

New York State
Summer Young Writers
Institute 2010

Young Voices



An Anthology of
Student Work



The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute

What you hold in your hands are the poems and stories—true and imagined—that the students of the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute produced during one crazily inventive week in July 2010, interspersed with photos and student comments that help to chronicle the sights and emotions of our annual writing residency.



In its twelfth year, the Young Writers Institute is held at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY, so that our students can take advantage of the New York State Summer Writers Institute, directed by Robert Boyers, which convenes on the Skidmore campus for the entire month. Having the opportunity to work on their own writing in three classes each day, hear accomplished writers in late-afternoon craft sessions or at packed evening readings, and then try out their own works-in-progress during late-night reading sessions in the residence hall means that our high school writers are thoroughly immersed in the writing life for every waking hour. And here's what we have learned to expect: they love it.

These young writers are unique in any number of disparate ways, but they all share a devotion to writing. That common interest creates almost instantaneous bonding when they meet each other, but it also encourages them to revel in the writing atmosphere of our intensive, week-long workshop. More than one hundred applicants send original writing samples each April, and we choose the thirty-six best writers to attend the

Young Writers Institute. That ability to be selective pays off for us. Year after year, we offer these students respect and recognition for what they have already achieved, and in return we receive not only a committed, attentive group of students for a week but also the dramatic, funny, moving, troubling, and remarkably creative pieces in this anthology. It was our pleasure to watch as these pieces unfolded during our Summer 2010 Workshop, and it's your pleasure to discover them here.

William Patrick

Director
New York State Summer
Young Writers Institute

NEW YORK STATE  **Writers** INSTITUTE
State University of New York

SKIDMORE
C O L L E G E

Summer 2010 Faculty



Kathleen Aguero's most recent book of poetry, *Daughter Of*, is published by Cedar Hill Books. The author of two previous books of poetry and editor of three anthologies of multicultural literature from the University of Georgia Press, she is a Professor of English at Pine Manor College in Chestnut Hill, MA, teaching in their low-residency MFA and undergraduate programs.



Liza Frenette is an assistant editor at *NYSUT United*, the official membership newspaper published by New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). Author of three novels for children, including *Soft Shoulders*, Ms. Frenette has published articles in *Reader's Digest* and *Adirondack Life*, among other publications, and has won first place feature and news writing awards from UPI and Associated Press.



Elaine Handley is a poet and fiction writer, as well as an Associate Professor of Writing and Literature at Empire State College. Her poetry chapbooks, *Notes from the Fire Tower* and *Glacial Erratica* won the Adirondack Center for Writing Award in Poetry in 2006 and 2007 respectively. She is currently completing *Deep River*, a historical novel about the Underground Railroad.



Richard Hoffman's memoir, *Half the House*, first published in 1995 by Harcourt Brace, was recently reissued in a new and expanded edition. He is also author of the poetry collections *Without Paradise* and *Gold Star Road*, winner of the 2007 Barrow Street Press Poetry Prize. Writer-in-Residence at Emerson College, he also teaches in the Stonecoast MFA Program.



Bob Miner worked for *Newsweek* and has written for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Village Voice*, and *Esquire*. He has published two novels—*Exes* and *Mother's Day*—and is finishing up the third novel in this series, *Father, Son and Holy Ghost*, as well as writing nonfiction about Istanbul, Turkey. Since 1980 he has taught writing for the University at Albany and Empire State College, as well as for Skidmore College, Syracuse University, Siena College, and the College of St. Rose.



William B. Patrick is the founder and director of the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute. His latest book, *Saving Troy*, is a creative nonfiction chronicle of a year spent living and riding with professional firefighters and paramedics. He has also published a memoir, an award-winning novel, and two books of poetry with BOA Editions. Mr. Patrick teaches writing for the College of St. Rose and for the Stonecoast MFA Program.

A Monologue Concerning a Cross in a Forest

by Zak Breckenridge

GATHER TOGETHER HERE, FRIENDS AND Neighbors! I have had a dream, and I am here to tell you all about the words I have received. I am here to tell you what you, yes you, can do to better this community, to *save* this commu-

nity. So come gather and hear these words from behind my teeth and find Inspiration in this circle. have been before. He reminded me of those times of abundant fish and plentiful wood and mud for our lodges. He showed me a time of Love and Brotherhood and Community; and He showed me how I missed

those years and how my heart did *long* for them.

He then did open my eyes to our present, and I did see in fresh and divine light the thinning fish and the black smog. He did show me Bucky's skin wrapped around one of those massive creatures and did show that vacant smile on its face; and then He did show me Bucky's corpse, long discarded by these *abominations*, his

once broad tail now disintegrated. He showed me the sadness and fear in our hearts.

And finally He did grant me a vision of our *future* if we do not heed His Word. If we disregard His warnings and continue as we are now, we, as shown to me by the Lord Himself in my dream, all shall perish. I have *seen* the fires of Hell on Earth as they roiled around our twisted skeletons and I have seen the pure destruction of our race at the hands of those beasts. I have *seen* pain and sorrow like none could imagine.

But let Hope fill your hearts! For the Lord can help us through this—to a brighter future lit by His holy Light. The cross that we will today erect shall stand as an earthly symbol of our *devotion* to Him, as a sign to Him that we are ready to accept Him into our lives and follow his Word; for this Word can carry us through anything,

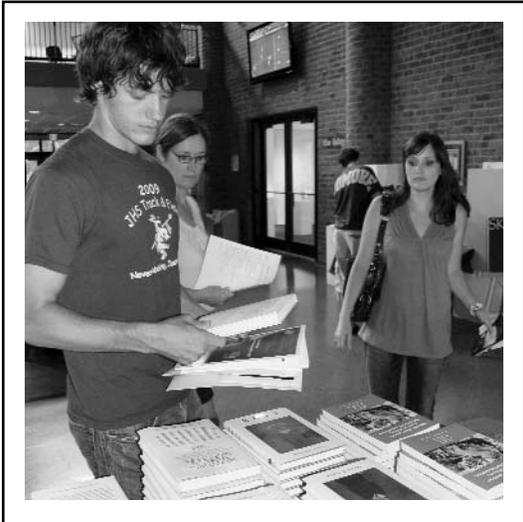
carry us even to battle against the monsters of the *choking smoke*. To build this cross we will be chewing through trees, but we will also be chewing through the chains of sorrow and pain, sin and vice—to swim to the Word. If we are anything, we are industrious, and when correctly directed, directed towards Faith, this industriousness can be a powerful weapon, a weapon against our towering, hairless foes.

The Lord hath called us, Brother and Sisters, and called us to a noble cause, to a cause that is true and just, a cause under which we cannot fail. It is a cause for which we must give up our heathen ways. It is a cause for which

“I really appreciated the easygoing, non-judgmental manner of the students. Everyone was accepting and genuinely excited about each other's work. I felt like my writing really improved over the course of the week, and it was a humbling experience to be in the presence of such adept young writers. Writing is hard work, but together we made it easier and more fun.”

— JOY WESTERMAN

our lives must change, perhaps even for the worst for a short time, but will ultimately carry us teeth-first to Victory. So let me hear it Brothers and Sisters! Are you ready to break these bonds, and chew these trees down, and *build this cross*? ■



nity. So come gather and hear these words from behind my teeth and find Inspiration in this circle.

The Lord did come to me in my sleep and did say unto me, “Bishop,” he said, “Bishop, thou art the prophet of thy people. Thou shalt unite thy people in community and fear of my majesty.” And He did tell me in that dream that I must construct a massive cross amongst our dams and lodges to show our devotion. It shall stand far over our heads at two and a half cubits. I know the fish have been scarce and our trials have been many. The loss of Bucky to those tall animals with the giant yellow growling beasts that steal our trees was tragic, but we can overcome. The Lord helps those in need and, my friends, if we are anything, we are in need.

In this dream of mine the Lord did show me a vision of the years now past. He showed me how our lives

Forbidden Fruit

by Rebecca Brown

When I am deaf,
My taste buds are all burned,
My epidermal nerves no longer function,
My nose has been sheered from my face,
Then my eyes will truly feast on you,
A splash of varying maroon and sunshine,
An imperfect roundness to offset burning
perfection,
Two main parts to play integral roles,
The skin I caress with longing eyes,
The stem that leads to the potential of cut
off nothingness.

When fire has burned my eyeballs,
My ears hear no more,
My taste buds no longer exist,
I feel nothing, but the heat of passion,
But I smell the sweetest scent wafting on the
breeze,
Fumes that intoxicate all that inhale,
The smell of beauty and honey sweetness,
The glorifying scent of summer freedom.

When sinuses incapacitate my nose,
My eyeballs have been seared from their sockets,
My ear cells have all died,
My taste buds work incorrectly,
My fingers, my lips will feel your contours,
My skin trembles in pure joy at the prospect of
lightly,
So lightly touching the delicate hairs that cover

your body,
As my lips explore every part of your skin I thrill at
the softness,
But equally love the hardness of contrast,
Feeling the bumps, knowing every curve.

When my skin no longer observes the world and
you,
My nose has not sniffed a whiff in memory,
My eyeballs don't understand how beauty is
a sight,
My ears detect no sound,
But my tongue is electrified by an unearthly taste,
Juices roll over my tongue like gentle liquid fire,
You are sweet, you are bitter and sour,
You possess that salty zest that is still sweet.

When I taste nothing,
My skin feels no more,
My nose has no job,
My eyes envy every light they do not see,
Yet my ears strain for any trace of sound you may
produce,
No words are needed to establish our
connection,
Still the slightest note is a symphony of desire,
Speak to me, forsake the rules of your nature in
favor of passion.

My tongue no longer knows what taste buds are,
I have no sense of feeling,
I know no scents,
I am blind,
I am deaf,
But I am not senseless,
I still know you,
I visualize you on a deeper level,
Our intellects sing in tune to each other,
You are my forbidden fruit.



Subconscious

by Sarah Brown

A house, blanketed in foreboding shades of black and gray, looming above the surface of the world, the holder of the inner soul

A gate of black iron guarding a cobble path to the entrance, covered only by the large wooden door, its old gray paint beginning to break free

A room yet not a room, an opening to different journeys, all washed in shades of reds and gold

A crimson armchair with a chipped dark wood frame, once overstuffed but deflated by probing and pulling hands, the covering cloth worn from abuse

A flight of stairs, faded lines on the banister from lagging hands, steps worn in places from repetitive foot falls, ascending to the upper mysteries

A long pathway, lined by images of the past framed with yellow edges surrounded by peeling wallpaper, extends toward the distance, each of the gateways on either side offering a different end, each blocked by a part of a tree shaped by man into a useful form

A carpet, long and thin with holes eaten into the dark red and gold tracings etched into the fabric with brightly dyed thread

A door, with peeling finish dropping to the dusty floor in brittle flakes and rusted hinges that protest the opening of the entryway

A room decorated with miscellaneous artifacts, each aged appropriately where they sit on the clean and fresh hard wood, once covered by the moth feasted rug with red and gold designs, a baby's chew toy lightly dented by teeth long fallen out, a box with once bright-now-pale pink paint, still occasionally releasing a calming melody, books about princes and princesses, heroes and villains, cliques and loners

A sheer white dress on a false body that stands by the open French doors, memories lost in the

expanse of time briefly visible in the fluttering folds of its skirt, blown by the breeze coming through the foreign glass panes that open to a balcony

A set of deep maroon curtains billow in towards the darkness of the room, stretching like arms, bidding entrance to the fresh air

A curved line of small stone pillars protrude from the edge of the sleet gray balcony, providing a wall between the safe haven that is the house and the open world

A garden envelops the ground below, bright and glowing, surrounding the dark gray and brown house

A white rock bench, an unexpected but not unwelcome visitor in the lush green garden that nourishes dreams, a world blanketed with growing flowers with petals of white reaching outward



Blue Bed

by Lily Cao

a blue bed sits in the corner, sheets unmade
borrowed from baby bear, never returned
capture the moment, perfection to spare
dead girls crossing, sleeping on tousled sheets
ejects her, wants her out, needs her gone
flips her inside out, cutting, casting, calling
goldilocks doesn't really have gold locks
her hair is mud brown with a yellowy sheen
introspective, surely not (she's an idiot)
jars of honey are lined up on dust worn shelves
kicked and driven out of her own house of lies
left to fend for herself, and so she drinks—
momma bear's plain porridge is first, but
no—it's too hot, or too cold, or something like that
openly grimacing, her feet hurt from running
papa bear's chair is too big, so is Momma's
questions fill her vacant little head—it's just so
right! It's really, so right. Baby bear's a match
so she sleeps in his blue little bed, eats his porridge
traces the worn out wood panels on his chair
untouchable, unwritten, like a ghost she thinks
veering, vrooming, crashing and cowering
waking up from nightmares to see they're home
x-rays them like they're made of wrapped rice paper
yelling, angry, voices make her unwelcome
zip and zap her, erase her, make her disappear.



Nonfiction

by Leigh Gialanella

AS SOME HAPLESS WAITRESS BRUSHED past the tray stands leaning against the wall, a whole column of them fell forward, causing the whole room to reverberate with the metallic, clinking sounds they made as they hit the ground. Standing about ten feet away next to a newly set table, I watched them fall, more interested in the heavy tray I was balancing on one shoulder than anything else.

As I started walking in that direction, I noticed that a number of elderly men and women were observing my behavior, their gazes flickering first to me and then to the tray stands lying on the floor. When I looked down at the crumpled stands, the urge to do something spectacular came over me. Carefully, tray still fixed on my shoulder, I bent down into a crouch, hoping and praying that the tray's contents (water glasses, bread plates, underliners, mugs, and various eating utensils) would stay on the tray where they belonged.

As luck would have it, I succeeded in lifting up the tray stands with one hand and somehow managed to get myself up again, tray still aloft. The same elderly people were now staring at me, and a few of them clapped appreciatively. Thrilled over my accomplishment, I gave them a huge smile, and then continued towards the kitchen.

At the time, this was a huge triumph for me. Only about four months into my restaurant job, I remembered well the first few days of torture, as I tried unsuccessfully to hold the large, round trays and cringed every time they seemed remotely heavy. Looking back now, I guess I've come a long way, since I'm now reluctantly capable of carrying six dinners at a time and the tray ceases to be frightening. . . most of the time.

I started my first job last January as a server at a local assisted living community for the elderly. It was not completely a voluntary commitment, and in my first weeks, I bemoaned my fate. How did restaurant servers ever take down people's orders correctly? How could they possibly carry all of those heavy trays? How did they manage to leave work on time, not a half hour later? In those first adjusting days (which lasted until April), I feared handing out soups, particularly the dreaded chicken broth, and sighed inwardly every time I was asked for oil and vinegar. The residents were diffi-



cult to serve, too. They'd ask me for the "pink juice" and after some mental mind-jogging, they would give me its appropriate name, cranberry-orange. I'd return with the juice in hand and what do you know, it was *cranberry* they wanted. Others ordered entrees, immediately forgetting what they ordered; when their meal was placed before them, they adamantly protested that it was not what they wanted at all: could I get them the sirloin instead?

Then, of course, the residents occasionally tended to be almost over-familiar with us, saying things that no one in their right minds would ever

tell their servers in the average restaurant. Perhaps they secretly considered us their minions, their pawns to order about—which, assuredly, they do on a regular basis. For instance, when I was attempting to take the order of one woman, she began her order by randomly asking me, "How can you possibly see through those glasses? They're so dirty." Although I inwardly wondered why on earth she felt the need to convey these sentiments, I responded with a smile, agreeing with her. But at least her remark was intended to be constructive and I found it most amusing. Other times,

I'd find myself growing frustrated with our elderly populace because of their less thoughtful comments. One time, I was placed in section 5, one of the two restaurant sectors that proudly house our "crazy old man tables." At the table, our most famous insane resident, his Russian buddy, and their kindly friend were joined by an add-on halfway through their meal. When I tried to ask the rest of the table if they would prefer to wait on dinner until our latecomer was finished with his

appetizers, I was greeted by the response: "You're here to serve us, not talk to us. We're not here to talk to you; we're here to eat dinner," or something to that effect. I was definitely shocked at the time, but this same man has quite a history of saying rather inappropriate tidbits and generally harassing everyone he meets.

But the majority of the residents are understanding and kind; in truth they are, as a whole, a lovely bunch. Most don't care if some soup sloshes over the bowl during the journey from kitchen to table; most always seem

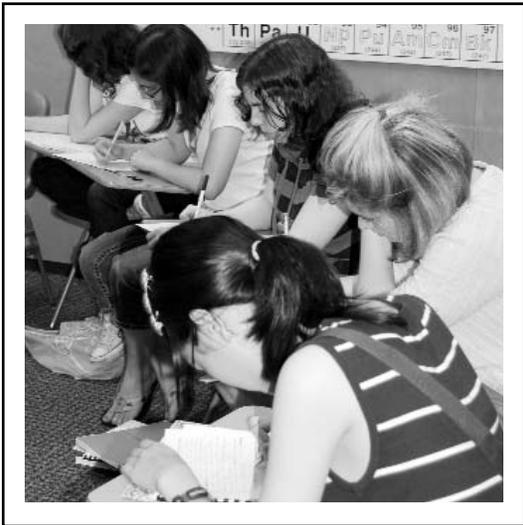
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really happy to see me.

And at the moment, I think I'm pretty comfortable now, familiar with the residents and their idiosyncrasies. The job itself is no longer a mystery, either. I am well aware of the fact that "to dessert" is a perfectly acceptable verb for everyday use. I also can tell you that two common salad dressings can respectively be called peppercorn and Russian. And I don't confuse cocktail sauce and tartar sauce anymore, like I did in the beginning.

Now that I have spent six months serving dinners to the eld-



erly, I am finding my outlook changing little by little. Yes, it's true that I still dread work each and every day I must commit my time. It's true that I complain constantly to my family and friends, that I look like a thundercloud as I fasten my bow tie in preparation for the upcoming four hours. But I fancy my opinion toward my job and the people I dislike serving has changed somewhat with time.

For one thing, getting to know the residents has been a fulfilling process, even if all I can say is that I am aware of their food preferences.

It's nice to know that Ms. Claire doesn't like lettuce with her grilled chicken and instead wants tomato slices and mayonnaise. Moreover, it's rather gratifying to anticipate Ms. Petty's desire for hot water to drink before she even asks for it. And it makes me feel psychic to know that Mr. White will want vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce for dessert any time I happen to serve him. I feel awesome when I get their preferences right and they acknowledge it, pleased with the fact that I have taken the time to get to know their likes and dislikes.

For the most part, I don't really get to learn about personal lives, but interesting tidbits do find their way to my ears. As I bus tables, I hear people reminiscing over their past occupations. Other details come to the surface and seem almost hard to believe. For instance, the same man who insulted me in section 5 happens to be a really talented artist; his drawings are posted in the

hallways for all to view. Even at a fairly advanced age, he still must be able to deftly draw lines and carefully create beautiful images.

Then, of course, one of the residents recently celebrated her birthday. I would have guessed her to be in her eighties or nineties, but apparently she is one hundred and four years old. Doing the math, I found that she was born in 1906. One can only imagine the changes in technologies, societal/gender roles, and politics

she has experienced throughout her life. When around my age, she must have marveled at Henry Ford's Model-T. No doubt she tried to incorporate the Roaring Twenties style into her clothing and appearance. As a young adult and beyond, she lived through two world wars, the disconcerting, abstract threat of the Cold War, the feminist movement, the hippie movement, and the emerging faces of globalization...to name just a few.

I made the mistake of sharing these thoughts with my mother. When I'd finished, she said "Admit it, Leigh, you do like your job. You like the old people!" ■

"I'll admit that I was scared out of my mind about coming here. It was the first time I had ever gone to a summer camp without a friend. My father practically had to force me to talk to people before he left me to fend for myself. After the initial awkwardness, I realized that I didn't need to be afraid. I was in a camp full of writers — people who had similar tastes and thoughts to mine. I made friends faster than I ever had before. I really enjoyed hearing the different writing styles. It's probably the most fun that I've ever had at a camp."

— CAROLYN SCHULTZ

Run

by Maggie Guzman

SHE SCREAMED BUT I COULDN'T SEE her. Out beyond the thick wooden walls dusted with cedar smoke and memories, my daughter's screams rebounded off the apathetic mountains. I cut through the door, willing my soul to be as steady as the geysers they say go off in constant intervals in the dusty fire pits near Rome.

My eyes adjusted quickly enough in the darkness to see my daughter, eyes wide in the moonlight, gripping her side where blood ran like sunbeams. Enough, it seemed, to fill the world. Beside

lent, but of a kind which wanted to try the vague passions of human emotion. It wanted to see if we creatures who moved subtly then rapidly and with callous enthusiasm into its land could brave the dangers that it faced. I saw the land reflected there—Dark pine trees scattering their children to the wind as they carelessly weaved their towering forms—Mountains making rubble of the hills and carving ever downwards with the passage of time—Meadows permeated with the ripe smell of clover and dandelions who always made room for more by dying in the winter. Death was in its eyes, the knowledge of too many deaths, and the fear that it was too late to give up on life.

The wolf moved slowly, eying me with curiosity as I watched my daughter for a sign of shallow movement in muscle or bone, a ripple of life under a sea of blood and clothing. I made noise while I wept to frighten it, as my father had taught me. I wanted to make it think that I was one of a pack, that

eyes with scathing derision and the knowledge of her strength. My tears burned, sizzled to a mist and were gone as my mind filled with desires to strip off my naked skin and run. Run with her, run at her, run far away.

She seemed to smile, her eyes flushing my cheeks with their intensity. She smelled the air, a tremble of recognition sliding through her coarse body and for the first time she broke our gaze. She nudged my daughter with her head like a tame cat and my daughter made a noise just loud enough so that I knew she lived. She took one last look at me, her fervency reflecting the drumming in my chest and left, leaving me seething both with motherly rage and kinship.

I ran to my daughter, heart beating like the last sound in the world. Seeing her wound I wanted to faint, to inhabit a world of darkness for a while, to let someone else take care of everything. But like the wolf I was forced to will iron into my heart, to make my blood course blue with fire and initiative. Like the wolf I did not have the luxury of defeat. ■



her crumpled form stood a wolf, complacent, strangely calm, no sign of knowing or caring what it had done, no remnant of violence in its ancient yellowed eyes. I stared into the eyes of what I hoped would not prove to be my daughter's killer and saw a challenge there. Its muscles were tense, moving like water under silk as it slowly breathed in and out never taking its eyes off my face. I saw myself in its face; a sort of ferocity, unbalanced by too much time spent digging holes in the world. I saw its fury, not vio-

it had more to fear from me than from a sickly deer. I wanted to wake her father who was in the house with the gun, but even if he woke he wouldn't respond to the screams. He would cower, afraid of losing his own life, and reminding himself that in the Bible women disappeared without meaning or consequence like Japheth's unnamed sister, convincing himself it would be a sin to interfere. I faced the beast head-on and she met my

Snail

by Chloe Hamer

I want to be a snail, carrying my home on my back.
I want to fall asleep in Burma, Siberia, Kenya,
and dream in different languages,
wake up to different faces,
or wake up alone.
I want to be so comfortable with myself
that I don't need an anchor,
just a sailboat
and a sea.

I want to believe that all lives are worth the same;
that circumstances create
monsters and prophets.
I want to take a bullet
for a nobody.

(In the shoulder, I reassure my friend.
And then I'll get a sunflower tattoo
where the scar is
and tell her children fantastic stories
about its origin.)

I've spent plenty of years
in a nice house, with a library
and a dining room
with a beautiful chandelier,
and two fireplaces,
one of which we never use.

Let me trade my comfortable bed for dirt,
or rock,
or straw instead.

The Earth is just big enough
to satisfy my restlessness.



Rationale for Demonic Possession

by Zach Hays

I WAS ALLERGIC TO COMPAZINE. I DIDN'T actually *know* I was allergic to Compazine, and I can't even say that I knew what it was, other than my doctor telling me it would take away nausea, no problem. (I now firmly believe that any doctor who uses the phrase "no problem" is lying through his teeth). I took the medicine for about three days, and was pretty okay, apart from the expected aches and pains of being a whiny, angst-ridden teenager. There was the chronic insomnia, but I was, to be frank, used to that.

It wasn't altogether unexpected, then, when I began falling asleep in English class one day, partially lulled by the teacher's droning, soporific tones. He had the tendency to talk on without the merest hint of a conclusion anywhere in sight, like a driver refusing to acquiesce to his wife's demand that he stop for directions, already. Running on perhaps three hours of sleep on this particular day, it wasn't much of a shocker when I began slipping to the side, though I'd never started losing consciousness so quickly before. It was when I found myself at a forty-five degree angle, mouth hanging wide open yet gasping for a breath that I thought two interesting things: "Oh, eff, something's wrong with me, isn't it?" and "At least I might be able to get out of class."

The teacher, as it turned out, was fairly lenient when it came to kids not being able to breathe in his class, and he might as well have shoved me out the door. I pivoted right, passing by my French teacher, who gave me a loving "bonjour", before asking if I was okay. (I looked a bit off.) I merrily responded that I was fine, just feeling a bit under the weather, at the same time inwardly contemplating ever more creative means of getting my precious oxygen. I hurried down the steps to the lower floor, and into the nurse's office, where she sat at her desk across from some freshman. I waved

to catch her attention, and she paused in her conversation with the freshman to ask what was wrong. In between deepening breaths, I told her, "Oh...just nearly...fainted...bit of trouble...breathing..." Naturally, she jumped straight to attention and told me to go lie down, which I did. Granted, after a few seconds of staring at the ceiling, the breathing was getting somewhat easier, but I was beginning to notice new symptoms. My lower jaw was no longer in my control—indeed, it was jutting angrily to the left, clamping upwards with so much force that I worried my teeth were going to crack. I waited for the nurse, trying to be patient, but it was taking longer than I'd have liked. I could just catch snatches of her conversation

"It's refreshing to spend a week with a group of creative, talented people who have the same crazy dream that you do."

— KAITLYN SCOONS

with another student, who, it seemed, wanted to go home because he was just "so mad" at this other kid who he apparently wouldn't be able to pass in the hall without beating him to death. My jaw was really starting to ache, and I was making frequent trips to the bathroom to splash sink water on my face. I could, with immense will power, pull my jaw back to a somewhat more normal position, but the second I stopped paying attention, it'd snap back to a state of abnormality.

Now I was really panicking, largely out of not having any clue what was going on. I really hoped I wasn't having a seizure, and under the not entirely misguided assumption that it was something as bad as that, and that it wouldn't go away on its own, I strolled up to the nurse's desk. I

politely interrupted her, telling her that I *really* needed a bit of help. She handed me a plastic strip of a thing that was probably intended to be a thermometer, and told me to go lie down again. After a few more such interruptions on my part, with similar responses by the nurse, and the ache in my lower jaw becoming more unbearable every minute, I finally snapped:

"Okay, I can't breathe!" I shouted, marking the first time I have ever shouted at a faculty member. "Call my parents, now!" The expression upon the nurse's face was unreadable, though I think she may have been trying not to laugh at me, as my locked jaw muscles were forcing me to speak with a thick lisp. After a pause, the nurse ripped the phone up to her ear, and dialed the number I gave her.

"Mrs. Hays?" she spoke quickly into the mouthpiece, "Hi there, this is the school nurse. Your son, Zachary, came to me just a couple of minutes ago, telling me he's having some issues. He told me he was having a bit of trouble breathing." There was a pause, and the sound of my mother's frantic tones issued forth, muted such that I couldn't distinguish any specific words. "I assumed he was having a panic attack, so I told him to go lie down, you know, relax." A pause. "No, I don't think ..." — My mother interrupted her, something anybody who knew her as well as I do would know to be completely unlike her. "That's ... that's fine. I'll let him know." The nurse dropped the phone, without letting me speak to my own mother, I noticed, and glared at me. The glaring was odd, because she was still attempting to keep the rest of her face passive. "Apparently your mother has called your father. He's going to take you to the hospital." I nodded and replied with a brisk thank you, and went to sit down before she could tell me to do so.

My father arrived within about

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twenty minutes, a time I spent taking deeper and deeper breaths, both to calm myself and to fuel my natural oxygen habit. The moment I saw his car pull into the school parking lot from the nurse's office, I stormed from the room, meeting him halfway. He filled out the appropriate paperwork, clarifying that he was indeed my father and that he was indeed taking me to the hospital and not to a brothel or something. Once in the car, my dad booked it for the hospital, taking razor sharp turns and studiously ignoring all the honks, middle fingers, and colorful language from the vehicles he was currently racing past. In the meantime, a nasty change had just taken place: my lower jaw had loosened ... and then was forced open, my tongue lolling out, my visage contorted into a silent scream. Though my father was obviously trying hard to keep his cool, he blanched noticeably. I began repeating the verses, "Mary had a little lamb, his fleece was white as snow," because it gave me some temporary control of my facial muscles, though I could usually only get to the word 'lamb' before my mouth was ripped open again. You could have summed my thoughts up as, "Ow, ow, ow, ow, my face really hurts, is this going to end?"

There were remarkably few people in the hospital on this particular day; the sickies must have been lounging about at home, or, God forbid, school. The people at the main desk were very friendly, and asked my father what, exactly, was wrong. He pointed his index finger at my gaping mouth. "Ah," they said, "yeah, we'd better get him in." My father went to sit down, and I headed for the opposite side of the room and into a small bathroom, both for the obvious reasons and to try splashing more water on my face. I stood in front of a long mirror, regarding my shaking form with mild amusement, somewhat exacerbated by the black hole of my open maw. I

flicked droplets of water at my face, relieved to some extent by the prickles of coldness peppering my cheeks, and then something nigh-miraculous happened. My face returned to normal. I was stunned. Was I, maybe, cured? Was it actually over? Was this horrible ordeal just finished? I hurried out to tell my father the good news, very nearly skipping, and it should be said that I very rarely have a predilection for skipping.

Two things then happened in quick succession. A hospital employee popped out of a side door like a Whack-A-Mole, calling my name, my father standing up to explain that his son was in the bathroom. At almost the precise moment my father noticed me, my head snapped to the side, as though an invisible palm had taken hold of my scalp and twisted it. The pain was excruciating, and I am prepared to say that it was the worst I have ever felt, though that may partially have been due to the shock of having one's head twisted about like that girl from the *Exorcist*. I was hurriedly led into the sterile depths of the hospital and onto a bed, where the nurses immediately gave a ton of sympathy for the tormented and distorted young child who had just come in, the child whose neck seemed to be trying very hard to imitate a corkscrew.

It took perhaps an hour for the doctor to arrive, but I found myself feeling relieved the moment he pushed back the curtains and strolled in. He looked like the protagonist of a medical drama, showing off a set of pearly-whites that could only have belonged to a television actor. He diagnosed me in an instant, asking if I had, perchance, taken something called Compazine, to which I nodded vigorously (or, you know, tried to). According to my TV doctor, one out of every one-hundred people taking this drug would have something called a 'dystonic reaction', which essentially meant having random, ever-changing

muscle seizures all over the body, an issue quite easily solved by flushing the drug out of my body, and giving me a hearty dose of Benadryl. I didn't even wince as a needle slipped into my left wrist, strange considering I've a terrible aversion to anything that looks even remotely like a hypodermic. I clearly recall urging the doctor, as the nurses worked around me, "Sooner might be better." Benadryl has the side-effect of knocking one at least three-quarters into unconsciousness, and I said something like, "Ah, that's much better," as I floated into a comfortable, albeit somewhat achy, sleep. After a little while, a time I cannot properly account for because of the meds, my father took me home. The ride was quiet; my father was shell-shocked and I was napping in the back seat. Obviously, I was not going to be returning to school, and when we arrived home, I drifted to my bedroom. I curled up next to my cat, and soon dropped into a dreamless sleep.

To this date, the 'Compazine incident' is the scariest thing that has ever happened to me, and I took two things out of that experience. For one thing, I think I have discovered why the concept of demonic possession is so prevalent in history. Any idiot that stumbled across that particular chemical cocktail and happened to be allergic to it, *and* ingested it would be in for quite the scare. Without knowledge of what in hell a "dystonic reaction" is, it wouldn't be entirely crazy to think that there might be some folks ready to blame invisible, malevolent entities, messing about with us mortal folk. The second thing I took from that experience was an extreme, mostly nonsensical paranoia about taking medicine, or even eating things coming from a place I'm not familiar with. Perhaps it's just a wee bit crazy, but I don't plan on putting my life entirely in some doctor's hands. ■

Untitled

by Sabrina Hua

“Ji de,” ordered the Buddhist monk. Remember.

I flinched when he grabbed my shoulder. The rosary beads on his wrist were worn and his skin was warm and pruned. I remained silent and looked up at his stiff chin. I didn’t know how to say, “Leave me alone.” And his gaze had me captured. The pious stranger’s dark eyes had looked so much like mine but conveyed an unfamiliar intensity.

“Ni shi yi ge zhong guo ren.” *You are Chinese.*

“Wo zhi dao wo shi.” *I know I am.*

Of course I know, I thought, for I truly believed the mystical lyrics of an old Chinese folk song that had convinced me that I was a descendant of the dragon’s descendants and belonged to the Middle Kingdom, the Yellow River, and the language spoken with a thousand tongues.

Why was he even questioning me? Wasn’t it obvious that I was proud of my culture? Wasn’t that the reason why I was there in China standing in his temple and committing the idyllic sights to memory? I was proud— so, so proud— of my ethnicity, of how it made me who I am. How could he have not seen that? My pride even flowed like blood; it travelled from my heart and through my body, running relay races in my veins whenever I heard bamboo pipes and saw scarlet flags.

“Wo men hua ren dou shi yi ge su. Ni yao ji de ni de gen.”

We Chinese are like a tree. You need to remember your roots.

And I told him, “Dui bu qi. Wo bu ming bai.”

I’m sorry. I don’t understand.

His grip loosened. And the fierce desperation in his eyes was replaced with disappointment. He whispered me a blessing, but I didn’t understand.

I cried that day, for in the few exchanges we shared, I had suddenly been struck by the weight of emptiness. I had thought that I was Chinese until he told me to remember my roots. It was then I realized that I couldn’t; it’s terribly hard to remember something when you never knew of it. And the scarlet flags and bamboo pipes became symbols constantly reminding me to remember an unknown motherland.

I was born in America, not China.

I attended a school in New York and spoke English, not Chinese.

Eating the food, hearing the language from others’ lips, and knowing the vague outline of its history and stories is not enough to make me feel Chinese. Looking Chinese isn’t the same as feeling Chinese, and being Chinese cannot simply be confirmed by check marks or being told that you are Chinese. Being Chinese comes from your *xin zhong*, the depths of your heart.

I am still learning the significance of my surname. And I’m still trying to become accustomed to hearing Chinese spoken in my own voice. But I think that I’m finally starting to understand what it means to feel Chinese, slowly and preciously. ■



“I love the atmosphere you find in this program. People here are industrious and inventive, but they also have youth and humor.”

— JULIA MALLECK

Untitled

by Gretel Kauffman

Me, I am the wallpaper.
I don't mean that I am flat
And excessively flowered,
Plastered on walls in large sheets
With my corners peeled away by bored and restless children
While their parents aren't looking.
I am not for sale in large quantities
At Home Depot.

I mean that I am always here,
Clinging to the solid immovable structure
That is a wall.
Unnoticeable to some,
Off bland and understated,
Sometimes obnoxious, ugly
And embarrassingly crude.
The furniture in the room
Is always shifting, changing, upgrading, fading.
People enter and exit,
But I remain,
And I observe.

“Although very short, this program has forced me to hone my skills and develop new ones that I would not have otherwise. Because we're forced to work in three different genres, we were not allowed to draw back into the comfort zones that would inhibit our growth as writers.”

— CATHERINE SATERSON



The Complete and Utter Ridiculous Truth behind the Headline

by M.C. Kelly

Dear Mr. Editor,

My name is unimportant to the purpose of my writing you. You don't know me, nor will you ever. I have taken the time out of my very pressing schedule to point out a number of inconsistencies with the recent story you ran, "Girl Helps Choking Friend." My goal is to relay the truth of what happened—or rather, some of the truth. While your story conveys that Allyson Robin saved the life of her classmate, Mary Golden, from choking on gum, the truth is infinitely more interesting. I was there and can attest to the validity of my claims. An hour prior to this so-called act of heroism, I followed the two girls to the local pizza parlor—which was very unclean, I must point out—and it is there I watched as Ms. Robin pulled out a once concealed glass vile and poured its contents into the soda of her so-called friend, Mary.

Your journalist claims that Ms. Robin performed the Heimlich to save Mary from choking on the piece of gum she was chewing. It must be that your reporter does not do much at all of what his job title entails. While Mary may have been chewing on gum, it was not the reason why Ms. Robin felt the need to save her.

I watched from the shadows at the filthy pizza parlor. I observed, and I saw Mary slip Ms. Robin an envelope after returning from the bathroom and ingesting her poisoned soda. I cannot tell you what was in that envelope; I could speculate, but in this case, will not. I will tell you this: Ms. Robin realized in that moment that if Mary were to die, the truth would come out. She did not perform the Heimlich to save Mary from gum. She saved Mary from the very poison she gave her, and did so for other motivations. Mary would have eventually begun oozing blood from every orifice had it not been for Ms. Robin, who injected her with the antidote while pretending to perform the Heimlich. I found the needle in her school locker afterwards, where the silly little girl stashed it in a frantic state of mind. I have generously left it there for you so you can verify this information. Ms. Robin did not save Mary to spare her life, she saved Mary to protect her own...and keep the contents of the envelope a secret.

The why: In about two days the Smithsonian Institute, which both students recently visited, will report that the infamous and legendary Hope diamond has been replaced with a fake. Of course, they will first delay such an announcement in some vain attempt to spare them the embarrassment, thus giving me some extra time to spend. If you check both girls' school records, as I'm sure you will, it will reveal that they did indeed take a trip together, with the school, to the Smithsonian for a few days. And if you were to get your hands on the surveillance footage of their hotel, you would see them sneaking through the lobby at a late hour to meet a man. This man would be wearing black clothes, not a wrinkle in them, with his back precisely positioned so that his face was just out of view. Even as I write this letter, my eyes feast upon the dazzling facets of the real Hope diamond. It will fit perfectly with the rest of my exquisite collection. I will not explain my history with the girls nor recall my meeting with them, but I will tell you that appearances are often deceiving, Mr. Editor, and both girls were equally devious.

I understand you cannot authenticate this letter as I hope you will try to do and take more caution than you did with previous stories. So, after calling your wife at 2:00pm as you do every day, I urge you to walk out the door to your office, and head down those red-carpeted stairs that you do each day like clockwork. Out the door and five miles east, you will come to a forest. It is off the first path, behind the large boulder and beneath thin layers of dirt, where you will find the dead bodies of both Ms. Robin and Ms. Golden. Both have a single well placed-bullet to the head. I left them each with their money. They earned it, along with everything else they got.

There will be no blood. There will be no fingerprints other than theirs. For such a messy crime scene, it will be very clean—much cleaner than that filthy pizza shop. I have not informed the police of this unfortunate incident—I don't normally dirty myself with the loss of life and I have to say I do not intend to again, although, I must say I do clean up nicely. My main and only concern is, and always will be, my jewels.

I suspect the money will not be there forever. While I cannot prevent you from calling the authorities, I urge you not to; it would be a waste of time. I will be long gone before anything of use is discovered.

My motives I admit are mysterious, but they are mine and mine alone, you silly little man. They will remain unknown. I bid you farewell Mr. Editor. Now, you have a choice to make and I have a plane to catch.

Sincerely,
A Concerned Citizen

The Man Behind the Camera

by Yasmin Kelly

STEVE DINYER DOESN'T GET TRANQUILITY from sitting by a beautiful, soft pond framed by tall oaks and cattails and chirping birds. He gets it in the dead of night, in the wee hours of the morning, and inside a gray, dimly lit, windowless room filled with whirring, humming computers.

"Here's what I do—I stay up all night," he says. He works in Media Services at Skidmore College, where I'm hunting for an interesting character on campus to profile. You'll see him at the Summer Writers' readings, but only for a few minutes: he is in charge of the sound and lighting, and while the growing audience cranes their necks towards the stage—where the real stars of the show are—he stands in the back, surveying the scene and checking for glitches to fix. He is very short, short and stout like a hobbit, with wide brown eyes and slightly pointed ears. He has light gray hair (thinning, but still tied back into a tiny bun) and darker eyebrows. Sometimes he wears spectacles, thin rectangular ones that make him look bookish. Above all, his eyes are kind and honest, especially when he speaks.

Past the Davis Auditorium I go, following the arrows to the Media Services room. Steve, a friend of my mom's boyfriend, has told me I could come to see him if I ever should need help, though I've hardly said two words to him before. When he saw me sidling shyly in through the open door he immediately offered some:

"You dig Macs?" He pointed at the computers, telling me I was welcome to use them.

"Oh—well, actually, um. I was wondering if you would let me interview you for a writing piece—a profile..."

It dawned on him. "Oh."

He leaned back on his heels and thought. "Well, I *guess*..." his voice trailed off dubiously. "How personal are we talkin'?" He looked uncomfortable. I expected as much from the

computer geek behind the scenes, but he continued.

"Well, OK. I wouldn't do this for anyone else, you know." I couldn't tell whether he was joking or not—so dry is his voice sometimes. We pulled up two gray swivel chairs and began.

He's a quiet guy, so he says—in the computer room he seldom paused to let the silence in. He is the kind of person who thinks before he speaks: before answering my questions (there were really only two significant ones—he did the rest) he pursed his lips and repeated them to himself, taking his time to search his mind for the right reply. He told me that he is horrible at a formal

"I really enjoyed meeting many awesome people with literary interests, practicing new forms of expression, and learning about the modern writing climate."

— LEIGH GIALANELLA

debate and horrible at arguing. He's quiet in a phone call, talkative in an email. Seeing himself in pictures or being on camera is "like torture."

Being on camera may be hell for him, but behind the camera is his kingdom. He tells me about his job, the job that he loves, when during the slow summer days he can have the whole computer room to himself—just him and the whirring machines. He can sit for hours researching the different types of software for sound effects. E-mailing got him past his shyness; he was absolutely certain that discovering the first computers in his twenties "really changed my life." He found himself in these huffing and puffing monitors and hard drives that surrounded us. Many people might be tempted to think of him as some kind of hermit, a recluse fatally attached to an inanimate best friend, but his love

for computers is far away from the kids nowadays who sit in front of the screen all day to play video games:

"For me, [the computer] is more of a tool than a plaything."

Steve has used that tool to edit a movie and to do the music, sound effects and/or filming for several film shorts. He's revised and written parts of scripts. He wishes that he had more time to edit movies and carry out his ideas with his friends...and more time to write.

"I never liked to write like with a pen...writing it all out is very tiresome...the way I write is things just come to me, thought after thought after thought, and I like being able to take everything and move it around [on the computer]." His penmanship is terrible and he does not keep a journal; when he was younger, he had ideas and wrote them down but always forgot them. But on the computer, he's got a big file of all the ideas that come to him, enough material for several unfinished novels.

He simply likes the feeling of typing. It's helped him to realize one important thing about a first draft: "I could actually correct it later." He stretches out his fingers in midair and putters them over imaginary keys.

Then, my foolish idea of him as a bookish wizard, spectacles complete, was snuffed out. "I hardly read at all though—because I'm dyslexic. Some things I'll read, but fiction—I never read. The words just don't hold as great a meaning for me." He doesn't keep up with or listen to much music anymore, either: his love of the Beatles is connected with the nostalgia of childhood.

"Am I doing OK?" he kept asking me, as we paused in the conversation. At the end, when we both got up, he joked, "I hope I passed." He did tell me, however, that our chat was not as hard as he thought it would be. And his eyes were kinder, more honest than ever. "You're just lucky you didn't bring a camera in here." ■

H2O

by Andrew Kim

I am ice

I don't mean that I am cold
Or that I am found in the winter
And hate the summer

I mean that I expand as I cool
So my mind can explore
I mean that I am transparent

I am water

I don't mean that I can dissolve many things
Or that I flow all around our vast planet
And am essential to its very existence

I mean that I lack a definite and concrete form
So I occupy the containers given to me
I mean that I am a mere drop in the sea

I am vapor

I don't mean that I am a great, blanketing form of white
Or that I rise up in the air and fill the Earth's atmosphere
And have no boundaries that bind my existence to the ground

I mean that I provide a slight resistance that is easy to miss
So that people walk through me and never know who I am
I mean that I am the product of a great exertion of energy and effort



"I thoroughly enjoyed this week. I found that I was so comfortable with everyone and that, for once, I was a part of the in-crowd. Everyone was so nice and accepting, and I made some really great friends. I learned a lot, and saw so many different writing styles."

— SARAH BROWN

I Am From

by Toby Levy

I am from bright lights, a big city.
I was sprung in a concrete jungle where there are no second chances,
where peak success flirts with failure. I am from 5,000 dollar
bottles of Bordeaux, and Caspian caviar nestled on pearl spoons.
I am from Bronx Bombers who fire managers for 100 win seasons.
I am from the poorest slums, and 5th Avenue. From the projects and
The Plaza. I am from where they all think they're
better than the rest, from the borough they call the center of the world.
I am from fast movers, "Get the fuck out of my way," and **HONK**,
from a park that reeks of weed, and smells of horseshit,
from Strawberry Fields and Japanese Cherry Blossoms.
I am from Hip/Hop and Jazz and Friday shots of Grey Goose,
because here, "we go classy."
From humid summers, and black-sleet winters.
From Bentleys to bikes, from Midtown to Malcolm X.
I am from ground zero; from Judaism without a God, and "Harvard or bust."
I am from bitter racism, and from "looks are power, and money is
everything." I am from trophy wives.
I am from Versace laden dogs, and pampered cats,
from power suits to drug dealers, and the musky
smell of woodchips on floors.
I am from a Le Creuset pot filled with black, white, yellow, red.
I am from a city I loathe, a city I love.
I am from bittersweet poetry.

"By the end of this week, I felt like I had known my fellow young writers for years. Through our writing we shared so much and grew so much, as individuals and as a group."

— REBECCA BROWN



Boyfriends: An Exposé On All Things Unrequited

by Lily Lopate

MY GRANDMOTHER HAS ALWAYS SENT mixed messages concerning men, both suspicious and sexual. But



regardless of her story she most often ends with the moral of “You have two options, kiddo, marry a nice Jewish boy, or marry a doctor.” My mother has always told me to marry someone I love, and who loves me back and who gets me, we work, we fit. And my father has always told me, cutting to the harsh cold truth going against all my fantasies: “Lily, we all know the best guy for you in the end would be a nerd. Just face the facts and go for the nerd. Marry the nerd.” But the issue here at present is not so much who to marry but rather how to navigate this dilemma and conundrum of first loves and crushes. So I’ve had three options—well, four, including my own.

I started out well. I chose a nice, good boy in second grade, one that my family would’ve been proud of and one that followed nearly all of their guidelines. He was Indian and his name was Nishant. He had chubby cheeks and sweaty black hair, always running around and

then panting, his hands clutched around his knees. One time during an independent math lesson, when

I was having trouble grasping the concept of money, he explained how four quarters make a dollar. And with each quarter that he picked up, his fingers pawing the rug, he picked up my hand with his, to showcase. I never forgot that math lesson.

I guess we had a finger trend going because when a table of us were laughing over goldfish, I gave him the middle finger, only because I was eager to show him the ring that I had won from a quarter machine (for which

I did my own calculations), and he began to plead with me, tears streaming down his face, “please don’t!” and pushing my finger with force down into my palm. The day I told him I liked him, towards the end of second grade, he was indifferent. And immediately after he told me he and his family were moving to Chicago.

So I guess you could say that Nishant started my trend of unrequited crushes. And I began to develop my pattern of picking very attractive ethnic guys whose overall appearance and image were foreign to that of my family. The whole idea of picking someone who was different from what I knew was exciting. After attending Hebrew school I characterized the “nice Jewish boy” as pale, gangly, nasal voiced, with hat hair, not muscular, lover of lox and cream cheese (a predictable recipe for food peeking out of their mouths), always talking about their grandmothers, etc. In any case they weren’t interest-

ing. My dad would say, whispering to me once in the synagogue as I scanned the room with dissatisfaction: “You know, Lil, I’m gonna say something you’re not gonna like but sometimes it’s good to pick someone who you feel comfortable with, makes things go easier. Why do you like to pick someone who is always so different from us and incompatible with you?” Just beginning the hunt as a fresh fourteen-year-old, in the pews of the synagogue, this was a lot to take in. I knew my posture was more relaxed and conversation flowed naturally with them but Jewish guys weren’t exciting to me; I felt at home with them, and I resented that. I wanted to live out the novel of girls on an adventure pushing themselves to unknown limits and finding exotic love in return.

So, after I spent some time mourning over India, I went in search of new adventures in Italia. And then Brazil or Spain, the two kind of merged together. Neither were long-term relationships, only embarrassing month-long quandaries or obsessions, functioning as a mental Rubik’s cube to grapple with.

But before and during and after, I suppose, elementary and middle school, there was one other guy who would always compete: the boy next door. “The dumb boy,” as my father called him, when he had stopped pretending he didn’t know of my not-so-secret spy subject. “That boy is dumb, Lily. I’m gonna tell you right now?” I grinned, looking dazed into my cereal bowl, instantly translating his negative judgment into an encouragement that we would work. I just had to make him see it first. I suppose this idea of “changing him” derived from a kind of feminine psychology, a defective

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reasoning that I would bring out the best in him, an imagining of how I would transform his character from public to private, with me. I had planned it all to a tee, the whole idea very romantic and intimate. However, in doing this, I set myself up for precarious high stakes, high expectations and of course, unpleasant surprise.

The boy next door was a big deal for me. I felt as though I went through all the states of dating, inside my head of course. He was my first kiss outside his stoop when we were five, my first online and outward flirtation, and let's not forget how he showed me the many ways that a guy is just not that into you, and the millions of ways that I ignored them.

Here's some background: he was Italian. His passion was soccer. We had nothing in common. And when I would speak, he never did. He only nodded occasionally, soon walking away during my mid-sentence. At one point when we were tweens, he threw his soccer ball towards me—as a test of our compatibility, I'd assumed. I squealed with giggles, throwing the ball straight up in the air, and ran into my house, slamming the door with a toothy grin on my face.

Little by little over many years, I saw the pieces come together, the cumulative memories that I had chosen to remember differently from reality. For instance, the time I gave him a hand-made decoupage and glitter valentine and he delivered a white rose on my stoop with a scribbled thank you, which I later found out was his mother's doing. Or when we went through our one-way relationship on Facebook, my paragraphs of thoughts and his mind-boggling clever remark of “lol.”

Even my friends would pry

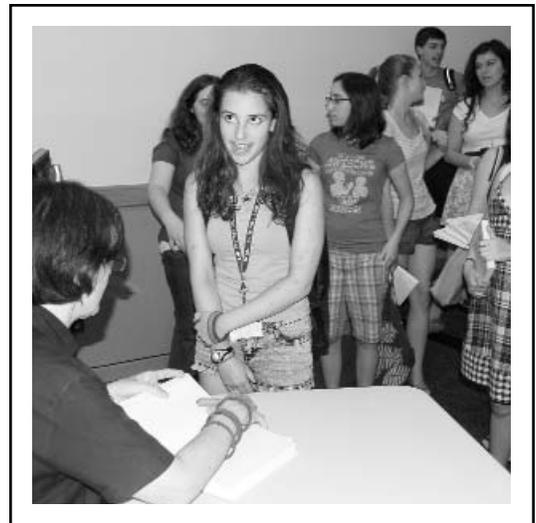
“what do you really see in him?” I wasn't sure; he was so convenient, such easy access. He had a way of dribbling his ball around his backyard and his occasional grunt of “ughh man!” was like a drug to me. I remember walking down our street and seeing him up above, me not looking my best, and carrying grocery bags with one of my parents, which didn't exactly read that I was a “more than meets the eye: fun and sassy” kinda girl. “You've really got your head in the toilet with this one” my mother would say, as I would hastily break away from her to cross the street and hide behind a car. The way his cute button face exchanged itself for his hot six-pack when he hit puberty, the way he never gave me notice as though it was all a secret between us were all good reasons for me to make an excuse to flee the dinner table every time I heard his voice outside. Just to catch a glimpse, a little bit of fantasy. A little touch of something more that could be.

After many years of still having a sweet spot for the boy next door, I realized just how much I tormented myself over this. How much more I had observed and remembered about him, knowing that he knew nothing about me in return. I was always watching him and he was never watching me. I finally decided that he really was uninteresting and slow on the uptake. “It took you that long?” my father would say in disbelief and then continuing to joke, “geeze maybe you two are perfect for each other.” The attraction to the dumb guy, pardon my crudeness, was first and foremost my unmistakable

and undeniable attraction to hotness. I considered myself to have a strong head on my shoulders in many aspects of life except in this department where my logic failed me. I would explain to my father “You can't control matters of the heart!” as though that would explain it, my father always ready with a quick comeback: “Yes. But you can control your reason!” It was better to look at the hot guys, lapping up every morsel like eye candy rather than go up and talk to them. Because talking to them ruined everything: they hadn't read the script! They weren't saying the right things! He was supposed to be infatuated with me, not looking at another girl! The reality collided with my fantasy and the mixture was like oil and water.

Freshman year of high school was an adjustment shock, and in many ways, the opposite from what I had anticipated. But after that first week when this boy helped me with my locker lock, it was all over. He had the best smell, especially in the mornings. The combination of his leather jacket mixed with the crisp smell of air conditioning, mixed with his morning sham-

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poo/after shave was a recipe to make me melt. I had never been such mush in my life. I became a self-conscious wreck around him. I was Mr. Gloop in the Candyland game. He, too, was ethnic, dark, with curly black hair, perfect hands with writer veins, and of course, the ultimate ingredient—popular, out of my league (I thought) and a bad boy. If I wasn't such a self-conscious wreck around him, I bet I could've been the girl he was look-



ing for, but I was never able to talk, correctly or grammatically that is, my personality falling to the floor like the books that I'd drop around him. Regardless, out of all my crushes, he was by far the most intriguing. He was a puzzle that I knew nothing about, and I made it my mission to figure it out, through speculation of course.

He was a slacker but there was something sincerely intelligent about him. He was supposedly a good writer; his goal was to travel and tour the world and, quote "fix all the bullshit." He was the one guy that I didn't need to convince myself of our compatibility: we

would've worked...if he hadn't ruined the plan and gotten expelled from school for dealing pot. (But that wasn't important, really.) We still would've worked...in some perplexing mismatched way. And I must confess, I liked him monogamously for a year and a half. (Impressive, I know.) I nearly flunked my freshman algebra midterm because his chair was directly in front of mine and I couldn't help but find his curly black hair and neck more breathtaking than quadratic equations. My father would always joke harshly "hmmm...expelled for dealing pot, juicy! Wow, Lil, you really know how to pick 'em!" I couldn't ignore the butterflies in my stomach whenever I came close to him, the way my ears would tingle when I heard his voice, never being able to form correct sentences around him, stapling my finger twice just because he put his hand over mine to unclasp the stapler,

or my incredible clumsiness when trying to accomplish the arduous gesture of waving hello—all seemed a close approximation. Like my neighbor, he was the kind of guy that frustrated you. And I liked that. He was the type of person that made me endlessly analyze his effortless "hey" as though I was meticulously diagramming his sentence. He must've known I had a thing for him, always giving me the slimmest bit of acknowledgement,

just to make my life miserable. Just to make my life exciting.

Whenever I pry my cousin for details concerning his dating life, he would of course pry into mine. He would always say, as I hid my blushing face in the dishes or in the cupboard, busying myself, "you know Lil, it should've happened by now, I mean it did for me, there's just a point where they start to notice you, you pick up on the signals and it all sorta just happens. Maybe you're doing something wrong?" Yes, maybe I am doing something wrong, I'm sure. If I were to do it all again, the many crushes and unrequited loves and trials and tribulations with myself and the opposite sex, I would rearrange the pieces on the Ouija board in a completely different orientation. I wouldn't repeat the many moments where I questioned my qualities and physical appearance. Maybe next time I should play it more by the book? I've always heard this saying "You don't pick them, they pick you." But who controls the picking in the game of love? I had always known I had three options, but I found myself, over the years, picking up the dice and rolling it, traveling two steps back, three steps forward, and one step from the finish line, then back to the starting place again, swallowing, playing with more stupidity and wisdom each time, the game of unrequited love. ■

"This week successfully ended my writer's block and permitted me to be more social than ever because I was in a room with people just like me. I loved sharing my work with others, and others reading my work. I loved this program!"

— LILY CAO

November Mornings

by Julia Malleck

I'M GOING TO BE LATE TO HOMEROOM. I barely made the 7:21 train and now have only 45 seconds to run up four flights of stairs. My shoes are sopping wet from the rain. My backpack makes me feel like a Sherpa. I slip off my shoes and begin to sprint through the lobby, passing the stray student who doesn't give a flying fart in space if he or she is late. I still give a fart.

I'm not sure why I care, but in the cold weeks of November that



blend into slushy feet and bucket seats on the subway, I feel oddly fragile. I'm far enough into school so that I've lost my summer vitality. School begins to drain me: my laugh and my voice. Suddenly, small things like making the train or homeroom become colossal in my mind. If I'm late, the day will be a failure.

When I run into 402 South fifteen seconds late, hair damp, heart damp, my morning greeting is from one boy who says, "Julia you're late. You're getting water all over the floor."

"I'm not late. I've just crossed an invisible line drawn by human

beings." No one laughs. *Way to crystallize your smarty pants Asian label*, I think. I don't know why I'm so edgy in this strange microclimate called homeroom.

I'm in my seat, peeling off the socks from my feet that are saturated with rainwater. I slyly wring them out in the paper-recycling bin behind me.

A girl floats into class late and sits down next to me in a puff of perfume. She gives me the up and down look, and I might have sneered at her. I forget about the expressions on my face sometimes. I'm hungry. I get jittery.

"You must be cold!" she says worriedly. She sounds loud, too loud. I lean away from her.

"I'm freezing!" I say, trying to remedy my slip with a big grin.

"I love the winter; I have so many cashmere sweaters to wear." I prevent myself from mentioning it isn't officially winter yet, and if it really were,

why is she

wearing a miniskirt?

I turn my head away when I hear gasps around the room. The track star with the puka shell necklace is putting on deodorant. He has a huge smirk on his face. Ms. Delta is looking through baby pictures on the computer.

"That's repulsive!" I say. *Whoops, not a good idea, I think. Which teenagers say the word repulsive? Totally not colloquial. But who flirts by putting on deodorant?*

Maybe Neanderthals.

"What? I need to smell good," he says. "Do you want to smell my armpits? They smell great."

He finishes the ceremony with a flourish, smelling the deodorant with a, "mmm..." before capping it with a pop.

I open the front pouch of my bag to get my schedule, but it's a lump of wet pulp bleeding ink colors. It is like the texture of oatmeal and I cannot get it off my fingers.

The girl with the cashmere sweaters next to me says, "What is your favorite part of your body?" It is said almost aggressively.

I start imagining isolated body parts floating through space. A leg. An arm. That indentation between your nose and mouth. (I've never known the name of it.)

"I'm rather fond of my earlobes," I pronounce after a few seconds of contemplation. She stops idly twisting her hair and makes a certain face, a cross between confusion and I just-stepped-in-dog-poop.

The bell rings. As we walk out my feet squelch in my sneakers. ■

"The other writers in this program surprised me with how diverse, and how accepting of diversity, they were. Never before have I met a group of teenagers so open and intriguing. With these students, I have had some of the deepest and most candid conversations I have ever had. Everyone offered honest, constructive critiques of each other's work."

— ANDREW KIM

Manhunt

by Corinne Mather

“Shh.”

“I am shh’d!”

Brittany fidgeted beneath the belly of the old pickup, her dark clothes scraping nosily across damp tarmac. If she didn’t stop moving, I knew we were going to be caught. That didn’t seem to stop the tight excitement churning in my stomach, nor the cracking of an amused grin as we pressed closer together, trying to be certain that no part of us was obviously sticking out from beneath the truck. The sky was pitch-black and a chill had draped itself across the quiet night. Spring was just coming to a close, but the summer heat had yet to fall on our sleepy little neighborhood in Keeseville, so we bundled ourselves in black, perfect for camouflage on our well lit street. As long as you kept your distance from the tall street lamp in the middle of the “field,” where the shadows were thick and heavy, a person could run clear past you and not notice you if you were still enough.

Regardless, it was never wise to try to hide in plain sight, especially not on the nights when the

older kids joined the game. Everyone knew the same tricks, because at some point or another, we’d probably hidden with them. Manhunt was our favorite game after Brittany and her family moved into the bulky, square apartment building next door to my house. I had lots of friends move in and out of those apartments, and Brittany and her two siblings were the first of two new additions to our extended family that year.

Almost every evening that summer we all got together, laughing as we all dressed in as much black clothing as we could find, preparing ourselves for a night of adrenaline rushes and playful squeals of probably real terror. As I’ve learned since then, our brand of Manhunt was rather disturbing. Most people play the game in groups, one half chases down the other half, and that’s that. Not us though. It was every kid for him or herself, unless pre-existing truces were made—which they usually were (and they were usually broken)—and one person, all alone, would stalk the rest of us, all scattered across pre-existing limits, all the while pretending to be a psycho-crazy serial killer. Naturally, I was the best at it.

“I don’t see anyone,” Brittany whispered, trying unsuccessfully to keep her blond hair away from the dirty ground.

“Me either,” I whispered back. Now, when you’re ten, it doesn’t matter if you actually don’t hear anything or not, sitting

around under a truck gets boring. Silently, or as silent as two giddy kids can be, we crawled on our elbows and knees from the safety of our hiding place. The street was silent, normal for the beginnings of our game, and we kept our eyes peeled for Brittany’s older brother, Derias, who was ‘it’ when we started. We stood just outside of my house, one lot away from the bend of our little side street where the “field” began to section us off from the main road. The porch light glowed yellow like candlelight, and the beams from the tall street lamp stretched to meet the sidewalk. I was in a spotlight, not a wise move. I hissed at Brittany to come to me, feeling the familiar tickle of anxiety between my shoulder blades as I spun and kept my eyes open. She was on her way when someone suddenly let out a bellowing yell and leapt out of the bed of the truck. Derias laughed at our piercing shrieks, and we tore off into the darkness of our backyards. He laughed the whole time, chasing us down, his heavy footsteps squishing as they pounded the wet grass. It was a muddy game that night.

I’ve never been a fast runner, and my legs tended to fail me most when I was afraid. Needless to say, I always got caught, and this time was no different. Derias just laughed when he tapped me on the shoulder and I stumbled onto the wet ground, trying to catch my breath as he disappeared off into the night.

I didn’t like being ‘it’ early on; it’s probably more frightening than being a potential victim because you can at least hide with someone. But after a few rounds before and later to come, I was always the



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most dreaded thing on that street. My favorite victim was Andrew, a boy my age who had been a constant during my childhood.

He always gave me some reason to target him. Whether it was just taunting me into anger so intense I couldn't find words, or just playing mean jokes on me, he found some deep, great joy in it. A favorite tactic of his, guaranteed to tick me off to no end was his love of cheating at games, from board games to "guns" when he'd get up or shoot at me when he hadn't been "dead" as long as he was supposed to be.

He didn't stop when it came to Manhunt either; Andrew was forever going past the boundaries, and because he lived farther up the street, he felt he was entitled to it, which put a damper on the whole pay-back thing as I could never find him. His older brother Jamie had at least a bit more sportsmanship in him.

I found Jamie this time, aimlessly passing through the "field" right under the street-light for anyone to see. When I reached him, he taunted me, dancing on the balls of his feet, shoulders hunched, promising he wouldn't need to run but he'd give me a fair chance. His grin was smug, and I cocked an eyebrow at him. I did not like his

attitude, nor his underestimation of my creep-tastic abilities. So I smiled at him, and I waited, pacing my steps as he laughed and continued his bouncing, until I felt I had closed enough space between us. His cocky grin shattered when I lunged very suddenly, my fingertips barely missing the fabric of his

shirt. "Holy sh—"

He didn't stick around long enough for me to catch the end of that. After that I decided I'd found my pattern, and whenever I didn't have a person in my sights I'd mimic whatever creepy, fun, "bad guy" mannerisms I could think of from Buffy. I don't know how often I actually caught someone, so I don't really understand how I was so "scary." It might have been my habit of giving chase before suddenly stopping, disappearing, and reappearing some time later to do it all again. Maybe they found my inconsistent, unpredictability frightening. All I know is, we stopped playing Manhunt when everyone was piled in the big pine tree in the field, refusing to come down until I went inside. I think I lost interest after that anyway. ■

"Assuming that I would be my usual apathetic, anti-social self, my mother's one rule for when I would be at the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute was, "Be outgoing." I suppose that if I were anywhere else but a writing camp filled with 35 other students who were more or less just like me, I would have had a painfully hard time. Every minute that I have spent here was precious. I have never been surrounded by like-minded people who were just as enthusiastic and passionate about writing as I was, and it was a beautiful and heartwarming sensation learning that everybody around you — faculty and peers alike — felt the same way you did. I may sound redundant, but it's just that mind-blowing."

— SABRINA HUA

Pursue Your Passion

by Joan O'Leary

PURSUE YOUR PASSION. THAT'S WHAT we are all doing here, right? I believe I have found my passion within the art of stage management and directing. When I'm working on a project, work isn't at all the right word to use because I love and cherish every precious minute that I get to 'pursue' my directing addictions. It's an almost indescribable feeling when I get a good idea for a show. Things just start clicking and I just can't stop writing and thinking and planning everything out, from the most miniscule details to the broadest ideas. From what color stitching the lead's dress should be to making sure all of the kids understand the theme of the play. I love the whole process. A show for me is never finished until it is performed. I write to show others the impossible is possible and provide joy as an antidote to the unimaginative and monotonous routine of life. Socrates once said, "Do what you love and you will never work a day in your life," and I've pretty much mastered the art of not working.

"Okay, okay everyone please circle up. Guys, GUYS!" I've finally got my cast of 23 kids under the

age of 13 to settle down, somewhat. The three boys are punching each other and fidgeting. I give them the do-that-one-more-time-look and they stop abruptly. "Okay, my name is Joan O'Leary and I'm the director of 'Odd Jobs and A Little Food Poisoning.' Thank you so much for coming out for the show." The kids whisper to each other excitedly and nervously. I'm so excited: I've been prepping for this day for weeks now, and I'm totally ready to meet my cast. I split them up into age groups and things start flying. Some kids are dancing with Christina, my 15-year-old choreographer, and some kids are singing with Lorraine my 14-year-old singing coach, and some people are reading scenes with me. This petite little blonde girl named Ally Wallace just about knocks my socks off with her singing voice and acting skills; Cooper Holmes and Kevin Quinn are so adorable—and comfortable in front of an audience—I know they'll be perfect; and I can tell that Camilla Varoli has lots of potential. I see a spark in her that is just waiting to be turned into a full blown fire. I don't know how to explain it, but

everything fell into place perfectly. I had all the right kids plus some, and I knew then and there the show would be great. And—not to brag—but it was pretty awesome.

My head spins with excitement and mania. I get hyped up and talk a mile a minute. I'm always creating new cheat sheets and making notes and, well, of course, directing, directing, directing! I direct all my shows, I always will, I hope. For me, directing a show is more fun than, well, basically anything you can think of, and I'm really not just saying it. I love to spend hours planning our rehearsals and printing out notes and helping the actors and making changes to the script and getting the costumes and making/finding the sets and, well, the other three hundred other things I do when I direct! I'm a nutcase when it comes to organization, and for me directing feels like organizing my play in a way that people will get the most out of it and have the most fun watching it. I love finding my characters in real life, what is commonly referred to as "casting." That's one of my favorite parts about directing. I love seeing what I have to work with and, well, making it work! I love seeing someone at my audition who I just know will be a great character, and I love discussing the endless casting possibilities and the effects the different actors will have on the show. When a play is over—it's written, directed and it's all done—I feel a little sad, like part of me has been released and is now part of something I cannot control. But it's a good feeling—a "my work here is done" kind of feeling.

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Ally Wallace starred in the show with Camilla supporting her all the way, Cooper and Kevin had the audience laughing hysterically the entire time, and all the other kids really held their own and shined, despite the craziness that was going on back stage. I was on a roll, my head was spinning, and I was barking orders in a whisper and trying my hardest to make things run perfectly, which never works. I had a head set which was removed from my possession by Christina after I told the lighting booth to turn on the lights when the stage crew was changing the sets. And mayhem broke out when we couldn't find a little girl's skirt for the next scene and she went on in just a leotard. And when Ally kicked the fake boom box off the stage, or when Cooper forgot his fake cell phone and ran off stage, or when Kevin got a wedgie half way through the show, and, well, you can guess the rest. Everything was far from perfect, but very entertaining and the show was a smashing success. I think the mistakes and mishaps added to the authenticity of the show and made it more entertaining. Everyone was beaming with pride after the show and I was so proud of my cast and crew, for really pulling it together in the end

and taking my craziness well, which not everyone always does. I would have never thought that we could pull it off. Something weird and almost magical happens during a show. Kids who usually mess something up, do it perfectly; lines that I'd been begging to be memorized are suddenly memorized—well—and everyone kind of goes into “show mode” and turns on the charm and gives one hundred percent. The theater really is a magical place.

When I direct my plays it provides me with a sense of worth and fulfillment. I feel accomplished, uncontrollably delighted and appreciated. I love giving back to my community and providing another theater opportunity for the students in my area. I love going to meetings, and I am gaining lots of important business and marketing skills that will be helpful throughout my entire life. Through my works I am able to benefit not only myself but the peo-

“This is my third year at the Institute, and over the course of those three years my life has been completely changed for the better. I've pretty much learned how to write poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, and how to edit my writing effectively. Additionally, my literary sensibilities have increased greatly. This is one of the most important places to me. Thank you, Bill Patrick.”

—ZAK BRECKENRIDGE

ple in my shows and the people who come to see them. I look at the stage like I look at a blank sheet of paper, filled with endless creative possibilities. With new shows come new lessons and new experiences that make me wiser, smarter and happier. Life is a lot like a show in a sense: you write the general idea of it, change it along the way, go with the surprises and mishaps, enjoy it and embrace it. So pursue your passion, and be amazed by the results. The world is your stage, what will you put on it? ■



I Am

by Jennie Ochshorn

I am a soccer ball

I don't mean that I am kicked around
Through dirty fields of watching fans
And piercing whistles that always scream
Never ending roundness

I mean that I am indecisive following the wind
Always almost never certain
Rolling, rising, landing alive
Making up my mind

I am a Frisbee

I don't mean that I am flat
Plate-like disc of entertainment
Soaring, riding on the air
Landing in a flop

I mean that I seek stability
Avoid wobbling or uneasy efforts
Desiring to fly straight and reach my goal
Eliminate free falling

I am a puck

I don't mean that I am easily hit
Smacked by relentless wooden sticks
Screeching through the foggy ice
So slippery and worn

I mean that I can remain so still until
I feel a push that leaves me flying
All it takes to get me gliding
Sometimes not enough

I Am From by Taylor Ordines

I am from the jungles of Africa, the mountains of Greece, the forests of Spain.

I am from fruit and meat, from water and herbs.

From the roots of farmers, those that toil for the shoots and potatoes.

I am from the warriors, those that imperil, themselves, for their loveliest maiden.

I am from murderers and thieves, those that are separate of society

From anarchists and atheists, from Catholics and Christians.

I am from the forests of the New World, from which my state was built.

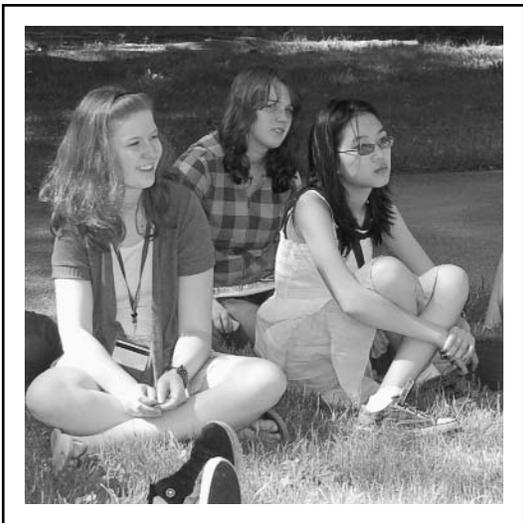
I am from the wooded hills and leafy lakes.

From the bickering men in dirty wigs, who know not what to do.

I am from the Natives, who showed me Alira,

Who showed me my life, who showed me myself, my spirit, and my sight.

From these roots I am steady, as my life unfolds.



“When I first arrived — this being my second year — right off the bat, I was impressed by the program. What was most surprising was the difference in the group of young writers, and the way our minds migrated from separate to whole. Starting out awkward, quiet, and disconnected, we left our individual worlds behind and, within days, got to know more intriguing people than ever before.”

— LILY LOPATE

Poem

by Emma Rainoff

I'm not going to talk about myself.

Not because I'm boring,
Or because I'm not worth talking about,
Or because I don't think I could.

I won't because you wouldn't hear me.
You'll want to hear about something else.
You wouldn't write a poem about me.

I'm not going to talk about my lovers.

Not because they aren't good company,
Or good to talk about,
Or interesting.

I won't because to you, they're strangers
Men and women that you've never known
You wouldn't feel the same.

I'm not going to talk about you.

Not because you don't want it,
Or because there's nothing to talk about,
Or because anyone might mistake you for someone else.

I won't because you, with all your gray hair and dead dreams,
Wouldn't want to hear what I'm saying.
You'd only hear what you want to hear,
And you'd want to say it all yourself.



Our Architecture

by Maddie Rojas Lynch

I am built crooked

Not like an old bench
Fraught with splinters and scars
From past lives and better days

But like a picture frame
Tilted
Striving for perfect symmetry
Yet flawed and unfixable just the same

You are built gently

Not like a cushion
Lumpy and altered and with time
Stained with the marks of melancholy

But like a rocking chair
Lamenting and lulling little ears
Made for sweet songs and comforting caresses

We are built beautifully

Not like a chandelier
Glistening and gloating in dark hours
Shining just because it can

But like a skylight
Sun and skin coming together
In the bright August afternoon



“I loved being here. Everyone I spoke to has become a friend. The classes were helpful and the faculty (teachers?) were fun. I felt happy to be here from the moment I got off the photo I.D. line — which was, admittedly, too long, and the worst part of being here. I only wish we could form a country of only awesome writers, but that would be prejudice against others. “

— CASSANDRA SARNELL

A Lifetime by Cassy Sarnell

I am Russia, Poland, Germany, perhaps Israel

I am not Maine, the cold winters and isolation
or cold people, if you ever encounter one.
I am not England, nor (if you go back enough)
France. Not noble, royal, loyal, brave
I might not be Israel. It remains
to be seen.

I am tall and skinny, pale (sometimes).
Or maybe short, tan, and fat
I am math and science and only language
because it speaks to me.
As such, I am an oddity.

I am True Blue, Goal Songs, *Hen-rik*

I am not baseball or softball, which I'm told
are entirely separate, though I don't get it.
I am not muscles and abs and bodies
even if people think I am.
And I am certainly not Devil nor Island
even when the band-wagon stops for me.

I am proud of history and tradition
which comes with the New York territory.
Even though we've sucked since '94
and, before then, sometime in the past, so
"this one will last..."

I am Oasis, The Beatles, The Arctic Monkeys, and sometimes some-
one else

I am not Miley, nor Jonas, nor Disney
and pride myself on resisting, or having talent.
I am not Gaga, not 50, not Diddy
and I doubt I am beautifu-u-ul
even if what's-his-face says so.

I am folky or grunge-y, depending on my mood
with Dylan and Mika and Cobain and, yes, Grohl.
I am reinvented and re-inspired and renewed.
I may be re-mastered some day

Three Rounds

by Catherine Saterson

I

Yesterday at noon, rooted wriggled
from potted dirt and split their stems, bubbling
buds into blossoms, twisting towards the light.

Though today by dawn, they had become slack,
their milky skin slipped and stripped; they lost leaves
splotched yellow, thumbprint bruises burned in them.

Maybe tomorrow, perhaps in violet
twilight, from disintegrating blossoms
some pollen will catch wind into the night.

II

Yesterday at noon, the spiders, humming,
spun spindles, strummed their fibers, and crouched
they crept upon the sill, hairs catching light.

Though today by dawn, they scurried frantic,
panicked in empty corners, they scuttled,
hungry and looking for their lost cobwebs.

Maybe tomorrow, perhaps in violet
twilight, they will search for cracks and travel
through, snarling insects blown about the night.

III

Yesterday, in violet twilight, I held
my breath and all the night I swept the house
and shuttered it beneath electric light.

Today at noon, I felt I could not breathe,
the rooms too sterile and the air too stale,
all sucked hollow now. This was not a house.

Tomorrow, by dawn I will inhale deep
from every window opened through the night.

Voices

by Carolyn Schultz

DYLAN COULD HEAR THE METHODICAL rhythm of shoes coming down the hallway and he thought about his next move. Being caught was simply not an option. Those blue clad orderlies would throw him right back into his painfully white prison cell. Apparently the color white was supposed to repress violent outbursts or something like that. It didn't work in Dylan's case. The constant onslaught of the bright color made him want to claw his eyes out. Why couldn't his room be the same color as his bed-spread, a nice soothing blue color that didn't hurt his eyes? Maybe not. The color might remind him of orderlies and Dylan hated orderlies. Green would be a nice color. He'd always thought sea foam green was a pretty color...

Shut up about color and figure out how you're going to avoid those orderlies!

The Voice commanded this in a resonating hiss. Dylan rolled his eyes. The Voice was always so damn serious. He attempted to follow its order but, as always, his mind wandered elsewhere. Dylan found himself contemplating whether or not he should name the Voice or if it should simply remain, the Voice. He had named the other voices. . .

Damn it, Dylan! Concentrate!

"Fine!" Dylan whispered. Not quietly enough though. The tempo of the walking feet switched from Andante to Presto. With that, Dylan slipped into a nearby room, whose inhabitant was thankfully absent. The orderlies jogged past without even bothering to glance through the open doorway, their white shoes clapping against the linoleum. He almost snickered at their stupidity, but remained silent under the strict order of the Voice. The Voice could be

such a buzz kill. Dylan missed Giggles. Giggles had been way more fun. Then again, it had been Giggles' fault that people had discovered that he was crazy in the first place. Dylan's mind drifted back six months to that fateful day.

Come on Dylan! Just do it! It'll be fun!

Dylan fumbled with his McDonald's bag, feeling indecisive. His eyes flicked to the marble fountain that was spouting crystal water. It was torture on such a hot June day. Hadn't the



weather man said that today held the highest temperatures for the year of 2009? The hot and humid breeze that rearranged his sweaty, sandy blonde hair only increased Dylan's discomfort. It also made Giggles' idea seem even better. It did sound kind of fun...

The general public unleashed mumbles of disapproval as Dylan pulled off his itchy Price Chopper shirt and kicked off his shoes.

Put the McDonald's bag on your head!

Dylan dumped its contents on the ground. More disapproving mumbblings. He felt kind of sad. He was hungry and had kind of wanted to eat the burger. After fixing the greasy bag on his head,

Dylan felt slightly embarrassed. Something told him that this wasn't quite socially acceptable. Hansel had never told him to do something like this. Under the careful instructions of his most reasonable voice to date, Dylan had been able to hold down his two jobs (one at Price Chopper and the other at a book store) and pay all of his bills. Hansel had always told him not to do anything outrageous. Outrageous things got people noticed...

Don't think about him! I'm much more fun than he ever was, aren't I?

Dylan nodded, causing the fast food bag to tilt slightly to the left.

Then go play in that fountain! This is a public park, so that's a public fountain and it's a hot day! There's nothing wrong with having a little bit of fun.

Giggles was right, Dylan decided. As long as his fun wasn't hurting anybody, how could it be wrong? How could he be punished for it? With the trust of a small child, he leapt over the white, marble rim and splashed. It was fun. Who wouldn't find kicking water

about and sticking your head under one of the spouts fun? Dylan was enjoying himself so very much that he did what he always did when he was irrevocably happy. It was then that people began removing their cell phones from their pockets and dialing.

"The sun'll come out, tomorrow. Bet your bottom dollar..."

Approaching sirens.

"Just thinkin' 'bout tomorrow clears away the cobwebs and the sorrow..."

More sirens.

"I just stick out my chin and grin, and say: Oh the sun will come out tomorrow..."

Dylan smirked, in the empty

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room, at the memory. He didn't regret dancing in the fountain shirtless, crowned with a McDonald's bag, and singing tunes from "Annie." That particular experience had been quite liberating. It was what he did afterwards that left him with some remorse. Still on his self-made high, Dylan had naively believed that it would be just fine to tell that Police Officer that Giggles had told him to do it and when asked who Giggles was, he told the truth. It was then that Dylan realized that the biggest mistake a crazy person can make is to inform the authorities that you are, in fact, crazy.

Dylan, they're gone now. Make your move!

Dylan nodded in agreement to the Voice's words: he needed to get out. Being in this place was a punishment that he didn't deserve. He wasn't one of those dangerous insane people. He had never had any intentions of hurting anyone. The only person that he had ever harmed was himself and that had been under the strict instructions of Rave. Dylan shivered as he remembered the dark and seductive voice that had convinced him that stealing from his foster parent's medicine cabinet was all right and later on, that stealing from their liquor cabinet was just fine as well. He remembered being talked into taking their car before he learned to drive and crashing it. He remembered how the morphine the doctors had given him to cope with the pain of a broken arm and leg had acted as a microphone for Rave's voice. Rave had liked that. There were dark and twisted memories of drug addiction and Dylan had felt that he would be trapped that way forever. Held prisoner by something that was and wasn't himself. After some time, Rave went away. Rehab had stripped Rave of his strength and Dylan had vowed never to give it back. However, the fear that he would return remained. Just thinking about Rave

brought back some of the awful things that he had done under his influence.

Dylan stood on the dark street corner, fidgeting slightly. He fingered the cool plastic of the spray paint can. It housed a bright green colored substance. Green was his favorite color, but at the time he wanted to throw the container and watch it bounce across the asphalt and if he was lucky, it would then roll down the storm drain. He didn't want to do this. This was wrong, it just had to be.

What are you waiting for?

Rave's growl seemed to fill all the corners of Dylan's teenage head. He shivered and gripped the can tightly and wished that Rave would just go away. There had been a time when he had been helpful, necessary even. It was Rave who had taught him how to defend himself and his mother against father, but Rave had stayed even after Dylan didn't need him for that anymore. Father was in jail and mother was...not here anymore...

Hurry up with it! If you keep standing out here like a hoodlum, someone is going to call the police on you. Go on and get some revenge!

"I don't know if I want revenge," Dylan pleaded, his voice sounding impossibly small in the darkness, "Can't I just go home?"

No! And what do you mean you don't want revenge? That man in that house is your Uncle! Your family! He knew what your Daddy was doing and he didn't do a thing to stop it. Don't you remember what he did to you...to your Mommy?

The last part was spoken as a taunt. Dylan didn't want to remember, but he would never be able

to forget. How could he forget how her pretty brown eyes had stared right at him without seeing him? He would never forget how her favorite blue dress had been redesigned with splatters of crimson.

Then go and spray paint his car! Write all of the things that you want to say to your Uncle!

"Don't you mean what you want me to say to him?" He let the question slip past his lips with thinking and regretted it immensely.

Dylan...

He didn't need to hear another word. Rave could get mean when he was angry. Dylan ran up to the white Cadillac that belonged to his Uncle, shook the can, and began his work. He sprayed every single curse that Rave commanded on the pristine surface. Dylan felt cold and empty while doing this. His Uncle didn't deserve this. Dylan couldn't bring himself to hate the man. He simply did what any sane person would have done, he stayed away from danger. The only small hurt that he held against his Uncle was the fact that he had not wanted him, but Dylan couldn't even blame him for that. There was no way that his Uncle would ever be able to look at him without seeing his cruel and abusive older brother and

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maybe even his own father who had taught his son to act like he had.

When the deed was almost done he remembered what Rave had told him: Write all of the things that you want to say to him. Dylan did. He sprayed two words upon the windshield. 'I'm sorry.'



Dylan...

The Voice's tone was softer this time. The sound was enough to remind Dylan that he was in an empty room and not a darkened street. The gentle prodding caused Dylan to pull out his orderly's swipe card. The process of securing this had been difficult, but worth the trouble. The expression that would be on Mark's face once he discovered that his swipe card had been replaced by a library card would be priceless as well. He'd begun by switching his library card with another patient named Hardy and then switching Hardy's library card with Larry's. All that was left to do after that had been switching Larry's library card with Mike's swipe card. It only needed to con-

fuse the orderlies long enough for him to escape. If the plan worked correctly then his orderly, Mark, would realize that his swipe card had been replaced by Larry's library card and confront Larry. Larry would then show Mark what he thinks is his library card and realize that it's actually Hardy's and so on. By the time that they figured out that it was Dylan who had the swipe card, he would be long gone. At least, he hoped so.

With a deep breath, he slipped out of the room and sneaked his way towards the exit door that led towards the alley where the orderlies liked to go to have their midday smoke. Dylan hated the smell of smoke. Sometimes that very scent clung to their scrubs and he was forced to inhale the

acidic swell as they brought him his anti-psychotic medicine. This obviously didn't work, by the way.

Before he knew it, he was at the exit door. With anxious anticipation Dylan slid the key down the gray, metal slot. He wanted to jump for joy when the light flashed green accompanied by the click of the heavy door, but he repressed this. The noise might lead to his capture. He opened the door a small amount and peaked out. The alley was empty. Dylan opened the door just enough for him to slip through and shut the door quietly. He was slightly disappointed when he realized the time of the day. It was nighttime. There was no sun. He'd been looking so very forward to free air and sunshine.

Come on, Dylan, you're 25, stop pouting and get a move on! The sun will be there for you tomorrow if you get away, I promise!

"The sun'll come out tomorrow. So ya gotta hang on 'til tomorrow," Dylan sang quietly under his breath as he broke into a brisk jog away from his prison, "Come what may. Tomorrow! Tomorrow! I love ya, tomorrow! You're always a day away!"

Will you be quiet and run faster!

"Aw, you're just grumpy 'cause you haven't got a name. Don't worry, I'll think of something," Dylan promised and then grinned once an idea popped into his head, "I'll call you Victor!"

Why?

"'Cause I like the name and we just sort of had a victory 'cause we escaped from the mental hospital," Dylan explained, his hazel eyes widening in excitement, "You call someone that wins a victor and it's a name too, so it works! Oh and I was meaning to ask you something...Do you think we could stop by a Dairy Queen or something? I could really go for an ice cream!"

You're practically a wanted man! What makes you think that you can just walk into a place with security cameras or even people who could recognize you for that matter? Are you stupid or something?

"Naw, I'm just crazy!" ■

Blitz

by Kaitlyn Scoons

“TELL ME AGAIN, SLOWLY, WHAT happened,” the soldier, Bill Rowan, said. He held the shivering little boy stiffly by the shoulders. The small boy had sprinted towards Bill, materializing from the gritty London fog and wrapping his skinny arms around the soldier’s knees. Fat tears were streaming down the

to be the roofs and walls of buildings lay piled in the street. Vague childhood memories of this city block fought to surface in his mind, but he pushed them back down.

“You have to help him,” the boy pleaded, grabbing Bill’s sleeve and yanking him towards the door. Bill picked up the frantic child, trying to protect him from whatever had happened here. He carried the boy up the stairs and through the only open door.

“Stay here, I’ll be right back,” Bill said, trying to sound confident while he sat the boy down on a ratty green couch. He could see the bathroom from the entryway.

Bill walked into the room. A middle-aged man lay crumpled on the white tile floor, his head framed by a halo of his own blood. He stepped forward to take

body Bill had ever seen. He was here to fight the war for his country, for London. But he didn’t know how to tell a six-year-old that his father was dead on the bathroom floor. Every day he saw people die, people he knew, but he’d never had to explain why.

Bill took a few deep breaths, trying to find the right words, if there were any. He felt a little dizzy, so he leaned against the sink, staring down the drain. Something glinted from the dark pipe. Bill fished out a locket that held the picture of a young woman. The photograph was wet, making it look like the woman had been crying. He clicked the silver oval closed, the sound of the metal clasp echoing in the bathroom. For a few seconds, Bill turned the necklace over in his hands, and then he slipped it into the breast pocket of his uniform. Finally, he glanced up. It was then that he saw the scrawled note taped to the mirror. ■



boy’s dirt-streaked face, leaving salty tracks. Bill bent down carefully, bringing the boy out in front of him.

“Daddy won’t get up,” the boy quivered. Bill’s stomach dropped.

“Why don’t you take me to your daddy?” Bill asked gently, taking the boy’s chapped hand. The boy nodded vigorously, wiped his dripping nose on his sleeve, and pulled Bill down the bombed-out street. The child let go of the soldier’s hand to point to the door of a dilapidated apartment building. Bill pulled out his radio and called for medical services.

“Is your daddy in here?” Bill asked, though he almost didn’t want an answer. Most of the windows on the block were either broken or boarded up, and what used

the man’s pulse. Nothing.

“We have a body,” Bill croaked into his radio. He stood up slowly, pressing his eyes with his fingertips. This was far from the first

“When I first came here, I was frightened about how my writing would stand up against such learned and outstanding writers. I soon learned that this program isn’t about criticism or comparing our works. But it is about learning from our mistakes and coming to accept our writing styles and embracing them as if they were our long-lost children. We learned a lot about ourselves, and about the writing world, and for that I am infinitely grateful.”

— JACKLYN SULLIVAN

Things I Will Not Write About

by Amanda Sternklar

I tell Mr. Fogle, *Andy*,
I'll never write about my father again.
He is standing at that old, huge bookshelf,
looking for The Forgiveness Parade,
and I have my legs pulled up under me,
my chin resting, exhausted, on top.

I tell him I won't write about
my father, or his father,
because writing is a magnifying glass,
and I don't want to see them that clearly.

I won't write about politics,
about screaming at my father
when he said Obama should die,
or about baseball, or football,
or sports in general.
Daddy made me a Jets fan
so I'd learn disappointment early.

"So don't," he says.
"No one will make you.
No one will make you write
about your best friend and his first boyfriend,
about sneaking out to Cumberland Farms,
about the smell of burnt pizza, how it means love,
about the accusing glint of light off of a sushi knife,
about the quiet space in the back shelves of a library,
about your love for Oscar Wilde and bubble tea,
about Andrew or Joshua, or, *God forbid*, Rebant.

"Don't write about pills
or your first goldfish, first boyfriend,
or the time you stuck your hand in a ceiling fan,
or when you jumped off a bus in Mexico,
or the parties behind your house you weren't invited to,
or the Strawberry Hill wine you'll never, *ever* drink,
and *please, God no more dead dogs*.
Don't write about your father,
or his father."

"Good," I say.
"Just so we're clear."

What Have I Become?

by Jackie Sullivan

I SWAM INSIDE MY BROTHER'S OLD BLACK and red striped Adidas jacket waiting for the warm sense of security that I'd longed for. In Mr. Stern's work-study class, the face of a sweet angel emerged and there wasn't anything to do but smile at the proximity of his body to mine as we walked to take our seats. It was crazy to think that in one short week he'd already started controlling my life. That was it: I've stepped out of the ring and surren-

dered my gloves to him. I was his now.

honestly I can't say that any of these factors pulled me more than Nick. I can't tell you that I wasn't always drawn to Nick or that I was the only girl who felt this way, because then I would be telling you a lie. I don't know what he did that won us all over so quickly. Was it his winning smile or his messy autumn-colored hair? Could it have been his pebble-sized chocolate brown eyes that almost twinkled when he talked and when he listened had such intensity that they could bore through a wall? Did it spawn from his pursuit of the abnormal or his pursuit of knowledge? Or was it a combination of all of these characteristics into one neat package that sent us through the roof? His charm was tangible and for some reason all you wanted to do was listen to him speak which was good because he sure liked to talk.



I suppose Nick wasn't the only force driving me toward change. There were the self-absorbed, clothing-obsessed, angry and verbally abusive girls at my school who with a single glare could make me feel lower than the ground that I walked on. And there was family pressure coming from my new-to-college sister who saw going to class as more of a voluntary task and drinking all night as a necessity. There was the pressure of society to finally leave my refreshingly optimistic view on life. There were even unknown pressures from new friends and their views of me and there were even pressures from expectations in the academic spectrum. But,

I suppose Nick didn't lead me on at all so all the disdain I've felt for him over the years is misplaced. It wasn't like he treated me much different from any of the other girls but his fascination with my math scores and willingness to sit near me—instead of all his friends—during work-study had thrown me through a never-ending loop of confusion. I'd tell myself it was a sign, that this overly, almost obnoxiously, social boy was just shy and didn't know how to say what he meant. (Foolish girl, just giving your heart away as if it were nothing more than a stick of gum). Nick and I obviously must've had different indicators of interest.

As the weeks went by, with laughter and talking, I'd realized a change in

myself. I was no longer the happy-go-lucky girl I'd once known. I'd become a female version of the Nick I knew. When he told me he didn't like my music, I changed it. When he told me he didn't like my hair all tied up in a messy ponytail, I let it down imitating the wavy natural curls that both Nick and I had. When he told me about his views on life, I'd force myself into his thought. Even the wardrobe choice had become more dark and morbid with many blacks and reds and very little of my comfy tees and loose-fitting hand-me-down's from my brother, I had once enjoyed. And when Nick told me about his protest to wear shorts I'd told my mother to donate all my shorts to the poor...luckily, my mother never listened to my delusional pleas. And when I caught onto the fact that Nick wore a sweatshirt to school no matter the weather outside, may it be too hot or too cold for this condition, again I conformed to his idea and as previously mentioned my red and black oversized Adidas sweatshirt came to be. I thought this change in me would force him to have a change of heart and he would proclaim his love to me...but again that was an irrational thought and again I got let down.

I started to feel despair...was I not good enough? This self-doubt had never plagued me before. Living such an optimistic life, sheltered from the darker human portrayal, I'd thrived on change and ability. I'd always believed those stupid things your mom told you about how you could change the world and how you could be all you wanted to be. I was sure I'd messed up the equation somehow, something must've gone wrong. "When you give yourself to someone and change so drastically for them you had to be rewarded. It wouldn't be fair otherwise," I'd thought...a delusional thought but nevertheless my thought.

I'd pulled myself out of this state

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and back into my optimistic power. I could fix this...I wasn't a quitter. That's when things really got messed up—when I thought I deserved him for my diligent work. You don't earn a person from the time you've invested...you can't earn a person at all. I still came to the ridiculous and detrimental conclusion that: a) it was his fault for my change and therefore; b) he owed me the love that I'd so diligently built up in my heart for him. "There was still hope," I'd said as I ferociously got out of bed and set up a game plan to win him over. I'd pretend that I was a-okay in



school, being sure not to let anyone see me waver, especially Nick. But when I got home I cried streams of tears that pooled into ponds of melancholy on my pillow. I'd stopped eating dinner, relying on the nutrition from lunch to get me through the day. I didn't talk to my parents or my brother and most weekends I spent alone in my room writing terrible breakup poems (even though we'd never been dating in the first place) instead of

hanging out with my friends like a normal teenager. In a sign of desperation my mother would buy me books like *You are Special* and would often ask me "Where's my little darling gone to?" and all I'd do was glare back at her through glossed-over eyes. I'd already started to hate who I'd become but had no momentum to change back and no idea how to start.

Nick was all I could think of...all I could dream of and I could officially define myself as obsessed. If I didn't see Nick on a daily basis I'd throw myself into a black crater of nothingness. I'd talk to no one and I'd see no one. He was the air that I breathed and the world that I lived on. He was the gravity that kept me from floating into oblivion.

As my obsession became stronger so did Nick's pursuit of me. Originally, I'd thought maybe he noticed me, but by now I was sure. It was all so obvious. That mischievous bastard got a sick high from fucking with girls and screwing them over. I wished I wasn't nearly as obsessed so I could've walked away

when he mysteriously showed up at my locker and rejected his spontaneous hugs, when for a moment I could breathe him in and get a high that would push me through the rest of the day. But being a foolish girl I did not shiver from his touch or divert my eyes from the sight of this fiend.

As the months went by I observed Nick. We were friends. We hung out on most weekends and texted every second of everyday, all that being my doing. A year had

passed since I met him and with all I had learned about his past and present with girls (at the time the biggest red light being his girlfriend Hannah) I couldn't break his hold on me. And although I should've hated Hannah for she held the heart of my most dear Nick, I didn't because in my mind, he'd already been mine and she was just a figurehead, and I was the real prize. (I think this is mainly because I'd never seen them do anything romantic together.) In a way we became best friends...but then again best friends don't try to break your heart. We started fighting a lot; again, this was my fault. I'd pick a fight with him just to have something to talk about, some way to hold his interest. And the expectations became so delusional and restrictive I couldn't believe what I said in hindsight. He couldn't look at other girls or flirt either. (Mind you, he wasn't my boyfriend.) I'd tell him if he didn't want to hurt me he wouldn't do it. By this time the now single Nick got agitated at my rulings—as he should've—though I never expected him to say what he did the summer afternoon.

As the sun fell I waited for him to speak his mind...as I always did. I let him take the lead. He did not let out a sigh or show any form of discomfort. He'd just stopped only 10 yards away from the now mutual friends at Sandhill Park. I stared into his eyes but he looked over my head to the horizon as if something incredibly interesting was happening, like the sun was fighting the moon for more time to stay up. His black sweatshirt gave the same amount of emotion as he did when he told me in monotone. "Jackie ...I'm done. I don't need to take any more of your crap." His arms crossed and his already furrowed

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eyebrows pinched together forming one super eyebrow. His eyes no longer had the twinkle in them. They were cold and detached from the rest of his body. “Just leave me alone.”

“But...I didn’t mean to. I’m sorry!” I said breathy like a chicken about to get its head cut off. It was as if my oxygen, my Nick, had already started to leave me.

“It’s a little late for that,” he said, breaking his strange concern for the horizon, giving me one last glance. He pitied me. But he said no more as he turned his back and walked away back to my friends, the ones I’d so foolishly introduced him to and the ones that I so foolishly had forgotten about. Woe is me.

I felt sick...deranged...mad. I was plagued with thoughts and yet I felt nothing at all.

As I walked home the three blocks, I couldn’t help but think: “What changed? What had I done wrong?” I was absorbed in this self-contemplation to the point where I couldn’t hear my two best friends running to me. Jessica and Katie grasped me in their warm

protective arms and hugged me steadily saying things like “Everything will be all right” and hoped to walk me slowly off the ledge like they’d done hundreds of times before. It wasn’t until then that I realized the tears that flew down my cheeks like razorblades digging into my skin; they filed into all the wounds of my heart too and stung with remembrance.

And yet there they were, my two best friends I’d neglected for so long, cradling me like a baby. They are the true angels in this story. And when I’d built up enough courage to talk I only asked them one thing: “What have I become?”

Later that night, as I lay awake in bed, I thought of this horrific cretin I must’ve become to repel Nick so far away from me. I was as strong as bug spray on mosquitoes. That’s what he was, the bloodsucking mosquito and what was once a nice and easy snack was now a fear and improbability.

I was suddenly scared that I not only acted like a cretin but I looked like one too. As I turned on the lights and approached the mirror I was able to see a girl I didn’t recog-

nize. She had messy waves of hair that framed her face and covered her left eye. The eyes of this girl were bloodshot and the cheeks rose to a visible pink. The black and red sweatshirt hung on her shoulders— for security of course—and this figure had nothing left in her at all. No fight. No sign of hope at all.

I couldn’t help myself from asking out loud, “What happened to you?”

The girl smiled a sheepish smile and mouthed the words, “How much time do you have?”

I laughed at that, taking delight in the fact that I still had humor. I mean, it felt like a gaping hole had torn me in two. No remains of what used to be showed through the tough exterior of this girl. I’d not yet found this new girl. I didn’t know what she liked or disliked but I did know it’d take work to find her. Work I was willing to do. The bittersweet tears flew through my eyes, because every ending brings a new beginning. ■

Reflections on Life

by Kerri Tobin

COLLEEN USED TO BE ABLE TO SIT AND support her head and move her tiny hands. When she was a baby her parents were unsure of exactly what was wrong. A few doctors and years later, they had their answer. It was a key that unlocked the door to an unavoidable and uncertain future of struggle but also of tri-

Colleen and I seemed to share nothing but the natural bonds of cousins. Even that felt different than with her sisters Kaitlyn and Lauren. I was intimidated by the chair and all that was not the same. How could I relate and what would I say? I worried about blurting out the wrong thing that would hurt

what I saw as a fragile being or awkwardly having to ask her to repeat herself because despite how hard I tried I couldn't understand. But more than that, I was young and found it easier to play Hide-and-Go-Seek in the dark with Kaitlyn, Lauren, and the others. My Nana and Poppa's basement protected me with familiarity and comfort. I enjoyed the laughs and innocent fun that occurred during our time there, but Colleen rarely came

down to join us. The stairs succeeded in providing too much stress for her and the trip was deemed to be not worth it.

I'm older now and so is Colleen. A perfect combination of a timely growth spurt and a new

schedule of tennis practices a few years ago caused stubborn pounds to finally fall off my body. Check-ups at the doctor became more pleasant. Though it seemed impossible, Colleen lost weight, too. Her skeletal frame frightens me, because it seems like it'd be so simple to break her. We're probably about the same height now. I don't feel quite as tall anymore.

Our lives have become intertwined like two necklace chains that are hopelessly tangled.

In knotted places, it can be hard to tell where one life ends and the other begins. I remember her never-ending surgeries and the uncertainty. I've seen the tears of pent-up frustration and helplessness that fall from the cocoa eyes of her mother and the tears of sympathy and unconditional love that fall from the cotton candy blue eyes of my mother.

My mother has a way with Colleen that is hard to explain. I've tried to mimic it, but it's impossible. Their conversation flows easily, and she has mastered an ability to treat Colleen like nothing is wrong without making it obvious she's trying hard to do so. I cannot fathom how she does it. My mom

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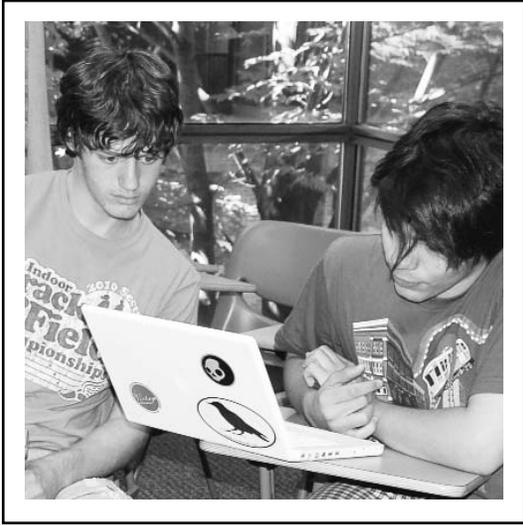
umph. She was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy. Slowly and tortuously she lost abilities until her fingers became the only part of her physical being that could respond to her functioning mind.

I am Colleen's younger cousin. Often times I would forget that she was older by a year. With her being a prisoner of an electric chair, I always felt taller. She screamed thinness, almost the kind of thin that you see on the commercials where starving children from Africa are displayed so you are moved to donate a dollar or two every month. I fell on the fatter end of the spectrum of chubbiness. If you want proof, you can ask my doctor. He might tell you about the time the eleven-year-old was brought to tears by the word "overweight" on his medical chart.

"Whenever I come here, I fall in love with writing all over again. During the year, I find myself shunting off to one side. My mind becomes clogged with other clutter. Here, I don't have to worry about all that clutter. It's a time for me to reboot, share and dream about my characters with people who will care about them, too."

— YASMIN KELLY

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makes efforts to go and see Colleen, and to listen while my aunt tries to figure out how to get through everything going on with her daughter. I used to be jealous of Colleen's relationship with my mother. One time, my mom was telling my aunt about writing an essay on someone who had an impact on her life. She wrote about Colleen and I cried. It amuses me now to think how silly I was being, but the fact that she had chosen my cousin, a girl so close to my age, and not her own daughter made me believe that she didn't care as much about me. Also, I would be upset over something and my mother would often argue "Think about Colleen." I would fill with anger and guilt at this. It was true that in comparison my problem was not as difficult as those facing Colleen, but I wanted to talk about what was going on with me. I didn't want to come off as whiny because my life wasn't that bad. I only wished she would listen.

can agree that the Jonas Brothers are sad excuses for actors, that I look strikingly similar to Miranda Cosgrove from "iCarly," and that playing Monopoly with our drunken Irish family at parties is far more entertaining than it may seem. If she were here with me right now we'd both warn you that if you're not a member of the family you should stand clear of our parties. She might add that the dysfunction can cause emotional scarring and attending might not be worth the bill to see a psychiatrist.

I appreciate having Colleen in my life. Although I used to be annoyed when my mom told me to compare my struggles with Coll's, it's an important

As I've matured, I've learned to get over the insecurities I used as excuses and the pointless envy. I spend more time with Colleen. Her wit is much sharper than mine. She likes to find things we share in common so there is always something for us to talk about. She has many concerns for my neglected turtle Buddy and often asks if he happened to survive the gap of time since our last conversation. We

perspective that I wouldn't have otherwise. I see her having to lie isolated on the couch and watch television all day because there's nothing else for her to do. Lately, she doesn't attend school. Sometimes she tries to keep her mother or father or sisters from leaving the house because she's so bored and so scared. I find it hard to even imagine what it must be like.

Because of Colleen, I've come to value inner strength. The doctors explained to her stunned parents that she would live to around nine. She's seventeen. If you met my family you would know that we're the kind of people that cry at every sad blockbuster movie, so Colleen's Sweet Sixteen was one of the most emotional events I've been able to witness. That day and through nearly all of the others, she's shown unflappable humor.

Colleen is an essential part to the family that I cherish more than anything. Instead of tearing us apart, her struggles and triumphs have helped bring us much closer. Family is the foundation that you grow upon and I consider myself lucky to have one that's so strong. ■

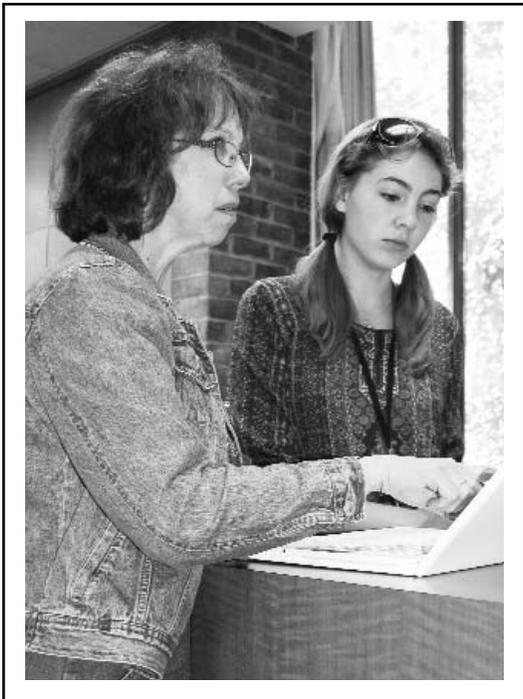


Untitled

by John Volza

the dining room
we never ate in
never sat
never occupied not allowed
once had topiary wall paper
—white, blue, magenta
above the chair rail.

i once dreamed that the
botanic walls held thousands
of light switches
chair rail to ceiling.
a dream version of my sister
stood beside me.
neither of us flipped
a single switch.



“This program was so awesome. It made me smile and smile. No, really. I wish I was a mutant freak with five extra arms so I could give it seven thumbs up. As it were, I am a mostly normal — albeit slightly mad — human child with only two thumbs, which will have to suffice.”

— ZACHARY HAYS

Woodside by Emma Warhover

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, PERHAPS between the ages of zero and thirteen, perhaps a little bit more than that, my family used to make routine trips to the country, to the house where my maternal family lives. (My mother has only one sister, my mother's sister has had only one husband, and they have only two children, so there were not too many of us). Sometime since, my mother and her sister have decided that they don't need to see each other all the time, and that their kids can't stand each other, so we don't go there anymore. The house, called Woodside, marked its two hundredth anniversary of standing in Towanda, Pennsylvania some time ago. Not all of it has been there the whole time, but the oldest parts are easily recognizable by the stone and mortar chimney outside and the copious renovation inside. Built on land that, long ago, was justly dirt cheap, the house approaches the significance of something like an ancestral manse to us city dwellers.

The most exciting thing about the history of the house, to me, was the portrait in the big dining room that is rarely used. It is a portrait without nuance of a stern woman of indeterminate age wearing a black dress and a headdress that makes her shiny black hair nearly invisible. Somebody has nestled a wreath of artificial purple flowers around the frame. She is—according to a much younger but already yellowing caption in my aunt's handwriting—Wealthy Tracy Hale, wife of John Hale and a schoolteacher. When we had to do family trees in fourth grade, I had my aunt send me a picture of the portrait, and was horribly proud that I was the only person with a picture of a portrait on my project. Wealthy Tracy Hale (her unusual first name probably derives from the Puritan notion that wealth was a sign

not of impiety, but of special blessedness if it were only accompanied by proper Calvinist sobriety) herself was not quite at the furthest temporal extreme of my recorded genealogy, but as an example she is fairly representative. She herself lived in the eighteenth century, moved west to Pennsylvania at some point, bought land, built the house, taught school, and began the slow expansion of the house. These ingredients multiplied in other ancestors.

My mom has told me nothing about Consider Wood, Wealthy's rough contemporary, except that he

"I found the entire experience a rewarding one. The woodsy campus setting provided a perfect backdrop to write. The teachers enlightened me with facts and information I will surely use throughout my writing career, whether I become a writer or work in another field."

— TOBY LEVY

fought in the Revolutionary War and that his name makes her think "oh, you should consider wood for your countertop." My grandmother says that during her mother's bid to join the D.A.R. he was the only ancestor she could come up with who was not a Tory.

Even in other branches, my ancestors have always shown a strange tendency to become teachers and often Latinists. My grandfather can list three "maiden aunts" and forgets the name of a fourth who were educated in their own right. The married ones of the same stripe apparently inevitably became alcoholics.

Of course, all the Hales' descendants added to the house, even when their last name became a middle name and the Coddings were the ones to

engrave their name on the doorknocker. (Their name probably derives from some obscure fisherman.) My grandmother's father, my great-grandfather, was the last of us to try to frame the house in his own image. Known to me as Captain Coddling, old man Coddling, or, when it's my mom, that "creepy old guy," he was a retired naval officer who apparently spent most of his career floating around the South Pacific picking up fishy jawbones and an inflated sense of his own authority. The jawbones are still in the attic, both the shark mouth and the serrated sword of some unspecified predator, along with a rotting sidesaddle, a decrepit spinning wheel, paper dolls nearly a century old, and decay. Coddling's gun collection was so massive that most of it had to be donated to a local historical museum, and his book collection, all sets of matching massive tomes with nothing interesting in them, should have been donated too.

Today, half the house at Woodside, the half I have slept in as a guest, is practically a museum. Half or more than half the house is decorated with reupholstered antiques and even the wood of the floors smells musty with age. These rooms cannot be lived in without thought. A person cannot climb into the bathtub with griffin's feet, cannot click the antiquated button light switch, cannot sleep in the old beds which still sport spring mattresses and carved bedposts without thinking that they are going to mess up forever some part of the past. This is what I have derived from, though I completely bypassed my father's family, who are from Illinois and therefore don't count. I am from an old house in an old backwater, itself mired in its own stagnation. ■

Untitled

by Joy Westerman

Fire Escape

There are three windows in my bedroom and one of them opens up to the fire escape. I like to sit on it and eat cereal and drink water with ice. In the morning the air is thick with the smoke from the restaurant on the corner and I can't smell anything. The building across from me has ivy along the entire back wall, layers upon layers, all the same shade, all the same size. If I look at it too long I lean forward and become afraid of falling. Mom says not to go on the fire escape, but I do it anyway, even when she's home. If I look straight ahead I can see the grape arbor, or what's left of it, which are mostly rusted pipes. If I look down I realize that I'm much closer to the ground than I had imagined, and instead I'll turn my face to the sky. On days like this it's gray and I hear nothing and smell nothing except my own chewing and my own sweat. Mornings in the city are hot, so I'll climb back inside and wait for night, when a girl will come into my room and go straight to the fire escape so she can smoke cigarettes and tell me about her problems. Instead of listening I'll look slightly past her at the ivy, and wonder what



would happen if she fell. I remember that this room used to be Mom's room, and I could only go inside it when she was at work. Once when I was younger, I came home early from school with a friend, and we went onto the fire escape and talked about boys. We drank ice cubes out of chocolate pudding glasses, and locked the door. When Mom came home we told her we were just resting and she told us she had a headache and to go downstairs.

Yoga Room/Moose Room

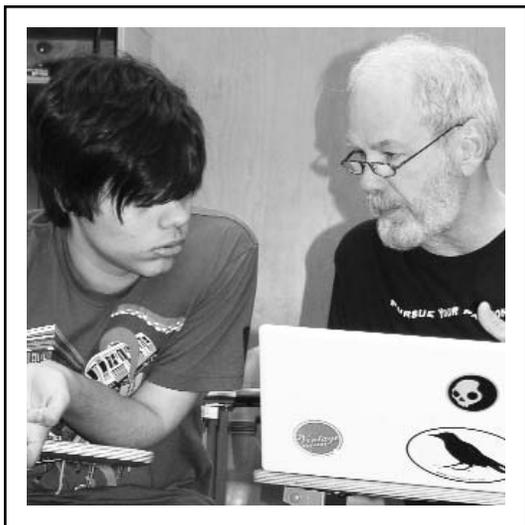
There is a room in our house that was once a museum of moose. Eddie had a collection, the largest I've ever seen, hundreds upon hundreds of stuffed moose dolls and figurines. They accumulated throughout the years, until finally they overwhelmed us all and Dad told him to put those fucking moose into the guest room or he'd throw them in the trash. They flopped over the storage bins and the thin bed, wilting. Eddie would visit them sometimes, but only to add a new addition to the collection. He gave them names like King Tut, but he would always add the word moose to the end. I made him a moose pillow on our sewing machine and it was so soft that I wanted to keep it but instead he put it on the floor in the moose room, beneath King Tutmoose. I went in there one day to climb onto the roof from the fire escape and when I opened the window the brown fabric bodies started to flutter. I closed the window and didn't look back. There's a sign on the wall that says Moose Crossing. It's a yellow sign, a real sign; one Dad bought Eddie from someplace out west where moose actually cross the street and present a danger to pedestrians. Eddie says moose are cute and he talks about hugging them and I say moose are not cute and I talk about how Eddie is fourteen. Now the room is Mom's yoga room where she exercises and builds muscle and loses weight and longs to be better. The moose are scattered in Eddie's room, hiding under the bed and on the top shelf. He pretends he doesn't need them anymore but I see him holding King Tutmoose when he sleeps. I don't say anything because what would be the point.

Kitchen

We sit on tiles on the kitchen floor, just because we can. The tiles are pale green and we wear socks but no shoes and sometimes we go barefoot. The room is big because we knocked down a wall last year, the wall to the guestroom. Now the guestroom is upstairs but we never have guests. The refrigerator door doesn't close properly and sometimes when we leave for school we forget to close it all the way and then the milk spoils. Mom yells at us because milk is expensive nowadays and she's told us a million times to slam the door as hard as possible. It's hard to slam the door because then the butter shelf breaks, but we can't talk back to Mom when she's in one of her moods. There are two windows in the kitchen and a door, which leads to the backyard. From the windows you can hear everything that happens outside. We have neighbors to the left who smoke weed in the morning, and when we're eat-

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“Even though I was running on about 4 or 5 hours of sleep every night, it was the most fun and satisfying week of all my writing experiences. The faculty are so funny and the people are friendly and creative. It’s a great atmosphere to be in. “

—MADDIE ROJAS-LYNCH

ing cereal the smell comes wafting in through the windows and we laugh a little bit, quietly. The smell permeates through our food and makes us tired, which is why we always forget to put back the butter. We can’t think when we’re in the kitchen. We just eat, or read the paper, but only the Styles section. Sometimes we make popcorn, usually with friends but more often alone. We never sit on the floor when people are watching. We have mice in the winter and we don’t tell anyone. People come over and are surprised that we have a backyard. I never even noticed, they’ll say. But no one ever goes outside. Mostly, now that it’s hot, we don’t even open the windows; we just turn on the air conditioner. The sound is loud, too loud, and we can’t concentrate anymore. Mom keeps the chocolate in the pantry, on the top shelf, the one we can’t reach without the stool. She says it’s hers but it doesn’t have her name on it so we always get to it. We’ll take little bites at a time, a couple of times a day, until the chocolate is gone. She yells at us and we bite our lips in shame, or maybe lie and say Dad must have eaten it. We don’t like to get in trouble, but we always do. Mom has a list of rules. She says we can’t have more than four ounces of juice a day, not that we like juice anyway. When she leaves for work we pour ourselves tall glasses and drink four ounces, because that’s all we can stomach. We go into the backyard and dump the rest of the juice on the plants. Mom doesn’t like candy either, so we have to hide it when we buy it from the deli around the corner. We know all the hiding places—behind the garbage can, inside Dad’s coffee mug, in the pocket of Mom’s aprons. She never

finds it and we always eat it the first day anyway. When we grow up we’re going to be fat, Mom says. She’s not fat, not fat at all—she only weighs ninety-five pounds. But we’re fat, because we eat too much and too often. We think that knocking down the wall to let in more light was a bad idea; we think it gave us more kitchen space, which has led to us becoming fat. Mom doesn’t know about the side effects of the kitchen; she spends all her time upstairs. But we’re here every day. The kitchen is at the back of the house, where it’s quietest, and where the neighbors’ weed drifts through the windows. We like to sit in the kitchen and eat bread and cheese, thinking about nothing. ■



The Chess Match

by Lydia Youngman

I.

The doll is moving in from the garage, singing about how it's going to burn the house down. I'm more concerned with beating the man in the closet at chess. He's a competitive secret but I'm still trying to win when the game is disrupted by the cat who jumps on the board, scattering the pieces everywhere.

II.

The White Knight is upside down, trapped in the opening of the soap dispenser. Two pawns have fallen into the toaster and are jumping in and out the two slots. Their new range of motion excites them.

III.

The Black Rook has fallen into a basket of matches where it is found by the murderous doll who chomps on its head while she digs through the basket in her quest for fire. From under the rug, the White Queen watches, laughing behind her hand.

IV.

Trapped inside his bubble world, jilted and disoriented, the White Knight tries to get back on his white horse to save the kingdom and ride off with the princess into the sunset.

V.

The princess is a Koi fish swimming in a pond out back, all white except for the imprint of an orange openmouthed kiss planted on the top of her head. While navigating the waters of her land, she comes across the Black Bishop sitting on a rock.

VI.

The doll finds the striking of a match quite difficult with her immobile porcelain hands. She enlists the help of the White Queen which is odd, as the White Queen has no hands either. Except the kind to laugh behind.

VII.

The White Knight has caught a ride on the back of a mighty steed—the cat that'd scattered the pieces in the first place. The Knight dismounts the cat, sliding down his sleek gray fur. He tightens his grip on his sword and charges onto the carpet, which is now alight with flame.

VIII.

The pawns in the toaster can feel the heat approaching. They realize that if one pawn can cross the board and become a queen, two pawns together can certainly become heroes. They take off diagonally and make good progress in opposite directions until one is captured by a falling teacup.

IX.

The teacup was pushed from an elevated location by the Black Rook who, though missing a head, is very much alive. And very much ready to take down the murderous doll.

X.

The Black Bishop, a piece who dabbles in magic, takes the kiss that doesn't belong to him from the back of the princess and, in return, transforms her into ivory. As white scales become white marble, a new chess piece is developed, one who was never meant to have a place on the board.

XI.

A pawn jabs his spear upward until the tea cup dome above him splits into a thousand hairline cracks. From the shards of drink receptacles comes a brave hero, like a bird hatching from its egg.

XII.

The princess sees the Knight facing off with the White Queen. Her heart is in her throat—she wants to run to them, but she knows if she does it means certain death for them all. Though a knight is a prominent figure in a game of chess, and though a queen is the most powerful piece on the board, no one yet knows what tricks an ivory princess has up her sleeve.

XIII.

The doll sings her song brightly and through it makes other plans to destroy the house. The fire is not enough. The doll will kill every last inhabitant personally. Perchance with the help of the White Queen whose weapon is poised above the head of the White Knight. The murderous doll is amused by two pieces of the same side fighting with each other.

XIV.

The fire on the carpet has seeped through to the floorboards. The murderous doll scales a bookshelf where the Black Rook is waiting, a heavy book end poised by the edge of the top shelf. He pushes with a strength he never knew he had, fueled by anger about his missing limb, and a burning desire for revenge. The book end plunges straight into the skull of the murderous doll. The expressionless porcelain face cracks down the middle and she is consumed by the flame. Through the sounds of war, no one notices that the song of the murderous doll has been forever silenced.

XV.

The princess runs to the Knight and pushes him out of the path of the deadly White Queen. He tumbles and skids a few lengths, too weak and too far away to save the princess from certain death. But he doesn't have to, for right at that moment, two new heroes have arrived. They're short and unlikely, but they have what it takes, knocking the White Queen back into the fire. It is the capture of the final piece.

XVI.

The White Knight approaches the princess. "You take my breath away," he says. "You saved me." The princess answers by pressing a kiss to his cheek. It is orange and openmouthed and it is where it belongs.

XVII.

With order in the house restored, I turn to the man in the closet. We decide to play a game of checkers.

I am the Stone that was First Cast

by Sinan Ziyalan

I am the stone that was first cast

I don't mean I am on a journey,
another person being my destination.
Or that because I am flying high,
it will be a short flight.

I mean that I am charged with emotion
That set me off.
Able to lie idly
Or let fury fly.

I am the parted red sea

I don't mean that I swallow up others
in a momentary show of the impossible.
That my moving is a boon to the few
and a bane to the many

I mean that I am undisturbed
Uninvolved, until when I do open up,
However rare, I swallow up another,
and they become a part of me emotionally
in a never ending slumber

I am the Alpha and the Omega

I don't mean that I am god,
the supposed omniscient being.
Nor that I am one that gives nor takes
in reasoning only seen
by the ever mysterious me

I mean that I create.
I birth universes of characters
in well under seven days.
I breathe them into their three dimensions
over a much longer span of time.
I mean that I am for eternity
through the immortality of my creations.
I mean that I contain the souls of many more
slumbering within the ink of my pen

awaiting a page to be born

New York State Summer Young Writers Institute Summer 2010 Participants

Zak Breckenridge

Essex

Yasmin Kelly

Brooklyn

Catherine Saterson

Brooklyn

Rebecca Brown

Peru

Andrew Kim

West Nyack

Carolyn Schultz

Delmar

Sarah Brown

Feura Bush

Tobias Levy

New York City

Kaitlyn Scoons

Delmar

Lily Cao

Mohegan Lake

Lily Lopate

Brooklyn

Amanda Sternklar

Glenmont

Leigh Gialanella

Albany

Julia Malleck

Brooklyn

Jacklyn Sullivan

Wantagh

Margaret Guzman

Highland Mills

Corinne Mather

Plattsburgh

Kerri Tobin

West Islip

Chloe Hamer

Pittsford

Joan O'Leary

Lake Placid

John Volza

New Hartford

Zachary Hays

Castleton-on-Hudson

Jennie Ochshorn

Ithaca

Emma Warhover

New York City

Sabrina Hua

New York City

Taylor Ordines

Jamestown

Joy Westerman

Brooklyn

Gretel Kauffman

Elba

Emma Rainoff

Tuxedo Park

Lydia Youngman

Glenmont

Michael Kelly

Bardonia

Maddie Rojas Lynch

Schenectady

Sinan Ziyalan

Brooklyn

Cassandra Sarnell

Brooklyn





Since its creation in 1984 by the state legislature to promote writing and the artistic imagination across the state, the New York State Writers Institute has emerged as one of the premiere sites in the country for presenting the literary arts. Over the course of three decades the Institute has sponsored readings, lectures, panel discussions, symposia, and film events which have featured appearances by over 1,000 artists—including six Nobel Prize winners, and 90 Pulitzer Prize winners—and has screened more than 600 films, from rare early prints to sneak previews of current releases. The Institute is a major contributor to the educational resources and cultural life at the University at Albany, where it is located, as well as the surrounding community. It is also identified by the writing and publishing communities as a place dedicated to promoting serious literature, where writers and their work are held in high esteem, where being an invited guest is considered an honor, and where talking about books is celebrated as the best conversation in the world.

Further information about Writers Institute programs may be obtained from its website at: www.albany.edu/writers-inst.

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