damaged. It would take him weeks to completely heal himself from the gouges, gashes, and bites he’d endured. One could barely recognize him. All he could do was breath.

As Sharla lay in her hiding place deep in the forest, she could hear the Mage roar his fury to the sky. He had been defeated, but he would hunt again, as soon as he was well. Would she escape the next time? Would she be strong enough? These thoughts, as well as others, went through her mind as she slowly drifted away to a peaceful and safe sleep.
Once upon a time there was a little boy named Timmy. Timmy sometimes got into trouble at home and at school, but he wasn't really bad. Sometimes Timmy's mom would get mad at him when he wouldn't clean his room, or if he got a bad grade at school, but she thought he was a good kid. Timmy knew that he had to be a little good because only good kids got presents for Christmas. Also, Timmy didn't like seeing his mom mad, so he tried to be a good boy.

One day Timmy had to sit next to his neighbor Johnny on the bus. Timmy did not like Johnny. Johnny always acted like he knew everything just because he got straight A's in school. Johnny started talking about all the presents he was going to get for Christmas. Johnny told Timmy that the better you act, the more presents you get. Timmy wanted more presents, but it was only September and he didn't know if he could be good for that long. He decided to try it out. For the rest of the year, Timmy was a very good boy. His mom was so happy.

On Christmas Eve, Timmy could hardly sleep thinking about all the presents he was going to get. The next morning, he ran downstairs to open his gifts, but there were none under the tree. Timmy's mom came down and saw that there were no presents under the tree. She thought that maybe Santa put them in the wrong room. They searched the house, but there were no presents. Timmy's mom became very upset. She called the North Pole and spoke to Santa's head elf, Tito. Tito didn't believe her, but he said he would check the "good kids" list. Timmy's name was on there, but it was crossed off. Tito called the head elf of Timmy's town, Mimi, and asked her why she crossed his name off the list. Mimi said she never crossed his name off. She said she sent Santa a letter requesting extra presents for Timmy because he was such a good boy. Tito apologized to Timmy's mom and told her that Timmy wouldn't be able to get any presents until the day after Christmas because Santa was still making deliveries on the other side of the world.

Timmy's mom told him the news. As she told him, she began to cry. Timmy asked his mom why she was crying. She told him that she was sad because he had been such a good boy, but his Christmas was ruined. She told him how happy she had been in the past few months. When Timmy heard his mom say how happy she was that he was a good boy, he felt bad. Timmy felt bad because all this time he had just been concerned about getting presents. Timmy made a silent promise that he would be a good boy from that point on. The next day, Santa delivered all of Timmy's presents. There were even more presents because Santa felt bad about the mix-up. Timmy and his mom had a great day after Christmas and they lived happily ever after.
The School Marm

By Cara Chaplin

All my life, we lived in a house in a new subdivision in a small town. It was your typical suburban neighborhood, consisting of rows of ranch houses with picket fences in the front yard and swing sets in the back. During my early high school years, my parents began to have serious discussions about moving to the country and getting back to a simpler life that they had enjoyed during their own childhoods. My older brother had left home years earlier for college and I was the only one remaining to keep the nest from being empty. So it was no surprise when my parents bought several acres in the country and decided to build a house during my senior year.

As I mentioned before, I grew up in a small town with a population of less than 4000. However, that town is a large city in relation to the village closest to my new house. This village consists of a general store and a few hundred people, all related to each other, it seems. Even this cluster of people is located several miles from my house. In fact, there is only one other building within a mile of my house and it is strangely within 500 feet. The only thing that separates us from the deserted wooden house is a stand of trees. Otherwise, this is country, a really rural area. The last inhabitants of this land were probably American Indians. It is a mainly wooded area set on a small peninsula surrounded by a 16-acre lake with a railroad running through it that actually carried Lincoln’s body from Washington to Springfield for burial many years ago. So in this isolated area, we built my family’s dream house surrounded by breathtaking nature scenes in the daytime and starry nights in the evenings. It was on one of those starry nights that we first saw the apparition.

After a spaghetti meal, my entire family was enjoying a cool summer evening sitting on the wide front porch. The stars were spread out across the sky and there was a little bit of fog drifting along the ground. We were discussing the animal life that we had spotted during the short time we had lived in the house. Deer, skunks, foxes, opossums, turtles and coyotes were mentioned. Then my dad said, “Speaking of wild animals, what’s that?” We turned towards the direction he was staring and tried to make out the shape that was moving towards us. It was walking on two legs, which eliminated a deer, and as it approached, I was able to make out the shape of a woman, or at least I thought I could. As she glided closer to the porch, no one from our previously verbal group said a word; in fact, no one was breathing.

Afterwards, inside the lit and locked house, the rationalizers among the group talked about moving branches and shadows while others mentioned that the ghost lady appeared to be carrying a book in her hand. We are not a superstitious family, so soon this first sighting became the source of many jokes. It wasn’t until after we started hearing “the voice” that we admitted to having other individual encounters with the school marm. The ghost lady became the ghost school marm, late one night after a four-hour game of Monopoly. People were tired, the lights were low and guards were down. My mom asked if we had heard anything out
of the ordinary lately. The conversation turned to raccoon fights in the woods and screech owls. However, my mom clarified her question by asking, “Have you heard any strange human voices at night?” It seemed that she had been hearing a male voice crying for help, and the weird thing was that it sounded like it came from under the ground.

It was very late and we were spooked, so maybe it was the mood, but it seemed that everyone had heard the voice. My dad thought maybe it came from across the lake because he explained, “Water carries sound, you know.” Others thought it came from a cave or even a grave. My brother wondered out loud if it was possible for someone to be buried alive in our woods. Was there really such a heinous crime being committed in our quiet area? That’s when talk turned back to the ghost lady. There had been other previously unspoken sightings. My mom had been carrying in groceries after dark one evening and swore the apparition was dressed in a high necked, old fashioned dress with her hair swept up into a tight bun. She was carrying a hand bell. After I came home late from a basketball game one night, the spirit drifted close enough to me that I could smell the distinct odor of blackboard chalk. Thus, we dubbed her the “school marm.”

Several months passed and no one outside of my family heard the voice or saw the lady, nor did we mention our “spirits” to others. The voice was obviously not from someone buried alive because it persisted as summer gave way to fall. There had been no attempt to harm anyone; we seemed to be simply cohabiting with some unusual neighbors. Actually, my parents said they preferred these new neighbors because they did not own loud barking dogs, nor did they drive cars in desperate need of new mufflers.

One winter evening, it was only about 7:00, but the sun had long since set and there was a chilling wind whipping along the front porch. There was a knock at the door. Everyone was home for the weekend; we were making s’mores in the fireplace and chatting about our week when the quiet knock froze us in our tracks. No one came out this far without calling first to make sure we were home, and most needed directions even then. After exchanging glances, I got up and opened the door. Standing there, wrapped in a shawl with only her dark eyes peering out was the form of a shivering little old lady.

A quick scan of her body indicated that she was real and I reached down and helped her up the step and out of the bitter cold. She didn’t pull off her scarf and reveal her wrinkled face until I had seated her by the fire. The entire family gathered around the fire waiting to hear the old woman’s reason for being out on such a cold night with such an isolated destination. When she at last spoke, her voice was cracked with age and emotion. She identified herself as Emma, and she had apparently stolen her son’s car for the evening and driven over a hundred miles. She was 82 years old and hadn’t driven in many years, but tonight was special. It was her sister’s birthday and she needed to be close to her. We looked at each other suspiciously; it was obvious that the poor woman was delusional.

Emma was surprised, she said, to discover our house in this area. She had thought that the old abandoned house next door was the only structure in the area. With sadness in her faded blue eyes, she asked, “Do you know the story
of what happened in that old school building?” We were an eager audience and all leaned in closer so as not to miss a word of her tale. Emma told of her sister, Lily, who had been full of life, energy and intelligence. Lily was given the opportunity to teach in a little one-room schoolhouse, and she enthusiastically embraced the job of teaching in a rural environment. Her students worshipped her and life got even better, when she met and married Sam, the minister’s son. During the second year of their marriage, Sam began to show signs of a mental illness manifesting itself primarily in delusional thoughts, anxiety and intense feelings of persecution.

Emma, the younger sister, was summoned to the area via letter. Her sister needed her; Lily was pregnant and wanted Emma to take over her teaching responsibilities. Lily had not told her husband about the baby yet, not wanting to add to his stress. Emma was thrilled about her sister’s “secret,” but she was even more excited to teach. It had been a childhood dream and it was about to come true. The second morning after Emma’s arrival, she and Lily walked to the schoolhouse in high spirits. Lily was going to train Emma for a few months before she had to stay home and wait for the baby. Sun poured in from the tiny windows as the women focused on the daily lessons. Just before lunch, Sam appeared at the single door of the building. He was in obvious emotional distress, talking to himself and brushing aside invisible insects. There was no discussion. He walked straight to Lily and pulled a long-bladed knife from his waistband. In horror, unable to intervene, Emma and the children watched as he plunged the knife into her chest over and over again.

Lily’s life leaked out of her body, covering the floor of the classroom. Emma had the sense to send some of the older kids to get help. Search parties tried vainly to find Lily’s husband. News had spread that Sam had accidentally found out that Lily was pregnant, and since she had not told him, he assumed the baby belonged to another man. Searchers reported that they thought they heard cries for help, but never found the source. Years later, hunters trying to get a drink found a body stuck in an ancient well, caught half way down on a large root. It appears that Sam’s hiding place became his grave as well.

The spring after the strange visit from the old lady, my parents had the old school house torn down and planted a flower garden in that spot. They planted masses of lily-of-the-valley and forget-me-not flowers. The telling of the story and the memorial has, for the time being, put the spirits to rest.
A Big Mistake
By Phuong-Anh La

“Hello, pick up the phone, honey. Anyway, I am going to be shopping with my friends.”

“Don’t wait for me. Eat your dinner. I might get home late if I go to a movie after that.”

“Hello, honey. Our store is so crowded, I’ll get home later. Do the laundry and take out trash, ok.”

“Hello, could you please go to the super market and buy some....”

These messages and similar messages were common after his wife, Mrs. Kim, had worked in the nail shop with her friend. During the time she was at work, Mr. Van stayed home doing laundry, and cooking for their 19-year-old son and a daughter, 18 years old. Looking at the calendar hanging on the wall in front of the kitchen, he murmured, “Uh, today is December 28, 1988.” It was exactly 3 years after his family left Vietnam. He sat on the chair and looked at the ceiling thoughtfully. The memories from the old days came back to him. He recalled 15 years ago, when he just married her. She was so gentle, pretty and shy. She was 20 when they married and he was 32. He was a lieutenant and served in the army. Every day after he left home, she stayed home and took care of their babies. When he got home in the evening, dinners had been ready. Sometimes because of his meetings or business, he got home late, but she was still waiting for him and they had dinner together. She didn’t work because his salary could support the whole family; moreover, they could help both sides of the family sometimes. Other than bringing home a check, he didn’t need to do anything at home. He didn’t even change their kids’ diapers. He had never touched his hands to the sink to wash dishes. These were women’s jobs. On weekends, he took his family to visit their grandparents or went to movies or shopping. Life was so wonderful. After Vietnam was taken over, he had to go to jail for almost 10 years, and about one year after that, his family came to the U.S. by the program sponsored by the Humane Organization that helped people who had served in the Army before 1975.

One year after coming to the U.S., his wife studied and passed the manicurist board exam, and she worked for her friend’s nail shop until today. Spending suffering years in the camp had affected Mr. Van’s health and spirit, which would not allow him to stand or sit for eight hours. His English was not advanced enough for him to pass interviews. Looking for a job was not easy for him; moreover, living in a community where the immigrants were crowded made competing with young people harder. Once he got a job at the electric company; after two weeks of working, the managers told him that they were out of jobs. Actually, that was a nice way to tell him that he was too slow for this job. The assembly line had to wait for him when he missed something; the quantity of products decreased.

His wife, after working ten hours a day, six days a week and sometimes seven, went home with a very tired face; she ate dinner, took a shower, asked their children about school, and then went to bed. They just talked whenever necessary. Normally she talked about whatever happened in the shop. He had nothing to talk about because every day was the same.
He felt that his wife had changed; she dressed in fashions like young people when she went to work. She went to movies and shopping with her friends instead of him. Sometimes she asked him to go with her, but he found reasons to refuse because he felt he was not young enough to go to these places anymore. Moreover, his wife asked him to do chores that he didn’t do before like laundry, trash, and shopping. He considered cooking his “permanent job.” He felt his wife didn’t respect him anymore, maybe because he was old, a bore or useless now. Sometimes he thought she had changed because she had been influenced by the American lifestyle. “Americanized wife” is the phrase that he and other men used for wives like his.

He kept thinking. He didn’t know it was 8 o’clock already. His wife stepped into the kitchen with a big bag in her hand, turned on the light and asked him, “Why don’t you turn on the light? What are you cooking today, honey?”

He didn’t respond.

“There is a big sale today. I wish I had more money; I could buy everything there. Oh, there is a red skirt that I really love, but it’s too expensive.”

He didn’t say anything. He looked out the backyard and tried to ignore her.

“Oh, tomorrow is the day they pick up trash. Did you take the trash out?” She opened the pot in the kitchen and asked, surprised, “You forget to cook today?”

He turned to look at her. His face turned red, and he struck his hand angrily on the desk, making the glass break. “No, I don’t forget. I just don’t want to. I don’t want people telling me what to do. I don’t want people to think I am useless. I don’t want to cook, clean up and wash dishes everyday. I am not your maid. I don’t want to live in this house anymore. I want to get away.” Pointing his finger into her face, he continued, “Why don’t you go ahead and do it yourself?”

Now, his wife looked at her husband, and she started crying. “I have to work every day to support this family, for the bills of this house, the telephone bill, car bill, electricity, water, and clothes to the food that we eat; everything is put on my head. I work every day until night. You just stay home and do some light stuff, but you still complain. What do you want more than that?”

“I want to divorce.”

“Ok, that’s fine, go ahead. Let’s see who’s lost.”

The two children were there, though the parents didn’t know. Looking at their parents, the girl cried and ran to her room. Her brother suddenly ran out of their house.

The environment was so sad and heavy. He didn’t feel joyful or happy during the greetings season. He felt his wife’s words that seemed like a smack on his face. He felt sorry and wanted to cry even though he didn’t know whom he was going to feel sorry for. Was he going to cry for his busy wife, himself or the tragedy of his family? The dream of happiness, wealth, modern lives that he thought he could find again in the U.S. became blurry in his mind. Dark was covering the night.
The young girl ran frantically. Her breathing was hard and fast. Her heart felt like it was about to burst out of her chest. Her body glistened with sweat from her exertions, and it made her shiver. It was so cold, her lungs were beginning to hurt. She shouted for help, but the only reply was the echo of her own voice. She stopped running and shivered violently. Suddenly, she heard voices all around her. She spun around, but could see no one. Then, floating before her, were the faces of her friends, family, teachers, and everyone she knew. They were yelling at her. Yelling about all the things she had ever done wrong. She was a failure. She clamped her hands over her ears and began running again. The voices and accusations just got louder. She couldn’t make them stop; she couldn’t outrun them. Tears streamed down her face.

She stumbled and fell to her knees on the cold, icy ground. Painful sobs wracked her body as she buried her face in her hands. “How could this be happening to me?” she thought. “I never meant for it to be like this. I never wanted to hurt anyone. I always hurt the ones I love the most. I’m such a screw up,” she berated herself. “When will I ever learn? I never do anything right. I always make the wrong decisions and screw everything up.”

The voices began their dismal litany again. “You’re such a moron. Why do you always mess up? Can’t you get anything right?” they chanted over and over again. The tormented girl began to sob harder. She turned her face up to the sky and cried out, “Why does this always happen to me? When will it ever stop?”

She woke with a start, drenched in sweat. That was the most realistic dream she’d had in a long time. “What a strange time to be having dreams like this again,” she thought. She’d just aced the biggest test of the year. It must have been the nachos she had eaten before bed as a celebration. “Well, that’s the last time I eat that before bed.”

It was late October in West Plaines, and high school had started a few weeks late because of a large outbreak of West Nile Virus. Everyone was actually excited and happy to be back, the new freshmen especially. The football team was ready to play and cheerleaders were ready to cheer. Our homecoming was just around the corner and there would be a tight race for homecoming court this year. The only person not so excited about all this was Nancy Sharp. She was a quiet girl who never went to school events. She attended class everyday and was never late. She also never spoke a word unless asked a question by a teacher. She had moved to West Plaines last year with her grandparents because her grandfather had just taken the janitorial position at the high
school. Nancy had no friends, but always seemed very happy. She was even nice when others weren’t so nice, such as Katrina Scott, who was a gorgeous cheerleader.

Katrina hadn’t like Nancy from the day the two girls met. Everyone around school had always thought Katrina was perfect. She was the head cheerleader for two years. She dated the quarterback. She drove the nicest car. She had the best grades. Katrina had it all. That was until Nancy showed up. Nancy quickly became the new teachers pet and the smartest girl in school. Katrina was afraid that once people began to see that she wasn’t as perfect as everyone thought, her classmates would start to notice all of her flaws. With this in mind, Katrina became determined to fix that Nancy Sharp. Unfortunately, Nancy wasn’t so easy to get rid of. She took everything Katrina said or did to her and shrugged it off with a smile. Which of course only further infuriated Katrina.

This year Katrina was also in the running for Homecoming Queen. She knew she only had a short time to, once again, become the top of the class; the best in everything. That was the only way to be homecoming queen. Nancy knew this year was going to be worse than last year because of Katrina’s added pressures for perfection. Each day she dreaded waking up for school.

On this particular morning, Nancy came to school wearing a white dress with a pink sweater and Mary Jane’s. As Nancy walked down the hall, heads turned. As she entered the room, Nancy’s classmates gasped, for they had never seen her in a dress or with her hair down instead of pulled back in a ponytail. Nancy received many compliments, but she did not understand what all the fuss was about. She did not realize that the class was noticing her natural beauty that seemed to glow as she walked to her desk. Katrina noticed the attention Nancy was getting, and she was immediately overcome with rage. People were to flaunt all over Katrina, not Nancy. Katrina knew she had to do something to put Nancy back in her place as a geek, and she knew she would have the perfect opportunity to do just that before third hour.

The bell had just rung, and students were dismissed to go to their third hour class. The halls quickly became crowded as the students made their way to their next class. Nancy made her way to the main staircase, so she could go down to the first level of the building for her Spanish class. Nancy was headed down the second flight of stairs when she suddenly tripped over something, lost her balance, and tumbled down the stairs. Some people began to laugh, and a couple helped Nancy to her feet, but one person had seen what had happened. The person knew Katrina had caused Nancy to fall, and Katrina should pay for being so cruel.

Nancy insisted she was okay, but she had a pretty bad limp. A teacher had heard the fall and came running to help. He ordered Nancy to see the nurse. Nurse Johnson was a sweet old lady. She had worked for the school for almost forty years. She had a lot of experience and knowledge. Upon examining Nancy, she concluded that she had broken her ankle. Nurse Johnson called Nancy’s grandparents and arranged for them to go to the emergency room. Sure enough, Nancy’s ankle was broken. Katrina was pleased with the news of Nancy’s condition. She thought she’d be a shoe in for sure for homecoming queen. After all, who wants a queen who can’t dance? Nancy would definitely not be able to boogie in her cast. Katrina smiled broadly as she pictured the thought.

The next day at school Katrina was shocked. The whole senior class was concerned for Nancy. They were beckoning to her every whim. It was a revolting sight to Katrina.
She could not believe her plan had backfired. She was even more furious now than ever before. Nancy was shocked herself. She had no idea so many people cared about her. She was very flattered, yet remained very humble. One can imagine her surprise when the captain of the football team was waiting at her locker. He had a single long stem yellow rose and a sheepish look on his face. Nancy flushed when she saw this.

Katrina also saw it, and it was her boyfriend. When lunchtime came, everyone wanted Nancy to sit with them. Katrina was forced to sit at the table with the chess team. Katrina couldn’t stand it. She walked over and poured her chocolate milk on Nancy’s head. Nancy looked shocked, then quickly bounced back and asked, “Anybody have any cookies?” Katrina stormed out of the cafeteria crying. For the next few days it only got worse. Then came the big night. The night Katrina had waited twelve years for. She showed up in the most beautiful pink dress. It had solid sequins at the top and was full of huge layers on the bottom. She looked like an actress at the Emmy’s. Nancy, on the other hand, wore a slinky red dress with her hair down. It was nothing spectacular, but she pulled it off great. The music stopped and the principal began.

“And the queen is...Katrina Scott.”

Katrina couldn’t believe it. Her dream had come true. But as she was walking to the stage, she noticed the only one clapping was Nancy. She began to wonder how she had won when everyone had ignored her for the last few weeks. So as her speech, she asked, “What’s going on?” At that time, Nancy walked out of the gym. Katrina’s boyfriend went onstage and explained everything to her. Nancy had sent emails to everyone telling them to vote for Katrina. Katrina began crying and stormed out to find Nancy. When she saw Nancy sitting on the steps, she couldn’t help but run up and hug her. She finally saw what everyone else did. Katrina and Nancy spent the rest of the night together. They became the best of friends and decided to go to the same college. As the years passed, they kept in touch and never fought again.

The Lie
By Schuyler Gerard

Have you ever told a white lie that turned into a huge mistake? The first night I met my current boyfriend, Andy, I made such an error. We were simply talking at Johnny Gitto’s and listening to music that blasted over the bar. All of the sudden a Dave Matthews Band song came on. I don’t know what I was thinking, but I said this song is cool.

Andy asked if I liked “Dave”. Not wanting to blow my chances with this hottie, I drunkenly blurted out, “I love Dave Matthews Band”! This is where all the trouble started, because in reality I did not much care for the band at all. At first it did not seem to matter. After all, I figured I’d never hear from Andy again. Of course, that was not the case. He called and that following Saturday we went on our first date.

Everything was going OK, until a song came on and I said this song sucks. Andy gave me a strange look and said this is the new Dave song.

I laughed and said, “Oh, yeah I was just messin’ with ya.” Much to my surprise we continued dating.
Andy always said he fell for me because I loved Dave Matthews Band. My friends, of course, knew the truth and thought this to be hilarious. Being the good friends they are, they would egg this on saying, “hey Schuyler, sing Crash.”

My version of “Crash” goes something like this: “Crash into me, wuh, wuh, wuh.” About a month later, Andy surprised me with concert tickets to the Dave concert. I could barely contain my excitement. At the concert, I pretended to know the words by singing watermelon, cucumber. Andy was really impressed by my vast song knowledge by Dave. Especially when I knew all the words to a song that hadn’t even been released. This lie continued on for the next two months of our relationship.

It finally came to a head when Andy asked which Dave CD was my favorite. Like a deer in the headlights I quickly replied, “the LIVE one.” Andy gave me a funny look and said, “which one?” In desperation I exclaimed, “I can’t take this anymore—I think Dave Matthews is all crybaby music!!!”

Andy started rolling with laughter. Come to find out, he hates Dave Matthews too.

Hamish
By Ethan Wilson

It was a simpler time, when the ruler of the land was divine and called King; when the law was that of the sword and the strongest, most veteran warrior won the way. A time of castles and empires lost and won over blood shed in battle. It was the time of the dark age of mankind, when new power fell upon the land like the changing of the seasons. People all over were tired of this civil unrest and craved an honest leader, which they would eventually get.

Far away from the heart of the death and seas of fallen soldiers, there was a small township of McCallahan’s Ford. It was a simple community of peaceful people. They were mostly farmers just trying to survive on the few crops that the ground would allow them. Set back in the rolling hills of central Scotland, or Britain if you asked the wrong person, they were too far away for King Edward to worry about, for it was a small community. There were only twelve families that lived there, and working together was the only way they made it for such a long time, nearly four generations.

Braden and his wife, Emiel, had grown up there, as did most all of the folk that stayed. They had a young lad named Hamish, who was their son. Hamish was a good boy who got in no more trouble than to be expected of a child of ten. He did all he could to help his family and those who lived in McCallahan’s Ford. He played often with the few other children who lived in the area.

Hamish grew up learning the importance of hard work and to do it without a soul asking him, and for the most part he made sure that all his chores were finished. He learned the importance of respecting his elders and his family and always did so with great pride. However, he was often left out from the talk of his elders. He knew it to be disrespectful to ask about matters of his father, but they had been talking a lot about the southern people coming near, and of something about the town of Yorkshire wanting
something from them, which really bothered him since he did not know what was going on. There was not much he could do about it, so he tried, with great effort, to forget about the whole idea.

Light was diminishing as evening came to a closure. The light sunk down below the green hills and no longer warmed their house of rock and thatch. It was left defenseless in the cool air of a fall evening. Lit by a couple of crude torches, his mother hurried Hamish indoors. Not much filled their small house; its circular parameter was filled only with the necessaries. A small stove with clay pots sitting around it, a small table with a couple of crude chairs, a ladder leading up to the sleeping loft, and a pile of winter clothes were all that filled their humble home. Hamish was hurried to go to bed so that he would be rested for his chores in the morning, for sunrise was his alarm clock every morning. Hamish hurried up the flimsy ladder and nestled himself into his bed of fur and straw. It did not take very long for him to drift into a nice, peaceful sleep.

“Wake up!” a voice shouted.

Hamish, dazed and confused, wiped the sleep from his eyes in hopes of focusing on the huge, black object that shouted the command. Not knowing what was happening, he slid back up against the fur and straw of his loft bed, hoping and knowing that they would all just go away and leave him alone. Not actually knowing whether the people were good or bad, he didn’t want to take a chance. As the black blob moved closer towards him, Hamish could make out the outline of a person, and a rather big person at that. As the figure walked nearer, he could hear the screams of people outside, people screaming for help. The sound of people screaming was soon drowned out by the fear that overwhelmed him as the figure clanked towards him, as if encumbered by a heavy metallic suit.

Hamish jumped up and screamed as if this was all happening right then. In a cold sweat, he came to his feet and paced back and forth, realizing that it had been a nightmare, the one that he had had ever since that night. Hamish had not seen his parents since King Edward abducted him. The life of royalty had not treated him badly. He was noble instead of a peasant, and well-fed instead of starving, although he still missed his parents and wanted nothing else but to see them again.

He had returned there since the incident and not a soul lived there, whether it be by choice or by force. Hamish knew the reason why this all came about. It was because of his father, and he had hated him ever since. Not the father that Hamish had known and loved all of his childhood, the simple farmer. He was proud to be the son of such a man. On the wedding night of his father and mother, the nobles of the land took their given right to have the bride in their bed. King Edward was his father. He hated the thought that such a man’s blood ran through his veins, but King Edward’s blood was running thin and he was desperate.

Hamish was brought to the castle to learn the ways of royalty and how to one day be an excellent ruler, and foremost to brainwash everything else out of his head. In the art of swordplay he excelled, outmaneuvering even his teachers. His tactics on the battlefield far outperformed the highest of generals. Now, in his prime, after years of training, there was one thing that he never was broken of: the bleeding wound of uncertainty about his family. No matter how it turned out, he disrespected them, and King Edward would someday pay the ultimate price at the end of Hamish’s sword.
The King loved Hamish and trusted him dearly, as if Hamish had been living with him for all his life. He often went out to the battlefield with the King and watched as the King’s army demolished towns and cities. These were not the King’s people. They were Hamish’s people, and this added to the anger that welled in his mind.

On this occasion, the Scots had a quite formidable army and victory was questionable, since the last few affairs had had mixed results. There was a great Scottish warrior that had been foiling the King’s plans, and it was expected that he would show. Both English and Scottish warriors flooded the battlefield, screaming both in rage and pain as Hamish and his father sat back. The battle raged on for hours as the field turned from its once green color to a mess of mud and red blood strewn with bodies. The King was becoming worried as he watched his army sink to the ground and the Scots draw nearer and nearer. Worried about his own well-being, he turned to his son and said, “I think it is time to retire.”

“Father, go and lead your men. They lack direction.”

“Poppycock.”

“If you leave your men to die, then you are no better than the local swine.”

Having never been spoken to in such a manner, King Edward became enraged and struck his son down. Hamish realized that this was the chance that he had been waiting for. He could show his dominance over his father in front of the armies of both sides.

Not hesitating to take his long-awaited action, he drew his sword and challenged his father without saying a word. King Edward let out a maniacal laugh and drew his sword as well. A hoard of guards surrounded them, not knowing what to do. “Let us be,” the King said. “I will teach this insolent twerp a lesson.”

The guards moved back, giving them space as they began to circle, both waiting for the other to strike. They clashed and clanked swords for what seemed like an eternity, Hamish obviously outdoing his father with every move. Then, in a fit of rage, King Edward flung his sword wildly at Hamish’s head, which he effortlessly blocked, causing the King’s sword to fall into pieces.

Hamish jabbed his sword into King Edward’s chest as if there was nothing there. The King fell immediately to the ground, his crown falling to the ground and rolling around the feet of Hamish. Peace was made in Hamish’s heart and mind at that very moment. It did not bring back his parents; it did not brink back the time that he had lost, but it brought peace to his mind, knowing that such tyranny would never befall his kingdom as long as blood ran through his veins.
Days in General Chemistry  
By Eboni Jones

I am sure you are all aware of the tedious assignments of General Chemistry. Well, during the second semester of General Chemistry, on a cold winter’s day, we were frantically working to finish our unknowns. The test tubes were spinning, reagent bottles tipping, as the smell of noxious gas filled the air. Most of us were confused about our test tubes because nothing came out clear. We asked Dr. Riley, but he wasn’t much help. He said, "Refer to your flowchart and pay attention to your steps." From then on, we refused to ask him questions, which led us to get answers from our bench companions. However, this was not a very good idea. In the midst of an assignment, your lab partner would interrupt you to ask a question. Often times you would not know the answer, so to keep things short, you just shrugged your shoulders. Well, on this cold winter’s day, my lab partner decided to be an "overachiever." She wanted to show everyone that she understood the lab, so every time someone had a question she would turn around and give them the answer.

When she answered the last question, the sleeve of her sweater got caught in the flame on the Bunsen burner. Quickly the room filled with the smell of charred material. When I looked up to locate the source of the horrible stench, I screamed, "Girl, you are on fire."

She replied, "I know."

Obviously she thought I meant that she was doing very well in the class, so I reiterated the fact that she really was on fire. When she looked down at her sleeve, she gasped and smothered the flame. Luckily, she had on two shirts, so she did not have damage to her skin. After I found out she was okay, I laughed so hard it made me cry. She did not remove the sweater. Instead, she left it on, rolled up the sleeves, and continued working. So there she was, frantically working, with a charred black hole in the sleeve of her sweater. For the rest of the lab period, she remained silent. I guess she learned not to break the unspoken lab rule of shrugging your shoulders when asked a question.

The Assessment  
By Mike Nolan

“This patient’s main problem is CHF along with uncontrolled HTN.”
“That was a stupid thing to say……you really messed that up….look: they’re all staring at you because they know you don’t know…..”
“Are there any conditions that could be making this patient’s HTN worse?”
“See...I told you so...he knows that you don’t understand anything about the cardiovascular system...you should just stop...”
“I think...his noncompliance with his atenolol and his obesity...those are complicating his HTN.”
“Good, go on.”
“He is a risk category C because he has target organ damage...he has end-stage renal disease.”
They are all looking at you...even your group can’t believe you said that...you have let them down by making some stupid comment about the kidney...they all see you are sweating...they know something is wrong...just leave before something bad happens.”
“How do you know he has end-stage renal disease?”
“What did I tell you? There is no problem...you should know that...just look at the rest of your group...they can’t even look at you...you have really cost them a good grade on this presentation...they’re probably going to talk to the professor after class...you will probably be asked to leave.”
“If you look at the patient’s lab values, you can tell he has end-stage renal disease.”
“Yes, but what specific lab value do we look at?”
“See? He’s angry at you now...you can tell by the way he was talking...everybody has noticed...you don’t know which lab value it is...everybody around the circle here knows...they know that you will probably have to drop out now...no one has ever done this badly in a presentation before...you should just quit now...avoid the embarrassment.”
“The patient’s creatinine clearance is below 10 mL/hour. That tells you that he has end-stage renal disease.”
“Good, continue.”
“He’s just humoring you...everyone knows that was the wrong answer...everyone else knows how the kidney works except for you...just look at them...they can’t even look at you...they probably have never seen someone so stupid before.”
“This patient’s HTN is exacerbated by the Zyprexa he takes for schizophrenia because it can cause excessive weight gain, as seen in this patient. This contributes to obesity, which worsens his HTN.”
“Zyprexa? For schizophrenia? Boy, have you really messed up this time...this patient doesn’t have schizophrenia...you do...now, they all know it...you let it slip...everybody will be afraid of you now...how could you say something so stupid? This is the end for you...just look at them...they all know now.”
“That is a really good point. Most students miss that. What would you suggest as a solution?”
“There is no solution...tell him that...tell him that the voices do not go away...tell him that I’m always here...in fact, look at him...he knows that you hear me...they all hear me...they all know...and they all know how stupid you are...why do you even try? You should just quit.”
“I would suggest Clozaril because he has failed the other atypical medications.”
“You know that won’t work...those voices will still be there, just like I’m here with you...you can change the meds all you want, and I’m still here...you can’t get away from me...I’ll be here forever...there is nothing you can do...tell him that the patient
can’t be helped.... he knows that you are just like the patient.... they all do.... look at them.... they all know."

"You’re right. Clozaril is the best choice for treatment-resistant schizophrenics."

"Best treatment? It might make me quieter.... but I’m still here.... I won’t go away.... just tell him that you are the patient.... tell him to take you away.... they can all tell.... look at them.... they’re all staring at you.... you know they’re talking about you all the time.... just stop.... if you don’t listen, something real bad will happen.... I promise."

"That’s all I have for this patient."

"Good job. We’ll move on to Evaluate."

First Kiss
By Becky Lich

Tyler Borman was an average guy. He was nice, decent looking, and blended in with the crowd. He only had one major problem: he was sixteen years old and had never kissed a girl. Tyler was constantly hearing his friends brag about how they made it to second or third base, but he hadn’t even stepped up to the plate yet!

Don’t worry: Tyler’s life was about to change. He decided that it was time for his first kiss. He didn’t even care who would be giving the kiss, as long as it was from girl and landed somewhere on his face. Tyler targeted Kiki Watson. She was the girl that all the guys talked about in the locker room. One day, after her cheerleading practice, Tyler approached her and asked her for a date. Tyler was thrilled when she said yes. His plan was off to a good start.

Tyler made reservations at the finest restaurant in town and picked her up in his new Ford Mustang. She was really impressed by his wheels and the work he had put into planning their date. They were about finished eating when Kiki leaned over the table to whisper, “So where are we going for dessert?”

Tyler’s sympathetic nervous system quickly caused norepinephrine to bind to the beta-receptors in his heart, and his pulse began to race. He tried to clear his throat and said, “Don’t worry, Kiki. I have something in mind.” Tyler threw some money onto the table and grabbed Kiki’s hand. They ran out of the restaurant and jumped into the car.

Within ten minutes, the car was parked at a lake a few miles from town. It was dark outside and a little chilly, since it had just rained.

“Tyler, I’m getting a little cold,” Kiki hinted as she puckered up her dark red lips.

“Yeah, me too,” he replied. “I’ll turn the heater up.”

Kiki rolled her eyes and said, “Tyler, I’m really cold!” She puckered up again.

“Oh! I can fix that,” he remarked. He took a deep breath.

This was the moment he had been waiting for. There was a beautiful girl sitting in his car, and she was waiting for him to kiss her! Tyler gathered up all his strength and moved in for a kiss. He wrapped one arm around her shoulders, turned his head, puckered his lips, and...

The car began to roll towards the lake!

“What’s going on?” Kiki demanded.
“Sorry, this is my first kiss, and I...”
“No, Tyler! Pull the emergency brake! We are rolling into the lake!” she shouted.
“Oh my gosh!” Tyler quickly pulled on the brake, but it was too late. The ground was mushy from the rain and it quickly absorbed the wheels of his car. Luckily, only the wheels were in the water, so no severe damage was done to his vehicle. “I must have hit the gear shift when I leaned over,” he concluded.
“Well, let’s try to get out,” she suggested.

The next several hours were not spent making out. Instead, they repeatedly tried backing the car out of the water. Unfortunately, their efforts were unsuccessful, and they had to wait for a tow truck to come get the car. Finally, it arrived and easily pulled the car out.

Tyler and Kiki both ended up covered in mud and algae from the lake water, and the next day at school was spent defending themselves from various insults. The gossip wasn’t exactly what Tyler had hoped for, and he didn’t even get the kiss. None the less, he was the guy that all the girls talked about.

**Untitled**
_by Susan Flaker_

“Brian, you shouldn’t eat all that cheese before you go to bed. You’ll get a stomachache.”
“Mom, don’t worry. I love cheese.”
It was true. Brian loved cheese. When he was little, he would not eat anything unless it was covered in cheese. Cheese pizza, cheesy nachos, cheesy fries, cheesy milk, and cheesy ice cream. Brian loved his cheese.

That night, Brian went to bed, and his tummy started to turn. As he fell asleep, he drifted to a whole new world, and when he woke up, his eyes were full of wonder.

He woke up on a bed of cheddar, under a blanket of ricotta. His eyes lit up with amazement. Brian pranced down the golden path of American cheese, stopping every now and then to take a bite. Just then, he saw the best place of all, Provolone’s Castle. It was made of Swiss, surrounded by a moat of limburger. Brian held his breath as he took a bite of the castle. Just then, a whistle sounded behind him and he saw Monterey Jack.

“You are under arrest for eating King Provolone’s castle,” Jack said. Poor little Brian was put in a dungeon, strung up on the wall with string cheese. Brian was so scared as the King came down to see him.

“Your punishment,” the King said, “is to eat this room full of cheese. The door behind him opened and Brian saw a room stacked to the ceiling. Brian began to eat and eat, until he passed out. When he woke up, he was back in his bed, swearing to never eat cheese again.
Significant Coincidence

By Krista Crump

Drew called home one night to find out his sister was engaged, so that next weekend he went back home to meet this new guy. Drew had a layover at the airport in Chicago, so he went to the bar to have a drink. It was there he met his soon-to-be brother-in-law, Triston, and he didn’t even know it.

Drew sat down and ordered himself a drink. He began watching the football game that was on the television screen.

"Not much of a game, huh?” Asked the guy sitting to the right of Drew.

"Not really." Answered Drew.

The men made simple small talk about sports and their jobs. They eventually introduced themselves to one another. Drew learned that the man’s name was Triston and he was currently attending medical school at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. He, too, was waiting a layover and was traveling to Boston. The men then began talking about their vehicles. To each other’s surprise, they had a lot in common. Drew drove a Wrangler and Triston, a Jeep Grand Cherokee.

The small talk eventually developed into genuine conversation. The men discussed political and social issues. This led them to talking about their families. Drew emphasized the important role family played in his life. Triston then told Drew that he was excited because he would be starting a family of his own soon because he had recently asked a beautiful woman to be his wife. Triston then informed Drew that he was actually going to Boston to meet his fiancé’s family. Drew smiled in disbelief at the coincidence of meeting his future brother-in-law in an airport bar. Then Drew clued Triston into the realization that they were both headed to the Walker residence in Boston.

After twenty minutes, the boarding call for Boston was announced. As Drew and Triston boarded the plane, they smiled at the thought of being more than just brother’s-in-law, but friends.

The First Big Lesson

By Brian Morris

Ever since I was a young girl I have always loved to run. It was a way for me to just forget about all the worries in my life for a while and just enjoy the scenery. I spent so much time running that I became rather good at it. So good, in fact, that I earned myself a trip to the state track meet my seventh grade year. I was so excited about the meet. I would get to run at the highest level and spend the whole day with my dream man, Bob. Bob was a few years older than I was. He was the varsity captain of the boys’ high school team, and our coach. So what if he was six years older than me? My dad is six years older than my mom.

The night before the meet, my mom and I packed my things and then I tried to go to sleep, but I was too nervous for that, so I stayed up all night thinking of Bob. Well, at five the next morning I couldn’t wait any longer. I got up, took a shower, had breakfast, and
had dad take me up to school in the old farm truck. When I arrived at school, I saw all of my friends, but most importantly Bob. As we loaded the bus, I made sure that nobody sat next to me because that seat was for Bob. As soon as everyone was on the bus, Bob stood up and gave us girls a little pep talk. Then, he made his way towards the back of the bus and sat down in the only vacant seat, which was conveniently next to me.

As he sat down, we began to talk and I got nervous, and when I become nervous I drink a lot. I was so nervous about the meet and sitting next to Bob that I must have drank at least four or five bottles of water on the way to the meet. Once we got to the meet, I had to go to the bathroom really bad, so I told Bob where I was going and then took off running towards the port-a-potties.

I stood in line for what seemed like an eternity, but I finally got into one of the port-a-potties. As I entered it, I began to thoroughly cover the seat with toilet paper because God only knows what kind of people have sat down on it. After doing this for a few minutes I began to go, when all of a sudden the door began to swing open and, before I had time to cover myself, Bob was staring right at me. I screamed and he slammed the door shut. When I came out of the port-a-potty I was so embarrassed that I just wanted to run and hide, but before I could do that I ran into Bob. Bob apologized about the incident and I accepted his apology, but I was still too embarrassed to run or even talk to anyone, so I went and laid down on the bus and waited for the meet to end so I could go home.

Since this unfortunate incident I have learned to once again feel comfortable around guys and am attending college, trying to find Mr. Right. Bob, on the other hand, was so mentally scarred from what he saw that day that he now walks all over the Central West End wearing a pink tutu and twirling a baton. So I may not have won the state championship that day, but I did learn a very valuable lesson, and that is to always lock the door when you go to the restroom, because you never know who might come pulling on it.

**Life Walks**

*By Allyson Harvey*

The walk down the long, desolate hallway was nothing but a closer stride towards my goal. Each day ended with the long walk. Tears, guilt, and thoughts of regret sometimes accompanied the walks. Yet, some walks brought about inspiration, joy, and reflections of a miracle. This was going to be my last walk down the corridor, and the thoughts that escorted me changed my life forever.

I was completing my last day of medical residency at Baptist County Medical Hospital. I was anxious to finally get back to the life of a city girl. The small town of Pennington, Louisiana had taken my fashion sense from Saks to totally sucks. I could never figure out the attraction between animals and people. But after living there for three months, I think I understood. Cows, horses, and chickens are all they have. To them, Tiffany is the name of their cousin’s girlfriend’s illegitimate child. I guess people can come from two different worlds. All I knew is that after
today, I was headed back to my world. The world where the nightlife never stopped. The world where cultures collided and cappuccino flowed nonstop. That world was my home, and I longed for it.

The day started off like any other day. The morning crew usually started off with a bang. Mornings were always busy. People in small towns seem to start their day early; they seem to wake the rooster, contrary to what the commercials say. The emergency department’s odors changed as frequently as its customers. The morning smells were always a mixture of fresh brewed coffee, Old Spice, and a hint of farm. No doubt, the hint of farm could have been left off, but it always reminded me of where I was. I attended to the typical morning traumas brought about by the farming lifestyle. Missing fingers, large cuts, and smashed appendages were a daily routine for me. Most of my clients were male, over the age of fifty, and all with an attitude. That was just another reason why I hated the small town so much. No man was going to let a woman half his age tell him what to do. I tried to accept that as much as possible and carry on with my work. My sentence there was nearly finished, and I would never have to see these backward people again. What do they know about life? The morning rush of bleeders seemed to trail off around eleven each day. That always allowed me to get a quick bite to eat and head up to the rest of the hospital to do my rounds. There was one advantage to doing rounds in a small town: the adjective. Small meant that this hospital only held a hundred beds. With four floors and the cafeteria in the basement, rounds at Baptist County Medical flew.

One after another, I visited each patient as if I were making rounds for the mayoral election. My mind wasn’t really there, but to get the vote, I needed to make an appearance. My day was nearly half over. I couldn’t get the thought of first class and free champagne out of my mind. Four hours on an airplane is just what this doctor ordered. I slapped my clipboard shut and raced down the north stairwell back to the emergency department. All I had left to do was make a few phone calls and chart some things for the patients’ records. I was in the home stretch. By now, I was sure my plane was being fueled and the drinks were being chilled. I couldn’t wait to wave my white handkerchief in the window of the plane. I had an hour drive to the airport. I had to get out of here on time.

With my nose stuffed in a large pink, plastic binder, the wail of the sirens had caught my attention. There couldn’t be a worse time to bring in a victim. I was bound and determined not to let this country bumpkin ruin my chance of escape. As the patient was wheeled into trauma room B, I noticed that this one did not look like any of the others I had seen there before. The young male did not belong to any farm. He looked like something straight out of the movie *Dazed and Confused*. His long hair matched his long shirt that hung well below his knees. He was definitely no poster child for Tractor Supply. He looked more like a drifter, catching the wind down to the Florida Keys to start a new life. At least he found life outside Pennington. His place in life was the least of my worries, however. I just wanted to patch him up and send him on his way. Then I could be on my way. I worked quickly. Although I wanted to get the hell out of
there, I did not cut any corners. I had a license to uphold, and that I had not forgotten. There were many people in trauma room B helping to unlock the problems that had afflicted the mystery man. I had to focus for a brief time before I could indulge in blissful relaxation. This day had been quite mellow up until now. Not a bad way to end my residency. As I drifted back and forth from reality and dream, the task of concentrating became extremely difficult. Too bad this case wasn’t such an open and shut one. This man seemed to be suffering from some sort of internal infection. As a standard practice, I called out among the team of professionals to give an injection of a powerhouse antibiotic. Hopefully this would immediately stabilize the patient and bring down his dangerously high fever. The minutes seemed to take hours to go by. That feeling always emerges when you become impatient in the hands of time. I needed to get on the road. It must have been ten minutes since I phoned someone from lab to come and take a blood sample. This place could be so backwards at times. I decided to do it myself. I collected three vials of blood, and passed them along to be labeled. My job here was done. The patient seemed to be stable enough to be admitted. Besides, it would be an hour, or maybe more knowing this place, to get the results back from the lab. As I turned to cap the needle, I felt the sting of a honeybee so common to Pennington. Although, I knew this was no Pennington honeybee. The used needle had surpassed the latex barrier and buried itself deep within my flesh.

I had been struck with a panic that every medical student fears. In the blink of an eye, my life had been infected. Infected in every aspect. I was sick. I am sick. I will always be sick.

As I walked down the hallway of Baptist County Medical for the last time, my thoughts overwhelmed me. I didn’t want this walk to end. I wanted to erase what happened that day. My excitement to taste the fruits of my hard labor in the big city had diminished. I just wanted to be normal. Whether I tended to cows or shopped on Fifth Avenue, I just wanted to be normal. However, I knew that day, that I would never be normal. This was my last walk down the corridor in Pennington, Louisiana, but just the beginning of dreadful walks to come in the future.

“Almost” One of the Best Nights of my Life

By Joe T. Buchanan

As I was walking through the halls of my high school for the last time on Friday, my best friend, Karl, came up to me and said he had made some plans for me that night. Since we were both seniors, Karl said he wanted to go out with a bang. Karl’s nickname was Krazy Karl, so I felt nervous at first about what he had planned, but he had never gotten me into a bad situation. When Karl asked me if I was serious about my parents being out of town on Friday night, I was a little apprehensive, but said yes. He told me just to have the house clean and he would be over later.

As I was cleaning the house, all I could think of was how much cleaning I would be doing the next day, figuring Karl had planned a major party at my house. At 9 o’clock, I heard a knock on the door. Afraid of what Karl had come up with, I reluctantly answered
the door. I was amazed at what was on the other side of the door. Karl had come through in a big way. On the other side of that door were three gorgeous girls from the class below us. They all came in and we just sat around, talking and drinking some of the liquor from my parent’s cabinet. After awhile, out of nowhere, one of the girls picked up a deck of cards and asked if we wanted to play some cards. Thinking nothing of it, everyone said yes to a friendly game of cards. However, the beautiful girl whose idea it was to play cards did not want to play a normal game of cards, she decided we were going to play poker. Not just regular poker, either; she wanted to play strip poker.

At first I was ecstatic, but then I figured only Karl and I would be playing with that one girl, which is not bad in its own right, but the more the merrier. I do not know if it was just because they had some liquor in them or what, but the next thing I know, all three girls are sitting at the table telling us the game is about to start. Karl and I could not get to our seats fast enough. We figured we would cheat to make this game go faster, but I think the girls had the same idea since Karl and I had gotten down to our underwear first. Luckily for us, the girls struck a few hands of bad luck, and they were in the same boat we were.

Just as we thought the game was going to get real interesting, I heard a knock on the door. When I answered the door, I forgot I was only wearing my boxers. I do not know who was more shocked: my grandparents, seeing me in my boxers, or me, seeing my grandparents while in my boxers. Luckily, the other people in the house heard my grandma scream and got out of the house before my grandparents saw them.

Supposedly, my parents had asked my grandparents to stop by and check on me to make sure everything was all right, and now I had to spend two long hours explaining to them how I was doing laundry and all I had to wear were my boxers. Then, when my parents came home on Sunday, I had to explain to them why some of the liquor from their cabinet was missing. All in all, my grandparents ended up ruining one of the better nights of my short life. The next time I saw Karl, however, we were all laughs about what had happened, but he said the girls were disappointed that we did not get to finish the game. Just to let you know, we finally did finish that game, but that’s a whole other story.

Just One of Those Days

By Rene Thomas

I was about to fall asleep in about two seconds when I heard the bell ring, which startled me out of my sober and sleepy mood. The day was almost over, just one more period and then I would be able to go home and start my weekend. Oh, man, there’s the one-minute warning music, I thought to myself. I must have been dreaming about getting out of school and my weekend longer than I expected. I’d never get to class on time. Then I’d get detention, and that wouldn’t be good because my parents would find out and I wouldn’t be able to go anywhere this weekend. Maybe if I hurry. No, I wouldn’t make it. It’s all the way at the other end of the school. Calm down, don’t panic. I started to walk real fast, trying to make it look like I was walking, so I wouldn’t be stopped by a hall monitor reminding me that there is no running in the halls. Then I’d
just be even later than I already was. I hurried down the hallway, with the view of my classroom in sight, and then out of nowhere a sophomore tripped me. I fell, my books scattered all over the floor. The group of sophomores behind me started to laugh. Thinking to myself I said, don’t get mad. It’s no big deal. I slowly got up and started to gather my books.

“What’s that matter freshman, did you drop your books? Here let me help.” She kicked one of my books down the hallway, and then she and her friends walked away laughing. Suddenly, she tripped over the same book that she kicked down the hall. All her books went all over the place, and when she lifted her head up, she had bruised and bloodied her nose. Everyone in the hallway who saw it started to laugh hysterically. As I looked around, I saw that some people came out of their classrooms to see what happened, and when they did, they all joined in with the laughter. I thought to myself that if I did get detention, it would be worth it. But luckily, as I walked into my classroom, I noticed that the teacher wasn’t even there; she was running late.

Alphabet

By Shelly Jones

Gracie the Gopher was very curious. She liked to explore the woods where she lived and discover new things. Gracie had just started kindergarten, and in school, she and her classmates were learning the alphabet. By the end of the week, Gracie was so excited about the alphabet that she decided to spend Saturday exploring the woods to find things that started with each letter of the alphabet. As she was leaving her house, she saw Andy the Alligator.

“Hi, Gracie. What are you doing?” Andy asked.
“I’m searching for the letters of the alphabet,” she replied.
“That sounds like fun! Can I come, too?”
“Sure, that would be super!” Gracie exclaimed. Gracie and Andy continued through the forest. Soon after they began walking, they saw Billy the Bat.
“What’s up?” Billy asked.
“Searching for the letters of the alphabet,” they replied.
“Can I come, too?”
“Sure!” Gracie and Andy exclaimed. Gracie, Andy, and Billy next met Christy the Cat.
“Hey guys! What’s up?” she called.
“We’re searching for the letters of the alphabet,” they called back. “Want to come?”
“Sure, that would be fun,” she replied. Before they could leave, Debbie the Dog came by.
“Hey, I heard you guys are looking for the letters of the alphabet. Can I come?” he asked.
“Yeah,” they replied in unison. A little ways down the path they were following, they saw Emily the Elk and Flaker the Fox.
“Hey, you two! Come with us to find the letters of the alphabet,” Gracie called.
“Sounds like fun!” Emily said.
“Great idea!” Flaker chimed in. So the group continued on. Next they met Holly the Hare. Holly liked the idea of looking for the alphabet, so she joined the group, too. They then met Ike the Iguana, Josh the Jaguar, and Kara the Kangaroo.
“Hey, what are you guys up to?” Ike asked.
“We’re looking for the alphabet,” Christy replied.
“Want to come?” Emily asked.
“Sounds like a blast!” Kara exclaimed. The group was getting quite large now. They continued down the path and soon met Lori the Leopard. Lori enthusiastically joined the group. Next they met Melissa the Monkey and Natalie the Nightingale.
“Hey guys,” Natalie trilled. “Melissa and I heard you were looking for the letters of the alphabet, so we came to join you.”
“Great!” Gracie exclaimed. “Let’s go!” As the group wandered on, they talked and laughed and carried on quite nicely. Since they were such a large group, though, they were quite loud without even realizing it. Because of all the noise they were making, they didn’t realize that they weren’t the only ones playing in the forest that day. As they rounded a bend in the trail, they emerged in a meadow. In this meadow, some of the other forest children were playing kickball. Gracie and the other alphabet seekers walked right into the middle of the game.
“Hey! Watch out!” Osterbur the Ox yelled. “You’re right in the middle of our game. What do you think you’re doing?”
“Oh my! We’re so sorry!” Gracie cried. “We didn’t even hear you guys playing out here.”
“Yeah. Well, we are. What are you guys doin’, anyway? Osterbur asked.
“We’re searching for the alphabet,” Gracie answered. “You guys should join us. We’d love to have you. The more, the merrier, I’ll always say.”
“Sounds good to me,” said Patty the Porcupine. “What do the rest of you guys think?” A rounding chorus of cheers went up. Everyone was thrilled with that idea. Just then, Gracie looked at her watch and realized that if she didn’t leave, she was going to be late for lunch, and her mom would be mad if she were late.
“Rats!” she exclaimed aloud.
“What’s wrong, Gracie?” Andy asked. Gracie quickly told him that she had to go home for lunch. A murmur went through the crowd as everyone realized that they had to leave too.
“I feel so bad,” Gracie said. “We haven’t found even a single letter of the alphabet yet.”
“Wait a minute!” Andy cried. “We’ve found ALL the letter of the alphabet.”
“What do you mean? How did we do that?” she asked.
“Everyone hear has a name that starts with a different letter of the alphabet. Everyone line up in alphabetical order,” Andy instructed. They all did as he asked and lined up in this order: Andy, Billy, Christy, Debbie, Emily, Flaker, Gracie, Holly, Ike, Josh, Kara, Lori, Melissa, Natalie, Osterbur, Patty, Quinn, Rachel, Schyler, Tommy, Ursula, Vinnie, Webster, Xavier, Yakus, and Zada.
“Wow, guys! This was neat!” Gracie exclaimed. “Thanks so much for helping me. I had a lot of fun.”
“I think we all had a lot of fun today, too, Gracie,” Andy said. “Thanks for inviting us all to come along.”

“You’re welcome. Come on. We all have to get home for lunch!”

A Long Day at the Beach
By Macey Murphy

It was 7:30 in the morning. I had just laid my towel down and I began to apply my sunscreen. It was a beautiful day in Clearwater, Florida, and I was perfectly situated under the sun and all I could see in front of me was the crystal blue water of the gulf. My Aunt Penny had brought rafts for everyone, which included by brother Michael, my cousin Matt, his girlfriend Angie, my mom, my dad, and myself. She had gotten them free from work, so the plan was to blow them up when we got there and leave them at the end of the week.

I began to blow my raft up, which was no easy task. They were heavy duty, and the plastic was stuck together pretty good. It took about forty-five minutes to blow up, but as soon as I was done, I caught my breath and headed for the water. The waves were very small, so I could float to shore and wade back out. It was about five minutes after being out on my raft that my mom came down. She was very interested in my raft, so she attempted to blow hers up. She was having a lot of difficulty, so I offered to blow hers up for her. I did not realize she was going to take mine while I was getting hers ready. Needless to say this process repeated for most of the morning. As the rest of our crew straggled down that morning, my raft kept getting stolen as I was blowing up someone else’s raft. They all thought it was funny, but I had no air left in me to complain.

By 11:00 that morning, everyone had come down, the rafts were all blown up, and the beach was packed. My mom and my aunt were quite content floating, and the guys were playing catch with the balls in the water. I had laid out for an hour or so and did some people watching. There was an old couple to our left who had spent the morning underneath their umbrella. To the right of us was a group of guys who had spent the morning fishing. That’s right, they were knee deep in the same water we were swimming, floating, and playing in, and they were fishing, not just for fish, but for stingrays. It was late June when we were in Florida, and that is the time that stingrays are nesting. They come close to shore to lay their eggs.

It was about noon and I decided to head back into the water, but I needed a change of scenery. I waded out about knee deep with my raft, but decided to go up the beach and float back. As I was wading through the water, and pulling my raft behind me, I caught a glimpse of a shadow, or what I thought was a shadow. When I looked down, there were four very large stingrays coming right at me. It was then I turned and began to scream. I was screaming the whole way out of the water, and not even thinking about how the hotel staff told us to shuffle our feet through the sand to scare them away. I, of course, was high stepping it out of the water as fast as I could which is the most
dangerous thing to do in that situation. The whole time, my mom and my aunt were staring at me and asking if they should be getting out of the water also. Of course everyone else on the beach was staring at me. I made it out safely, but I had no desire to get back in the water, so I thought I would take a lunch break.

Angie was laying out when I made it back to our spot on the beach. She, of course, was still laughing at what she had just witnessed. We had some munchies in our bag, so I got out the Doritos. We were huddled up together with the bag under a towel so we would not attract any seagulls. That did not work so well. Within a minute we had approximately fifty seagulls swarming around us. They were swooping at our heads so Angie got in a fetal position and threw a towel over herself. I, on the other hand, was not so smart. I took off running, with the Doritos in hand, of course, and you guessed it; the seagulls followed me. I instinctively ran for the water, but then realized half-way there that I was afraid to be back in. All I could think in my head was I am either going to get my eyes pecked out or stung in the foot. I finally heard my mom and my aunt yelling from their rafts to drop the bag, which would have been the intelligent thing to do in the first place. So once again, everyone was laughing as I sat in the sand and watched those stupid birds eat my snack. After that, I gave up on the beach and went back to the room. When my mom got back, she informed me that the elderly couple sitting next to us the whole day told her that I was very entertaining to watch all day.

Amy’s Dilemma
By Susan Flaker

Amy walked out of her classroom with a sigh of relief. Math was by far her least favorite class and she always felt relieved when it was over. It wasn’t just the class that bothered her, but the boy she sat next to, Matt. He would sit there breathing down her neck and she sat there, listening to the air going in and out of his mouth. Amy wove through the halls of her junior high to get to the second floor girls’ bathroom. She looked at herself in the mirror; her brown hair fell in spirals to her shoulders. She moved her glasses away from her hazel eyes and sighed. “I hate my glasses.” She was in the middle of checking to make sure everything else was ok when the bathroom door burst open.

“Mrs. Dotate is a complete witch!” It was Nicole, Amy’s best friend. Ever since the 7th grade the two girls had started a ritual of meeting in the second floor bathroom just before lunch.

“How do you do it?” Amy asked.

“What?” Nicole asked as she flipped her wavy blonde hair away from her face and began to apply some lip-gloss.

“How do you always manage to look like you just walked off the cover of a magazine?”

“Amy, let’s not start this again, ok? We go through this every day; you ask why you can’t look so good, and then I say you do and then I say how smart you are. It’s the same
everyday. Honestly, I should start trying to beat you to the bathroom so you don’t have time to look at yourself. You’re perfect, you’re curly hair is great, you’re bones aren’t too big, and you’re the one person I know in all honors classes that isn’t a complete dork. Now come on. I have to meet Tom for lunch.”

Amy returned her glasses to her face and followed Nicole out of the bathroom. She was still feeling a little down on herself even after her friend’s pep talk. As they walked, their friends Veronica and Shanna joined them. The four discussed their upcoming social calendar. Veronica had cheerleading tryouts and desperately wanted the other three to join the team. She was the captain of the squad and insisted that it wouldn’t be that hard to slide them on the team. Shanna refused. She had basketball tryouts coming up and it wouldn’t work out if she made the team, which she would. She had been a starter for the last two years. Nicole insisted that the yelling would kill her voice, and her singing coach would hate that. Amy thought about it. She really hated to say no to her friend, but she had gymnastics every day and the science fair was coming up, but she found herself telling Veronica that she would.

Veronica’s face started beaming with excitement. As the four girls entered the cafeteria, Nicole ran to Tom. Tom and Nicole were perfect for each other. They were both gorgeous. Amy looked at them with admiration as Veronica went on about all the fun the two of them would have. Amy tried to sound interested, but then something else caught her eye. Aaron Webel was standing at the other end of the cafeteria. He was like a Greek god to Amy, his hair was always perfect, and his blue eyes always seemed to shine. His body was perfect. Why shouldn’t it be, he played football, basketball and ran track. He was in almost all of Amy’s classes. All of them, except math. “Yet another reason that’s the worst class in the world.” Amy thought to herself. Just then, she realized that Aaron was walking over to her. Frightened by the thought that he had caught her staring at him, she whipped around and pretended to be interested in what Veronica was talking about.

“It will be so good to have someone who can actually tumble with me on the team. I mean at least we can do some really great stuff.” Veronica said.

“I can’t wait.” Amy said in a less than excited voice. Just then, she felt a tap on her shoulder. She turned around and it was him. Aaron Webel was standing in front of her. Her knees got weak and she struggled to keep herself upright. “Hey Aaron.”

“Hey Amy, can I talk to you for a second?”

“This is it.” Amy thought, “At last, he realized how great I am and he’s finally going to ask me out.” She wanted to start screaming, “Yes, you can ask me whatever you want, you sexy thing,” but she didn’t.

“You know that I play football right?”

“Yeah, I think the whole school knows that.”

“I guess you’re right. Umm, anyway, the football team is having a fundraiser, and I was wondering if you could just help out a little.”

“What kind of fundraiser is it?” Amy asked, barely able to stay in her shoes at the thought of working so close with Aaron.

“Well, that’s what I wanted your help with. Ya see, we’re, the guys, aren’t all that good at planning things and, well, umm, I’d like you to do it.”

“You don’t have any ideas at all?” Amy asked.
“Well no, you see, we have a few, but none of them are any good.” Amy looked into his cute blue eyes, and realized that no matter how hard she tried she would be unable to say no.

“Ok, I’ll help.”

“Thanks Amy, you’re the greatest.”

Amy watched him as he walked away. “I’m the greatest. Aaron Webel thinks I’m the greatest. This day is perfect,” Amy thought to herself. Just then she looked up to see that Veronica was walking her way with a lunch tray. Amy had lost her spot in line. “Oh well, I guess I won’t eat today,” she thought, but it was worth it. She got to talk to her Greek god. Amy walked over to the table where Nicole and Tom were sitting.

“Hey Amy.”

“Yeah, Nicole?”

“Do you understand what’s going on in Chemistry?”

“Yeah, sure. Why?”

“Cause Tom is completely lost and wanted to know if you would tutor him. He’d pay you.”

“Why doesn’t Tom ask me himself?”

“Cause he’s afraid to ask for help.”

“He’s sitting right next to you, and he’s afraid to ask for help?” Just then, the lunch bell rang. “I’ll help him. Tell Tom to meet me after school today, and we’ll set up a time to work.”

Amy got home that night at nine o’clock. She was exhausted. After school she met with Tom and helped him with his chemistry. She often felt that she was trying too explain the idea of an atom to a brick wall. After that she went to Gymnastics for four hours. Amy flopped onto her bed and was ready to fall asleep when her eyes fell on a stack of books looming on her desk. “I haven’t even started my homework.” Amy rolled off her bed and went to her desk. She had worked all through the night on her Math and French homework and was just about to start her English when she realized that it was one in the morning. “I’ll finish English in the morning,” she said with a sigh.

Amy fell asleep and it seemed that as soon as her head hit the pillow she had to wake up again. That morning she woke up and had just started to fix the grammatical errors on a paper when her mom called her down for breakfast. Amy fell down the stairs and sat in front of her cereal. She was less than interested.

“Honey, are you ok?” Amy’s mother asked.

“Yeah mom, I’m great, thanks,” Amy said with a yawn.

Amy’s week just got worse and the next week wasn’t any better. She had projects assigned for History and English, her science fair project was coming up and she hadn’t finished it at all, and she still needed to run more trials on the effects of acid rain on earth worm rates of decomposition. It was getting harder and harder to teach Tom the ins and outs of Chemistry. Aaron, as cute as he was, was not helping out with the fundraising, and Veronica was becoming more and more insistent about the two of them getting together to practice. On top of all this, Amy’s first gymnastics meet was quickly approaching. Amy was sleeping two hours a night before her mom stepped in.

“Amy I think your doing to much.”

“No mom, I’m doing good,” Amy said as she fell asleep over a pile of books.

“Amy, I, Amy, Amy AMY wake up!” her mom yelled.
“Mom, don’t yell. I’m trying to study.”

“Amy, you can’t live like this. You’re wearing yourself thin. You barely eat, you don’t sleep and your coach is worried that you’re not focusing enough on gymnastics. Sweetie, what’s going on?”

“Mom, stop nagging me. You don’t know what it’s like to be me. You don’t know how hard it is on me when I let someone down. Tom is Nicole’s boyfriend. If he fails that class, she would kill me. Veronica is one of my best friends and she would hate me forever if I wasn’t on the squad. And the football team really needs the money; they really need new pads and...”

Amy tried to continue but all she could do was cry. Her mom sat down next to her and gave her a hug.

“It’s ok, honey, I understand. You’ll be ok. But you need to stop doing so much; I don’t want to see you get sick.”

“But mom, I can’t,” She wailed.

“Honey, I love you and I’m saying no for your own good. Tell your friends I just won’t let you. Let’s sit down and prioritize your activities.”

The next day Amy went to school shaking. She knew her mother was right, but that didn’t make it any easier to let her friends down. She was afraid of what they would say. Half of her wanted to ignore what her mom said. However, the other half of her knew that if she did, she would be letting her mom down. Worst of all, she would be letting herself down. Amy saw Veronica at her locker, and went up to speak with her.

“Veronica, I’m sorry, but I don’t think there’s any way I can do cheerleading.”

Veronica looked at Amy and understood. She had seen how hard Amy had been working at everything over the last few days and knew that Cheerleading was not what Amy needed right now.

“That’s ok.” Veronica said, “I can’t have you showing me up anyways.” The two girls laughed as they walked off to their first class, talking about the awful wig Mr. Dotate wore.

In the bathroom before lunch, Amy explained to Nicole her problems, and let her know she would help Tom a little, just not as much as she had been. Nicole seemed to understand, and she would tell Tom for her. The two girls went on their normal route to the cafeteria when Amy saw Aaron and knew she had to tell him. She took a deep breath as she approached him at his locker.

“Aaron, I need to talk to you.”

“Yeah, ok.”

“Here’s the deal. I’ve been really ultra busy lately and I’m not on the football team, so I don’t think I should be the one organizing the fundraising. If you need any help with some ideas or if you need me to work for an hour or two, I would be more than happy to, but I just can’t be in charge of the whole thing.” Amy blurted out.

“That’s cool; it’s no big deal; I just thought it would be kinda nice if I could have a girl’s opinion on all of this stuff and, well, you were the first one to come to mind. I’ll get some of the guys on the squad to do it, though I will most definitely be calling you to help.”

Amy was quite relieved as she went down to the cafeteria. The next few months were spent with seeing here friend cheer the football team onto victory, washing cars with Aaron, and getting second place in the science fair.
Maria’s Airport Adventure

By Krista Crump

I am tired of being stuck in Lambert airport. I have been here since 5 a.m. and it is already noon. My flight was supposed to leave at six this morning; yet, here I wait. This blizzard has forced airport officials to keep all flights grounded until further notice. I thought maybe I could rest while waiting for the storm to pass, but that is nearly impossible. For starters, all of the chairs in the terminal are occupied, so I am having to sit on this dingy, filthy carpet. To make things worse, there is a mother with her three children, all under the age of five, sitting next to me on the floor. One of the little boys has a fire truck that makes a high-pitched siren noise, and it is giving me a horrendous headache.

I thought I would get up and stretch my legs for a while, so I went for a walk down the corridor. I decided to save my spot on the floor by leaving my luggage behind while I went for a walk. I walked down to the airport café and ordered a French vanilla cappuccino. To my disbelief, the woman behind the register told me the cappuccino machine was temporarily out of order. Reluctantly, I settled for a cup of hot chocolate, and began my journey back down the corridor.

Walking down the terminal, I noticed my right shoe was sticking to the floor, and it resisted as I picked my right leg up to take a step. As luck would have it, I had stepped in chewing gum. One would think others would have the common decency to spit the piece of gum into a trashcan! While holding my cup of hot chocolate and trying to keep my balance, I attempted to remove the gum from my shoe. Just as I pulled the gum from my shoe, some stranger bumped into me, and the hot chocolate spilled all over my new cardigan sweater. He did not stop to help me clean up the mess, and he did not even bother to stop and apologize. I threw the gum and the now empty Styrofoam cup into a nearby trashcan and proceeded down the terminal. Luckily, I had packed an extra blouse in my carry-on luggage, so I figured I could change out of my spoiled sweater and into something clean, dry, and not sticky.

As I approached the place where I had been sitting, I noticed my luggage was no longer there. Frantically, I searched the area hoping someone had just pushed the luggage to the side. To my dismay, my luggage had been stolen! There, in the middle of the airport, I began to cry. I was exhausted, my face was streaked with black mascara lines, and my luggage was nowhere to be found. When I went to the airport security, they said they could not guarantee anything, but that they would review surveillance tapes and notify me if anything was recovered.

My weekend getaway to Chicago was not getting off to a great start. So many inconvenient and bad things were happening to me. It was almost as if some one was practicing the art of voodoo, and wishing terrible things to happen to me. For now, I am stuck in this airport waiting for the blizzard to pass over. I might be in Chicago by Saturday morning, if I am lucky. However, this morning has not been all that lucky for me. I’m sure once I arrive in Chicago things will be much better, because after these mornings mishaps, things can only get better. Right?
Funny Story
By Cara Chaplin

In a little town in central Illinois, the students of Tuscola Community High School had a bizarre Homecoming tradition. Every year, to get into the school spirit, the seniors of the high school had the town’s and school’s full support to commit theft. The object of this strange ritual was to first drive around in the country in search of an outhouse. Once one was targeted, the next night’s goal was to round up as many friends as possible, grab a truck, and steal the outhouse. Then, the outhouse was hidden away at a senior’s house and spray painted with the signatures of the thieves. This process was actually done by two separate groups. The senior boys and senior girls each got their own outhouse.

The Thursday night before the Homecoming game, a bonfire was held at the high school parking lot. Years earlier, the seniors set off the rally by taking turns hitting the outhouses with a sledgehammer, then lighting them on fire and watching them burn. Later, the principal decided this was too dangerous and limited the tradition to the mere burning of the outhouse. Today, the tradition is outlawed completely, but students still carry out the torching at other locations.

Each year, the students had a blast, but something always seemed to go humorously wrong. The last class eligible to participate had a particularly rough time, especially the girls. Since this tradition had gone on for some time and modern times provided better sewage maintenance, there were few outhouses left in existence. So, needless to say, the girls had great difficulty finding one. Many after-school outhouse hunting trips were made until they settled on two possibilities. One was located about fifteen feet from an old farmhouse, and the other was in the back of an old hidden cemetery.

The girls all got together and decided to go for the farmhouse outhouse, since no one felt too comfortable stealing from the dead. They planned to steal the outhouse on a Tuesday night, giving them plenty of time to prepare it for Thursday night’s activities.

The evening did not get off to a good start. Usually, only the girls who were involved in sports got to go on the great outhouse adventure, which limited the participants. That particular year, the girls decided that was an unfair rule and invited any senior girl who wanted to come along. None of the girls had any idea so many girls would be interested. Traditionally, only about seven or eight girls went, at the most. That year, close to twenty girls went! They knew it was going to be tough to transport everyone together and keep them all quiet.

Tuesday night came and they ended up taking two trucks, ten in each. They arrived at the farmhouse right on schedule and parked one truck about one-fourth a mile away from the house. They made sure to turn the lights off and then waited patiently for the quick load and getaway. The other truck was further down. Everything was going as planned until a large brown mutt began barking uncontrollably.

The farmhouse lights flickered on and the girls took off running as fast as their feet could carry them. The dog had not been visible the day of their hunt and choosing.

The now desperate girls knew they only had one other option left: the cemetery. No one was very excited about it, but it had to be done. So, they piled back into the trucks and took off in the cemetery’s direction.

When they got to the next outhouse, they saw they hadn’t realized how large it was. Some girls even questioned if it was an outhouse at all. One of the girls said she knew it
was, because she used it as a little girl. So with no further questions, they spent the next twenty minutes loading it up, which was no easy task. The outhouse itself was monstrous, plus they had to fit ten girls back into the truck as well. Somehow, they managed and were very proud of themselves.

They brought it back to the country home of one of the girls and decorated it with their spray painted signatures. They really thought they had it made.

The next day at school, the girls were beaming. They were even more excited to hear the boys were unable to find an outhouse for themselves. Then, five of the sports girls were called to the principal’s office.

The principal sat them down and told them the caretaker of the cemetery called and said he knew they had taken his tool shed and he wanted it back. The girls were stunned and humiliated. They were sure it was an outhouse. The principal said they had two options. They could either repaint and return the outhouse, or burn it and build the man a new one. The girls knew they had to return it.

The boys were greatly amused by the revelation of the outhouse turned tool shed, but the girls were heartbroken. Luckily, the parents of one of the girls owned old farmland that had an outhouse on it. The only catch was it was about forty miles away. The girls didn’t want to face further embarrassment by not having an outhouse at all, so a few of them went and got it. They decorated and burned it just as they normally would that Thursday night. It wasn’t the same, but they didn’t really care because they had made some great memories.

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**Children’s Story**  
*By Eboni Jones*

Once upon a time, there was a small family that lived by the lake. There was a mommy, a daddy, and a loud little Lisa, who sang all day. Loud little Lisa loved to play next door with her friend, sharing Sarah. They played hide-and-seek for hours and hours.

One day, while playing hide-and-seek, Lisa ran to a tall tree far away from the house. She ducked behind the towering tree, for she knew Sarah could not see. Lisa knew if she got caught that far from the house, mommy would be mad at her, but Lisa did not care. She wanted to win the game.

Just as sharing Sarah gave up the search, Lisa fell into a ditch behind the tree as she jumped for glee at her victory.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!” she screamed.

Because Lisa was so far away from home, sharing Sarah could not hear the cry of loud little Lisa, so no one came to her rescue. The bright, sunny sky began to fall dark, and little Lisa knew mommy would be worried.

“HEEEEEEEEEEEELP! HEEEEEEEEEEELP!” Lisa yelled.

To her surprise, Mr. Owlie and Mr. Marooney appeared.

Mr. Owlie flew to her rescue, but his wings were not strong enough to fly her out of the dark ditch. Mr. Marooney wanted her to grab his long, tattered tail, but it was too short to reach her.
Mr. Marooney decided to jump into the ditch and push Lisa up, while Mr. Owlie would use his wings to fly them out of the hole to safety. As Mr. Marooney pushed Lisa out of the hole, she moved her arms frantically, gesturing the decent of Mr. Owlie. As she moved her arms, she hit Mr. Marooney in both his eyes, but he was strong enough not to drop her.

As Mr. Owlie gently placed Lisa on the ground, she kicked frantically, because she was safe. As she kicked her legs, she hit Mr. Owlie in his throat. “OHHHHH!” he yelled. Before they could catch their breath, Lisa ran off into the night, because she was afraid that her mommy would punish her. Too bad she did not even say thank you.

When Lisa arrived home, her mommy ran and gave her a big hug, because she had been worried about her. After Lisa explained what happened, her mommy sent her to her room.

Meanwhile, Mr. Owlie and Mr. Marooney were still in the ditch.

“Marooney, your eyes have dark circles around them,” said the moon. “Owlie, there’s nothing wrong with you.”

Mr. Owlie gestured and tried to say “My throat,” but all that came out was, “OOOH! OOOH!” So, the moon gave them new names. Mr. Marooney became the raccoon, and Mr. Owlie became the owl. Both creatures made a promise to come out every night to search for Lisa, so she could say thank you.

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**Addiction**

*By Brian Morris*

As I got into my car and left the center, I began to think of how lucky I was that my wife and kids did not leave me over the course of my addiction. I never really realized what I was doing to them until that dreadful weekend when I realized the true extent of my addiction. That weekend started off just like any other. I got out of the office fifteen minutes late and made a mad dash to the bank to cash my check, but this time I was pulled over for speeding and, consequently, I didn’t make it to the bank in time. “Great,” I thought to myself. “Now I won’t have any cash until tomorrow, and my wife is out of town with the checkbook.” As I walked in the door, I threw my coat onto the couch and went to the fridge to get a drink. “This ought to calm me down,” I thought. As I opened the door and reached my hand in to pull out a drink, I saw we were completely out. Now, not only did I have no money, but I also had no grape soda. That’s right. I was addicted to grape soda.

I drank at least a case a day, and there was no way that I could go until tomorrow, when I would cash my check to get some. So I began to frantically search the house for change, but all I could find was fifteen cents. I sat on the couch and thought about how I could get a few more bucks for a twelve pack, but found it difficult to think due to the mild withdrawal that I was having. I began to think about every way that I could obtain the money I needed, but without much success until, all of a sudden, it came to me. I would go to the mall and fish money out of the fountain. Now that I had a plan, I began to stand up and walk out to the car, but when I took a few steps out the door, the lack of
grape soda got the best of me, and I began to convulse and eventually passed out.
The next thing that I remember was waking up in a hospital bed and looking over
to see my wife and son.

"Where am I?" I asked my wife.
"You are in the hospital," my wife replied.
"What am I doing in the hospital?" I asked her.
"Our neighbor, Mr. Rogers, was out taking his sweaters off of the clothes line
when he saw you pass out and he called 9-1-1. About that time, the doctor came
in and sat on the end of the bed.

"Well, Frank," he said, "after reviewing your test results, I noticed that your
sugar levels were rather unusual. Tell me, do you eat a lot of sweets or drink a lot
of sodas?"

"Well, I don’t eat sweets, but I do drink a case of soda a day."
"That explains it," said the doctor.
"Explains what?" I asked.
"Well, your sugar intake is outrageous, but your body has become used to it
and now even expects it. That’s why you passed out. A lack of sugar."

"So all I have to do is continue to drink a case of grape soda a day? That’s
easy enough."

"No, Frank, it’s not. We are going to have to gradually lower your sugar
intake until you are no longer dependant on it.” The doctor then told me that he
was transferring me to a rehab center for six months, so I said goodbye to my wife
and son, then left for the center. While at the center, I was given subcutaneous
sugar injections in tapered doses until I was no longer dependant on sugar to keep
from passing out.

So this brings me back to present day. As I pull into the driveway, I see my
wife and son waiting on the front porch. I stop the car and run over to give them
both a big hug. As I hug them, I thank God for giving me the strength to beat the
horrible addiction, and for having my wife and son stick by me through it all. I
now have my life back and freedom from my dependency, and it feels great.

Family Story
By Allyson Harvey

I have never been close to my grandparents on my father’s side of the family. We have never shared stories or
anything ever since I can remember, until recently. My grandma’s health has taken a downward turn. It is quite
unfortunate, but her mind has sort of loosened up. She rattles off stories left and right of history of which I am only
learning. I find it really interesting.

Although most of her stories are repeated over and over, one still gives me the chills.

As we were riding to the baby shower of my cousin, my grandma began asking my sister and me the same questions.
Do you have a car? Where do you live? What do you do? Those seem to be the top three asked almost twice daily. My
sister and I have sort of gotten used to it,
but we still have to hold back our laughter. After the initial questions, my grandma started in on her storytelling extravaganza, only this time I was intrigued. I have never in my twenty-four years heard about her childhood. She started talking about when she was young. She lived next door to this beautiful house in Chicago. Her mother did not like her going over there to visit, but she couldn’t help it. The men who lived there were so nice, and they had a bunch of kittens. She liked to play with the kittens. On the hottest days, she would go over there and eat ice cream on the front steps with the guys.

It all sounded very innocent until her next statement. She said she would sit there and eat her ice cream while the guys cleaned their machine guns. Right then, I knew my grandma had lost it, so I played along and laughed with her through the rest of it. The parts where she would sneak into the house and find lots of candy, and the details of the elaborate house seemed to flow into and out of my nodding head.

I didn’t think much about the story until later that week. I asked my dad about it while we were at my grandparents’ house. He said it was all true. I sat there in disbelief. Just then, he brought a picture over to me. There was my grandma, sitting on top of a car with the guys surrounding her holding machine guns. She was telling the truth. My dad sort of filled in the gaps of the story for me. The men in the picture belonged to Al Capone’s gang. My grandma lived next door to them until the day of the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre. Her parents witnessed the horrors of it and packed them up to move to a safer place. They no longer wanted their daughter to hang around gangsters

Mother’s Day
By Alan Seaton

Jack pressed his round eight-year-old face against the reinforced glass as the rain drizzled past his tiny blue eyes on the other side. “When’s mom coming, dad?” asked Jack to his father who was standing beside him, looking into the cloudy sky.

“Her flight will be here soon, Jack,” he replied, obviously frustrated because he gave the same answer 30 seconds earlier.

Pacing back and forth between concourse A with an oversized gift box in his hands, Jack looked worried. “She said she would be here at 5:00 and it’s already 6:30; where could she be?” Jack said to himself. Looking down at the thoughtfully wrapped blue gift box he held in his hands, he wondered how much worse this Mother’s Day could get. Jack looked over at gate A-2, where his Mother’s plane should have arrived 30 minutes ago. He could see no signs of life, except his father Jonathan in a white business shirt with his sleeves rolled up busily typing away on his laptop computer—obviously unaware of his presence or the fact that Mom’s plane hadn’t arrived yet.

It was 7:15 now and Jack was really beginning to worry about his mom. He noticed that the weather outside was getting worse—the rain was coming down harder and the wind had picked up considerably. Worst of all, Jack had no idea where his mom was at and whether or not she was safe. “It’s not like her to be this late and not call; I just know
something’s wrong.” Jack said in a trembling voice. “I know, I’ll walk down the terminal and look at the arriving flights and see where mom’s plane is at; yeah, that’s what I’ll do.” Making his way down the terminal, Jack saw the group of monitors that he was looking for. “Ok, now I just need to find mom’s flight, ummm….700, yeah, there it is.” As Jack’s eyes focused on the line that held his mom’s flight info, he noticed that under flight status the word “error” was blinking and then after a few seconds the whole monitor blacked out. Jack froze in terror as his eight-year-old mind conjured up the worst. “I knew it; mom is hurt and something bad happened to her plane.” The tears began to well up in Jack’s eyes and his lips started quivering. “Mom,” Jack yelled out in a loud cry as he started running down the terminal tossing the blue box in the trashcan.

Having witnessed the whole scene, Jonathan and his wife Terri—whose plane had just arrived 5 minutes earlier, were puzzled. Nevertheless, seeing their only son crying and running down the terminal, Jonathan and Terri pulled the blue box out of the trashcan and caught up with Jack. “Hey shorty,” said a familiar voice to the still running Jack.

“Mom,” Jack yelled, stopping dead in his tracks and reversing direction into the arms of the person he thought he’d never see again.

“What’s the matter Jackie? I’m right here.” Jack didn’t say a word, nor did he notice the dirtied blue box in his mom’s hands. He was just happy to have his mom back on Mother’s day.

Cory

By Nick Bruggerman

Shadow Springs is a town located in the northeast corner of Vermont. Shadow Springs is a small little village with a population of about 3000 people. It is the type of community where you can walk down the street without ever having to worry, and everybody basically knows everybody in the town. There is one family in the town though that is well known; that would be the Rudolf family. Jeff Rudolf was a successful salesman for a major automobile company, and his wife Denise ran a popular restaurant in the town. Denise and Jeff had one child who they cared for very much ever since he was born. Cory, their son, wasn’t what some people would call normal. You see, Cory was born handicapped, or as others would say, mentally challenged. Cory suffered from severe attention disorder and was also mentally handicapped. Cory also suffered from epilepsy. To Cory though, he was normal because he was born like it and knew nothing different, so he never let anything get to him. It also helped that his parents did everything they could to make Cory’s life as normal as possible. Cory basically lived his elementary days and early teenage days with pure pleasure.

When Cory hit the age of 16 though, it seemed all the happiness he was full of changed. It seemed he started to question things. Cory started noticing that kids that he knew in his class were driving to school and were going out late at night. At the age of 17, he noticed that his peers were going to R rated movies whereas he wasn’t because his parents wouldn’t let him. He started to question himself each day and started to ask the question: why? No matter how
hard he tried to figure out why he
couldn’t do those things, he couldn’t
figure it out. So when Cory turned 18,
he finally brought out all of his
frustration on his parents. He questioned
everything and anything. He asked his
parents why he couldn’t drive, why kids
were in higher classes than he was, why
they were staying out later, why they
were allowed to see what he called bad
movies, and numerous other questions.
The only response that his parents would
give him was that they were a little
different so they were allowed to do
different things. They told him that they
didn’t want anything to happen to him
and they were trying to keep him safe.
Cory, though, still didn’t understand all
of the stuff his parents were telling him.
He knew he was the same age as all his
peers, and in his mind he wasn’t
different from all of them, and he
thought it was all a bunch of, well, you
know.

After thinking about it for a couple
more weeks, Cory decided that he was
going to do it; he decided that he was
going to become independent like all his
peers, and he was going to leave his
house and do what he wanted. So Cory
went up to his room and over to his
closet and pulled out his superman back
pack and started to put his favorite
things in there. He went to grab his
tooth brush, comb, deodorant, and along
with his favorite toys, like his action
figure of The Rock, his favorite comic
book, and his football. After he got all
of his stuff packed, he started to walk
downstairs toward the door. Just when
he was getting ready to walk outside,
Cory had a grand mal seizure and hit his
head against the floor and got knocked
out.

When Cory woke up, he noticed that
he wasn’t at home; in fact he had no idea
where he was at. He looked down at his
arm and noticed that there were some
needles in his arm, and he also noticed
that he was dressed in this ridiculous
gown. He then realized he was at a
hospital. Just then his parents walked
into the room. They asked Cory how he
was feeling, and he said, “I am fine now;
can we leave?” Of course Denise and
Jeff said that he wasn’t allowed to. This
information made Cory very upset. All
he kept thinking about was how he
wanted to get out and do things he
wanted to do. He felt that his parents
were holding him back. He felt that they
put him in the hospital just to stop him
from leaving.

That night Cory’s dad, Jeff, decided
that he would stay overnight with Cory
in his room. In the middle of the night,
Cory thought to himself he had to get out
of his torment and he had to do it then.
He felt his parents were causing him all
this pain, so he decided it was time for
payback, but he wasn’t sure how. So he
sat there for an hour thinking of how he
could get away. He looked over at his
father who was fast asleep and thought
to himself, “If I want to get away, I have
to make my dad leave, and the only way
to do that is to inflict pain.” Cory then
saw that the tray from his dinner was
still there and on the tray was the knife.
Cory grabbed the knife and inched closer
to his father. He pulled the knife back
and stabbed his father in the leg with it,
but nothing happened. His father didn’t
wake up and scream and leave or
anything. Cory pulled back again and
once again stabbed his father in the leg,
and once again nothing happened. On
the third try the plastic knife broke—still
without waking his father. This made
Cory mad and he just sat there and
thought to himself, “I will get my
revenge.”
Alien Attack
*By Erica Tenholder*

On a late August night, two friends were driving down a narrow country road enclosed by cornfields on every side. It was unusually chilly for a Midwestern summer night, but the green cornstalks still loomed outside of the car, cloaking anything hidden in their darkness. The two girls were desperately trying to ignore the ominous corn as it trapped them on that little road.

To entertain themselves and take their minds off the less than inviting scenery, the girls sang and laughed nervously along with the radio. During the distraction, the driver unknowingly missed their turn. The two began to notice how unfamiliar the road had become. Suddenly, there was no longer a road at all! It just ended. They had actually driven into the menacing cornfield with nothing in view but the enclosing stalks. The passenger began rambling nervously about a fear of aliens hidden deep in cornfields waiting to emerge and abduct the two of them.

More afraid than ever, the driver quickly turned around trying to escape from any creatures hidden by the camouflage of the corn. In her hurry, she accidentally screeched over loose gravel as she tensely attempted to get safely away from the aliens of the corn. Suddenly, the driver swerved off the road screaming wildly. The frightened passenger grabbed on to her friend and prepared for the worst, but she heard the screams next to her abruptly turn into laughter. The frightened girl looked over to see her friend laughing hysterically. “It was only a dog!” she finally squeaked.

The girls laughed at themselves for the rest of the ride home. Yet, each kept one eye out for the aliens.

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Alone
*By Stacey Phillips*

It started out as a typical summer morning, eating breakfast at 7:30 with my mom and dad. As breakfast ended, the plans for the day were being made. My mom was of course leaving for work at ten till eight, and my dad was deciding about what time he would be home for dinner. I assumed that I would be going with my dad to accompany him with whatever his day consisted of. I had always gone with my dad, whether it was hay season or simply checking on the oil wells. But this day was definitely different. They both looked at me, and decided that I could stay home by myself. This was a definite shock to me because I was twelve years old and had never been alone, even for ten minutes.

By 8:00 both parents were gone. I had the house to myself, so all morning I sat and watched MTV. My dad hated that channel so I rarely got to watch it. After I made myself a grilled cheese for lunch, I decided to lay out in the back yard. So I put on my swimsuit and packed my towel and radio outside.

About an hour later, I heard a squeaky truck drive by. Since I live so far out in the country, nobody ever drives by my house. So I was curious and sat up to see who was driving by. I didn’t recognize the rusty beat up orange
Chevy, so I ignored it and lay back down. Not long after that, I heard an awful screech. I quickly sat up to see the same truck backing down the old gravel road. It backed down the road at least a half-mile. I started to get nervous so I waited to see if he turned up our lane. He did. I hurried up and ran inside to put clothes over my swimsuit.

As I began to walk to the door to see who it was, I heard him yelling, “I know you’re here! I need to talk to you.” I peeked through the blinds to see an old dirty man that I did not recognize. I got scared and ran to my brother’s old room to grab his aluminum bat. Our doors do not lock so I decided to keep an eye on the man.

From the sound of the dogs barking and his continuous yelling, I was able to follow him from window to window as he circled the house three times. I just knew he was going to come in. I’m not sure why, but he never opened the door. He just knocked on every window and yelled that he was coming in. Finally, I saw him get in his truck. There he sat in his truck and laid on the horn for at least two minutes. Shaking from head to toe, I grabbed the phone and called my dad. Luckily, he was almost home. He said he would be right there and hung up.

When the man finally decided to leave, he met my dad at the end of our lane. Dad began questioning him as to what he wanted. He kept insisting that he just needed help with a tire. Dad was confused as to what he wanted but didn’t question him further because the man was obviously drunk or on some really good drugs. Dad told him to never come to our house again and the man left.

Dad ran in the house to see if I was ok. Of course I was, so we jumped in the pickup and followed his truck at a safe distance so that he didn’t see us. We followed him to a nearby campground where he pulled up to a nasty old trailer. We went back home and phoned the owner of the campground. We found out the name of the guy and that he was visiting from out of town.

The next morning started out like all the other mornings, except I knew I wasn’t going to spend the day by myself. So I finished my breakfast and rode to town with my dad. We stopped at the little coffee shop first thing. As we sat there, my dad happened to pick up that morning’s paper, and guess what was on the front page? “Out of Town Man Arrested for Theft.” We read on to find out that the old man robbed a house and the local sawmill that same day he had visited me.

Fire
By Alan Seaton

When I was five years old, my cousin Josh came over to visit one weekend. After playing outside for most of the day, we decided that we were bored and had to find something else to do. After the summer sun had gone down, about 8:30 in the evening as I remember, we made up our minds that we were going to build a fire. Not just any fire, but a tribal style bonfire is what we had in mind.
As five year old pyros, we gathered up everything flammable we could find. We rounded up sticks from the yard, papers from the trash, dried grass, and of course, gasoline from the garage. We took everything into the side backyard between my house and the fence because we reasoned that no one would see us there and we wouldn't get in trouble. We made a big pile out of everything, threw some gas on top, and lit it with a match. The fire screamed straight up in the air so high that I could have sworn it scorched the top of my house. After this initial "close call," we tamed the fire and got it under control. We roasted marshmallows on the fire, danced around it like five-year-old Indians, and just admired our creation. That is, until my neighbor caught us.

My neighbor Hector lived directly across the street. He was about the same age as my dad, in his mid 30's, and he always wore khaki slacks with a tucked-in shirt. He looked pretty much like a 35-year-old boy scout. Hector was often the target of our youthful humor because he always looked ridiculous, but nevertheless we respected him as an adult. The distance from my house to Hector's was about 200 feet, a great distance for a five-year-old. I'm guessing that our fire must have been pretty big and bright for Hector to see it from his "boy scout lodge," which is what I and my cousin Josh called Hector's house. After he saw the glow through the fence, he came over to our house to see if everything was all right. All I remember seeing was a small head with olive colored hair "parted of course" and the two huge Coke bottles that rested over Hector's eyes peer over the fence. "Hi guys, is, ummmm, everything alright?" said Hector in his high-pitched voice. "Oh dear, it looks like you have a mighty fire there boys; does your dad know what you're up to?" Josh and I were frozen. We didn't say to Hector, "Go home, scout," or any of the other jokes that he had opened himself up to. We just sat there, jaws hanging, like the five-year-olds that we were. The second he peered over the fence I remember feeling the most embarrassed I have ever felt in my life. It was quite strange because, given the situation, I should have felt scared because I knew my parents would find out and then I would really be in trouble. Or I should not have cared because, after all, it was just Hector, the scout. Because I had respect for adults, or "elders," when I was five, I guess I felt embarrassed because an "adult" caught me doing something that I shouldn't have. The fact that I considered Hector a stranger, compared to say, my Mom or my Dad, further intensified this feeling of embarrassment and shame. I think most people who do something stupid and get caught by a stranger experience similar feelings, even if they think the stranger looks like an adult "boy scout."

Random Thoughts
By Shannon Gergen

If you're anything like me (and Heaven help you if you are), you like to notice and question the little things in life. You might find yourself asking, "If a cyborg squirrel and a super-smart squirrel got into a fight on a deserted island, which would win? What would cause them to fight in the first place? What kind of world do we live in where an intelligence-enhanced squirrel can't embrace the camaraderie of his robotic brethren?" You then look around and notice that parents are anxiously pulling their kids out of the ball pit at Chuck E.
Cheese’s that you have been sitting in for the last seven hours. For that reason, it’s best to ponder such thoughts in times of solitude, away from other individuals, which for me tends to be Saturday nights. With this in mind, I’d like to make some observations.

Not long ago, I saw a paid programming commercial for something called the “Ultimate Chopper.” Unsure of which rigorous tests a chopper must go through to be deemed the Mac daddy of all choppers, I watched with interest. The nice man with the fake German accent informed me that it had 750 watts of “megapower.” While most choppers would find 750 watts of regular power adequate, the makers of this product would accept no inferior power, so they went for the kind of the mega variety. The man then demonstrated that it could easily chop up bricks and glass, and that it had a safety device to prevent injury. I cannot emphasize enough how big a step this is in chopper technology. The last time I was chopping up bricks for a fine dining experience, I nearly lost a finger. I can only imagine the comfort a disgruntled wife may feel while safely chopping up glass into shards that can easily be placed in her husband’s food, thus slowly killing him in an agonizing fashion. You may think that surely cleaning up after the big dinner with the potential clients will be a hassle, but think again! The blades are stainless steel, allowing quick washing of any brick that might be left on them. The commercial host, who appeared to have graduated from munching chopped bricks to swallowing cinder blocks whole, lead the audience in cheering on the little wonder of modern science.

Did you like running around in the rain as a kid? Or perhaps you have a kid that enjoys it, but you worry for his or her safety. Well, I have the solution. Buy a strobe light and put it in the bathroom. Next time little Suzy takes a shower, turn on the strobe light and shut off the regular lights. Instant thunderstorm! Much like a rubber ducky, it makes bath time lots of fun!

Jimmy Carter used to be a peanut farmer, but now he builds houses as part of Habitat For Humanity. I think he’s missing out on a profound opportunity to merge these two things together: peanut houses. Think of the wonders this would do for the peanut industry, and without the risk of termites! Mr. Peanut is obviously living a life of luxury, what with his top hat, cane, and monocle, so I’m sure the wealth could be shared by building peanut homes, complete with brittle for insulation. If Mr. Carter wants another Nobel prize, I think this is the way to go. Peanut houses are the future.

Speaking of houses, primate houses in zoos are often a popular attraction, but what’s so special? Since humans are primates, aren’t all of our houses primate houses? Granted, bystanders can see more flinging of excrements in the ones at the zoo (sadly, I must declare my own house as an exception to this generalization), but is that really the reason for all the interest? In a word: yes.

Other animals can also provide amusement. For example, how cool would it be to be attacked by a bear? Naturally, I mean you’d survive, preferably with little to no damage, but how many people can say they have been attacked by a bear? Last summer I was at Yellowstone, and while I did come close to being rammed by a buffalo, no bears came within striking distance. Knowing that few things in life could be as satisfying as being chased by a grizzly, I went to the zoo.
Unfortunately, there were no attackers to be found. Instead, I found two bears that suffered from some sort of mental impairments. One was clearly obsessive-compulsive, spending hours walking in the same tight circle (I’ll leave it to you to figure out how I know he spent hours doing it). Another bear hadn’t had his V-8 apparently, because he was walking crooked, with crossed eyes and a tongue dangling out of his mouth. As a result, I have yet to know the pleasure of being the recipient of a good mauling.

I once went to a steakhouse, which I shall not name, but I will say that the owners are so proud of their “no rules, just right” policy that they have been known to promote it in song. While I was disappointed in the lack of supposed anarchy that their slogan suggested, nothing could prepare me for something the waitress told my father. He ordered a steak cooked medium-well, but the server apologized, saying they were out of medium-well, though they did have medium-rare. That statement was so wrong that to this day it is still stuck somewhere in the vicinity of my temporal lobe, causing seizures every time I smell t-bone. In the waitress’s defense, however, there were “no rules” at the establishment, so perhaps this applied to the physiochemical properties of meat and the results of heating it.

No matter how thirsty you might ever become, do not steal from a Coke machine! On some machines there are stickers that say “Anti-theft Device. Rocking may result in injury or death.” It is illustrated with a stick figure about to meet his maker thanks to falling soda equipment. Logically, one can assume that the risk of death is the anti-theft device. While I can think of worse ways to go, it’s still surprising how harsh the people at Coca-Cola are when it comes to thieves. No carbonated beverage is worth that kind of risk. Well, maybe Zima.

The good people at Nabisco make some tasty crackers, but they, along with many other companies, promote their products with something that baffles me. Check on the box of several of their products and you’ll see that it does, in fact, contain “Real Cheese.” Oftentimes, this amazing ingredient is featured on the front of the package in bold letters. When did cheese become such a rare commodity that having the real stuff was a major selling point? And when, precisely, did fake cheese rule the market? I sometimes like to picture the meeting with the promotional department preceding the big push for real cheese propaganda. “Carl, I may be crazy like a fox, but I’ve got this promo idea that will blow our competitors out of the water!” I look forward to the day that I can go to the local grocer and buy a box of Cheez-Its with whatever featured ingredient they think of next. Just imagine: “Made with Real Flour!”

It kind of makes me nervous when someone starts a sentence with the phrase, “To tell you the truth...” Does this mean that he or she is lying the rest of the time? What reason did I have before to not think that I was being told the truth without some sort of disclaimer at the beginning of the statement? The same might apply to “Honestly...” and “Frankly...” I can never trust that person again. Unless that person has used the phrase “To tell you the truth” before most of the sentences I’ve ever heard him or her say, I can only assume that all the previous conversations were simply part of a grand scheme, filled with devilish trickery, most likely aimed at either getting me to buy stock in a
failing footwear company or forcing me
to pledge my support for a “Chico and
the Man” reunion show, which would be
especially useless since both of the
actors who portrayed the title characters
are dead.

In closing, I’d like to quote the
legendary Mel Brooks. He once said,
“As long as the world is turning and
spinning, we’re gonna be dizzy and we’re
gonna make mistakes.” He also said,
“Tragedy is when I cut my finger.

Comedy is when you fall into an open
sewer and die.” So we may forever be
cursed with stupidity and nonsense, but
it is also a blessing, as long as we can
laugh at it. Now, I’m going to go take a
shower in my peanut primate house and
have a dinner of real cheese spread on
medium-rare glass shards and wash it
down with some stolen Coke. To tell
you the truth, the door is unlocked and
bears are welcome.

Smiley Face

So
Be
Happy

Kevin Gott

Walking through the park
Beauty from God’s creation
Comes from the sunshine

Tonya Merz

A Winter’s Night

Silently and softly
the snowflakes hit the ground.
The white blanket covers the world
and ruffles all natural sound
The gentle breeze picks up whispering to all a song
Beyond the trees the sun is falling
Night will be here before long.
When the darkness finally settles
Dreamers will begin their night.
Hearts and thoughts are filled with love
As dreams and prayers take flight

Erica Kellerman
Right and Wrong

The distance between right and wrong is getting smaller day by day.
The difference between black and white is turning ever gray.
It used to be wrong is wrong and right is right,
Black is black and white is white.
Now right may be wrong and wrong may be right,
White may be black and black may be white.
Now, wouldn’t it be easier if the world was black and white?
Or does a little gray make the world seem right?

T. J. Allan

Ball

Ball
or ball game
is one in the same.
The game will live forever.
This great sport will never die out.
The same grand game is played today
as our forefathers played, back in the day.
But, the game has changed. Hasn’t it?
Just somewhat? To some extent?
It’s now about fame and money;
not about the winning.
That was the goal
I was taught.
Win!

Ben Calcaterra

Farewell

So the time has come when we must part,
So many memories of things we’ve done,
Thoughts of which fill my heart,
Some happy, some sad, some so much fun.

Regardless of where I am and what I do,
Despite where I go and what I see,
These memories will always remain- it’s true!
Those experiences will forever stay with me.

To this place, one day I shall return,
And many images will fill my mind,
Recalling all of the things I learned,
Reliving the moments of that time.

I truly hope that we’ll meet again,
For it would mean so much to see,
All of my most cherished friends,
Who were so very close to me.

Life is only painted pictures… experiences frozen in time,
When we pass they will erase, for they’re saved within our mind;
Cherish them all and hold them dear, for a finite amount remain,
At the end of life you wish not to fear, having had lived it in vain.

Jean-Marc Bovee