



# *Seaswells 2021*

## *The Best of a Decade*

### *Volume 55*

#### **SEASWELLS**

Sea sounds — surf — gull cries and sandpipers  
Ever near us here — if we but seek  
And let the sound and sight inspire.  
Sun and shadow, song and sorrow  
Wander in the heart — awaiting utterance.  
Eagerly the wind supplies the melody  
Lest the song be lost, — and we,  
Longing for a fragment of the universe,  
Sing, — before our voice is swallowed by the wind.

*Phyllis Barr*

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## BARR POETRY CONTEST

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|             | 4     | SECOND PLACE | Chaucer's Teacher- - - - - Karen Price                                |
| <b>2012</b> | 11    | FIRST PLACE  | The Lamp - - - - - Bennett Rainey                                     |
|             | 10    | SECOND PLACE | Redwood D.C. IV - - - - - Jeri Guyette                                |
| <b>2013</b> | 22    | FIRST PLACE  | A Sestina for Jake- - - - - Kimberly Helms                            |
|             | 21    | SECOND PLACE | My Southern Childhood- - - - - Hannah Carmichael                      |
| <b>2014</b> | 30    | FIRST PLACE  | On the Suffering of Beauty - - - - - Bennett Rainey                   |
|             | 23    | SECOND PLACE | I Am From - - - - - Alesha Walker                                     |
| <b>2015</b> | 32    | FIRST PLACE  | Life Below the Waves - - - - - Nichole Herrin                         |
|             | 31    | SECOND PLACE | Everything - - - - - Jason Brinckmann                                 |
| <b>2016</b> | 34-35 | FIRST PLACE  | De Portal- - - - - Jeri Guyette                                       |
|             | 37    | SECOND PLACE | Whitecaps - - - - - Samantha Skinner                                  |
| <b>2017</b> | 37    | FIRST PLACE  | Still - - - - - Pamala Holton   |
|             | 39    | SECOND PLACE | The Planet Ball - - - - - Barry Bowens                                |
| <b>2018</b> | 42    | FIRST PLACE  | an artificial connecting of points in time - - - - - Whitney Johnston |
|             | 48    | SECOND PLACE | How Pride Falls - - - - - Willie Vaughn                               |
| <b>2019</b> | 53    | FIRST PLACE  | Rattling Truths - - - - - Travis Lantrip                              |
|             | 53    | SECOND PLACE | Spaghetti - - - - - James Carpenter                                   |
| <b>2020</b> | 56    | FIRST PLACE  | Bee Me - - - - - Travis Lantrip                                       |
|             | 57    | SECOND PLACE | Ellie - - - - - John Edward Menechino III                             |

## SEASWELLS PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

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|             |    |               |  |
|-------------|----|---------------|--|
| <b>2011</b> | 5  | BEST OVERALL  | Breaking News: Blood-sucker Tracked to Pond- - - - - Pamela Westcott |
|             | 4  | BEST COLOR    | Universal Truth - - - - - Janet Dominy                               |
|             | 2  | BEST B & W    | It Runs in the Family- - - - - Charity Andersen                      |
|             | 4  | BEST COMP-ENH | Ready to Race - - - - - Kara Jackson                                 |
| <b>2012</b> | 7  | BEST OVERALL  | Blues in Black & White- - - - - Shawntay Rivers                      |
|             | 12 | BEST COLOR    | Station Falls- - - - - Larry Carter                                  |
|             | 7  | BEST B & W    | If - - - - - Justin Gines  |
|             | 9  | BEST COMP-ENH | Come Over to My Pad- - - - - Pamela Westcott                         |
| <b>2013</b> | 22 | BEST OVERALL  | Peerless - - - - - Jeremy Black                                      |
|             | 20 | BEST COLOR    | Why I Live Here - - - - - Rainey Gregg                               |
|             | 10 | BEST B & W    | Uprising - - - - - Samantha Barwick                                  |
|             | 13 | BEST COMP-ENH | Shuttered Ruins- - - - - Pamela Westcott                             |
| <b>2014</b> | 26 | BEST OVERALL  | Barriers- - - - - Alyssa Keeve                                       |
|             | 24 | BEST COLOR    | "Leave Me Alone" - - - - - Chelsea Spivey                            |
|             | 30 | BEST B & W    | Empty Houses - - - - - Megan Nash                                    |
|             | 21 | BEST COMP-ENH | Rainbow Fountain- - - - - Brittany Fulkerson                         |
| <b>2015</b> | 29 | BEST OVERALL  | Look Into My Eyes - - - - - Mikayla Craft                            |
|             | 25 | BEST COLOR    | Follow the Leader- - - - - Pamela Westcott                           |
|             | 29 | BEST B & W    | Chime In - - - - - Rebecca Rapp                                      |
|             | 28 | BEST COMP-ENH | Neon White - - - - - Carla Simon                                     |



|             |    |               |                                     |                    |
|-------------|----|---------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>2016</b> | 35 | BEST OVERALL  | The Road to New Beginnings- - - - - | Cody Haynes        |
|             | 33 | BEST COLOR    | Forgotten - - - - -                 | -Krista Tharp      |
|             | 34 | BEST B & W    | Time Stands Still- - - - -          | -Stephanie Scott   |
|             | 32 | BEST COMP-ENH | Out Standing- - - - -               | - Kari Powell      |
| <b>2017</b> | 37 | BEST OVERALL  | Shadows of Winter - - - - -         | Nicole Carter      |
|             | 36 | BEST COLOR    | Christmas Lights - - - - -          | Audrey Butts       |
|             | 41 | BEST B & W    | Family Farm- - - - -                | Cody Haynes        |
|             | 39 | BEST COMP-ENH | Innocent Spirit - - - - -           | Jordan Agee        |
| <b>2018</b> | 44 | BEST OVERALL  | Humidity - - - - -                  | Cody Haynes        |
|             | 45 | BEST COLOR    | Mirror Mirror - - - - -             | -Haleigh Terhune   |
|             | 42 | BEST B & W    | Perspective-- - - - -               | Nicole Carter      |
|             | 44 | BEST COMP-ENH | The Path Less Traveled - - - - -    | Kaleigh Pfaff      |
| <b>2019</b> | 51 | BEST OVERALL  | "12°06'17"S 76° 49'17 "W" - - - - - | Hunter Groce       |
|             | 48 | BEST COLOR    | Inirotnas - - - - -                 | -Travis Troutt     |
|             | 47 | BEST B & W    | Missing Someone- - - - -            | Cody Haynes        |
|             | 48 | BEST COMP-ENH | Glitched Personality-- - - - -      | -Ben Platnick      |
| <b>2020</b> | 59 | BEST OVERALL  | Untitled - - - - -                  | Marybelle Caldwell |
|             | 57 | BEST COLOR    | Bahhh - - - - -                     | -Mackenzie Buck    |
|             | 56 | BEST B & W    | View from Below - - - - -           | Benjamin Davis     |
|             | 52 | BEST COMP-ENH | Untitled - - - - -                  | Marybelle Caldwell |

#### **AUSTIN/GARNER PROSE CONTEST**

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|             |       |              |   |                    |
|-------------|-------|--------------|---|--------------------|
| <b>2011</b> | 2-3   | FIRST PLACE  | It Seems So Basic - - - - -                       | Elizabeth Anderson |
|             | 6     | THIRD PLACE  | The Maiden and the Mouse - - - - -                | Lance T. Brown     |
| <b>2012</b> | 12-13 | FIRST PLACE  | The Ancient Oak - - - - -                         | Kimberly Helms     |
|             | 14    | SECOND PLACE | Where It's At- - - - -                            | Ashley Miller      |
| <b>2013</b> | 19-20 | FIRST PLACE  | The Ups and Downs of Crushes - - - - -            | Becki Cowatch      |
|             | 24    | SECOND PLACE | Day in a Daze- - - - -                            | Shamara Thomas     |
| <b>2014</b> | 25    | FIRST PLACE  | Reflections-- - - - -                             | Becki Cowatch      |
|             | 26    | SECOND PLACE | Baghdad Unicorn - - - - -                         | -Jonathan Parker   |
| <b>2015</b> | 31-32 | FIRST PLACE  | Leap of Faith - - - - -                           | -Dani Marine       |
|             | 28    | SECOND PLACE | A Story of Earth- - - - -                         | Cobe Wilson        |
| <b>2016</b> | 35-36 | FIRST PLACE  | Let the Pieces Fall Where They May- - - - -       | Becki Cowatch      |
|             | 33    | SECOND PLACE | Ginger-- - - - -                                  | Cobe Wilson        |
| <b>2017</b> | 40-41 | FIRST PLACE  | Daisy Dust - - - - -                              | Morgan Wilson      |
|             | 38    | SECOND PLACE | Smoking Gun- - - - -                              | Laquedia Kelly     |
| <b>2018</b> | 45-46 | FIRST PLACE  | My Reflection- - - - -                            | -Haleigh Terhune   |
|             | 42-43 | SECOND PLACE | The Tale of Nothing-- - - - -                     | Allison Williams   |
| <b>2019</b> | 52    | FIRST PLACE  | On Le Chapeau (1999) by Michèle Cournoyer - - - - | Whitney Johnston   |
|             | 49-51 | SECOND PLACE | Sunset on Venus - - - - -                         | James Carpenter    |
| <b>2020</b> | 54-56 | FIRST PLACE  | Yowie - - - - -                                   | James C. Carpenter |
|             | 58-59 | SECOND PLACE | On Giving Birth-- - - - -                         | -Rebekah Moore     |



## SEASWELLS ART CONTEST

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|      |    |              |                                |                         |
|------|----|--------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2011 | 3  | FIRST PLACE  | What's for Lunch? - - - - -    | Kat Taylor              |
|      | 3  | SECOND PLACE | Curtains - - - - -             | Lindsey Cirmotich       |
| 2012 | 9  | FIRST PLACE  | Rope on Fire - - - - -         | Shandy Stubbs           |
|      | 8  | SECOND PLACE | Summer's Last Gasp- - - - -    | Jamie Hardy             |
| 2013 | 18 | FIRST PLACE  | Softly - - - - -               | Ryan Rodriguez          |
|      | 20 | SECOND PLACE | Recycled as Art-- - - - -      | Alicia Hurd             |
| 2014 | 23 | FIRST PLACE  | Brown Bagging-- - - - -        | Lauren Smith            |
|      | 29 | SECOND PLACE | Silky Smooth - - - - -         | Alicia Hurd             |
| 2015 | 31 | FIRST PLACE  | Gabba Gabba Hey! - - - - -     | Lauren Smith            |
|      | 27 | SECOND PLACE | Combat Fatigued - - - - -      | Sydney Fulton           |
| 2016 | 35 | FIRST PLACE  | Silly Spirit- - - - -          | Alicia Hurd             |
|      | 33 | SECOND PLACE | Attitude - - - - -             | Cherry Langley Chambers |
| 2017 | 39 | FIRST PLACE  | Fired Was Tim Burton - - - - - | Lauren Holman           |
|      | 37 | SECOND PLACE | Blaming Asami - - - - -        | Nicole Carter           |
| 2018 | 45 | FIRST PLACE  | Green Sea Turtle - - - - -     | Jacob Billings          |
|      | 44 | SECOND PLACE | Only to Be with You- - - - -   | Nicole Carter           |
| 2019 | 49 | FIRST PLACE  | Still Life (Vanitas) - - - - - | Jacob Billings          |
|      | 49 | SECOND PLACE | Obsidian Sunset- - - - -       | Ben Platnick            |
| 2020 | 56 | FIRST PLACE  | The Hawk - - - - -             | Zachariah Williams      |
|      | 57 | SECOND PLACE | Hedy Lamarr Portrait - - - - - | Zachariah Williams      |

## IN MEMORIAM: POETRY & CREATIVE NONFICTION BY DR. ELIZABETH WURZ

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|       |  |   |
|-------|--|---|
| 8     | In <i>Cuttings</i> Chapbook, Blast Furnace 1st Place | You Asked Me to Plant Your Amaryllis   Originally published in <i>Cuttings</i>  |
| 15-18 | Pushcart-Nominated                                   | What Will You Tell Her   Originally published in <i>Quarterly West</i> : 81   |
| 21    | In <i>Cuttings</i> Chapbook, Blast Furnace 1st Place | The Nap After Swimming   Originally published in <i>The GSU Review</i> : 51   |
| 27    |  | To Chicago, The Eagle   Originally published in <i>O-Dark-Thirty: The Literary Journal of Veterans' Writing</i>         |
| 30    | In <i>Cuttings</i> Chapbook, Blast Furnace 1st Place | The Moth She Noticed   Originally published in <i>The Gay &amp; Lesbian Review Worldwide</i> : 21                       |
| 36    | In <i>Cuttings</i> Chapbook, Blast Furnace 1st Place | Without Counting   Originally published in <i>Crazyhorse</i> : 58   |
| 41    | In <i>Cuttings</i> Chapbook, Blast Furnace 1st Place | After My Third Tattoo   Originally published in <i>Rattle</i> : 14.1  |
| 47    | In <i>Cuttings</i> Chapbook, Blast Furnace 1st Place | Rehab   Originally published in <i>Cuttings</i>   |
| 53    | In <i>Cuttings</i> Chapbook, Blast Furnace 1st Place | To the Ceramic House before the Second Firing   Originally published in <i>The GSU Review</i> : 49                      |
| 58    | In <i>Cuttings</i> Chapbook, Blast Furnace 1st Place | In Response to the Blood   Originally published in <i>Poetry Potion</i> : 3 and Featured Poem on poetrypotion.com, 2011 |

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60 REPRINT OF ALL COVER ART SINCE 2011



### About *Seaswells*

The mission of *Seaswells*, the literary-art journal at the College of Coastal Georgia, is to showcase the writing, art, and photography of our students, in order to foster important modes of thinking and connecting. The student-run print journal is a collaborative effort between JOUR 1000 students, *Seaswells* club members, our faculty advisor, and students who contribute their work. Copies of the journal, which are funded by student activity fees, are free for students and other Coastal community members.

*Seaswells* conducts four contests each year: the Barr Poetry Contest, the *Seaswells* photography contest, the *Seaswells* Art Contest, and the Austin/Garner Prose Contest. These contests are open only to currently enrolled Coastal Georgia students, who can submit up to five entries in each contest during the fall and the beginning of spring semesters. Entries are judged anonymously, and cash prizes total \$1000.

In order to be considered for publication, submitted works must not disparage or in any way harm those in marginalized communities, including but not limited to

disability, race, religion, national origin, gender identity, or sexual orientation. All submissions must be original, previously unpublished, and must include a bio between 50 and 75 words, written in third person. Edit and proofread carefully; we reserve the right to edit but cannot proofread all submissions.

Entries should be emailed to [seaswells@ccga.edu](mailto:seaswells@ccga.edu). All photography and art entries should be attached as high quality digital files, at least 1MB/300dpi, and poetry and prose entries must be attached as .doc or .docx files. A length of fewer than fifty lines is recommended for poems, and 1,500 words or fewer for prose. If submitting in more than one category, compose a separate email for each category. For full guidelines visit [www.ccca.edu/seaswells](http://www.ccca.edu/seaswells).

*Seaswells* serves as a gathering ground for artistic modes of thinking. As Edward Hirsch, poet and former president of the Guggenheim Foundation, reminds us, “the arts give us a way of thinking that you can’t get in other places...A healthy democracy needs a healthy world of the arts.”

### Editor’s Note and Dedication to Dr. Elizabeth Wurz

In this issue of *Seaswells*, we celebrate the best student work from the past decade. We present the first and second place winners since 2011 in our Barr Poetry contests, Austin/Garner Prose contests, and *Seaswells* Art contests. The only exception is we republish third place instead of second place in prose for 2011, in order to align with our current guidelines. From our *Seaswells* Photography contests, we showcase the best overall, best color, best black & white, and best computer-enhanced winners.

I, Dr. Melilli-Hand, have been fortunate to work with such wonderful student work and amazing student editors since I became faculty advisor to *Seaswells* in 2016. I will miss serving in this role but will continue supporting *Seaswells* and am excited for what the future holds with the talented Dr. Farris as the faculty advisor.

The cover art for this issue, *A Peaceful Transition*, is a graphite drawing by Asher Wogomon that we first published in 2018. Asher explains “my piece is an illustration of the inner peace I’ve experienced throughout my transition from female to male.” We selected this piece due to its impressive technical skill, artistry, and ability to help represent the college’s dedication to diversity and inclusion.

In consultation with Asher, we added color to his piece. These colors match those of designer Daniel Quasar’s recent Pride flag, which includes Gilbert Baker’s traditional rainbow, with red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sunlight, green for nature, royal blue for art and serenity, and violet for spirit; the addition of black and brown stripes for racial justice; and the colors from Monica Helms’ Transgender Pride Flag design, with pink and light blue representing the gender binary and white representing non-binary and gender-nonconforming people.

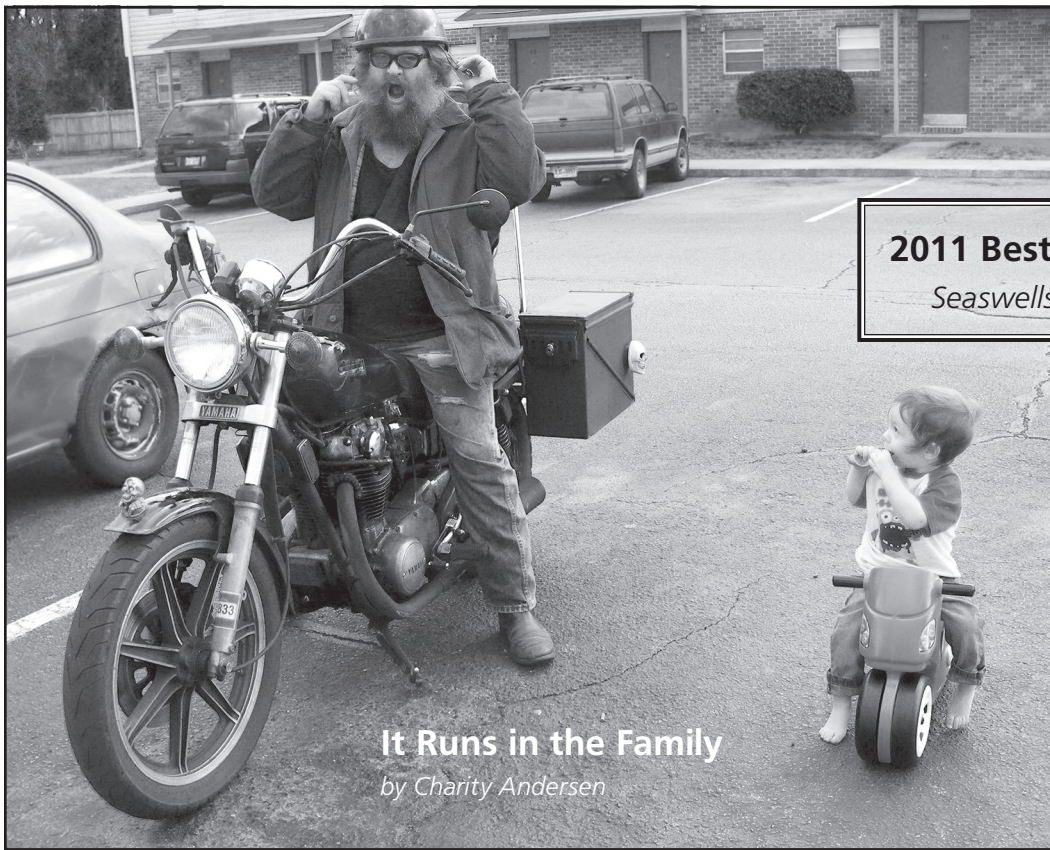
We also highlight diversity and inclusion as we honor the life and work of Dr. Elizabeth (Beth) Wurz, to whom this issue of *Seaswells* is dedicated. Dr. Wurz was among the best of Coastal Georgia since she joined the faculty in 2011 until her sudden passing in 2020. She is survived by her wife Krista, their eight children, and countless admiring students and colleagues, through whom her positive impact continues. Because of Dr. Wurz’s passionate dedication to her students and social causes, particularly racial and LGBTQ+ justice, her powerful teaching, and her leadership, she was posthumously bestowed the Professor Lifelong Advocacy Award. Among many other examples, she initiated the new campus policy to utilize students’ chosen names in campus systems, as legal or given names often contradict students’ identities and perpetuate harm.

Dr. Wurz was also an accomplished writer, with publications in myriad literary journals and an award-winning chapbook. Much of her work explores social justice issues. With Krista’s permission, we have republished a sample of her work. Her poems and nonfiction are intermingled with student work to signify the way she was always available to and interacting with students. She was likewise always there for her department and colleagues, and her gentle openness belied her fierce advocacy as she consistently voiced opposition whenever injustice or unfairness was present. We all deeply miss our “squeaky wheel.”



**Dr. Elizabeth (Beth) Wurz**





**2011 Best Black & White Photo**  
Seaswells Photography Contest

**It Runs in the Family**  
*by Charity Andersen*

**2011  
First Place**  
Austin/Garner  
Prose Contest

### **It Seems So Basic**

*by Elizabeth Anderson*

The *New York Times* has a formula online: articles that have been judged to be the most interesting in a given section are listed at the top of the page by headline, with brief summaries. There is a bar dividing these from a longer list of headlines in a smaller font, with no summaries at all. Most days, the link at the end of this second list is titled “Names of the Dead.” So buried, it appears on the pages of the Politics, World, and US sections — a list in alphabetical order of the soldiers who have fallen in service to this country. The Pentagon has released their information (name, age, hometown, branch of service, rank, and division) and the newspaper has published it as they receive it, under the same introductory paragraph, for years. I found it about 10 months ago, when my subscription for the local newspaper ended. I don’t remember whether I wept out of fear or rage or plain anxiety at the sight of that list, but I know I cried. For weeks, I halted my morning routine long enough to read the “Names of the Dead.” I felt compelled, as an American, to recognize the death of our soldiers in combat. A terrible assumption was all it took to flip my new ritual on its head.

It was still early in the morning, and winter, and there was little light in the room save the blue-white glow of the computer screen. My dogs, still smelling of grass and morning dew, had settled in at the base of my chair. I sipped my coffee every half minute or so, setting the cup back down on my desk with the ceramic *thunk*. Seeing that more names had been released was an unpleasant way to finish such a peaceful morning, but I clicked the link and pushed my coffee cup away. The last sentence of the introduction was the only

one that ever changed. This time, it said the names had all come from the conflict in Iraq. There were five, but I only saw the Marine.

His first name was Christopher, and there was a city in California printed next to his name. He was 20 years old. My reading, my arrogant reverence, stalled. In my head, I rifled frantically through my high school memories, groping for details. There was a girl, Lisa, who had borrowed my history notes and eaten lunch at my table. We had never escaped that limbo between acquaintance and friendship. She married quickly, eagerly, the way some girls do when the boy they love decides to join the military. I had their wedding photo tucked away somewhere: Lisa beaming in an ivory sundress, Chris smiling and sweating in Marine Corps ceremonial garb. He had swept her off to the west coast. I couldn’t remember their last name.

I began to lecture myself — there were dozens of Marines named Chris stationed in California, I hadn’t spoken to Lisa in two years; this was none of my business, et cetera — but grief and a kind of mindless terror overran my pragmatism. I felt desperately sorry for Lisa. What would she do, if this was *her* Christopher who’d been killed? She had been so proud of their marriage and his military service. It was unfathomable that she should lose her husband, with the whole of the country between her and her family, at 20 years old. It was unfair. It was wrong.

I called my husband to babble, to hear his voice, and found the sense to ask if he remembered Chris’s last name. He did. It wasn’t the name on the computer screen. Even



after I hung up the phone, though, the rush of relief I had been hoping for never came. The name on the *New York Times* webpage was suddenly much more than a name. They all were. There were five people on my computer screen who had left their homes to serve their country, and they weren't coming back. I was aware now of five different sets of family members, drinking buddies, and mentors whose worlds had stopped spinning, with yet more pain and incredulity than my own just had, and for greater reason.

Death, the greatest imminent threat, took on a harsh new light in my eyes. Moreover, since I was considering the deaths of the soldiers, Marines, sailors, and airmen of an all-volunteer defense force, I began to understand the difference between war as a reality and war as a media concept. It was an epiphany tainted with the same sense of blind fumbling as a teenager's realization that adulthood is an inevitable and grown-up life is directly subject to the consequences of his or her current actions. I stared at the list of men. Not one was in his 30s. If I had asked what the lives of our soldiers were worth before this moment, it had been as a piece of political rhetoric. I asked the question aloud now in my silent office

and found myself pleading for an answer I could believe in.

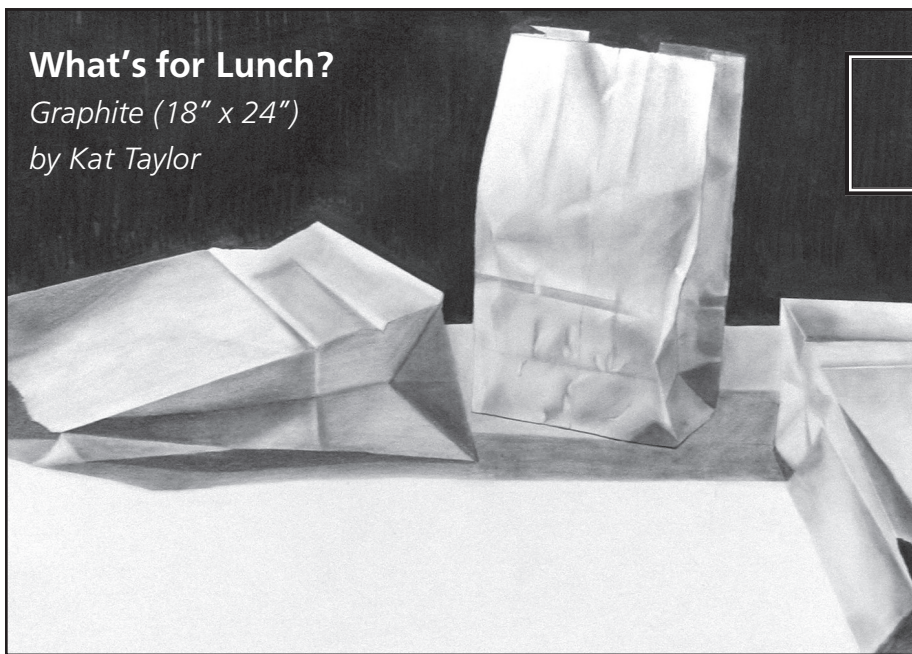
I weighed the usual careworn questions with a new precision: What would I die for? What lengths would I go to, to defend my way of life? Who did I trust to make such decisions for me? After a while, my answers began to lose their glamour. People had answered before me and were answering every day, electing to serve their country in the most deadly, literal fashion. I had never considered the integrity it took to do such a thing. I had trivialized and trampled on it by only thinking of those men and women as nameless bodies in uniforms, as instruments of aggressive foreign policy at best or, at worst, political collateral damage. Worrying over Chris, and the very real people he would leave behind, brought that home for me.

I still seek out the Names of the Dead. I turn off my music, put down my coffee, and read them each in turn, holding myself back from any sense of patriotic duty or pride. It is an act of mourning now, and of gratitude for their faith in our country. It is an act of anger, too, at the way I used to think, and at the system that continues to use such canned solemnity when uttering the phrase *human life*.

### What's for Lunch?

*Graphite (18" x 24")*

*by Kat Taylor*



### 2011 First Place

*Seaswells Art Contest*

### 2011 Second Place

*Seaswells Art Contest*

### Curtains

*Charcoal and Chalk on  
Red-toned Paper (18" x 24")*

*by Lindsey Cirmotich*



**2011 Best Computer-Enhanced Photo**

*Seaswells Photography Contest*



**Ready to Race**

*by Kara Jackson*

**Chaucer's Teacher**

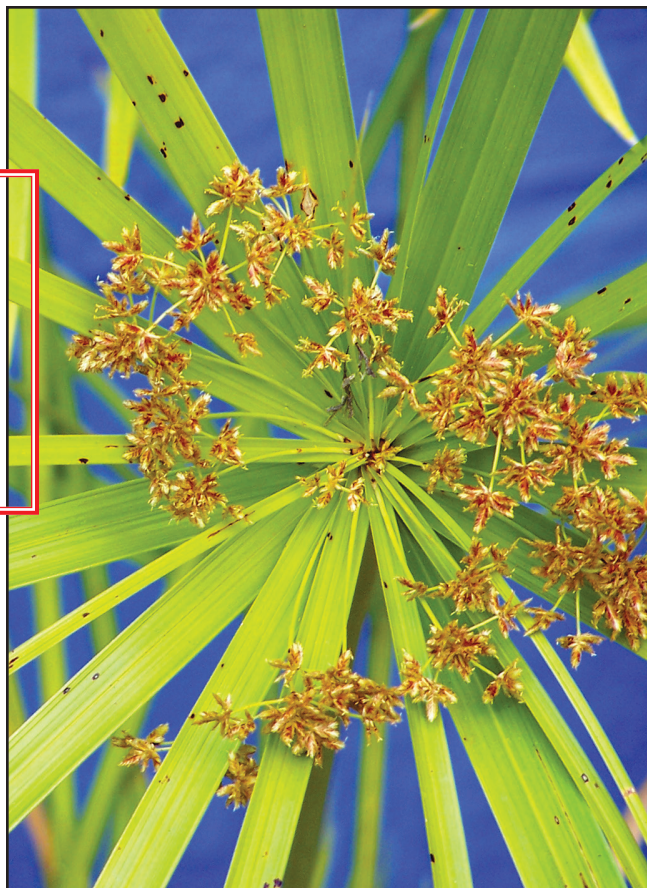
*by Karen Price*

There was a woman on our trip,  
Whose true vocation seemed, a moving lip.  
She talked and talked, then talked a little more.  
She talked 'til our listening ears were sore.  
But words were her love, to speak or to write.  
They took her to places far from life's plight.  
She dressed like a child would, most of the time,  
Caring not for the satins, or heels so divine.  
She wore all her hair down, mopping with curls.  
Had a nose full of freckles, just like a girl  
Seen in a school-yard, and yet she seemed old.  
Something about her eyes looked very bold.  
She rode proud and high, upon midnight's steed,  
Afraid of falling behind, she'd often lead.  
The woman was confusing to us all,  
Now appearing little, next, very tall.  
Stitching her words as the finest tailor,  
Next thing you know, she cussed like a sailor!

Gentle and sweet and soft as a flower,  
She'd read us a story, come bed-time's hour.  
Don't go thinking she's nice as a daisy,  
Tough as she is, she might be half crazy.  
A teacher by trade, a learner by right,  
She dreamed of her words, from morning 'til night.  
To err is human, to forgive divine-  
This was the way that her heart was inclined.  
This lady was chaos, right from the start.  
If you didn't hate her, she stole your heart.  
She was funny sometimes, and friendly, too.  
She had a strange way of capturing you.  
But with that same art, she had a real flair,  
For keeping her distance, even while there.

**2011 Best Color Photo**

*Seaswells Photography Contest*



**Universal Truth**

*By Janet Dominy*

**2011 Second Place**

*Barr Poetry Contest*





**2011 Best Overall Photo**

Seaswells Photography Contest

**Breaking News: Blood-sucker Tracked to Pond**

*Computer-enhanced Photo*

*by Pamela Westcott*

**The Marsh**

*by Kimberly Helms*

The marsh is living, breathing, sighing, singing  
I have entered into the sanctuary  
Into the solace, beneath the inky blackness  
Silky, verdant curtains fill the murky pools

Others enter, anticipating, wading, watching,  
Countless voices, ageless melodies  
Join in perfect harmony  
Rising above the blackness of the pond

The marsh waits for me  
To join, to retreat, to draw me in  
Sliding backward, I kneel, I pause, I wait  
The marsh looks back at me

Graceful limbs hold up a smoky canopy  
White ivy-laced trunks and piney boughs form the canvas  
I wait, expecting, needing to be inspired  
Straining to hear the song, the voices of many

Ebony silhouettes blend together swaying with  
Lily whiteness closed within  
The humming chorus lifts and transcends  
Into the stillness of the night

Groves of pine shelter the tranquil solitude  
Mosses and grasses swish, swirl, stretch  
To the ever hanging branches of grey moss  
Voices crescendo and peak

Open to receive the dewy drink,  
The marsh pauses in her chorus to meditate  
Lulling the night into peaceful sleep  
Humming with the timeless chant of beauty,  
Peace and darkness

The stillness of the air quiets the single voice  
And blends the croak, the chirp, the cry  
Until light breaks into the shelter  
Breaking through the night

I rise with the dawn; the sky raises  
the stained glass  
With the breaking light, the moment is lost.

**2011 First Place**

Barr Poetry Contest



## The Maiden and the Mouse

by Lance T. Brown

2011 Third Place

Austin/Garner Prose Contest

There she is, the love of his life, Samantha Day! Every evening she passes by on her way home from work, and every day he sits on the steps and watches. Maybe today will be the day he speaks. Maybe today will be the day he sums up the courage to at least say, "Hello." It had only been a few years since that day that she once spoke to him:

"Excuse me," she said.

"Y – Y – Yes," stammered Timmy.

"Could you please tell me where this address is?" asked Samantha. Timmy just pointed to the building two doors down.

Since that day Timothy Ledbetter, or Timmy as he is known by on the block, has had the crush of all crushes.

That one moment in time has lightened his ever so dreary life. Aside from his favorite comic, *The Green Hornet*, there is nothing Timmy loved more than to watch Samantha walk down the street. She always had a smile on her angelic face and always looked beautiful; but why wouldn't she. She was an aspiring model who had done some local magazines and a few commercials, but still had not gotten her "Big Break."

Working part-time at a local restaurant had provided her plenty of time to work on her modeling career; and even though she had not made it big, she was hopeful that she would.

Timmy, on the other hand, had very few aspirations in life. He was 25 years old and had worked as a delivery boy at the local grocery store since he was 13 years old. Timmy played a big part in the neighborhood; he delivered groceries to all the elderly.

Two of his loyal customers were the "Bingo Sisters," as they were affectionately named by everyone. First, there is Mrs. Mildred Lutz. Mrs. Mildred is the local grandmother of the neighborhood. Born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, she moved here to Boston, Massachusetts, in the early 30s. She worked as a seamstress for 25 years before retiring with arthritis of the hands. She has curly white hair, a pointed nose, and always has a smile for everyone. She uses her nearly 70 years on earth to help and guide young adults and children of the neighborhood.

Then, there is Mrs. Agnes Wellborn. Mrs. Agnes can best be described as the "Wicked Witch of the North." She is 73 going on dead, and is afflicted with every ailment known to man! Plus, she has no patience. She peers out of her dollar-store bifocal lenses, wearing her hand-me-down apron. Her pale, wrinkled skin appears as though it hasn't seen sunlight in over a decade. Her voice can be heard for blocks over as she yells at all the small children in the neighborhood.

"Timmy," she would bellow. "Timmy, come here." Timmy would drop whatever he was doing to help Mrs. Agnes. She and Mrs. Mildred were his extended family. They lived on the floor above him, in adjoining apartments. The highlight of their week was playing bingo every Wednesday at the local church.

When she wasn't playing bingo, Mrs. Agnes was finding some poor soul to yell at. She would even find a reason to yell at Tiger.

Tiger was the neighborhood stray. He was a five-year-old Persian who had been left behind by his family when they moved. He was only two years old then. That was three years

ago and ever since he had been foraging for food in trash cans, alleys, and sidewalks. Tiger was also a Champion Mouser. He had developed his skill by living in old abandoned houses on the block. Occasionally, the Bingo Sisters would set out a can of tuna for him to eat.

But enough about Tiger. How was Timmy to ever get to know Samantha? He could barely speak to the Bingo Sisters, let alone a beautiful girl like Samantha. One day Mrs. Agnes decided to put things in motion to help Timmy out.

She had called the restaurant where Samantha worked and mentioned that there is a cheaper apartment in their building. Knowing that Samantha was working as a waitress while she waited for her big break, she knew she would jump at the opportunity to move. She only lived two buildings over, but the move would be worth it, if she could save some money.

"Hello, Samantha?" said Mrs. Agnes.

"Yes," replied Samantha.

"This is Mrs. Agnes, Agnes Wellborn."

"Hello, Mrs. Agnes," Samantha replied.

"The reason I am calling, is to let you know that an apartment in our building has become available to rent. I am friends with the landlord and am positive I can save you some money if you are interested."

"That would be wonderful! I could really use a break in my rent right now. Work is been slow, and my landlord isn't so friendly," Samantha stated.

"Why don't you come over tonight and take a look at the place?" asked Mrs. Agnes.

"Tonight would be fine" said Samantha as she said goodbye and hung up to go back to work.

Overhearing the conversation that had taken place, Mrs. Mildred seemed puzzled.

"What are you up to, Agnes?" inquired Mrs. Mildred.

"I am trying to do something that should have been done a while ago: get those two to talk," exclaimed Mrs. Agnes.

"Who?" asked Mrs. Mildred.

Mrs. Agnes replied, "Samantha and Timothy. Those who see each other every day and it is just amazing that that Timmy of ours has not worked up the nerve to talk to her."

Mrs. Mildred retorted, "You know he doesn't have much luck in that department."

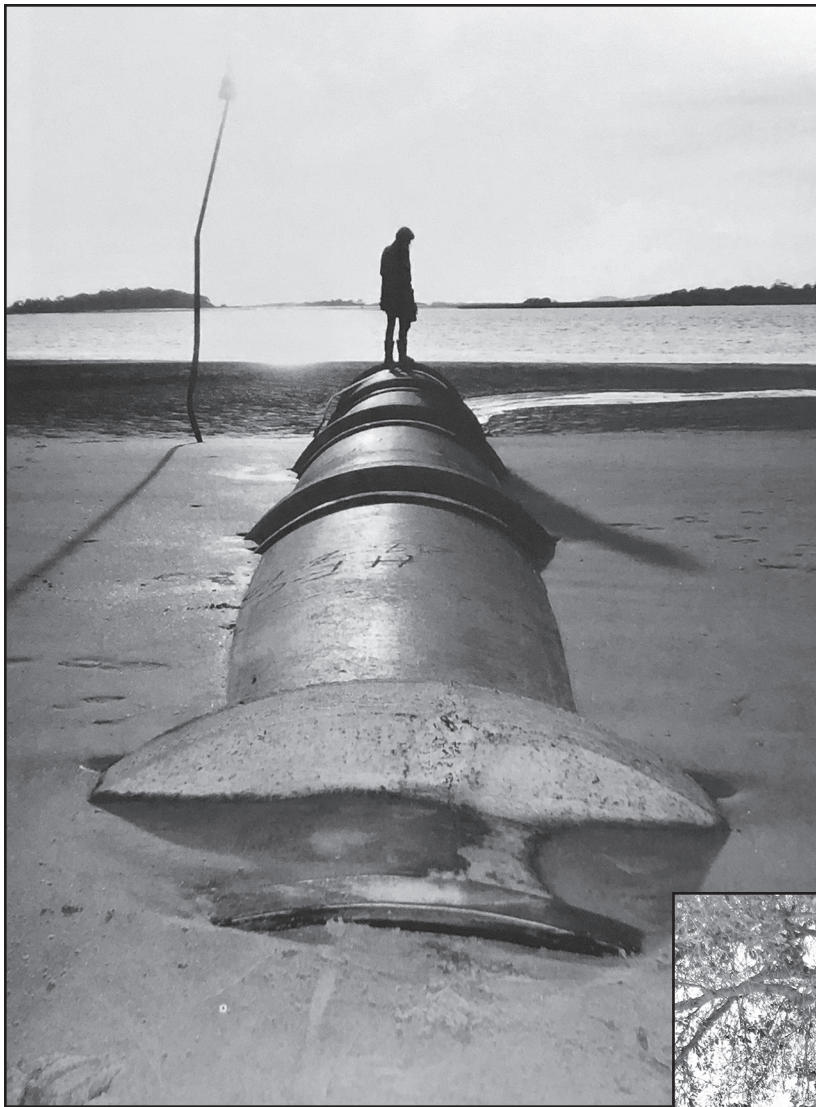
"Much luck?" Mrs. Agnes said with sarcasm in her voice. "He doesn't have any. He hasn't taken the rabbit's foot out of his pocket!"

"He is just shy," replied Mrs. Mildred.

"Bashful was shy; this boy is petrified!" Mrs. Agnes responded. "We have got to do something or he will end up alone and foraging for food like Tiger!"

So that evening after work, just like clockwork, Samantha came walking down the street; and just like clockwork, Timmy was on the steps waiting. Only this time, Samantha would not just walk on by. The Bingo Sisters were on the top of the stairs waiting for her. As she approached, you could hear Mrs. Agnes yell out, in her most piercing shrill, "Whistle, you dumb bastard!" just as Samantha got to the front steps. Timmy smiled and said with a grin, "It's about time that old bag did something for me!"





**If**

*by Justin Gines*

**2012 Best Black &  
White Photo**

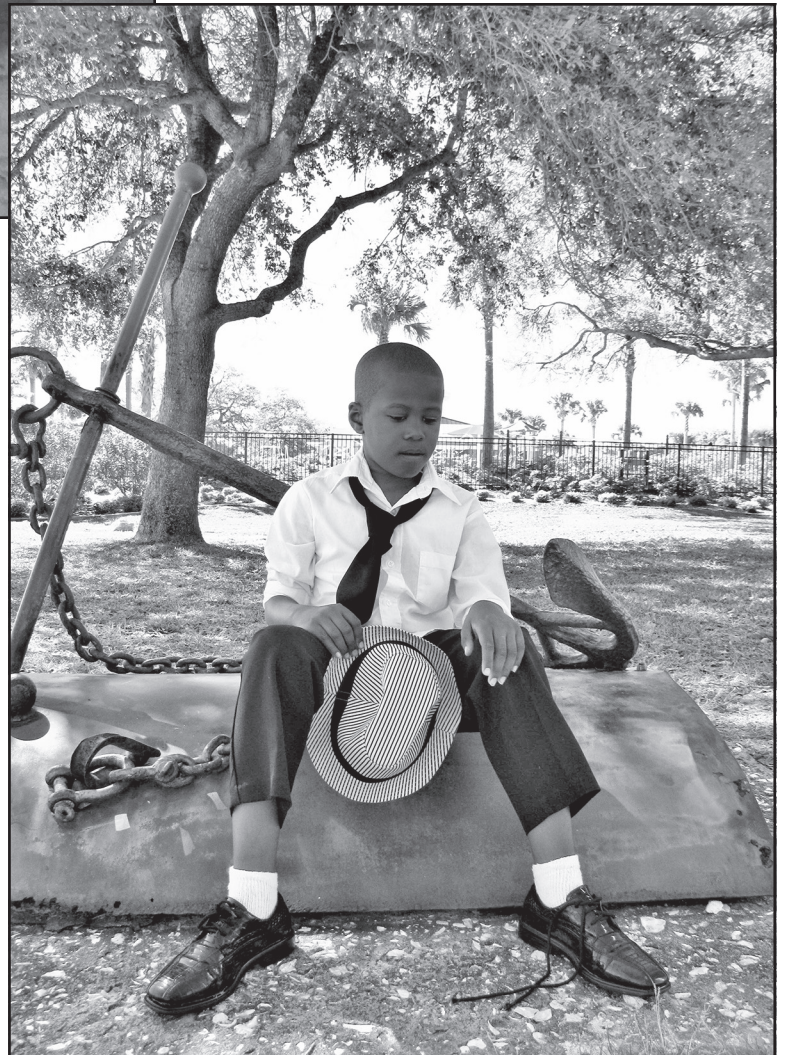
*Seaswells Photography  
Contest*

**Blues in Black & White**

*by Shawntay Rivers*

**2012 Best Overall Photo**

*Seaswells Photography Contest*



**2012 Second Place**  
*Seaswells Art Contest*

**Summer's Last Gasp**  
*Watercolor (13" x 9")*  
*by Jamie Hardy*



## **You Asked Me to Plant Your Amaryllis**

*by Dr. Elizabeth Wurz*

~First published in *Cuttings*, Blast Furnace Poetry Chapbook 1st Place~

I  
For four days, I left the ready-grow kit unopened  
on my kitchen counter. I untangle the folded directions  
from the bulb and roots. The Red Lion  
started its bloom in the dark.

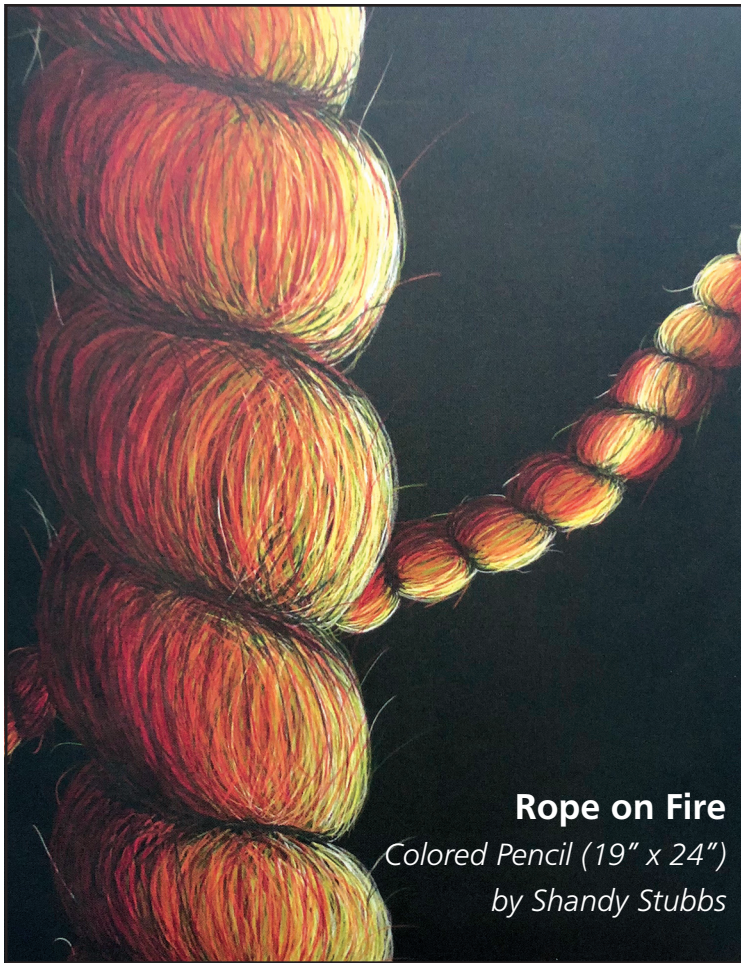
II  
Around the blooming flame, your son, my daughter,  
you and I sit down for supper. You laugh,  
"We're like an old married couple."

We decorate the tree with snowflakes the kids made  
out of silver glitter, glue, and tongue depressors. On my  
grocery list you wrote, "I love you." Now, we sit here  
while our children eat frosted stars, and you tell me  
some friend stopped by your house last night  
and watched the Bulldogs' game.  
He left this morning.

This is the last time I'll imagine a family  
with a woman who is not out.

III  
After a resting period,  
perennials flower again.

I remove one stamen from the Red Lion  
and brush pollen on its stigma. The light brown ovum  
swells and opens.



**2012 First Place**  
*Seaswells Art Contest*

**Rope on Fire**  
*Colored Pencil (19" x 24")*  
*by Shandy Stubbs*



**2012 Best Computer-Enhanced Photo**  
*Seaswells Photography Contest*

**Come Over to My Pad**  
*by Pamela Westcott*



**2012 Second Place**

Barr Poetry Contest

**Redwood D.C. IV**

by *Jeri L.M.S. Guyette*

Dawn drags its feet like a  
coffee drinker  
in need of a caffeine fix.  
It can't come fast enough for me.  
I've wrestled  
with the sandman  
all through the raven night.

He was stingy  
with his dust of  
slumber  
and so I  
held his breath as  
collateral.  
When he finally turned blue  
in the face,  
he blew me  
gossamer veils  
w/o dreams to take the place  
of you.

Now the dew  
torments me,  
dampens my skin with  
loneliness  
and I can't even use an electric blanket  
to stay warm for  
this chill runs straight through my  
bones.

But,  
Dawn brings the promise  
of a new day,  
another chance to  
capture the high of your  
existence,  
another chance for you to  
reach out your hand and  
finger the ten digits  
that will bring me closer  
to you.

My ears awaken  
with the sunrise  
to bask in the tenor  
of your voice

**Uprising**

by *Samantha Barwick*

**2013 Best Black & White Photo**

*Seaswells* Photography Contest

## The Lamp

by Bennett Rainey

2012 First Place

Barr Poetry Contest

Once, in need of shelter,  
    Weary from the rain;  
I ventured deep into the cave,  
    Seeking solace from the pain.

I came to know its secrets;  
    Water dripping to the floor.  
Cool, dark places hidden;  
    I thought to leave no more.

Cold rock against my face,  
    Cheek caressed by the stone,  
Soothing my fevered brow.  
    Anonymous here and alone.

Occasionally would come,  
    Upon rustling paper wings,  
Fleeting black ghost of form;  
    Transient, shadowy things.

To ignore or overcome them,  
    A simple task for me.  
The cave was my refuge  
    Where safe I could be.

I thought I needed not  
    Light that burned above.  
There lived heartache and sorrow;  
    The tragedies of love.

That light had burned my skin.  
    My eyes ached in its glare.  
Torment it had caused me;  
    Only hurt lived out there.

Now wandering in my cave,  
    Treasure I had found,  
Among the old and odd debris,  
    Strewn upon the ground.

A dull and tarnished oil lamp,  
    Relic from the past.  
I lit its worn and tattered wick  
    And found true comfort at last.

Its glow reminded me of  
    What power shines most bright  
And reignited in me  
    A yearning for the light.

Then came a whirlwind of sound;  
    Dervishes, foul demons of air,  
Rushing torrent of leathery wings,  
    Swarms of sorrow everywhere.

Blinded by the blind,  
    Shrill cries fill the room.  
Suffocating, burdened, drowning,  
    Now my fortress is my tomb.

No clear path before me  
    To guide me safely through.  
No friends there to comfort me,  
    Or keep my footing true.

As I fought against the tide,  
    I remembered what was found:  
That small and battered lamp that lay  
    At my feet upon the ground.

Tightly I gripped my lamp  
    And, against my nature, trusted  
In the weak and gentle beam  
    From relic worn and rusted.

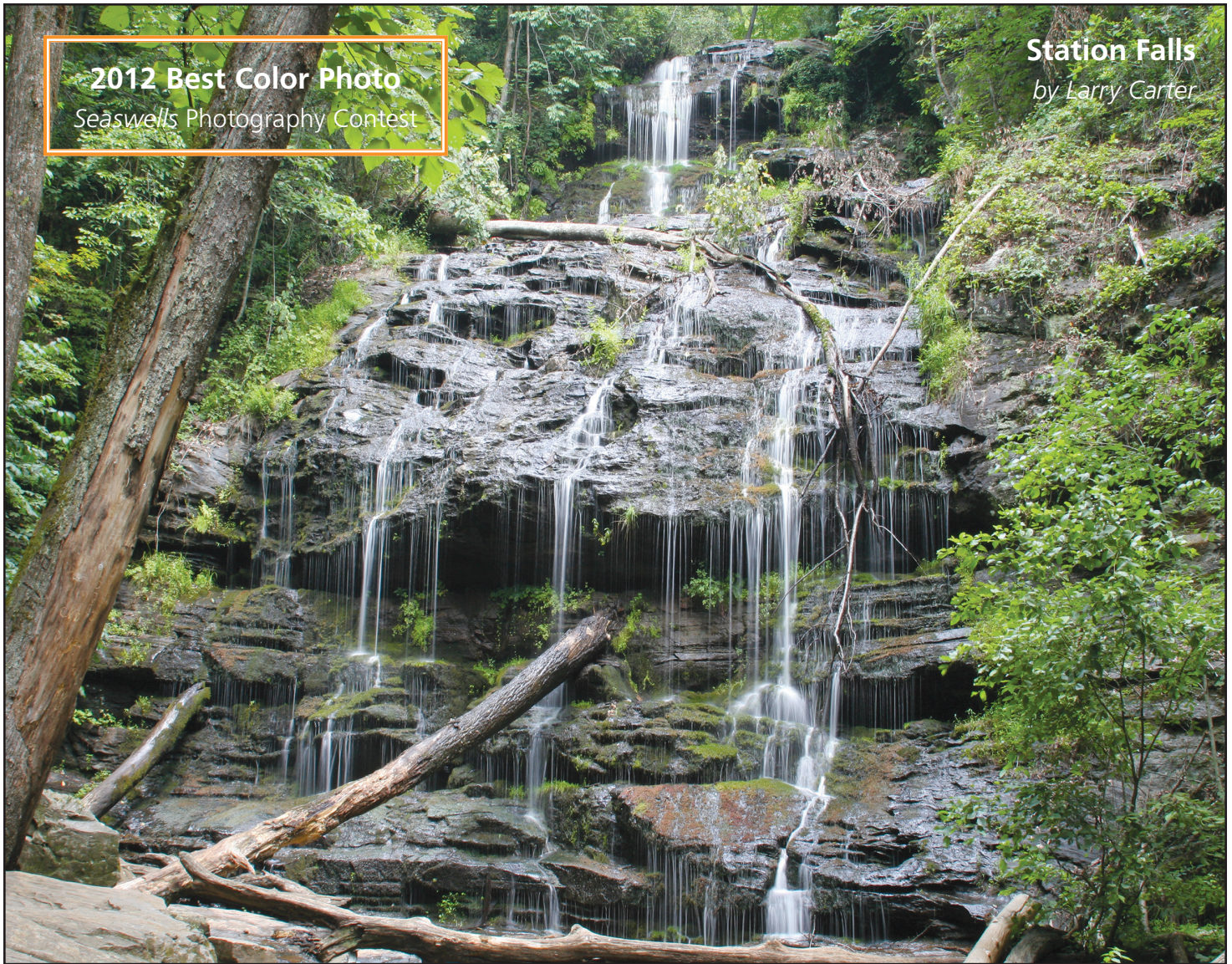
I prayed that God would let it  
    Burn long and bright.  
Then I gave myself to it,  
    Followed its beacon light.

It led me safely out  
    Past the troubles and foes.  
In it I found solace,  
    Comfort in spite of woes.

Then I came into the light  
    That so long I had denied.  
Warmth I had forgotten,  
    Beauty and peace sublime.

Now I live in the splendor,  
    Just the occasional cloud,  
But I always have my sweet lamp  
    For whenever there is doubt.





**Station Falls**  
*by Larry Carter*

**2012 Best Color Photo**  
*Seaswells Photography Contest*

**The Ancient Oak**  
*by Kimberly Helms*

**2012 First Place**  
*Austin/Garner Prose Contest*

Several hundred years ago in a place not far away, the animals gathered in the midst of the forest holding a single acorn. Agreement was made that this acorn would be the perfect seed to plant. The animals envisioned that they would help the seed to become a mighty oak and in return, the oak would remember all the animals that planted and cherished it.

The birds wanted the tree to grow straight and strong so they could rest in his branches and build homes for their babes and have the tree sway them all to sleep. The squirrels wanted the tree to grow straight, springy branches with colorful leaves. They wanted a place to store their food, to teach their children to run and jump, and a place to play 'hide-and-seek'. The animals that would gather at the base of its trunk wanted a shady place to rest and a place to escape from the hot sun, the harsh winds, or the storms of

life. Making their home at the base of the great tree, they surrounded him with pleasant play.

The mighty oak grew and grew. He played with the animals that helped him to grow and he became very old. He played with children of children and told them his ancient stories of long ago. He was cozy and comfortable nestled between the friendly pines and he gladly gave his mossy hair to the birds to build their nests and swayed them gently in the breeze to rock them to sleep. Through the storms, the animals gathered beneath and against his trunk. The mighty oak powerfully held back the rushing winds and powerful storms. Beneath his branches, they rested, knowing that the ancient oak would protect them all. He became strong and his strength and his wisdom never failed; he remembered the birds, the animals, and the pines; even the buzzing insects were his constant friends.



He loved the nights of the harvest moon when the animals stayed up to play. They danced in the moonlight and tickled him with their scampering feet. The twinkling fireflies would play in his beard and the insects would buzz and sing happy songs. The happy pines would lift their boughs and sway in the breeze. The tender vines wrapped their tendrils around him and opened with flowers to greet him every morning and the ancient oak was very happy.

Many years went by until the 'peace of the forest' was abruptly broken by foreign sounds, cracking noises, grinding screeches, and blasting booms. The ancient oak was fearful of the strange invaders and had no way to comfort his forest friends who fled with terror at the bitter invasion of their tranquil existence. The birds flew away and the squirrels and animals ran from the forest. His pine tree friends were also unable to flee the onslaught of noise and in terror stood with him to take the brunt of the noise and eventual violence. Feeling the orange tape being wrapped around his body, he heard the word "protected" before closing himself into his trunk to await his fate and for the axe to fall across his body.

Many days passed and the angry clamor continued to replace the solace of the forest until one day the noises

ceased, the rumbling ground no longer shook, and the dust settled back to the land. Rising cautiously out of his trunk, he cautiously asked, "Where are you, brother pines? Where are you, friendly birds? Where are you, gentle animals?" The scarred earth, the stakes in the ground, and the scattered decay of the plants were more than the ancient tree could weather. He understood that his friends were forced to leave and he was overcome for once in his old age with something unfamiliar to him...loneliness.

Though he was protected, the ancient one had no one left to tell his stories to or to rock in his leafy boughs. No one was left to braid his lifeless locks or swing from his drooping branches.

No one was left to sing in the moonlight. Now the ancient oak endures exposure to the ravages inflicted onto the forest. The owl, another ancient creature, is left to sit among his branches, trying to rouse the soul that was lost. Bewail the oaks with their mossy long hair!

Will he vanish as the great chestnuts or become gnarled in eerie silence and solitude?

The ancient oak slips back into his trunk, never to return again.



**2013 Best Computer-Enhanced Photo**

*Seaswells* Photography Contest

**Shuttered Ruins**

*by Pamela Westcott*



## Where It's At

by Ashley Miller

**2012 Second Place**  
Austin/Garner Prose Contest

Hi Y'all! My name is Olivia Grace Morton, formerly Simpson. I am a good ole G.R.I.T.S., you know a Girl Raised In The South. I've got Southern values with Southern charm. I am as sweet as cornbread, and I've got a bite as sharp as White Lightning.

I graduated from the local high school (Go 'Cats!) and four years later I married my high school sweetheart. We moved to North Georgia where I had hoped to find my own little piece of "Tara." My hubby and I were going to work our dream jobs; have our dream house; and little ones running about the yard with the family dog. But it seems that life never pans out the way you quite want it to. Those things were just what I said: DREAMS.

Here I am almost thirty, my dream job failed with the recession; my little piece of "Tara" was taken by the bank; and my little ones are just a figment of my imagination. There are no buns in this oven! God has made other plans.

I am back in this Podunk coastal town. I know home is supposed to be where your roots are, but I told myself I would leave this town and never move back to it. But I'm starting to think this place is cursed; it always brings people back. I don't know how or why. I hate all the bugs here- after all this is the "Sand Gnat Capital of the World." I despise the flat land. Where are the hills and mountains? There are sooo many pine trees. Where is the change of seasons? It feels like summer all year long, like beach weather. And I've never been much of a beach person. I prefer the cool babbling brooks and the shady trees that change from greens to golds, reds, and brown during the season some call autumn. Can't you tell I'm so glad to be back?

You know, I figured by moving away that when I came back this place would somehow be different... changed... and by that I don't mean the new Longhorn's down the street. This place is still the same as when I left it. The same boring traffic lights, the same slow Sunday drivers, and the same old gossip (Guess who Carolyn Hardee is having an affair with?!)

I guess while I am here though, I should look on the brighter side of things. If I wasn't back here, I wouldn't be able to see my wonderful little red headed niece and nephew grow up. Lord knows they got that hair from their daddy! Their mama (my sister) her hair is as dark as the Columbian roasted coffee I like to drink. Ahh, those two children are just the apple of my eye. They are just so precious, even if that hair makes them mean as fire sometimes.

You know what else? If I wasn't here, I wouldn't be able to go back to school. I've got a new job in mind: Elementary school teacher. Of course, I'm not in it for the money! I just want to give those babies a proper education, plus it's birth control considering my "situation." Oh, but I haven't talked to you about my "situation" have I? Well that's just a doozy all on its own! That's why my 'little figment of my imagination children' are on the backburner.

Let's see...about four years ago I was diagnosed with an anomaly in my heart. So I had to have heart surgery- it was a sophisticated state of the art kind of surgery- they used a robot. It was so sophisticated that I, Olivia Grace Morton (formerly Simpson), am going to be in a medical journal! I just can't wait to see it!! ME...published. I can picture the article now it'll probably say: "Patient A was diagnosed with partial anomalous pulmonary...blah, blah, blah..." Frankly, I've always found it a mouthful to say, but I do hope that my doctor gives me an autographed copy!

Well my heart, it was just not normal. One of my pulmonary veins it connected to the wrong end of my heart, so all the blood in my heart was not circulating throughout my body. I just had a little ole recyclin' factory in the right side of my heart. I was tired all the time and come to find out the right side of my heart was TWICE the normal size that it should've been because of all that extra blood it was pumping. So to compensate for the room it needed, my heart caused my right lung to get smaller. That accounts for the reason why I always had trouble blowing out my birthday candles!

Here's another kicker before my surgery, my doctor told me that if I had gotten pregnant or by the time I had hit 40 I would've been as dead as a doornail! Can you believe that?? Now he's got me on something called Coo-me-dun or something (I have trouble saying it, too). But I'm an experiment, there's really no record on how long I should be on this stuff. I can't get preggers, at least not right now. It's IMPERATIVE!

So that's why I would rather immerse myself with little children and teach them. I would not only be able to help them, but they would help me as well. They would be my reminder as to why I've waited so long, while all my friends have jumped the baby train with at least two kids on board and their sanity out the window. TOOT! TOOT!

Well, you know what? Since I've been thinking about all this (and I've condensed it for you), I guess my life ain't so bad after all! I'm still married to my high school sweetheart, we're still going strong. I've also got the love of my family and my friends. Everyone that I truly do love and care about is right here: right around the corner or probably at the Super Wal-Mart. Plus, I've got my health even if I do take medication. And I guess I'll admit I've got happiness too! Even if I don't like this flat, marshy, pine tree-infested land; the sand gnats; or the beach there are good things that have come from all of this.

Now I realize that God does things for a reason. Even though at times we may feel like he makes our lives seem like a big ole pile of doggy doo that he's decided to throw at the fan. He's got plans for me and I've just got to find the courage and perseverance to trudge my way along the path to reach that salvation. One day. One day, my day will come when I can say that I was happy with the way my life turned out. And that I, Olivia Grace Morton (formerly Simpson), had no regrets! ONWARD!!



## What Will You Tell Her by Dr. Elizabeth Wurz

~First published in *Quarterly West*, Issue 81 • nominated for a Pushcart Prize~

I

In November 1996, I donated fourteen ova at Mt. Sinai Hospital on Manhattan's Upper East Side. On New York University's campus, between graduate-level American literature classes, I read one of the fertility clinic's ads in a magazine. The Reproductive Endocrinology Program paid donors who were between the ages of eighteen and thirty-two \$3000 for their eggs. With that money, and the \$2500 I earned while teaching Introduction to Creative Writing to NYU undergraduates during the Spring 1997 semester, I could pay almost five months' rent for my studio apartment at 208 West 23rd Street in Manhattan.

My grandfather's sister and her husband struggled with infertility before in-vitro fertilization was an option, and, on my interest form, I wrote that I wanted to help people like them become parents. An ovum that I would shed with uterine lining could become someone's child. I signed the clinic's forms; my donation is anonymous. The clinic's nurse demonstrated, on a practice model, where and how to give hormone injections. Into the foam leg, I injected saline. During the first two weeks of my cycle, I injected follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) into my thigh muscle and increased the number of viable eggs before the harvest procedure.

Every four days, I visited the clinic for a trans-vaginal ultrasound. The nurse placed a condom on the probe, I inserted it, and she measured and photographed sixteen ova. I looked forward to seeing those milky novae on the gray ultrasound screen, and I hoped that, in a Petri dish, one ovum might let sperm in. To the uterus of another woman, the blastocyst might attach.

Following the clinic's instructions for the eve of the harvest, I injected human chorion gonadotrophin (HCG) at nine thirty. From 8-10 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays, the poetry workshop with Philip Levine met at 19 University Place. Before our discussion of that night's last poem, I excused myself from the conference table and walked to the bathroom. Standing inside the stall, I found my hip bone with my thumb. With my middle finger, I found the right place on my ass, swabbed the skin with antiseptic, and injected HCG. Instead of joining my classmates at the Cedar Tavern after the workshop, I walked to the West 4th Street subway stop and took the B train home.

To get to Mt. Sinai by six a.m. for the harvest, I splurged on a taxi. The nurses rolled my gurney into the O.R., lifted the sheet beneath me, and placed me on the operating table. The anesthesiologist tightened the oxygen mask on my face, and Dr. Alan Cooperman began the surgery. In the recovery room, under heated blankets, I sipped hot Pekoe tea. The hospital would not let me leave on my own, so Sanjana Nair, my classmate, met me at the nurse's station and signed the discharge papers. At my follow-up appointment, Dr. Cooperman said, "We harvested fourteen ova. The nurse will give you options for birth control pills. If you become pregnant soon, you'll have a much higher chance of multiples."

When the nurse asked if I was sexually active, I said, "I don't need birth control. I've been an out lesbian since I turned nineteen." In November or December of 1996, those who selected me as a donor began in-vitro fertilization. Did the parents keep my donor essays? Did they keep a copy of my family medical history, the results of the clinic's genetic tests, the MMPI report, or the picture of me in Central Park?

II

In my apartment, I didn't have an Internet connection, so I spent a lot of time on computers in the NYU Library or in the Muhlenberg Branch of the New York Public Library. After the egg harvest, I searched for sperm donors and located the California Cryobank's website. For free, I browsed and read donors' short profiles, printed out ten of my favorites, and narrowed my list of ten down to three tall, young men who had dark hair, brown or hazel eyes, straight teeth, and good vision. For twelve dollars, I ordered three donors' long profiles and their essays. Each described himself as open-minded, artistic, and athletic, and each was in college. I rejected donors who answered the questions on the cryobank's forms with one or two-sentence responses, donors whose essays did not contain vivid description or specific examples, and one donor who described himself as "Pan-like."

At age 23, I thought the egg donation would be the closest I would get to becoming pregnant, but I placed the donors' profiles in the box where I kept my elementary and high-school report cards, college transcripts, A papers from undergraduate English courses, Alpha Omicron Pi scrapbooks, letters from college boyfriends, and the Ellen DeGeneres "Yep I'm Gay" issue of TIME.

I watched "The Puppy Episode" of *Ellen* alone. Though I'd lived in Manhattan for nine months, I had not found the "lesbian community" I longed for when I loaded up the U-Haul and moved from my first apartment in downtown Little Rock. While looking for lesbians sipping coffee at A Different Light's lectures and The Big Cup's poetry readings in Chelsea, I found mostly older gay men. The lesbian community I found in New York City, like the lesbian community I was part of in Little Rock, gathered mostly, or was visible mostly, in bars. At Henrietta Hudson and the Ruby Fruit Bar and Grill, the women were usually Caucasian.

At Crazy Nanny's and the Meow Mix, the crowd was racially diverse and working class. Even in New York City, women often partnered according to butch/femme roles.

In Crazy Nanny's, a woman who dressed like James Dean asked, "Are you a lipstick lesbian?"

I explained that, obviously, I wore lipstick and, yes, I was a lesbian: "That does not mean I am in here looking for a butch girlfriend who has her Marlboros rolled up in her t-shirt sleeve!"

Another woman in Crazy Nanny's asked, "Honey, do you know you're in a gay bar?"

After taking a long drink of beer, I said, "Sorry, I left my lesbian membership card back in Arkansas."

Among the women who wore dog collar necklaces and wallets on chains, my long hair, khaki shorts, Gap cardigan, and Birkenstocks made me feel like a tourist. In the creative writing program at NYU, there were other lesbians, and each was partnered. I envied those women who were exploring New York City together.

When the Defense of Marriage Act passed on September 21, 1996, I did not expect that, in my lifetime, I would use marriage as a word to describe my relationship with another woman. I hoped that, if any of the offspring of my egg donation were LGBT, they might be able to marry. The word family is what I expected to continue using, during my lifetime, to describe my future life partner, and I assumed that

*continued on Page 16*



New York City is where I would find her.

In the summer of 1997, Katharine and I met at the Meow Mix in the East Village. She asked the bartender what I was drinking and sent me another Wild Turkey and Coke. After I thanked Katharine for the drink, she sat on the bar stool beside me. The lead singer of that night's cover band was a black woman who shook her wide wooden bracelets like tambourines.

Katharine said, "I hope I come back reincarnated as a black woman. I'd have Tina Turner's voice."

Growing up in a wealthy Jewish family in Alabama, she was raised, primarily, by an African-American nanny. Men in her family were some of the first Jewish members of the country club in Birmingham. She, too, had been asked if she was straight when she visited lesbian bars, and she'd been teased about her Southern accent. Katharine spent a lot of time in the darkroom, developing film and making prints. Like the bars' clientele who formed cliques of people who were very much like themselves, Katharine and I were drawn to sameness and what reminded us of home.

Under her bed, she kept the nude self-portrait that her mother despised. Those three fragments did not include her face. At the beginning of our relationship, I spent hours lying on her bed, above those photographs, until her roommates left the apartment. I could sneak out without anyone discovering I was there. She had her uptown (wealthy and conservative) friends and her downtown (queer and avant-garde) friends, and she kept those worlds separate.

Sometimes, she and I prepared meals for dinner parties. Her guests were the uptown friends who didn't know about our relationship, and I left her apartment before their arrival. When I imagined our future together out loud and asked her to describe what our lives would be like as old women, she said she didn't let herself think that far ahead.

I never told Katharine about my egg donation. The money I received after the harvest procedure would probably cover one month of what her parents paid her personal driver. Though she met my mother and grandmother when they visited from Arkansas, I never met her family.

She explained, "My mom would figure us out. It's the way you look at me." My mentors and community of writers in New York provided the affirmation that I needed. In my first semester at NYU, I was assigned to Philip Levine's poetry workshop. I dreaded working with a white male who was the age of my grandparents and assumed that, like my grandparents, he would think I was going straight to Hell for writing lesbian poetry. When I read my four page poem aloud in his workshop for the first time, I was terrified and could not breathe in the right places.

Before class one night, he pulled me aside and said, "Some of the finest minds and the finest poets of my generation are gay or lesbian. If you continue to work hard, you can make your mark on our poetry too."

In an individual conference, he signed and gave me a copy of *The Bread of Time*. Feeling invisible and lonely, despite (or because of) my relationship with Katharine, I clung to his words.

In the margins of one of my workshop poems, a classmate wrote that my speaker seemed claustrophobic. In my early twenties, I confined myself to first-person narrative poems about childhood in rural Arkansas and being rejected by my family when I came out. I re-arranged and re-numbered the poems into a sequence, trying to find the right order.

Levine recommended that I read Roethke's greenhouse poems. Sharon Olds recommended Hart Crane. I read everything I could get my hands on. The more I read, the more I realized that I had not really lived life yet. Even in Manhattan, I would never find a LGBT Mecca where no one is stereotyped or judged. Lesbian life partners raising children were rare in New York City and in Arkansas, but I committed to building the life I imagined. Living only on the page was not what I wanted.

At Goldwater Memorial Hospital, I spent several hours per week teaching creative writing to residents who lived with Lou Gehrig's, Multiple Sclerosis, quadriplegia, and AIDS. Sharon Olds founded the Goldwater Writing Program. Part of my service-learning experience involved transcribing the work of residents who used assistive technology to communicate.

Tamika was my age. Goldwater had been her home since age two; she became quadriplegic after a car accident. She held and moved a paintbrush with her mouth. Her life outside of the hospital existed in the stories she dictated to us.

Deborah, in the late stages of Lou Gehrig's, pointed with her foot to a homemade, plastic letter board, and we recorded each word of her poetry. Marianna finished her degree in Russian Studies at Hunter College while in her seventies. In her purse, she still kept her receipt for the \$200 she borrowed to sail from Poland to the United States. When she knew I was coming, she saved her orange juice from breakfast. At the end of the semester, she gave me a stars-and-stripes dograg that was identical to hers.

The community of writers that I found at Goldwater helped me commit to writing, and teaching writing, as a career. First, I would complete my Ph.D. Then, with or without a partner, I would become a parent. From the University of Mississippi, Oklahoma State University, and Georgia State University, I received invitations to join their Ph.D. programs in 1999. The rural South was not where I wanted to look for a life partner and start a family. Into the same size U-Haul I drove from Little Rock to Manhattan in 1996, I packed my belongings and drove to my new apartment in Midtown Atlanta that was three times the size of my Chelsea studio.

### III

In January 2002, I opened the Seagram's box of mementos that contained my favorite sperm donor profiles. I would complete my coursework for the doctorate by December 2003, and I wanted to become a mother before age thirty.

During the five years that I stored the donor profiles, California Cryobank began offering options to purchase a baby photo, an audio-taped interview, and a list of staff impressions about the donor's appearance. For one of the three I'd selected in 1996, the updated catalog indicated that a pregnancy had occurred for at least one recipient.

Olivia's donor knows that his donation has been a gift for others, but I have no idea if my egg donation ever resulted in a birth. Society assumes that women are more attached to their reproductive tissue and the offspring that result from it. I don't think of the children who could have been conceived with my eggs as mine, but I would love to know if someone made a life out of one of my ova. Whether an anonymous donor's motivation is money or helping others know the joy of parenthood, we give because we have a strong faith in the goodness of humanity. We want these children in the world, even if we never see their faces or hear their voices. Anonymous donors live the rest of our lives feeling more deeply connected to humanity. Everyone's eyes are the eyes

of those we helped make.

The donor's baby photo was a close up, and he'd been dressed up for his first Christmas. When I look at Olivia, and photos of her six donor siblings, I see his large forehead, small nose, thin lips, and almond-shaped eyes.

While listening to the taped interview for the first time, I could hear him smile when he described his long and short-term goals: "My short-term girls, I mean goals, are to finish college. My long term girls, I mean goals, are to have a family of my own someday." He described his open-mindedness and tolerance, and he shared his appreciation for his parents who immigrated to the United States before his birth. His favorite movie was "There's Something about Mary." The staff at the Cryobank gave him an eight out of ten for appearance.

When I decided to order vials and try the "turkey-baster method," I realized at the online checkout that the vials contained a very small amount of semen. An eye-dropper or infant medicine dropper would be more appropriate for an in-home insemination. On the Internet, I also learned that, if I inseminated myself, I would be committing a felony in the State of Georgia.

According to O.C.G.A. 43-34-37, "Physicians and surgeons licensed to practice medicine in accordance with and under this article shall be the only persons authorized to administer or perform artificial insemination upon any female human being. Any other person or persons who shall attempt to administer or perform or who shall actually administer or perform artificial insemination upon any female human being shall be guilty of a felony and, upon conviction thereof, shall be punished by imprisonment in the penitentiary for not less than one year nor more than five years."

Two vials of frozen sperm arrived via FedEx. I kept them in the freezer by the Illy coffee and Dove bars until my ovulation predictor kit showed two lines and I left for my appointment at the clinic. Before the intra-cervical insemination (ICI), the nurse showed me the sperm on a slide in the microscope.

She said, "That is definitely a high volume of sperm, and they're strong! There are millions of chances in there."

At home, I counted the days until it was time to take a pregnancy test. None of my lesbian friends had children or were considering becoming mothers, but both of my cousins' wives in Arkansas had become pregnant in recent months. With two straight friends I made on babycenter.com's Trying to Conceive (TTC) discussion forum, I shared the details of my ICI. I listened to the timing and sexual positions they were trying with their husbands, and we gave each other tips on detecting ovulation. I learned acronyms like EWCM (egg-white cervical mucus) and MC (miscarriage.) After a few months, each of us graduated to the Pregnancy forum.

Like one of my online friends, I eventually required fertility drugs to conceive. After two unsuccessful ICI procedures at the first clinic, I made an appointment with Dr. Carolyn Kaplan at Georgia Reproductive Specialists in Atlanta. She prescribed Clomid and HCG injections at the time of ovulation, and she recommended an intra-uterine insemination (IUI). From the California Cryobank, I ordered seven vials that GRS would store in its lab. The FedEx delivery woman who brought the tank to my door let me take her picture.

I asked, "Did you know you were delivering sperm? Can I take your picture and label it 'The Stork' in the scrapbook I am making? I'll put it by the picture I take of the positive pregnancy test!"

The stork photo is bordered by some of the four-leaf clovers that my mom sent weekly from Arkansas after I told

her I was trying to conceive. She and my step-father were the only family members who were excited.

When I told my biological father, he said, "I think you're selfish. What will you tell the baby? What if he asks who his dad is?"

My dad's mother, who told me I was going to Hell for being a lesbian, did not ask about my attempts to conceive. She called to update me on the children my male cousins' wives were expecting. I remember sitting at her kitchen bar when I was no older than seven.

She said, "Dave, when are you going to have more children? All you have is her, and she won't carry on the Wurz name."

My dad said, "Mother, I had a vasectomy!"

When I called to tell my mom's mother about selecting a sperm donor and taking fertility drugs, she said, "I wish you wouldn't do this. What will you tell this child? How will she explain that she does not have a dad?"

In September 2002, I was studying in the Little Five Points Starbucks. The clinic's nurse called to say that the blood test I took that morning confirmed I was pregnant. After taking a picture of the positive home test, I kept the news to myself until I was 100% sure. I called my mom first and told her the news was her birthday present. She called her mom, and my grandma called my dad's mom.

When my dad called me after hearing the news, he said, "I hope everything works out for the best. When is your due-date?"

On May 16, 2003, fifteen days before my due-date, I went for a weekly checkup at the OBGYN. My blood pressure was still elevated, so she admitted me to Emory's Crawford Long Hospital and made plans for an induction. Since starting contractions at twenty-two weeks and staying on bed rest, I'd had my suitcase in the trunk. My mom didn't have hers packed yet, but she threw some clothes in a bag and drove from Maumelle, Arkansas to Atlanta.

My father and grandmother drove to Atlanta a few days after Olivia was born, and, after holding her, they joined me in my selfishness. My father had a stroke and developed locked-in syndrome when Olivia was nine months old. I brought her into his room in the ICU and held her cheek to his before they removed the life-support.

My pregnancy was classified as "high-risk" because I needed fertility drugs, so I saw Olivia on the ultrasound every week until I delivered. The nurse gave me a picture at every appointment. Olivia likes to find those pictures and the four-leaf clovers in the scrapbook. She looks for the "Here She Is" wrapper from one of the chocolate bar birth announcements and holds it to her nose to see if it still smells like chocolate.

When Olivia was two, I met Krista and her son Thomas, who was born in 1996. Krista and I married in New Hampshire on October 12, 2010. Through the Department of Children and Family Services, we have adopted three sisters, and we are waiting to finalize the adoption on our two-year-old twins.

Olivia has seen pictures of her donor siblings, and she hopes to meet them someday. Three of the four families have two moms. She knows that she can contact the Cryobank and request contact with the donor when she turns eighteen. For adult offspring conceived through egg donation at Mt. Sinai, there is not a method for contacting anonymous donors.

Since Pre-K, when kids have asked Olivia about her father, she has corrected them.

She has told me about several occasions when she has

*continued on Page 18*



**What Will You Tell Her** *continued from Page 17*

explained, "I have a donor. In my family, there are two moms. I do not have a dad. There was a donor who was nice enough to give one of my moms some sperm so she could have me. I can meet him one day if I want to."

When thinking of what those children told their parents and how the parents may have reacted, Olivia and I laugh. I doubt that Olivia, or any of our other children, will have to move to New York City to develop assertiveness and self-confidence. Krista and I only know what it is like to raise children in Georgia. Would our lives be much different in a city that has a LGBT Community Center or an active COLAGE chapter? Would our lives be better in a place where there are more inter-racial families?

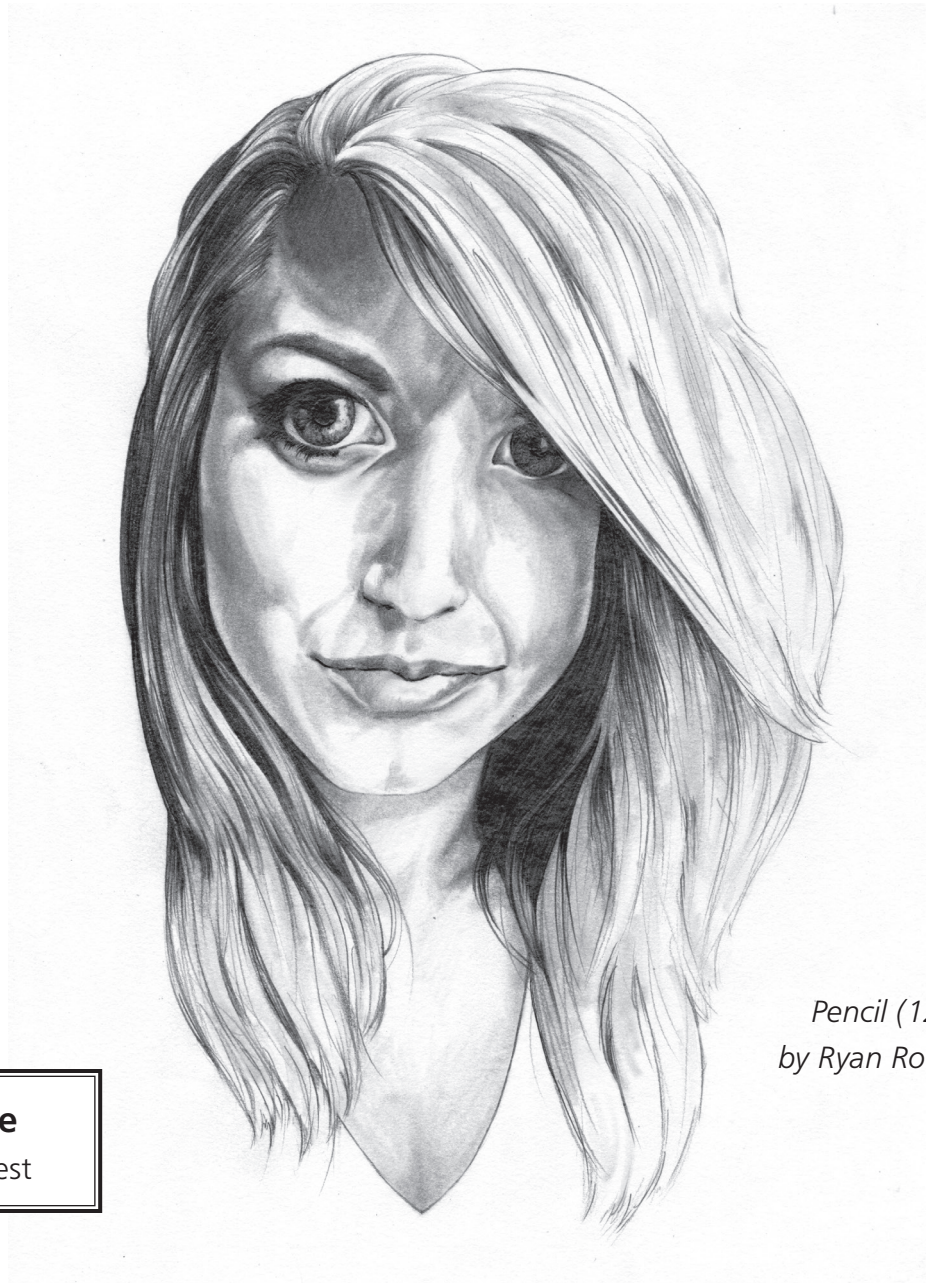
Last fall, at the College of Coastal Georgia in Brunswick where I teach English, our new Gay-Straight Alliance brought Zach Wahls to campus. Our family watched the YouTube video of his speech to lawmakers in Iowa before we attended the event. It was the second time our children had met

someone who has two moms and was conceived with sperm from an anonymous donor. After that event, Olivia became even more outspoken.

Right before the 2012 election, Olivia came home from school and said, "Some of my friends were saying they would not vote to re-elect President Obama in the school's mock election. I asked them why, and they said, 'Duh, because he is black.' So, I told them they better not say another racist thing to me because my little brother is black. Mom, I wasn't having it!"

For a class project, Olivia had to write a bill, and she wrote about why lawmakers should make gay marriage legal. If we lived in Northampton, MA or Chelsea, would our children become complacent?

At the end of this summer, after Olivia and Maria returned from a month's stay in Arkansas, my grandma called to tell me about some Monster High doll clothes that the girls left at her house. She said, "I told you before Olivia was born that I didn't think you should get pregnant, but I sure am glad you didn't listen to me."



**Softly**

*Pencil (12" x 9")*

*by Ryan Rodriguez*

**2013 First Place**

*Seaswells Art Contest*

# The Ups and Downs of Crushes

by Becki Cowatch

One of these days, you and I will be side by side waiting for the elevator to open. And in the moments that follow, everything will change. We will say hello and make small talk as if nothing has happened even though both of us will be at a loss for words considering . . . well, you know. When the doors open, you allow me to enter first. The fact that you are a gentleman is one of the many things that attracts me to you. I say a soft "Thank you," reminding you that I am a lady, a rarity in today's society and one of the things you say you long for. You catch a small scent of my perfume and for a moment — just a moment — it makes you wish you could stand a bit closer. You look down at your sneakers as you follow me.

I push the button for the second floor and look at the monthly calendar taped to the wall in front of me. I frown at the immaturity of the person who drew devilish ears, eyes, and teeth on the faces. The doors shut and we are alone. Everything I want — no, need — to say is sitting in my throat. I open my mouth and turn enough to see you watching me. You look down quickly and raise and lower yourself on your toes. You do this often, almost as if it is automatic. You have several adorable habits you likely do without realizing. Sweet quirks I wish I could tell you I have noticed and smiled at. Not that I have watched you. I swallow the words. There isn't time. Not in only two floors.

You adjust your stance, switch the hand your folder is in, and look at the doors. I take a deep breath and sigh. This ride is taking forever. And the fact that your cell phone keeps telling you a new text has come in is driving me crazy. Without warning, the elevator jolts and snaps me out of my thoughts. I step back, take hold of the bar, and regain my balance.

"You OK?" you ask, suddenly closer than ever before. Your hand would have touched my back had it not stopped midair. I fear you will hear my heart pounding. I smile slightly, keeping a lock on your amazing blue eyes, and shake my head yes. You step back and take hold of the bar. Just in case. And just in time. The sound of chains being dragged against each other comes from above us. The elevator jolts and tips slightly. You stumble a bit. The engine groans and the elevator stops, creaking for a few seconds. Then silence. Stuck.

We look at each other. I raise an eyebrow. You grin and say "Hope you don't have to pee!" I laugh, but just a bit, not ready yet to allow you to reach into my heart once more. That wall, the one I put up after . . . well, you know . . . is going to be hard to knock down.

You press the emergency call button. No answer. You press it again. Still no answer. You pull your cell phone out of the pocket of your cargo shorts. The fact that it is still telling you texts are coming in affirms a connection...and that you are quite popular. You call the administration office and give them the 1-800 number on the elevator's panel. When they call back, you put the phone on speaker.

Normally, the receptionist says, a master key would reset the elevator. According to an operator at the main office who sees everything through a network, that isn't the case this time. Some chains above us have snapped. The elevator is tilted slightly and jammed. Its doors are locked tight. The wires inside our panel have tripped, making the call button useless. Administration will call the cell phone as things progress. We may hear someone outside placing an OUT OF ORDER sign on the doors.

**2013 First Place**  
Austin/Garner Prose Contest

I remove my backpack and place it and my purse in the corner behind me. We sit at the same time, you facing the door with your legs stretched out in front of you, me parallel to it, close to the front, with my knees raised. Why hadn't I taken the stairs like I usually do? I lean my head back onto the wall. I hadn't taken the stairs because I saw you waiting for the elevator and wanted to be near you . . . if only for a moment. I close my eyes and sigh. This is going to be one long, awkward moment.

Your cell phone starts making a racket. More texts. You read and respond to them, chuckling at a few. I wonder who they are from. Family likely. You talk a lot about how close you all are, how you spend nearly every weekend hanging out, doing stuff, going places, and eating lots of delicious food. I am jealous. I have always wanted a large family that loves to just be around each other. I want somewhere to belong. I want someone to belong to. But you don't care about my heart. Even if it seemed you did or might have when . . . you know. Or is it that you do care but you can't show it right now? How much longer do I have to wait until it's OK for you to say what you want, for us to admit to what we feel, and for all our flirtations and innuendos to be given a chance at being something legit?

There's one layer of my wall — bricks of men who won't admit a connection because they fear what society will think. They love my excitement for the small things, are grateful for my compassion, and enjoy my cookies. They are enamored by the fact that I am not like most women my age and they ask where I was before they married the wives they are now divorced from. They tell me I am adorable, pretty, beautiful even. They make me feel like something could happen, like I could finally be accepted and seen for the incredible heart I have. But — and there is always a but — they don't see me as anything more than a friend. Ever. I am likely to be emotionally buried by the bricks this realization continues to stack. But I dare not let the wall they build crumble. Not again. Not when so many times before I have been reminded why it was there in the first place and had to build it once more.

More texts come in. Are they from fellow females who caught your eye and earned your attention? Were they fooled too by your random blurbs about how you adore children and want a good woman, things you said while looking directly at me sometimes? Had these women been marked as someone you wanted to meet on a dating website you are both members of as well? Had it made them think a relationship with you could actually happen? Had they put thought into it, been looking forward to the possibilities, and even dreamed about being with you? Had they felt anything I felt? The idea that the romantic movie — the one with you in the leading role, the one that is constantly playing in my head — will never be real sets in. More bricks.

It is quiet for some time. No texts. No calls. And neither of us speak. What would we say really? There is so much sitting on my heart and trying to escape my lips. I have a feeling you have things to say as well. It is very unlike you to be quiet. But

*continued on Page 20*



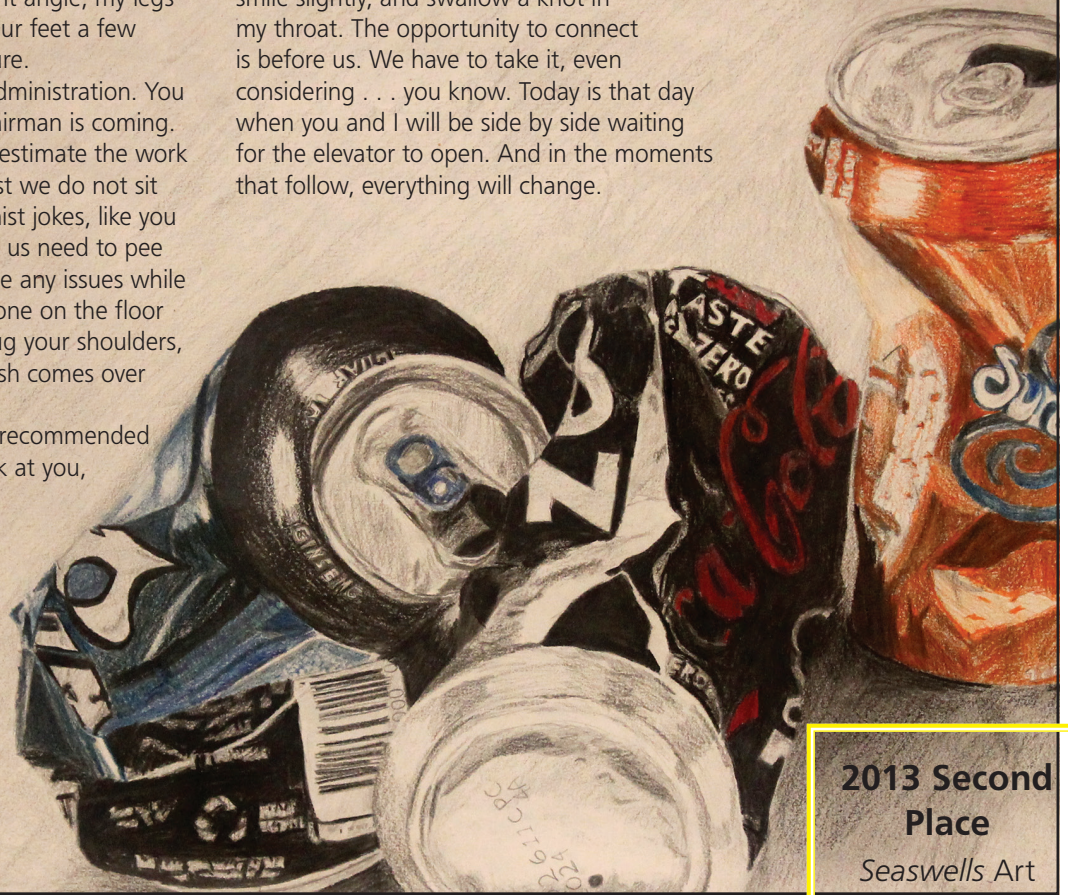
## The Ups and Downs of Crushes *continued from Page 19*

there we are, sitting at a right angle, my legs now stretched out as well, our feet a few inches apart, silent and unsure.

Your phone rings. It's administration. You put them on speaker. A repairman is coming. From two hours away. They estimate the work will take an hour and suggest we do not sit near the door. The receptionist jokes, like you did, about hoping neither of us need to pee and tells us to call if we sense any issues while we wait. You set the cell phone on the floor by your leg, look at me, shrug your shoulders, and grin slightly. A small blush comes over your cheeks.

I move to sit by you, as recommended by the repair company. I look at you,

smile slightly, and swallow a knot in my throat. The opportunity to connect is before us. We have to take it, even considering . . . you know. Today is that day when you and I will be side by side waiting for the elevator to open. And in the moments that follow, everything will change.



### Recycled as Art

*Colored Pencil & Pencil (12" x 16")*

*by Alicia Hurd*

**2013 Second Place**

*Seaswells Art Contest*

## Why I Live Here

*by Rainey Gregg*



**2013 Best Color Photo**  
*Seaswells Photography Contest*



# My Southern Childhood

by Hannah Carmichael

I'm from southern accents and fried chicken,  
From a place where we like our tea cold and sweet,  
Greens are not colors but food,  
And kindness is contagious,  
That is where I'm from.

I'm from Church on Sundays and Wednesday nights,  
From family dinners around the table  
And baking in the kitchen.  
From Doodad's to Chocolate Chip Cookies,  
And recipes passed down,  
That is where I'm from

I'm from the "Home of the Dawgs"  
And colors of red, black and white,  
Where the Dawgs and Gators battle in a good ole'  
southern rivalry  
And houses are divided,  
That is where I'm from.

I'm from rocking chairs and front porch swings,  
From flip flops and sand gnats,  
Peach and Pecan trees,  
Fireflies and Mason jars,  
And warm Summer nights under the moon,  
That is where I'm from.

I'm from the Ocean Air,  
From sand between my toes and wind blowing through  
my hair,  
From seashells and drip sand castles,  
From bocce balls to 4 square,  
Swimsuits and sunscreen by the gallon,  
That is where I'm from.

**2013 Second Place**  
Barr Poetry Contest



**2014**  
**Best Computer-Enhanced Photo**  
Seaswells Photography Contest

## The Nap After Swimming

by Dr. Elizabeth Wurz

~First published in *The GSU Review*, Issue 51~

~Reprinted in *Cuttings*, Blast Furnace Poetry Chapbook 1st Place~

I fasten her bikini-top clasp.  
She takes my hand; we jump  
together into the pool.  
My foot touches the concrete floor.

My foot against hers,  
my leg and hip,  
her leg and hip.

She sees sexuality as a spectrum.  
*I'm in the middle;*  
*I just can't live like that.*

My foot touches the concrete.  
I push off, float up,  
breathe.

My foot against hers,  
my leg and hip,  
her leg and hip.  
Sweat collects at our touching,  
soaks a line between us on the white sheet.

## Rainbow Fountain

by Brittany Fulkerson



## 2013 First Place

Barr Poetry Contest

I live in a house with a wonderful dog.  
His life is entwined with mine, and we have both grown old.  
Unconditionally, I love him as if he is my own child.  
Younger than me, but so much older, we adjust  
because his grey muzzle ages him, and he knows  
every day that passes is a closer end to his life.

He has been with me all of his life.  
I brought him home to be my son's dog  
and we are the only family he knows.  
He has become more 'mine' as he has grown old.  
I don't know how we will ever be able to adjust  
when it is his time to go. He is so much like a beloved child.

The vet calls him a senior citizen, but he's sometimes like a  
child.  
On one day he has so much spunkiness and life  
in him; but now, with no need for leashes and collars to ad-  
just,  
he plays, and then rests, without the energy of a younger dog.  
No more training was needed after he finally grew old,  
the house rules and manners he already knows.

A dog is a boy's best friend as everyone knows,  
but his bones have begun to creak like mine, this petted child  
I love. He has stiff joints and the calamities of the old.

## A Sestina for Jake

by Kimberly Helms

We look at each other and wonder about life  
and how long it will last. I can understand and relate to this  
dog  
who has always had the ability to gracefully adjust.

Living with a wonderful dog requires you to adjust.  
He can't be left with strangers because he grieves. He should  
know  
I could never abandon my precious dog.  
He has always comforted and protected me, this pampered  
child.  
He is a part of many special memories. He lives a full good life  
even if his days are sleepy and long, because he has grown  
old.

It is hard for our family to watch this dog grow old.  
He and I have learned that slowing down requires both of us  
to adjust  
to less play, less walks, and a slower pace of life.  
He has taught me about the unconditional love he knows  
instinctively. He has loved us as deeply as any natural child  
because he does not realize he is 'just a dog'.

This sweet one is old and he already knows.  
I will struggle to adjust, without my petted child,  
when life shall end for my wonderful dog.



## 2013 Best Overall Photo

Seaswells Photography Contest

Peerless

by Jeremy Black

**2014 Second Place**

Barr Poetry Contest

**I Am From**

*by Alesha Walker*

I am from R&B to Hip Hop I am from frowns to smiles  
From crying to laughing  
From shy to intriguing colloquies  
From rock bottom to believing I can persevere  
I am a survivor.

From Caria to Ti  
From roots in 'Bama to the dirty south  
From Grady's to Decatur  
From old school to new school  
From Mariah Carey to Bow Wow  
I am midnight train to Georgia

I am from a great grandma Enetta Wells to a grandmother  
Teresa Walker  
From a grandmother who had 6 to the only child of her oldest  
From the niece of her girls Sherita, Tina, & Eboni to niece of  
her boys Kelly and Terry  
I am Lele

I am from Atlanta metro seventh day Adventist to believing in  
god's glory  
From loving kids to wanting to teach them  
From teaching kids while there young to watching bloom  
I am a future educator

I am from the mountains to the oceans  
From A's and B'S to traveling of the seas  
From losing 4 people in 3 years to maintaining a 3.3  
I am graduating with honors

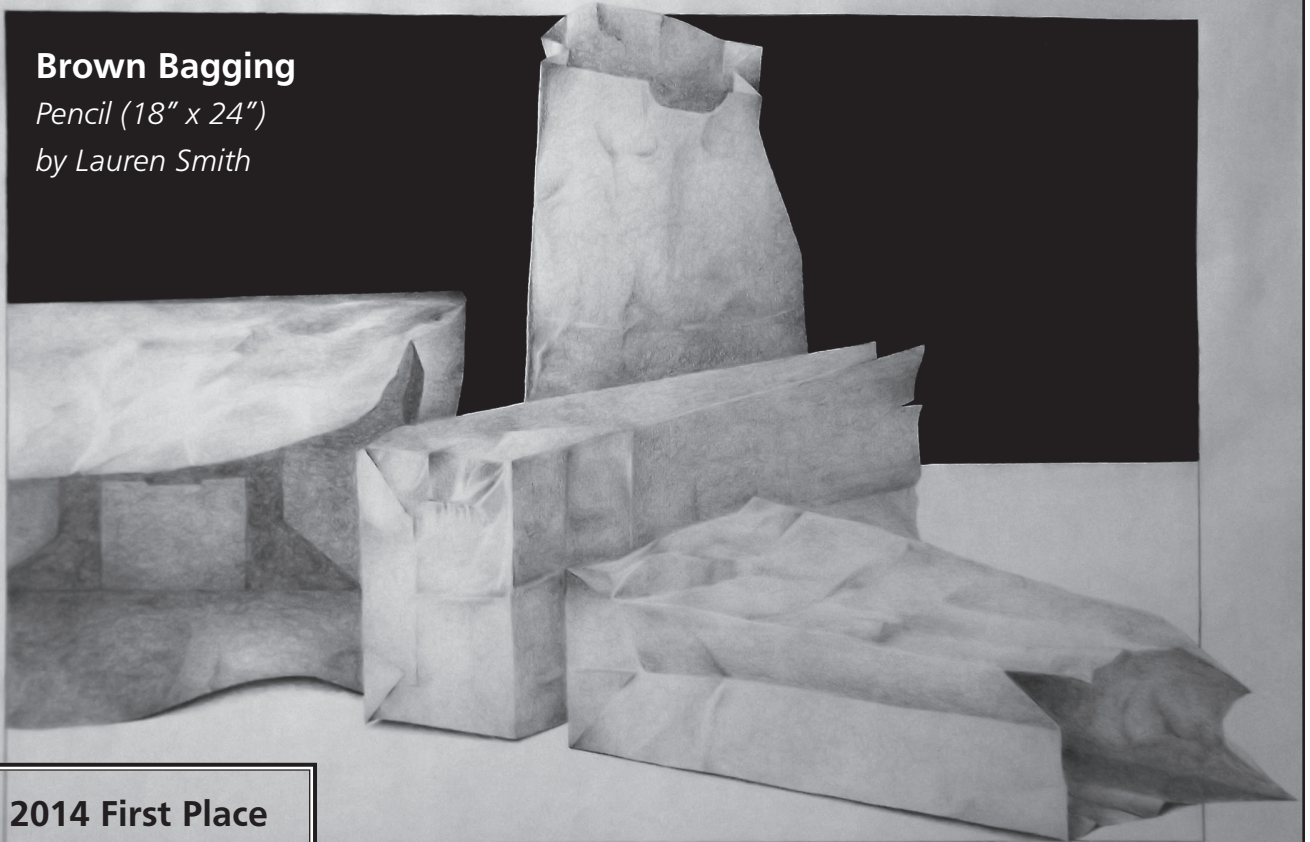
I am from a mother who had me young to a mother who is  
going for a master degree  
From red and black to a mother and father who's against the  
home team  
I am a falcon

I am from collard greens to fried green tomatoes  
From TGI Friday's to my great grandma's house on Saturdays  
I am soul

**Brown Bagging**

*Pencil (18" x 24")*

*by Lauren Smith*



**2014 First Place**

*Seaswells Art Contest*



## Day in a Daze

by Shamara Thomas

2013 Second Place  
Austin/Garner Prose Contest

Day 41

I got up. I decided that I would go out. It has been 10 days. I have yet to see the sunlight. I spent my whole lousy paycheck trying to find the darkest curtains to keep the sunlight out of my room. I do not wish to see my reflection. To see any part of me that tells me I exist. Dark. Invisible. I assume it really does not make a difference. No one sees me anyway.

Day 42

I am going to open those curtains. I need the light to do my homework. Only ten minutes I tell myself. I am going to work fast. I do not care about any erroneously mistakes. I know I cannot write an essay in ten minutes. I am still going to try. Hurry I tell myself, Hurry. I at least need to write a vowel down. This sucks. I need approval to write on this topic. I have to contact my teacher. I have to communicate. My throat hurts.

Day 43

Somehow, my curtain has separated. There is a little crack of light seeping through. A very small amount but it is enough to make me uncomfortable and very apprehensive. This light is shining directly on a picture of my deceased mother. Her face is glowing. That glow was not there before. Moreover, her eyes, they keep following me. She keeps smiling. Why? You are not here anymore. You left me, you did not love me, and you are dead. I cannot cry. I will not. I cannot. How did that curtain get open? I need to buy another one.

Day 44

There is a knock on my door. Someone is knocking. It is a roommate. I am sleep. I am wide-awake, but I am sleep. She is knocking. She wants to come in. She likes my room. The way it is decorated, the colors, she thinks it is nice. She is nice and she thinks I am nice. She wants to open the curtains. There is no need for that. Go away. Just go, please.

Day 45

I have a friend.

Day 46

I cannot make friends.

Day 47

Without words.

Day 48

I need to eat lunch. I am scared. I cannot go out. My heart is beating fast. I am sick. I am really sick. I need to see a doctor. I do not feel well. I need to get dressed. I need to go out. Out where there are people who will stare at me. People who will talk and be cordial. I do not exist. Why would they be speaking to me? I have to walk down the hall. It is only four steps but my worst fear. I might fall while walking down the hall. I might injure myself or something. Then I will be forced to face someone. Someone will see me. They will have to help me. They will look at me. I will

have to talk. My heart is beating fast. I cannot breathe. My throat is closing. I am screaming in silence. My hands are shaking. My eyes are tearing up. My palms are sweating. I am feeling faint. The room is spinning and I really cannot breathe.

Today I cried. All day.

Day 49

Social Phobia. I spend most of my time communicating with paper, and walls, and an inner psyche. And a therapist. I am not normal. I do not even exist. What is this? My therapist says I need to take the curtains down. I have selective hearing.

I hear roommates talking. I have visitors. I am panicking. The curtains will protect me. I have to open them. "It is too dark," the visitors say. They are about to open them. Visiting hours are over. They reply, "They just made it in". I want them to go away. They are invading my space, invading my property, invading my life. They really need light, but it is getting darker and darker to me. I am lost in the darkness. I am drowning. Curtains open or not, I am far away in a deep sleep. Unaware that the curtains are open and my life is changing. I panicked.

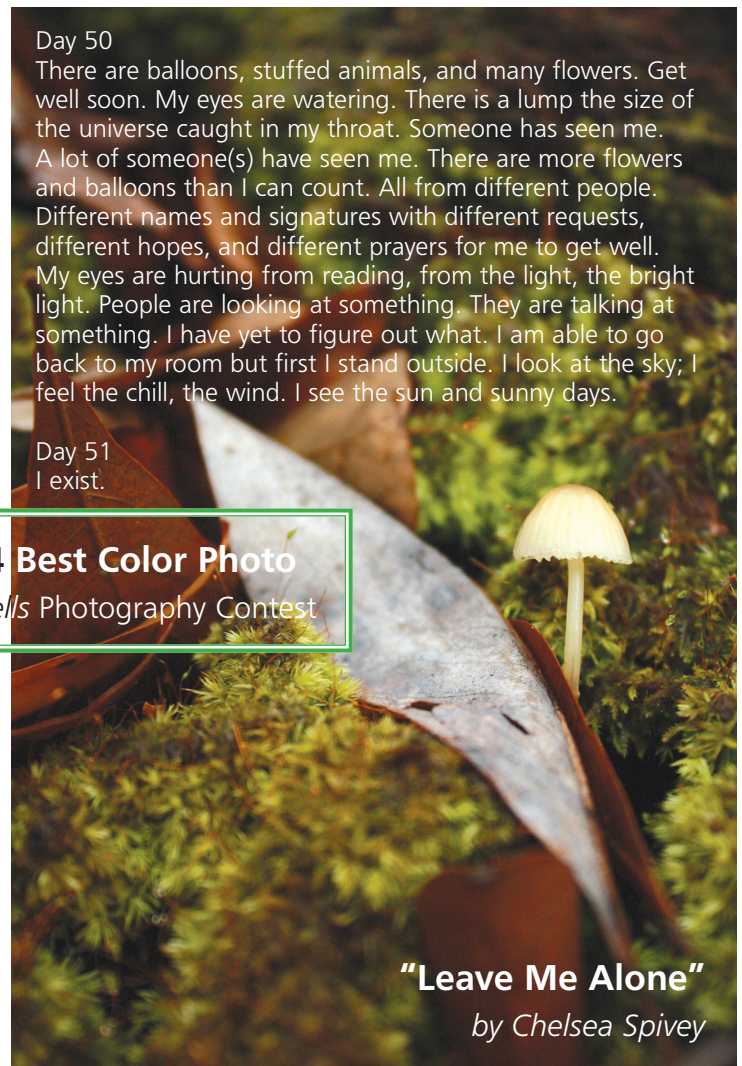
Day 50

There are balloons, stuffed animals, and many flowers. Get well soon. My eyes are watering. There is a lump the size of the universe caught in my throat. Someone has seen me. A lot of someone(s) have seen me. There are more flowers and balloons than I can count. All from different people. Different names and signatures with different requests, different hopes, and different prayers for me to get well. My eyes are hurting from reading, from the light, the bright light. People are looking at something. They are talking at something. I have yet to figure out what. I am able to go back to my room but first I stand outside. I look at the sky; I feel the chill, the wind. I see the sun and sunny days.

Day 51

I exist.

2014 Best Color Photo  
Seaswells Photography Contest



**"Leave Me Alone"**  
by Chelsea Spivey

**2015 Best Color Photo**  
*Seaswells Photography Contest*



**Follow the Leader**

*by Pamela Westcott*

**Reflections**

*by Becki Cowatch*

I see you. You're young – or maybe not so young, impressionable, scared of not fitting in, and anxious about losing yourself. You're nervous about taking those first steps towards a future. You want desperately to become part of something and wish someone would want you for who you are and, even, for who you are not.

I see you. You're sitting in the corner, hiding behind your glasses and hair, eating by yourself, and pretending to be engrossed in your studies. You look up every now and then, hoping the person passing by will notice you and want to make you a part of his or her life so you can finally have that connection, friendship, or even love that you crave.

I see you. You're hoping for a human bond to help you through the loneliness of being amongst people you feel you will never connect with. You attend events and community service projects. You set up meetings, study sessions, and social hours. You do it all in hopes that people will appreciate your enthusiasm, adore your personality, and want to be with you. But, all too often, you find you still don't fit in. Ever.

I see you. You're being overly nice, setting your needs aside to make someone else happy, and searching for similarities between yourself and everyone you meet. You think it's your fault that making connections is difficult. You damn yourself for being studious, for wanting to impress professors and faculty, for not partying constantly, and for growing up. You strongly consider setting aside your morals, values, and beliefs because not being a part of the crowd that goes against most of those hurts as much as the thought of doing so yourself.

I see you. That face in the mirror looks like a stranger, doesn't it? You've colored and cut your hair. You're wearing clothes you swore you'd never buy. You spend more time building layers of makeup than you do building your self-esteem. You gossip and use foul language. You listen to the

**2014 First Place**

*Austin/Garner Prose Contest*

music everyone else enjoys and hide the CDs they would laugh at. You've lost and gained weight – often in unhealthy ways. You've changed so much about who you are just to be what everyone else considers better.

I see you. You're giving in to the opinion of the masses, backing down from your own stands, and following paths you can't always find your way back from. You forget that, sometimes, by fitting in, you are fading out. In your efforts to avoid rejection, you set aside everything that makes you unique and become just another one of the crowd.

I see you. You're positive that being popular, known, and wanted will make you acceptable. You fall for the jerk who says you have to give your body to him to keep his love. You trust the liar who says the only way to free your soul and be a part of her group is through drugs. You believe it when those around you say just one drink won't affect anything. You start questioning the choices you have before you, wondering which paths to take, and asking who will go with you. Sadly, to remain true to yourself, you find you often walk many roads alone. However, if people allow you to be a part of their worlds only when you follow their rules and give them what they desire, have they truly accepted you? Do you really want to be someone else in order to be loved?

I see you. You're unique and extraordinary. You are exactly who you are supposed to be in this moment. You have years, if not decades, to figure out who you will become. Don't lose yourself in the chaos of trying to fit in and stand out at the same time because who you are – with all your passions, talents, and integrity – is what will make a mark, a difference, and a change in the world around you.





**2014 Best Overall Photo**  
*Seaswells Photography Contest*

**Barriers**  
*by Alyssa Keeve*

**2014  
Second  
Place**  
Austin/Garner  
Prose Contest

**Baghdad Unicorn** *by Sergeant Jonathan Parker, United States Army Veteran, Operation Iraqi Freedom I & III*

The water flowed over my freshly shaven head, ran through my eyes and down the front of my shirt, soaking it instantly. I closed my eyes and wished for the refreshing sting of cold water rushing out of a shower head but ultimately settled for the lukewarm liquid that trickled out of my water bottle. I applied a small dab of shampoo from the same generic bottle I had lugged around for almost five months now and began lathering it onto my scalp. As the water ran over the top of my head, I swore that I could feel my pores opening up to drink the water in as it flowed over them. I also found myself drinking sips of the soapy water to wet the sandpaper that had become my tongue. The bitter taste of the liquid made me grimace but it served its purpose. The heat was excruciating and rose every minute it seemed. The reality of the situation was settling in and I couldn't think back to a time when life was normal and the search for a shower was such an undertaking.

My convoy had a few more stops before we reached the Baghdad airport, but I was getting anxious and tired. I needed three things to make this trip better; food, sleep, and a true shower. The first two I could manage, though in very small rations, but the shower was my unicorn. It was my mystical beast, just out of reach, and the one thing that I wished for. It had been almost a month now since clean, cold water had touched my skin and every minute without it seemed like an eternity of grunginess. Up to this point, I had been using my ration of bottled water along with packets of baby wipes I stock-piled prior to deployment. The downside of this tactic was that I was always dying of thirst but at least I smelled like a new born baby's butt. That smell only lasted a few minutes due to the heat and then it was back to the stench of rotten onions as sweat seeped from every orifice. Needless to say it wasn't my finest moment.

The next few days on the road had me excited like a Chihuahua on crystal meth, wishing and hoping that I would find the right place, the right shower and the right temperature of water. It was crucial that I find my unicorn to bring me back to sanity and to cleanse myself and my soul. We

arrived at the airport in the sweltering heat of the afternoon and after a few minutes, set off towards the residential area. A short time later we were clearing the inside of a run down and bullet ridden house. Once inside, I turned the corner, entered the bathroom and saw my unicorn in all its rusty bacterial-ridden glory. There were only two things in the bathroom. One was a small hole no bigger than a fist, inset in the floor, obviously a primitive type of toilet, and the rust-colored shower head with a chain connected to it. I approached slowly and with a slight tug on the chain sand colored water spluttered then flowed out of the head.

I thought about how vulnerable I was as I frantically stripped naked and yanked on the chain again but it soon disappeared from my mind as the water hit the crown of my head. The water was not the desired temperature and I suspected it had some type of fecal matter in it but it was running water. After a minute or so, I leaned against the wall and finally felt a sense of relaxation. In that moment I thought about the gun shots, explosions, dead bodies, and families that were dragging their loved ones down the road to safety. I thought of the constant fear that any minute I would have to take a life and the fear that mine would be taken in return. I thought about the fact that once I returned home from this deployment, I would never be the same man again. The water ran down my body, collected on the floor around my feet and travelled across the room where it swirled down the toilet hole along with my thoughts.

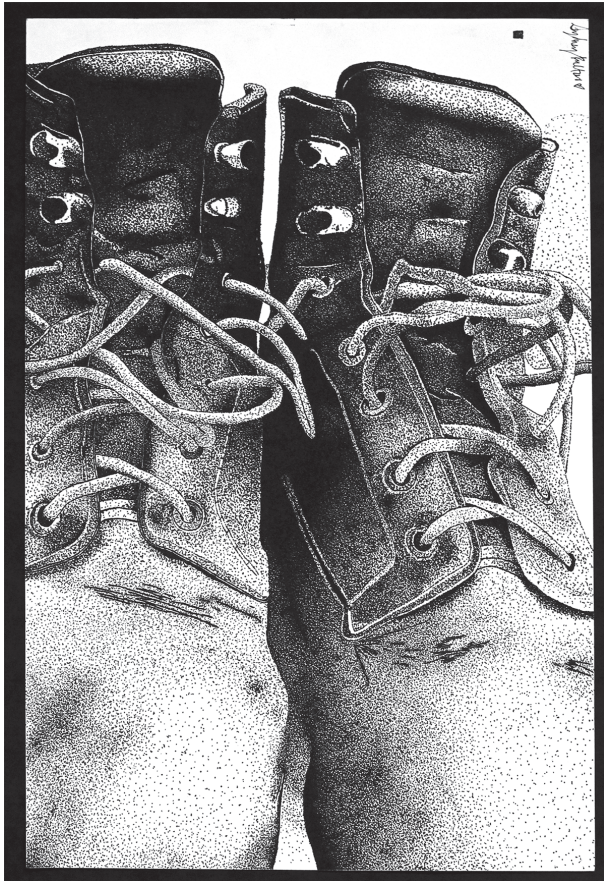
With my thoughts drained away, I dried off, put my uniform back on, laced up my boots, grabbed my rifle and headed out to relieve the others. While outside I turned towards the sound of a small bird perched on the roof of my crack house and noticed a large metal drum on top of the roof, directly over the bathroom. The top of the drum was open and exposed to the elements allowing the Sun to heat water inside and I suspected that this was the source of my bacterial shower water. I stared at this drum for a long while and realized that even in war we need something that feels familiar to us to keep us sane. My sandy water shower brought me back to reality and every so often I would revisit it and let my thoughts swirl down the drain.

## To Chicago, The Eagle by Dr. Elizabeth Wurz

~First published in *O-Dark-Thirty: The Literary Journal of Veterans' Writing*~

Today, I found your paper  
"Giving Back: Volunteering at the Columbus Boys and Girls  
Club,"  
and I Googled your name. Mark Abdul Shaheer Obituary  
was the first result. After two tours in Iraq,  
winning, as part of "Team Wolfpack,"  
the Eagle Challenge at Forward Operating Base Hammer,  
taking courses at Columbus State,  
marrying, and becoming a father,  
you died on June 11  
at your residence.

I called you Chicago—  
the name on your papers: "I am  
from the substandard housing projects  
in the belly of Chicago, Illinois." You wrote,  
"When a volunteer spends time with a child  
and teaches him the ABC's, the volunteer earns  
a young person's trust and respect." I shared  
your service-learning paper as an example  
when I gave a teaching demonstration,  
and I landed this job.



### Combat Fatigued

*Ink on Construction Paper (18" x 12")*

*by Sydney Fulton*

As Spc. Mark Shaheer,  
you transformed from Crow to Eagle  
while having your rucksack inventoried,  
running a mile with your rifle,  
disassembling and assembling it,  
marching four miles, making radio checks,  
and treating casualties.

My search results included Donations Asked  
for Deceased CSU Student and Soldier.

Sixteen months ago, I could have  
helped with and attended your funeral.  
In a Defense.gov article, I read  
a quote from your Battalion Commander:  
"You are the reason for this battalion's success,  
and for that I thank you." He presented brass belt buckles  
to your group of Eagles: "Other soldiers will ask you  
where you earned it."

On the buckle,  
"203rd Brigade Support Battalion,  
Eagle Challenge,  
Support and Defend,  
3rd Infantry Division"  
wraps around an eagle's head.

One of your fellow Eagles said,  
"For a few moments today, I forgot  
I was in Iraq." One of the contest's requirements  
was maintaining a positive attitude.

To the children at the Club,  
you read What Was I Scared Of.  
You wrote, "I asked the kids to listen to the rhythm of the  
story,  
and I told them it was trochaic tetrameter.  
Three kids who stood out  
because of their attitudes. I sat down  
and talked about their disruptive behavior's  
effect on others. One boy asked about my belt buckle.  
I told him about the Eagles—how it pays  
to remain positive and focused  
as he moves through life."

With "Everyone's small contribution  
adds up to a big impact,"  
you closed the paper.

**2015 Second Place**

*Seaswells Art Contest*





**Neon White**  
by *Carla Simon*

**2015 Best Computer-Enhanced Photo**  
*Seaswells* Photography Contest

**2015 Second Place**  
Austin/Garner Prose Contest

## A Story of Earth

by *Cobe Wilson*

Long before the creation of time there was a small flower floating through the darkness. This flower was alone in the world and knew not where to go. One day this flower decided to spread out its spores into the darkness. So, as the spores flew out into the blackness of the void they nested into place and so created the suns of the universe and by extension the first remnants of time.

So the flower no longer being alone felt the warmth of the suns in the universe and was, for a time, content. However, a millennium passed and the flower again began to grow lonely. So, in a desperate plea for company the flower took one of its roots and broke it into many pieces big and small. The flower took those pieces and spread it out among the empty spaces between suns and thus created the planets of the solar systems.

So the flower went content with its new creations. Another millennium passed and the flower once again became desperately lonely. So the flower took his root buds and cast them onto the earth. One by one they fell from the sky burning up from the speed. As they began to break apart they fell onto the surface creating raging volcanic eruptions from the shockwave of impact.

These volcanoes raged and after billions of years the flower grew tired of waiting. So with his great petals unfurled the flower began to spin and spin. The flower pushed great winds from his body and cooled off the volcanic land mass below it thus creating the various lands of the earth. However, the flower began to spin so rapidly that the planets of the solar system began to spin around the sun.

The flower saw what was happening and out of fear began to weep and slow to a halt. The flower's tears fell to the earth as a great rain and for another millennium it rained upon the earth causing a great flood of torrential waters. When the flower stopped crying it saw what it had made and was overjoyed, thus were the oceans and continents created.

The joy was not to last. Billions of years passed and the flower became sad that there were no other plants that it could spend time with. So the great flower took the rest of its roots and cast them down upon the earth. The roots spread over every land mass covering them. The flower then took its pollen and cast it also down upon the earth. The pollen fell to the earth and impregnated the roots. Thus were the trees, the flowers, and all the plants of the world created.

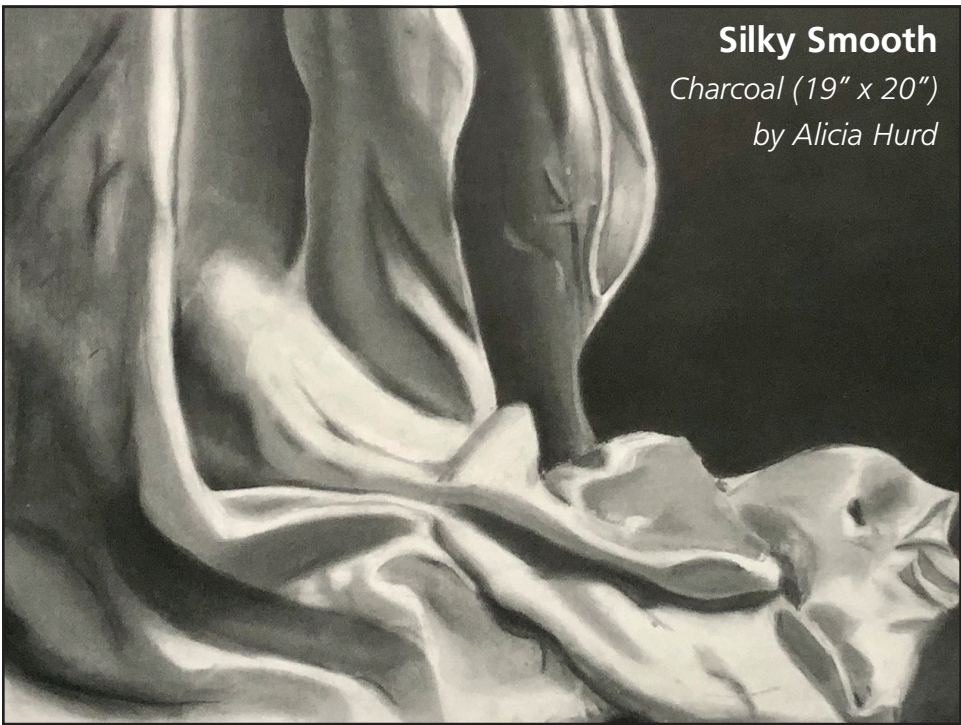
So for another billion years the flower watched as its creations took root upon the earth. Soon however the flower was disturbed that there was nothing that could enjoy the plants it had created. So the flower took its seeds and cast them upon the earth. The seeds rained down and crashed upon every continent. Seeds of varying sizes and colors fell to the surface from the sky thus creating all the different animals of the world.

One thousand years after the animals' creation the flower began to float down towards the earth to see all it had created. It landed in a large green field wherein all the animals and plants bowed before its presence. The great flower saw all it had made and decided it was not quite enough. So the flower took its petals and cast them from itself. The petals floated upon the great winds to the north, south, east, and west. When each petal landed upon the ground it broke into pieces. The pieces grew into new life called the woman, made of flesh and hair, skin tones and hair colors abundant as flowers. Thus woman was created from the luscious petals of the flower.

The flower was not yet satisfied and with a great heave threw the nectar from itself in all directions. The drops of nectar fell upon the corners of the earth and created a new substance of otherworldly clay. The flower then took its breath and blew the winds into small storms above the puddles of clay. The storms twisted and molded the clay into a new form, a companion for woman. Thus the flower created man and was finally content.

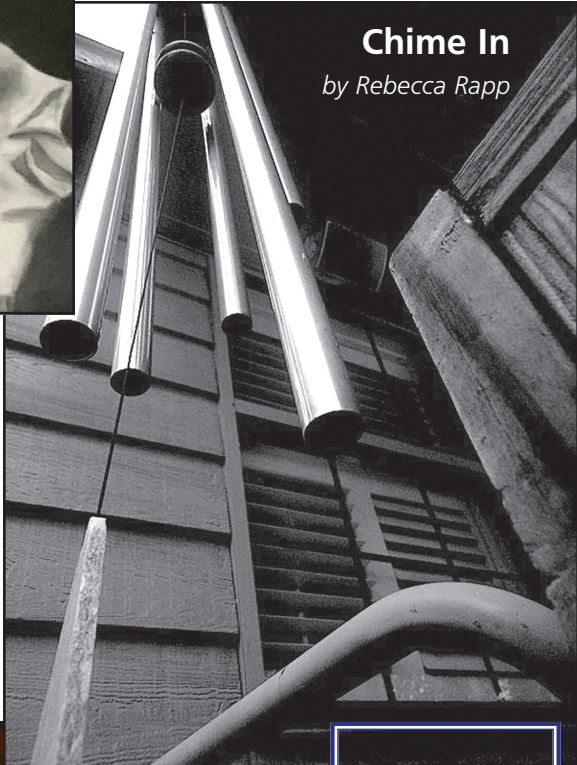
The flower let go of reality and fell into the earth being absorbed by its creation. In its place grew a vast field of pink lotus flowers. For its final creation the great flower became a part of the world it created forever to keep watch over its creations.





**Silky Smooth**  
*Charcoal (19" x 20")*  
by Alicia Hurd

**2014 Second Place**  
Seaswells Art Contest



**Chime In**  
by Rebecca Rapp

**2015 Best Overall Photo**  
Seaswells Photography Contest



**Look Into My Eyes**  
by Mikayla Craft

**2015 Best Black & White Photo**  
Seaswells Photography Contest

## 2014 First Place

Barr Poetry Contest

## On the Suffering of Beauty

by Bennett Rainey

The hardest thing to witness  
Is the suffering of beauty.  
A delicate rose being crushed  
By the harsh grasp of sorrow.  
The joy of a perfect sunrise,  
Darkened by ominous clouds.  
Warmth of softly glowing embers  
Dampened by rains of cruel fate.  
The dulcet sounds of a wondrous melody  
Drowned out by crashing despair.

A golden meadow dotted with violet  
Blanketed by cold, unyielding snow.  
Yet beauty has great strength that  
Must be found buried deep within.  
Wild roses will grow red anew.  
The sun shall rise again tomorrow  
And deep embers burst into flame.  
The quiet symphony will endure forever,  
And the meadow return in the spring.



## Empty Houses

by Megan Nash

## 2014 Best Black & White Photo

Seaswells  
Photography  
Contest

## The Moth She Noticed

by Dr. Elizabeth Wurz

~First published in *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, Issue 21~

~Reprinted in *Cuttings*, Blast Furnace Poetry Chapbook 1st Place~

She tells you she's written a poem  
about the moth on her window pane--  
that she worries using the image  
reveals the depth of her longing.

You visualize that moth's wings.  
They tap that rhythm on the glass.

If you'd been there in her apartment,  
when she associated the caged moth  
with herself, she may have invited you  
to her side of the glass.

You let yourself imagine you were there,  
that you, too, saw the moth. She could feel  
your tongue moving when she saw  
those persistent wings.

## 2015 Second Place

Barr Poetry Contest

### Everything

by Jason Brinckmann

Everything is always about time; time that everyone's racing against,  
Time they don't have, time they can't make, and all the times they forgot.  
Always nervous for the first time, anxious for the next time, afraid of the last time;  
Now that it's our time, time for us to start living, it's time for us to get away.

Everything is always about memories; everyone's trying to remember,  
Trying so hard to forget, the greatest and most unforgettable,  
Memories that never fade away, so hard to recall the very next day,  
Those that come from the heart and those that come from the soul.

Everything is trapped within a moment, every moment ever treasured,  
Always caught up in the moment, lost in the moment, living for the moment.  
The moment that we escape to, the moment we die for, the moment we live for,  
All the moments that are spent with you are the moments that last forever.

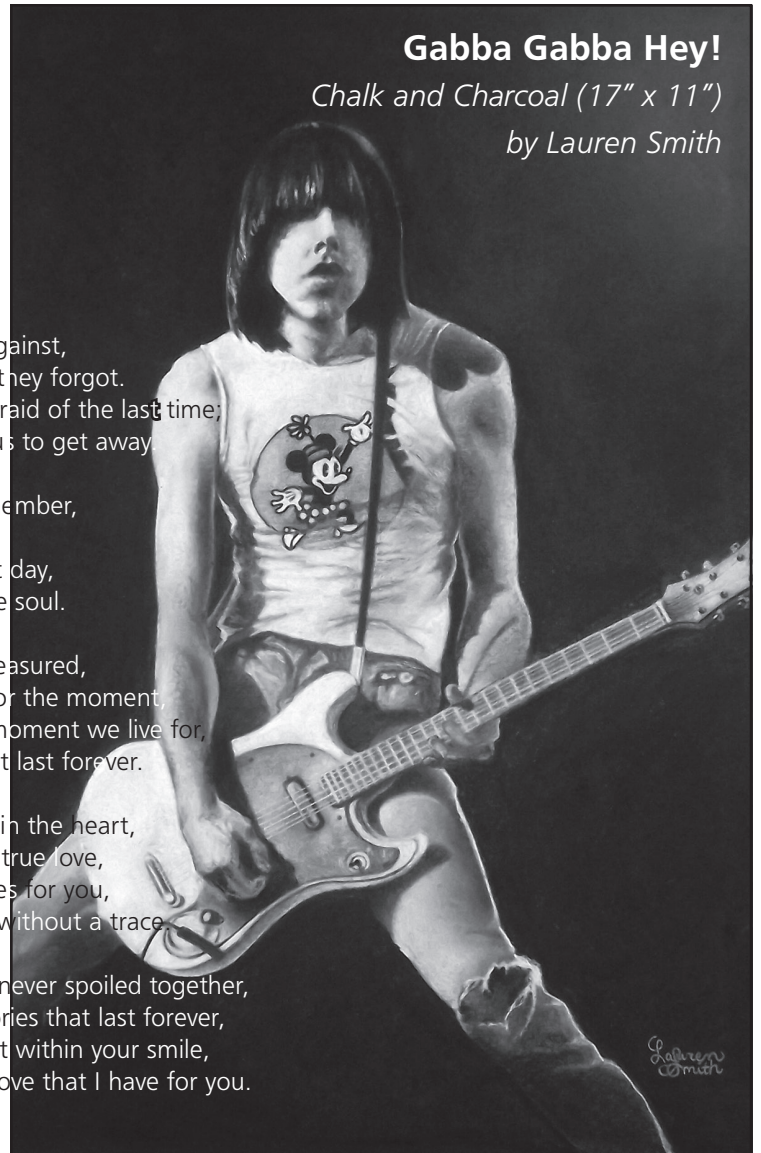
Everything is all for love, the kind of love that's held deep within the heart,  
Love that's unconditional, love that can never be replaced, it's true love,  
Love that fills the soul with warmth knowing that someone lives for you,  
A love that you and I for eternity can embrace, never to leave without a trace.

If I could add up all the time that we've spent and spoke, but never spoiled together,  
All the everlasting, never fading, greatest for dreaming, memories that last forever,  
Every moment ever spent, ever lived, ever escaped, and caught within your smile,  
Has created this deepest, truest, unconditionally, for eternity, love that I have for you.

## Gabba Gabba Hey!

Chalk and Charcoal (17" x 11")

by Lauren Smith



## 2015 First Place

Austin/Garner Prose Contest

### Leap of Faith

by Dani Marine

50 lbs of equipment strapped on my back. Foggy goggles secured on my face. Flippers strapped on my feet. I look around at everyone crammed on the small boat. Most of the occupants are still fresh-faced children, while others' faces reveal old experiences and wisdom. Nervous expressions adorn the faces of the novice scuba divers, while a devious grin lies upon our dive master's face. I look to the dive master for reassurance, but all I get is a single nod. I peer over the edge of the boat into my soon-to-be destination. The words Dive Dominica are charmingly painted onto the side of the white boat in blue and black. I cling to the boat's edge as the waves crash against the boat, rocking us aggressively to and fro. The small island of Dominica cowers in the horizon as the boat comes to a halt. The waves seem to crave my arrival. I look down at my equipment to make sure that everything looks correct. All of my trust lies in the hands of this equipment. I attempt to persuade myself into thinking that everything will be okay, but the thought that one malfunction

could put my life in danger lingers in my mind. I must trust my equipment, my training, and myself. I take my last breath of fresh air, place the regulator into my mouth and plunge into the dark water.

All of my training has led up to this exact moment: grueling hours of class time, numerous quizzes and my final exam. All I have under my belt is my recently received high school diploma. I have never done anything like diving. I had a few experiences of diving underwater in my training, but none of those dives had been out in the wide-open, merciless Atlantic Ocean. Still submerged underwater, thoughts of panic race through my mind as I look above me at a world that was so much more familiar to me than this dark abyss. I sink deeper and deeper into new territory until I am hovering just above the bottom. I look at my depth gauge and see that I am at 55 feet, 55 feet away from the surface and 55 feet away from everything that I had been so accustomed

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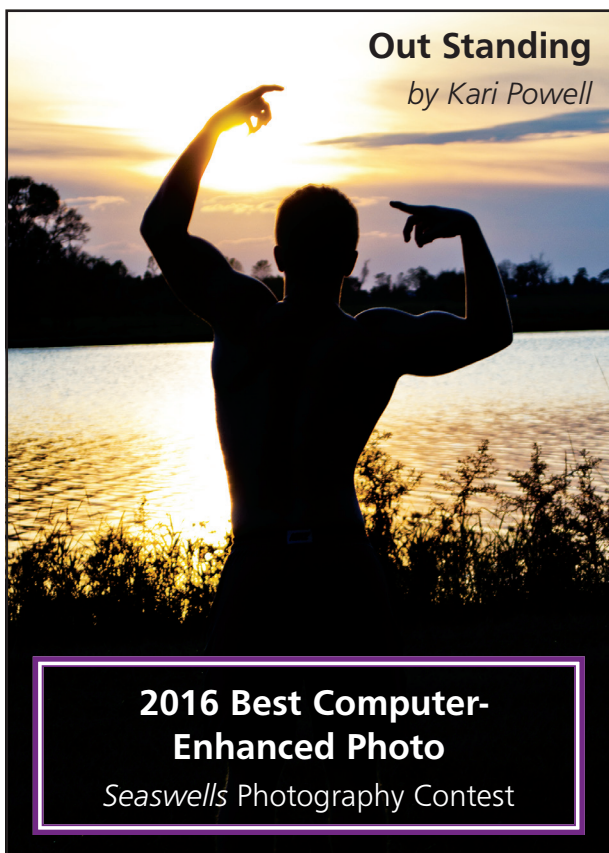
to. I pop back into my current situation and look all around me for the other divers, but they are nowhere to be seen. A new sense of terror rips through me. I am completely alone. Left, right, up and down seem to be almost nonexistent. I look for an escape route, but everything appears blurred and unrecognizable. There is no sound, just the panicked thoughts rushing through my head. Suddenly, a quiet clicking noise ends the treacherous silence. I turn around to find the source of this mysterious noise and see my dive master smirking at me. He pulls out a slate and underwater pencil and writes, "Are you lost?" I grin back at him and flash my "I am okay" sign that we learned.

Relief floods through my veins as I begin to see all of the other divers around us. I look down and finally come to the realization that I am actually scuba diving and I am okay. I am not drowning. All of my equipment works properly. I remember all of my training. Now, the once dark and dreadful ocean seems to light up and the previously unknown shapes around me become clear. A beautiful landscape unfolds below me as I float with the ocean's current. Arrays of colors span across the entire ocean floor over the trillions of grains of sand. Seaweed flows tenderly with the pull of the current. The hundreds of coral rooted into the ocean floor stand statuesque as fish dance through the countless colorful branches. Sunlight kisses the ocean floor and ignites the rocks with dazzling sparkles. Delicate fish of all different colors and sizes leisurely swim in and out of rock crevices and take little notice of the large bizarre creatures hovering above them. We continue onward over the vast floor for what feels like an eternity.

The concept of time is unreal: seconds last for minutes and minutes for hours. I am on an endless journey with no conceptual beginning or ending. I remove myself for a moment from the scene of serenity to take a look at

how much oxygen remains in my tank. Not much. I have used up about three quarters of my tank and am getting closer and closer every second to being dangerously low. Unfortunately, time had slipped through my grasp as I had been soaring over the limitless ocean floor. However, now time exponentially slips past as I dread resurfacing. Inch by aching inch I float closer and closer back to a place that now seems so bizarre and unfamiliar. I had once feared these depths before I had known of their true beauty. The moment that I finally understand, I have to leave. The ocean calls to me with songs of sirens as the caravan of divers and I slowly ascend to the surface mentally and physically. Physically, I am leaving for a while, but mentally, I have made an everlasting connection that can never be taken away from me. I glance down at the sights below and wish I could just grow gills and never return to my old bland surface life again. But I cannot.

I put all of my trust into this dive and now I have to trust myself to return to the ocean another day. I have always been distrustful by nature. There is no rhyme or reason as to why. However, the ocean revived my trust in people and myself. This dive was more than just a dive. This dive gave me a new meaning to who I am and opened up a whole new world to me. That memorable feeling of going somewhere with no real destination and seeing all of the sights around me sparked something inside me that changed my entire perception. The distrustful shackles bound around my arms and feet have been destroyed and I do not feel trapped anymore. I have more confidence in myself and others. I never could say that I trusted people or situations before I went and learned to scuba dive in Dominica. But now, I know for a fact that I absolutely can and look forward to all of the bold new adventures I will partake in because of my newfound trust.



### **Out Standing**

*by Kari Powell*

**2016 Best Computer-Enhanced Photo**

*Seaswells Photography Contest*

**2015 First Place**  
Barr Poetry Contest

### **Life Below the Waves**

*by Nichole Herrin*

Slowly the shrimping boat meanders  
around the bend  
of the marsh,  
Its sides creak with effort,  
the deck rocks with the ocean  
and the undulating waves

The nets trail the ocean floor  
stirring up the muck and sludge.  
Awakening the sea creatures and  
sending crabs scuttling, fish flurrying  
the marsh erupts in motion

While life above deck is business as usual,  
men trying to bring in the daily catch,  
earn their daily bread,  
underneath the hull of the ship is another world  
unnoticed by those  
not watching with a close eye.



## 2016 Second Place

Austin/Garner Prose Contest

### Ginger

by Cobe Wilson

It's always the normal ones. They get close and you never see it coming. They throw you off balance with their normalcy and averageness. Who knows what they are going to do. That was exactly what happened. She got close. She used her normalcy, her averageness, to get close and snap, the trap was sprung.

Ginger was a simple adolescent kid in a small town. She had acquaintances that she called friends and a friend she called a bestie. She was kind of a loner - never really participated to the maximum extent she was capable of. She was well read, and she never, ever referred to herself as a kid. She liked the adult world much more. She walked within the maturity that was not characteristic of her age group and she owned it. She flouted her command of maturity among her friends and submitted to the authority of the adults in her life as to not attract more attention than was necessary.

She had no boyfriend, no romantic interests to speak of except for the crush on the star baseball player on the school team. She saw him one day, in the cafeteria, and she fell hard. After he sat next to the cheerleaders, blowing her off in favor of the more outgoing crowd, she decided. Death was a fitting end.

She began to plan. First thoughts were pills, then poison, then bullets. Nothing she thought at first seemed right. She thought of a fall, a jump, a bus, suffocation, drowning, burning. The thought of screaming delighted her just a bit, at first a bit. Slowly she began to enjoy thinking of the screaming, the pain, and the pleasure of death. She began to seek company with herself and with the white horseman.

She knew that one day it would happen, the pain. Finally, after months of planning it did. She was a smart kid and her biology lab partner was none other than that baseball star. She filled with excitement. Weeks went by and the baseball player and she met every day. They talked about projects and grades. She almost changed her mind, almost.

A month after the lab assignment, she called him. She told him to meet her at the school, in the parking lot, to compare notes. He arrived within the hour and parked right next to where she was standing. He leaned out the window and asked, "Hey Ginger, you okay? I got the message to compare notes but you don't have your bag with you."

She giggled a little. Slowly she walked away from the car as he got out. She turned back and yelled, "Stop! You smell that, the gasoline. It burns you know, gasoline burns. Wait for it, the pain is coming."

She pulled out a matchbook and struck a match. She dropped the match right in front of him and watched as the flames overtook the ground. Clothes caught fire, then flesh and screaming. She heard the screaming, felt the screaming, the heat of the flames burning an everlasting memory in her mind. He should have listened, should have acknowledged her. She opened her eyes and smiled, his body a smoldering heap at her feet.

"Looks like I'm too hot for you. Sorry, no notes today."

She walked off towards her house, ready for another. She liked death, it satisfied her. It was her friend. Now, more than ever, she felt alive.



## Attitude

Oil (16" x 20")

by Cherry Langley Chambers

## 2016 Second Place

Seaswells Art Contest

## 2016 Best Color Photo

Seaswells  
Photography  
Contest

### Forgotten

by Krista Tharp



## Time Stands Still

by Stephanie Scott



**2016 Best  
Black & White Photo**

Seaswells  
Photography Contest

## De Portal

by Jeri Guyette

Embodying the essence of Delilah,  
 unraveling the mystery of Samson's strength,  
 I unfold each loc of your gnarled dreads  
 intricately interwoven with silver strands of soft wool  
 and keratinized cells.  
 I unveil the color of gray skies  
 inhale the scent of briny seas  
 and bathe in the musky oils of olives,  
 of Kemi,  
 of Kola nut,  
 and of organic beeswax.

with each parted utterance,  
 each sacred testimony  
 rolled in papyrus scrolls.

**2016 First Place**

Barr Poetry Contest

Singularly reminiscent of Medusa's coils,  
 they lie in wait like serpents  
 hissing to strike a fatal blow  
 towards my heart,  
 quicken my breath,  
 congeal my soul  
 and immortalize it into  
 a gargyle of stone;  
 an amalgam of twisted agony  
 and rapturous joy.

For wrapped like a cocoon  
 in infinite wonders  
 I am immersed into the  
 stories,  
 the memories  
 they expel  
 vomiting the pungency of your childhood  
 upon the rocks of my breast  
 and the bitterness of the cerasee leaves  
 that spew, drip,

f  
 a  
 |  
 |  
 onto the shores of my lap

10 revolutions have nurtured their growth  
 from minuscule twists in infancy  
 to unruly adolescents,  
 wiry and untamed with the wild cries of  
 radical change,  
 fists thrown high for liberation,  
 returning to rest  
 lie  
 d  
 o  
 w  
 n  
 in serpentine fashion,  
 comfort ~ easy in its maturation journey,  
 triumphant in its wizened glory.

Gathering a remnant in the palm of your fist  
 you collect your locs and all their legacy  
 and dry the warmth of my saline tears  
 that cry rivers for the squalor of shantytowns,  
 feet without shoes,  
 bare in the dusty rumble  
 of broken bottled yards,  
 rusted wash basins,  
 and haphazard laundry  
 penned to makeshift lines,  
 that mourn the little boy of your youth,  
 poor of belly and hungry  
 but rich in laughter and spirit.



## De Portal *continued from Page 34*

52 revolutions find you  
longing for the idle days of summer  
along your Caribbean Sea  
but finding it lost to the winter of  
racism, oppression, unemployment  
hopelessness and the death of dignity.  
Your mane is more than a melanous, cutaneous  
DNA fiber sprouting from the roots of your  
mental tree, crooked and knotted like Father Time.

It is a blow driven with strength  
against the vagaries of life.  
It is an autobiography of your footfalls  
across nations,  
red, white and blue,  
black, yellow and green;  
an ode to Jamaican history,  
a legacy for your children to laud.  
It is the scented entrance into the tropical garden  
of a weathered man professing his love  
with an open heart, humble in his desire  
to lay bare his world  
and share the vulnerable being  
of flesh, blood,  
bone, mortality.

**2016 First Place**  
Seaswells Art Contest

**Silly Spirit**  
*Graphite (22" x 28")*  
by Alicia Hurd

## The Road to New Beginnings

by Cody Haynes

I lie within the crevice of your arms,  
dreads spread ~ eagled upon my pillow  
inviting me beyond hanging vines  
and like Cleopatra falling upon the asp,  
neck upturned,  
I envision a golden sarcophagus  
and willingly succumb to the dying of  
living alone, to be reborn into the  
newness of two.

Replacing bitterness with the  
sweetness of mangos,  
of cane,  
of sea foam,  
transporting the splendor of your smile,  
I pull each loc gently across my shoulders  
and braid them into a blanket  
of hope,  
of acceptance,  
of redemption,  
of home.

**2016 Best Overall Photo**  
Seaswells Photography Contest

*Cody Haynes Photography*

## Let the Pieces Fall Where They May

by Becki Cowatch

Some time ago, on a morning walk, I saw a several-foot stretch of puzzle pieces scattered along the road. Some were turned up. Some turned down. Many were wet. Many flattened and torn. Many marked by tires, shoes, and animals. Some had not been affected at all. The winding display made me think about how similar to that puzzle and those pieces our lives can be and how much of ourselves we leave, lose, and scatter along the various paths we have walked.

Pieces of ourselves remain in the places that we cherish. We hope this will allow us to retrace our steps if we make a wrong turn and find ourselves without direction. We pursue the connections they keep when we feel forgotten, and we are thankful for the peace they provide when we feel reflective. All along, we pray someone will find the pieces and wonder who we are, how our lives have been, and if we would have a purpose for being in theirs. We want their hands to caress the pieces and give them semblance and meaning.

Pieces of ourselves remain on display. Some are uncovered. The colors and patterns show brilliantly and, even with their creases and marks, they shout "This is who I am!" We wait patiently and have faith that we will find

matches so that we can, finally, become complete and like the rest of the world around us. Some pieces are turned over. Only the brown paper backings – which are often stained, dirty, or wet – show. These are the big secrets, the faults we are embarrassed of, and the things we hide from even those closest to us. We cover them up because we fear the same rejection our pasts have told us we will receive. We hide them because we know our pieces have nowhere to fit. We long for a hand to reach down and pick up one – just one – of those pieces. We yearn for someone to turn it over and see its worth. We want someone to care enough about even one small piece of us that they will gather all of them and carefully reconstruct us to our original beauty. We wonder if our potential friends and lovers, even family or those we regard as family will leave once these pieces are turned over, when the covers of paint and clothing are taken off, and our entirety is revealed. We question if the truth of who we are underneath it all will be worthy of assembly.

Pieces of ourselves remain with others. We want to be remembered for the good we did, the care we gave, and

*continued on Page 36*



the love we showed. Even when many years or decades have passed, we wonder if those who held pieces of us will have them still. We hope they do and that those pieces brought them joy and comfort in their own times of need and that they will be grateful enough to allow us those pieces back when we have come apart ourselves.

If anyone were to spend time collecting and connecting all of our pieces, they would know everything about us. They would discover where we have come from, what we have been through, and why we are the way we are. We would be stripped of all our masks, costumes, paint, and barriers. We would be revealed and vulnerable, weak against their eyes, words, and thoughts. We fear the possibilities... and yet, we also yearn for them and for someone who will want us for everything we have been, are, and could be and even for everything we never were, are not now, and never will

be. We need to feel accepted and know that others see our mismatched and imperfect pieces as parts of our amazing journeys.

With all their flaws and splendors, mistakes and lessons, falls and victories, our pieces have helped shape us into the amazing works of art we show every day. In all the places, hearts, and hands we have left them in, our pieces have helped shape others as well. And, one day, after years and decades of scattering, gathering, and assembling pieces, we will find that the puzzle of our lives is finished. Every piece will find its purpose. Every moment will connect to the next. Every part will be given significance. The picture will be whole and worthy of display, and we will see exactly what we were meant to be all along...a beautiful, unique, complete masterpiece.



**Christmas Lights**  
*by Audrey Butts*

**2017 Best  
Color Photo**  
*Seaswells Photography  
Contest*

## Without Counting

*by Dr. Elizabeth Wurz*

~First published in *Crazyhorse* Issue 58~

~Reprinted in *Cuttings*, Blast Furnace Poetry Chapbook 1st Place~

It's been ten years since I two-stepped,  
felt the AGR fraternity brothers' belt buckles  
against my waistline on the dance floor.

Counting, I moved my feet, looked  
over their shoulders at my seated sisters  
who waited for the unpartnered men.

Tonight, at Hoedowns, a men's bar with two ladies' nights,  
men turn men and women turn women  
in unison; their boot heels clap the wood.

The woman with whom I dance has to lead  
until I can stop counting. Krista takes my hand.  
At the floor's edge, we listen for the music's beat,

Join with her saying, "Left, left, right," turning me,  
"Left, left, right." She counts for *her* feet.  
I must turn thinking, "Right, right left."

I have to stop counting to realize  
the places where my body moves against hers,  
look at her face as we dance.

My hair falls on her cheek, her fingertips  
slide between my knuckles. My thumb recognizes  
her palm lines. Against my inner thigh,  
her knee presses. Krista's hand moves up  
my bra-strapless spine. "You learn fast,"  
she says, "you're back-leading."



**2016 Second Place**

Barr Poetry Contest

**Whitecaps**

*by Samantha Skinner*

Whitecaps kiss the sand.  
Spanish moss silently sways  
in the summer breeze.

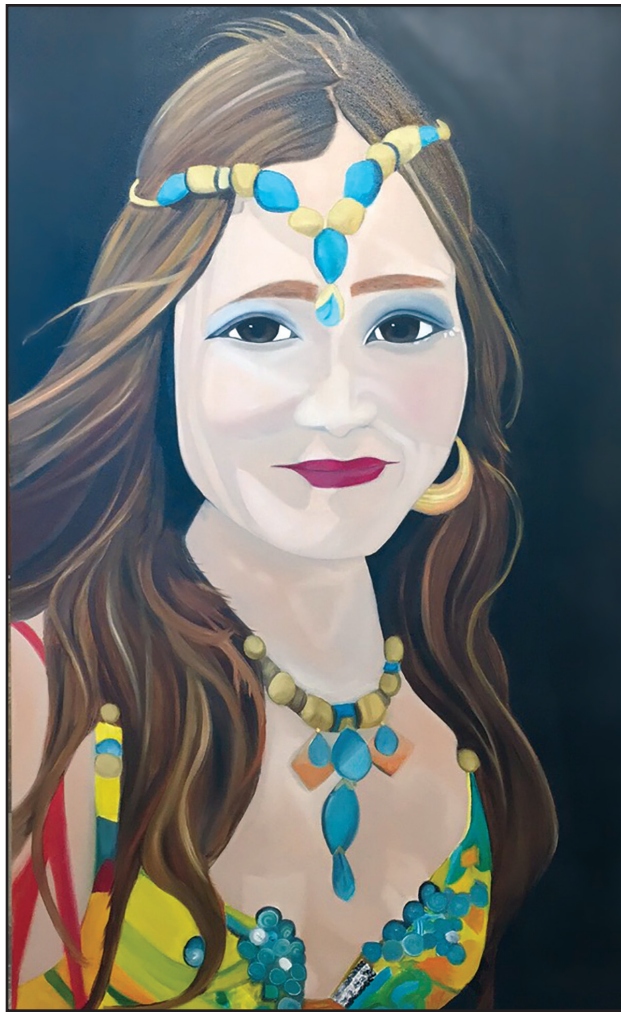
**2017 Second Place**

Seaswells Art Contest

**Blaming Asami**

Oil (30" x 48")

*by Nicole Carter*



**2017 First Place**

Barr Poetry Contest

**Still**

*by Pamala Holton*

Still crying, only inside  
now.  
Sky still blue,  
clouds still white.  
Water still moves,  
earth still spins.  
Heart still beats, but  
broken now.  
Waiting to be healed,  
as they say time  
does.  
Moon after moon I  
watch and wait.  
Still hurts as  
much, still love just  
as much.  
Mother's love is greatly  
missed.

**Shadows of Winter**

*by Nicole Carter*

**2017 Best Overall Photo**

Seaswells Photography Contest



## The Smoking Gun by Laquedia Kelly

2017 Second Place

Austin/Garner Prose Contest

My fascination with guns began when I was about ten years old. My dad owned a very extensive collection of large and small caliber firearms and ammo; just about any gun you can name, he had. Although, I was never sure how he came to own them (not even now), the word “illegal” was scarcely spoken in our household. Everyone avoided the word like a snake coiled up in the road. We lived in a three bedroom apartment that always smelled of oil, gunpowder and grease, not a thick scent but a light rich one, reminiscent of a good cup of brewed coffee. I always watched my dad from the doorway of the kitchen, as he would disassemble, clean, oil and reassemble guns.

I was always amazed at how his big calloused hands seemed to swallow the guns, working with such grace and eloquence, a battle between man and the proverbial machine.

It was times like those where I forged an unspoken bond with my dad; looking back, it was not only the guns I admired, but the man behind them. It was a deep love and respect for him that drew me to the guns, a wanting to get closer to the man I called father. I wonder if he felt the same. My mom would never let me go any further than the threshold, as she would warn me about the dangers of weapons and what they could do to “pretty little girls”. One day when Mom went grocery shopping, I began the same routine. I carefully observed every move he made. I listened to the symphony of the sounds as the pieces clicked into place. The kitchen was filled with the scent that I had grown to love more than that of a freshly baked pumpkin pie.

He suddenly said, “Come over here” with that deep booming tone that commanded respect from everyone he met. To be honest, I was a little scared. My grandma always said that he was as mean as a rattle snake and twice as deadly. His looks seemed to back up her claims; he was a behemoth of a man, 6’4” and 250 pounds of muscle and fat. Through the eyes of a kid, he might as well have been the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk. His features were hard and stern, the product of hard work. His eyes were deeply set in his skull and browned by many years of nicotine neglect.

As a child, I had never been very close to him. He was always either preoccupied with work or fiddling with his guns; the only thing that tied us together, other than our gene pool, was our fascination with “hardware”. To put it lightly, I was more than a little skeptical of his invitation. He motioned for me to come over again, this time expressing how he wasn’t going to bite me. I was completely overwhelmed with the contents of the table, rather than the man and his intentions, overseeing it.

Everything was different up close. The weapons that I had spent so much time watching, now seemed foreign. They were dull and held no mystery, reduced to nothing more than a bunch of metal pipes and tubes, scrap metal. I had always imagined “the other side of the threshold,” its forbidden status giving it even more appeal. Maybe this was the reason it was forbidden, for it was the death of a child’s dream. This was how children became adults. As if sensing my thoughts (it is very hard for kids to hide emotion) my dad let out a thunderous laugh. It was a laugh I only had

the pleasure of witnessing after he had downed countless cans of Colt .45 and just about everything seemed funny to him. He told me to grab my coat because we were going shooting.

Moments passed, what seemed like hours or days were merely seconds ticking away on a clock. I took a deep breath. When cold dry air filled my lungs, I could taste it, the sour slightly copper taste of nervousness that lingered on the tongue like onions after a good meal. I exhaled and got into position, planting my right foot behind me, locking my shoulders into place; becoming unmovable, firmly rooted to the ground like a giant Sequoia tree. He had showed me the stance countless times since arriving there and I imitated it perfectly. He had given me a .22 revolver, which he had explained was the easiest gun to handle even for a kid. It was a beautiful piece of machinery, silver with a black handle, worn from constant use. I had always thought that the weight of a gun would be heavy, but it was light, fitting my hand perfectly, like a glove. It was made for me.

I could feel him beside me, even though I had ear plugs, I could hear his steady breathing, every inhalation and every exhalation. With his arms crossed over his chest he could easily pass for a drill sergeant. He was watching me, studying me looking for any sign of “girly weaknesses” or so he called it. Under the weight of his stare, I felt as if I was one of the hunted. I grew anxious and the weight of the gun tripled. I gripped the handle as tight as I could, strangling it. The metal was cold and it numbed my hands, turning them a blinding white. I slowly brought the gun up to eye level, looking down my sight just as he had taught me. My target was an old piece of wood cut in the shape of a deer. I clutched the trigger tightly and released. All I heard was a muffled bang as I fell to the ground in pain, clutching my shoulder.

I will never forget that night. When we returned home mom was waiting on the front porch with the look of fury in her eyes; her cheeks drenched from crying, having already been informed of the situation in a thirty-minute phone call. She didn’t utter one word, just stood there glaring at my dad through bloodshot eyes. Her cold glare suddenly swept to me, freezing me in my place. She slowly scanned me over, stopping at my shoulder to see the extent of the damage (which wasn’t as bad as it looked). The saying “Hell has no fury like a women’s scorn,” is truly an understatement. She was a hell storm and we were in the eye of it. All I could think about was the weight of that gun and the recoil knocking me to the ground, becoming a defining moment in my history.

From that point forth, he taught me everything he knew about guns. My fascination became more of an obsession. Over the years he seemed to become tougher on me, treating me more like a son than a daughter. By the time I turned sixteen, I had already fired every gun in my father’s collection; I had become better than a bad pro. I do not know how he made “the up-keep” of weapons look amazing but it was a tedious process that I no longer cared for. Nevertheless it was always necessary. Of course my mom didn’t approve. She always said that I had traded in a women’s shoe for combat boots. Albeit that wasn’t far from the truth, as I preferred handguns over handbags.



**2017 Second Place**

Barr Poetry Contest

**The Planet Ball**

by Barry Bowens

Mercury came with Venus, Earth came with Mars, and Pluto was left to roam.  
Jupiter came with Saturn, Uranus came with Neptune, and the Sun came all alone.

Mercury and Venus tried to waltz; Earth and Mars danced a lively jig.  
Jupiter spun Saturn around so hard that Saturn lost her wig.

Uranus and Neptune were far too shy, and then Pluto saw his chance.  
He slipped behind Uranus, came up to Neptune, and asked for one little dance.

Neptune declined and Pluto cried, his surface turned sad and gray  
Neptune just stared at poor Pluto for lack of words to say

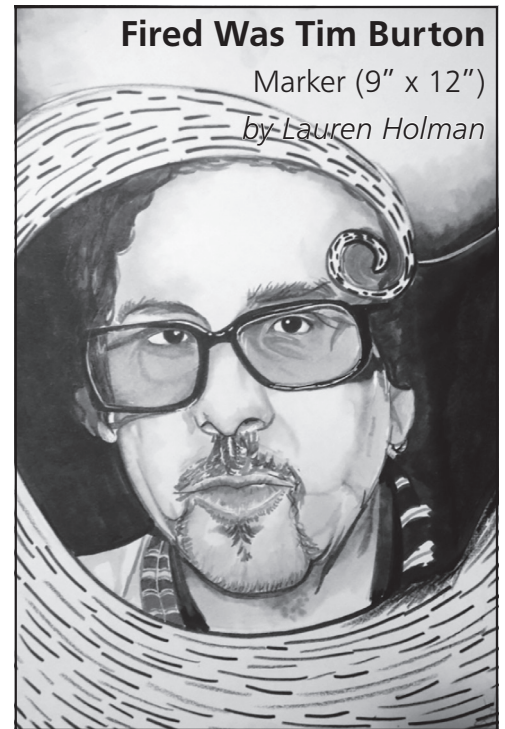
Earth bumped into Venus, and Venus gave a little snort  
She looked at Earth and gave a snide remark and Earth gave her retort

"Oh Venus", said Earth, "It's so obvious that you're full of jealousy."  
"Well at least", said Venus, "I don't have little things, crawling all over me."

Jupiter let out a bellowing laugh and Earth looked at him to inform  
"You've no room to laugh, just look at that pimple, oops I forgot, you like to call it a storm."

Mercury and Mars tried to keep the peace while Saturn took off her rings  
"Get ready!" said Saturn, "For a fight to the death, you human infested thing!"

Amongst all the commotion Pluto continued to shed a lonely tear  
The Sun sat back and with a sigh he said, "This happens every year."



**Fired Was Tim Burton**

Marker (9" x 12")

by Lauren Holman

**2017  
First Place**

Seaswells Art  
Contest



**Innocent Spirit**

by Jordan Agee

**2017 Best Computer-Enhanced Photo**

Seaswells Photography Contest



## Daisy Dust

by Morgan Wilson

Aoife Withrow. A daisy in appearance. A fiery red pixie cut shapes her pale porcelain face that has coffee colored freckles strategically placed by God himself there and throughout the rest of her petite body. Like a daisy, she is always flourishing. She is forever taking another chance to bloom. She never considers anything a burden. Even when she found the lump on the underside of her left breast, she wiped away one crystal tear as if it were meaningless morning dew on a yellow daisy petal. I on the other hand was in a state of disbelief. She has no family, only friends. But anyone she meets... needless to say, she won't leave their minds anytime soon.

Aoife is very likeable and loved. She's the yellow daisy that everyone stops to pick up on the edges and in the cracks of the sidewalk. Some see it as a miniscule plant and others get a hint of nostalgia when picking them from the ground. Aoife saw their beauty the whole time. She is the one who influenced me to see their beauty when I never gave them a second glance. Much like those flowers, she teaches everyone to see her beauty. Maybe that's why she asked for my help...

I suppose it's a "pride thing" for her. She doesn't want everyone to see her hair fall out like dehydrated petals, her body wilt like scrunched leaves and a wrinkled stem, and she doesn't want her presence to fade in the wind like she was never even here. It's all about beauty. Aoife has always been glorified over the essence she brings into the room. She fears that in this next phase of her life she may not be able to remain hopeful like she has for the past two years.

At the beginning she was fearless and now she fears everything. Aoife has always been brave. Aoife and I were roommates in college, we went to the same classes too. Now we work in the same hospital, in the same wing. All her patients call her Daisy. It's because of a song she sings every morning when she does her rounds. A Field of Yellow Daisies. We danced to the same song when we took our final nursing exam and passed. She now enters a patient's room and with the brightest smile she sings the lyrics. Since the first appointment, however, I haven't smiled much.

I went to the first doctor's appointment and every one since then. I have been there from the diagnosis of Stage II going on Stage III of breast cancer to the chemo pills. From the pills to the emergency radiation and hair loss. After she finished a month of radiation she was then able to rest. It had been a year that she was able to rest until we went to the most recent visit. The doctor said she was now Stage IV breast cancer and she had 6 weeks to live. Through all of this I have been there. She wanted me with her every step of the way, and so I was. In her radiation treatment they let me be her nurse. I would pick her up from her apartment and take her to radiation every morning. We'd get her through it and no matter how exhausted she was afterward, she'd stand up, run to the restroom, throw on her scrubs, and do her rounds. She said treating her patients is what kept her from wilting.

It was enough for a while, however, I guess it never was... enough. Aoife knocked on my apartment door two Sundays ago. April 7th. It was pouring rain outside. She came in her bright yellow hooded rain coat, her gray sweat-pants, and her black rain boots with yellow polka dots.

Usually she comes right in. She has a key. I heard the subtle knock on my door, but it took me a few minutes to answer. It was a perfect day for Earl Grey tea. I answered the door and she came in sulking. I knew something wasn't right. The tea kettle screamed for attention and I ran over to it to take it off the burner. Aoife asked me for a cup of the Earl Grey. As I was pouring it into the cup, she took out a flask that smelled like 1920's sour scotch. I jerked it from her hand and poured it down the drain. I was frantic.

"What the hell is wrong with you? Are you trying to die tomorrow?"

She smirked, wiped away a tear or two and stuttered.

"I... I need you to help me kill myself." I stood with my hands on the edge of the sink. She repeated clearer.

"I need you to help me kill myself." She walked over to me, grabbed my shoulders, shaking them, and screamed her proposal in my face. She fell into my arms exhausted. Sobbing, she couldn't find any more words. I never responded. Yet, how could I?

I stormed to the bathroom that was in my bedroom and ran hot water with "Daisy and Spring Water" bubble bath. Aoife got it for me for Christmas and I have never used it. She hesitated in the kitchen but wandered in behind me. As she entered, we both exchanged a glare of guilt. Her guilt was from wanting to leave me sooner than she had to, and my guilt was from me wanting to help her. She sat down on the top of the toilet and I took off her rain boots and socks for her. She stood up and undressed. I took her hand as her frail, pale, malnourished looking body stepped into the steam and bed of bubbles. I went to the kitchen and retrieved two cups of Earl Grey and a rag from the kitchen. I came back, placed the tea on the white and gray marble vanity slab, dipped the rag in the hot water and placed it on the back of Aoife's neck. I handed her the daffodil yellow tea cup and held mine as I slid down the wall for a seat on the floor. I cushioned my fall with my fluffy white linen rug that was next to the bath tub.

We sipped our teas with intensity, waiting for words to find a way out of us on their own. Everything that I wanted to say to her lived in every available space left in my mind. I looked at her as we both had tears rolling down our cheeks. I saw the pain in her eyes. That is when I was able to make a decision. I mean, the last thing she needed was for me to treat her a patient, like she didn't know what was going on. I sniffed in, wiped my eyes with my bleached stained navy blue sleeve, swallowed back the last of my tea, and said, "Okay."

Over the past two weeks we have done nothing but research in our spare time. We spent every hour together. There were a lot red wine and take-out nights. For a moment it felt like she didn't have cancer. It felt like she never had a lump in her left breast. The cancer never spread. Our adult sleepovers were the one thing that made us forget until we had to make a decision. We came up with a couple of solutions. She could overdose on medication. Demerol? Morphine? No. We finally came to an answer. The most obvious one. Time.

I have never seen someone go so quick. Each day she grew weaker, paler, and by yesterday she was no longer here. What happened to six weeks? Where did time go? She stayed the night for the final time two nights ago. Yesterday, I woke up to her with no sound but her breath



growing shallow. She turned her head and gasped.  
 "Don't cry daisy..." She lifted her hand to my face and started singing our song by Charlie Rich.  
 "Have you ever been in a field of yellow daisies, where the air is warm, pure, and sweet..." Her breathing grew heavier with each breath every minute.  
 "Just as if the world... is at your feet." \*breath\*  
 "She loved me... she loved me not..." She grabbed my hand with a breath and sang the last that she could.

"The daisies didn't lie..." I shaking, lying beside her touched her face and sang the rest.  
 "They knew better than I, she'd go away... yeah, but they didn't say why."  
 Why did she have to go away? Today I stand alone holding an urn in a field of yellow daisies. The wind is blowing. The song is playing from a CD out of my red Volkswagen bug. I turned the urn over little by little letting the wind take her, but I will not let her be forgotten.



**Family Farm**  
 by Cody Haynes

**2017 Best  
 Black & White  
 Photo**  
*Seaswells*  
 Photography Contest

**After My Third Tattoo** by Dr. Elizabeth Wurz

~First published in *Rattle*, Issue 14.1~  
 ~Reprinted in *Cuttings*, Blast Furnace Poetry Chapbook 1st Place~

"What noun would you want spoken on your skin your whole life through?"  
 —Mark Doty, "My Tattoo"

On the back of my neck, the verb experience is healing. With the hand-mirror and wall mirror, I see where to rub the ointment on my father's tombstone.

When I opened the plastic bag of his ashes, I expected to inhale some soft gray powder like flour. When flesh and bone burn, what's left is a bag of sand. Crumbled starfish and femurs.

They stented his basilar artery. In another vessel, the blockage paralyzed him. For ten days, he blinked once for no and repeated blinks for yes. He wanted the life support removed.

They've torn down the campground in Panama City where he and I slept in tents and boiled blue crabs every summer. They're building a seventeen-story condo at the site. The tattoo parlor is still there—where my Uncle Jay inked the topless mermaid on my father's bicep.

With twenty-five dollars from his retirement fund, I rent a cushioned lounge chair on the beach, set the bag of ashes and my cooler under the umbrella. I think of his blinking yes—he wanted the life support removed.

When they gave him morphine, he shut his eyes. I could not see his fear. I watched his heartbeat and respiration slow and stop on the monitor. In my hand, his hand hardened and lost warmth. His body turned gray.

They gave me his false teeth in a container, and I drove them to the funeral home.

Our rituals are not private. I pour his ashes into a red sand-castle bucket, stuff the plastic bag in my bag of empty beer cans, and walk past others' oil-covered bodies, surfboards, and the smell of coconut.

I pour the pieces of his body in where the wave breaks.



**Perspective**  
*by Nicole Carter*

**an artificial connecting  
of points in time**  
*by Whitney Johnston*

**2018 First Place**  
Barr Poetry Contest

this is to be expected  
do something unexpected  
try to become more aggressive  
fail  
get drunk  
succeed

birth: leads to death  
some are born dead  
some are born dead yet still  
breathing

this is to be expected

domesticated wild things  
stealing things  
manipulative things

manipulation:  
interactions with both the  
tangible and the intangible

the self and the other  
always manifested out of  
no matter how genuine the  
actions  
may feel  
the main goal is ultimately to  
achieve  
your own (happiness,  
contentment, satisfaction)

life: an ongoing performance  
figments of ideas of who we  
are and  
what our story will be  
truths as moments of  
falsehood, and  
vice versa

“and by now you can tell that I  
prefer  
talking about the fear of  
living  
as opposed to the fear of  
dying.”

this is to be expected

**2018 Best Black & White Photo**  
Seaswells Photography Contest

**2018 Second Place**  
Austin/Garner Prose Contest

**The Tale of Nothing** *by Allison Williams*

How do I write a paper about my life when I have nothing to tell? I sat there in front of the computer, staring at the blank screen, hoping for words to appear where the depressing white remained. My mind was full of sand, and I was trying to pick it up with a tennis racket. Every word I reached for slipped away before a decent sentence had formed. Maybe it was the setting: a room filled with other students struggling to clear their minds, the mumblings of people who couldn't figure it out, the bland white walls reflecting the whiteness of the screen in front of me. No matter how I looked at the screen, the empty page looked back.

I racked my brain, searching for any memorable moment, paper worthy. Every hunt came back the same, nothing exciting had happened to a boring square like me. Every day for me was the same: get up, go to school, eat food, watch Netflix, go to sleep. The only variation to the repetitive list being the show I watched. Everything was the same. Nothing was different. It was official; I was a world class loser. I had no story to tell, no crazy hoodlum adventure, no teenage tale to pass on, no nothing. I was one boring piece of trash blowing through the streets of life.

“Is this how every teenager feels when they're assigned a memoir to write?” I asked myself. Surely not, they all have gone out and done something incredible to tell at a party or a small friend gathering. Maybe they exaggerate, but they all have to have something to start with. They all have some experience to brag on, to tell to impress their friends, to tell their children and grandchildren when they get old. Some have snuck out at night, others have gone and broken the law, and others just have crazy stories about crazy parties. Me? I had nothing. I had the stories about how I stayed up all night doing homework, how I ate 57 hash browns at once, how I slept past noon. Jeez Louise, I was a lame, party-poopng, square-pants-wearing, goody-two-shoes.

I tried to relax, trying to let a memory just come to me. That was harder than I thought it would be with the due date looming around the corner: only two days. Of course, I had waited until the last minute to start my paper; why wouldn't I? To avoid the stress of a due date? Not my style. I've always worked better with the adrenaline pulsing through me; the stress of the short amount of time giving me energy. If I have an unnecessary amount of time to do something, I'm obviously going to waste it. Give me a short time and I'll be an efficiency machine.

Strangely enough, some memories did come to me, however none of them seemed appropriate. I thought about the time back in the third grade when my best friend died in a car crash, the only time I cried at school. It was one of the saddest times of my life, but it was so long ago that I couldn't remember any real details. Nothing to write about. The only thing to say were the facts, nothing to spice it up.

Then a more recent memory came to mind, my brother's boot-camp graduation. I'd never been so prideful in my life. The bright blue skies hovering over the huge blocks of military men and women standing in a bright green field. Flags of the country, the companies, and the world flapping in the wonderful breeze that kept the sun from being too hot. The Coasties walked and received their certificates and where they would be stationed. When the name "Aaron Williams" rang out followed by "Saul St. Marie, Michigan" I couldn't control my joy. I looked over and saw my mom crying, and my dad holding her hand as they saw their only son finally getting his life together. Their company was dismissed and we ran to meet him in uniform. There were hugs all around and more crying from both my mom and my dad. Aaron had changed. He had turned from a teenage hoodlum into a military man. He was so changed that when my mom started to jaywalk across the street, he looked at her like she was crazy and made us all use the sidewalk.

I could have written about that, but it still didn't seem right. I didn't learn anything from that trip to the Coast Guard base on Cape May. The only thing I learned was that my brother might turn out alright after all. There was no lesson. I couldn't write about that, even if it was one of the most emotional moments of my family.

I couldn't write about the other most joyful moment of my life either, brought to mind at the mention of the Coast Guard: when my letter from the Coast Guard Academy came in the mail. It wasn't even an acceptance letter, just an informational packet. Still, when it came I almost started crying.

I was on my front porch, blowing bubbles with my giant bubble set given to me on my birthday. I was covered in soap, the sticky solution coating everything in sight. Bubbles in my eyes, bubbles on my phone, bubbles on my shirt, bubbles everywhere. There wasn't a dry spot for miles. As I blew one of the biggest bubbles of all time, my dad pulled up in the drive way. I headed over to his car, ready to strike up some classic Williams conversation, but he rolled down his window and stuck out a giant envelope with the Coast Guard Academy logo on the front. I took it from him and ran inside to wash my hands. The soap seemed to take forever to get rid of. Finally, after a thorough scrubbing, I dried off and ripped the packet open. Inside was a letter to me thanking me for my interest in the Coast Guard Academy, a booklet about joining the Academy, and a magnet for my car that said "U.S. Coast Guard Bears" on it. As I flipped through the information I realized how wonderful everything was; I knew that this was what I wanted to do. The joy at realizing that this was it – that going to the Academy was what I wanted to do – was overpowering. This wasn't just some job that sounded good and people would be impressed with. This was something I actually wanted to do. I wanted to go to the United States Coast Guard Academy and become a marine engineer.

That was the most excited I'd ever been about something I did, but it still wasn't the right fit for my paper. It wasn't the experience that I wanted to tell. I knew there was surely something better. Some other story from my life

that really stuck out. I couldn't put my finger on it though. I thought long and hard, trying to find that one memory that was the memory. Even if my paper wasn't on some crazy adventure about jumping off a cliff into a mountain stream, I was sure I could still make it interesting. There must be something in my boring life that would translate to an interesting paper.

I looked back up at how much I had written, hoping to get some inspiration from the few words I had put to paper. I realized then that I had written more than I had thought I had. There were at least three full pages filled up in front of me. How had I missed it? What had I been doing? I had never even decided on my exciting memory. How was this possible?

I looked through everything, trying to figure out how I had written so much and then how I could write more without getting off topic. This was supposed to be about an experience in my life, what was I really writing about though? Then I realized. I was writing about writing. I had written four pages only on my memory of writing a memoir. I had turned a memory about nothing and turned it into four pages of the written word. I had turned truly nothing, into something. The paper I was worried about for weeks on end had turned out to be not as hard as I thought it would be. I was writing, and even more surprising, I was enjoying it. What was going on? I was writing and it was working.

My exhilarating time didn't last though. As I realized what I was doing, the words started to slow down. The steady stream of thoughts started to trickle to a slow drip. My shower of words turned to a dribble. The end was near, I could almost taste it as I began writing the fifth page, but I could feel myself slowing down. I could feel the repetition beginning and the God-awful conclusion starting to form. I was in trouble.

I was so close to the end, but it was so hard to reach. I had to find a way to put some spice back into my story. It was a memory, but that didn't make it a stale slice of bread. It could still be a juicy steak, cooked to perfection, brining joy with every bite. It could still be a delicious meal made with a good marinade and an open fire grill. I just had to figure out the best way to take my steak that was done cooking off of the grill. I had already taken care of the hard part, it was just taking the steak off before it burned. I had to figure out how to finish my paper without turning my paper stale.

As simple as it sounded, it seemed like the hardest part of the paper. Just finish what I want to say and get out. It sounded so simple before I had to put it to action. Just remember all of the tips my past teachers had taught me about finishing a paper. If you could drop the mic after the last line, it's good; if you can't, try again. I was trying. The mic just didn't want to drop.

I scrolled back through my work, once again looking for a way out. How had I missed it before? Listen to Nike, "Just Do It." I took one last glance at my work, and I saw what I had done. I had written a full memoir on writing a memoir. I had written a decent paper about a boring topic. I had done it. I realized, you don't need a crazy adventure or a wild story to tell a good tale. It's all in your head. You don't need to be crazy to have a story. A square can tell a story just as good as the next guy. I had finally learned something. I had done it. Winner-winner chicken dinner, I had done it. You don't need to be a hoodlum to have a story, you just have to have a brain.



**2018  
Second Place**  
*Seaswells Art Contest*

**Only to Be with You**  
Oil on canvas (24" x 30")  
*by Nicole Carter*



**The Path Less Traveled**  
*by Kaleigh Pfaff*

**2018 Best  
Computer-  
Enhanced  
Photo**  
*Seaswells  
Photography  
Contest*

**2018 Best Overall Photo**  
*Seaswells Photography Contest*



**Humidity**  
*by Cody Haynes*



**2018  
First Place**

*Seaswells Art Contest*

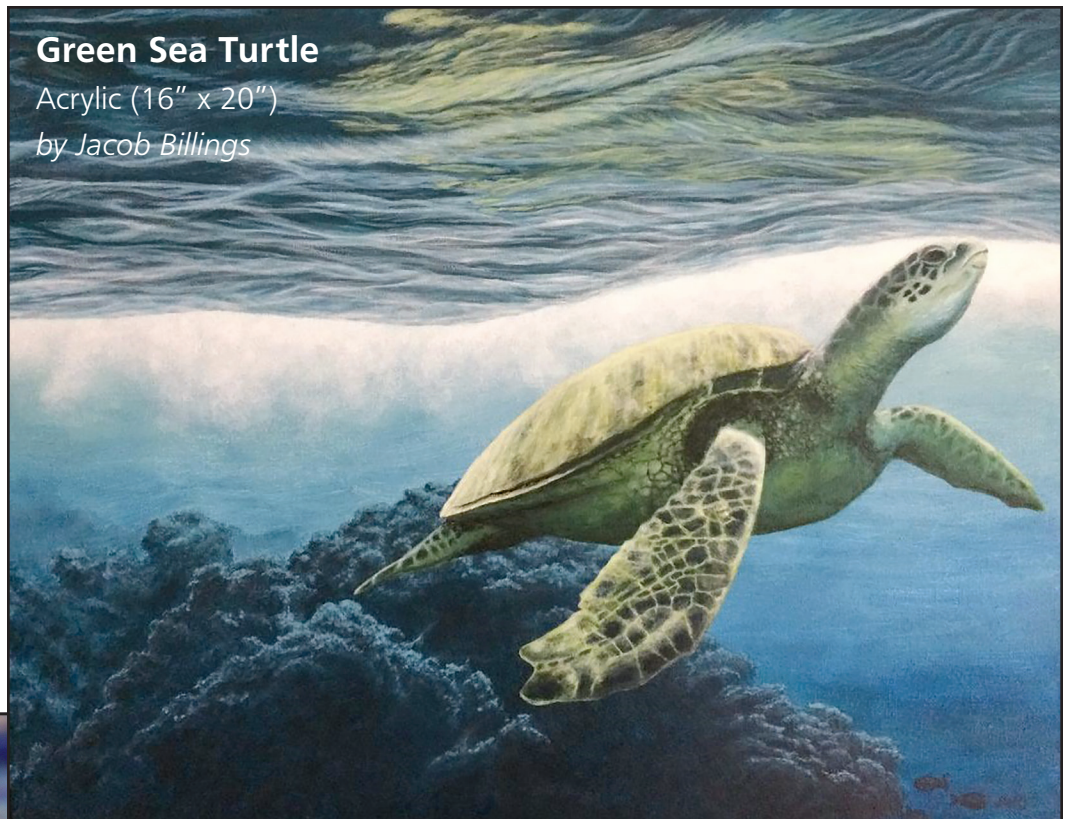
**2018 Best  
Color Photo**

*Seaswells Photography  
Contest*

## Green Sea Turtle

Acrylic (16" x 20")

by *Jacob Billings*



## Mirror Mirror

by *Haleigh Terhune*



**2018 First Place**

Austin/Garner  
Prose Contest

## My Reflection by *Haleigh Terhune*

A classmate once told me that I have a wonderful speaking voice. He told this to me after I had made a presentation, a speech, for my high school Model United Nations club. Maybe the comment would have made sense, maybe it would have fit into my life more easily and I would have said "thank you" and accepted the compliment without another thought, maybe it would have boosted my ego and left me simply with an inflated confidence. Maybe this would have happened if this was the first time I had spoken publicly.

But such was not the case. No, his comment had been tacked onto something which I do just about every other day. This speech was not the first time I had spoken in this club, or in public, or even in front of a major audience. This instance wasn't the 2nd or 3rd or the 4th time that I had

walked myself into a spotlight and pronounced an endless string of enunciated syllables to a group of people. In fact, throughout my academic and personal career, I had crafted a repertoire of giving lectures and reciting texts, both debating and performing, often poetry or prose. But my classmate had never commented on those, or maybe he had but he stuck to a similar script that most people take when doing so. Instead, what he had complimented was just another mundane event, just another speech in a club about speaking.

It stopped me, his simple comment, and I was forced to take a seat with a different perspective. Maybe I felt a kind of validation, one I knew of innately but never expected

*continued on Page 46*



## My Reflection *continued from Page 45*

anyone to agree on – like odd stories about your life that, until one day, you didn't know anyone could relate to. Conversely, maybe there was no inherent understanding, but rather a hope that had suddenly come true – a secret wish that I could address groups of people with the same rigor and artistry comparable to that of Dr. King or Mark Antony. And maybe, hidden beneath that hope, there was a shred of desire – a hunger for something more. To be charismatic. To be important. To be influential.

A stranger once came up to me, while I was talking with friends and about to exit for the stage, ready to perform in our school's production of *Willy Wonka*. With the slightest bit of sheepishness and an evident amount of much more bravery, she told me something I wasn't sure I had heard correctly – that I was beautiful. In a jumble of smiles and laughs, she nervously explained how she often passes me in the hallways or sees me across campus, and in her eyes, I always look very nice. It caught me off-guard, not in the sense that I have lived my whole life thinking I resemble a troll or mutilated frog, but in the sense that out of hundreds of students, something about me was memorable. Out of a class of 444 and a school population of approximately 2000, why should I have been considered noteworthy, or even noticed at the very least? While my mind raced to understand how T-shirts and shorts day-after-day could be viewed as minorly intriguing, a part of me blossomed to the idea that she was talking about me – myself – rather than the clothes I wore. It was, aside from astonishing, quite an eye-opener for how I imagined I was viewed. Her comment had forced me to think on how our ingrained thoughts of how people perceive us are often times rather inaccurate. We tend to think of ourselves as better or, in most cases, worse than we really are, but we don't allow ourselves to conceive that just by existing, we are already brilliant.

Similarly, around 1:25 PM of yet another fantastically thrilling day in band class, it was time to practice our major music selection for an upcoming competition. Around the center of the song, I took on the responsibility of leading with a lengthy solo, one that wasn't working out quite how I had hoped. I made mistakes, I knew I needed to practice – overall my play-through that day was relatively mediocre. When the bell eventually rang out, announcing the end of the period, band kids scattered to their cases and quickly packed up, hurrying as not to be late for their next class. I too rushed to my instrument, but before reaching my case, someone nudged me on the arm and congratulated me on playing the solo with such pleasant musicality. I don't remember who it was, or what instrument they played, but the compliment left me somewhat dazed nonetheless. As I took my instrument apart and packed up my things, a few other classmates also made the effort to tell me what a lovely job I had done playing during the song. This caught me by surprise! Why would they choose now to profess their adoration when today was just another run-through of off-pitch notes and clipped melodies? Was it them, or was it ultimately me?

I went home those days, feathers ruffled and thoroughly conflicted, and I stood in front of my bathroom mirror. Fluorescent lights shining down on me like a spotlight, the fan buzzing loud enough to nearly drown out my thoughts. Questions and worries and replayed scenes piled up in my mind, overflowing like water in a flooded dam, begging to find purchase in undisturbed pools and quiet riverbeds. I stared at myself for a long time beside that mirror. I stared at my reflection for a long time. Why would friends, and

classmates, and strangers alike take their own time, waste their own energy, to tell me something that probably wasn't true? Looking at my image in the reflective surface, I didn't feel well-spoken, or talented, or beautiful. I didn't think I was any of those things, in fact, I didn't want to think of myself at all. I didn't want to face the overwhelming complexity of existence, or the disturbing fact that my body and my mind sometimes don't feel as one.

I didn't want to contemplate those comments, those compliments. Those fleeting moments of exhilaration and excitement, words searing my skin and filling my heart with hope and appreciation. They flushed my mind with adrenaline and allowed me to believe, if only for a second, that I was somehow something more than I realized. But I didn't believe them, not really. Because once I stopped running on transient gratifications, I realized that my legs burned with exhaustion rather than jubilation, and the compliments were probably just lies, crafted only to make me feel better.

I leaned in to the mirror, examining the rough surface of my scarred face and every imperfection of my proportions. I didn't see myself, I couldn't fathom how others viewed me. The more I looked at my eyes and my ears and my nose, the more I shifted into something unreal and stitched together. Looking into the mirror, I saw everything but a human being. I saw a multidimensional shape with too many faces to count, and too many seems to understand. I watched Russian nesting dolls getting smaller and smaller with no end in sight, and I saw cardboard puzzles with a few too many missing pieces. I saw an unfinished sketch, an artist's abstract interpretation of a person. I saw a latched box, empty and hollow and painted with blinding colors – a constantly changing mural but no brushes in sight. I looked at that mirror but all I could seem to see were mistakes and mistakes and mistakes and mistakes...

My tongue swelled in on itself, and I tasted depression on my lips, every crafted word and sculpted smile coming back to haunt me. I pinched my nose, but I could still smell the ocean – salty and churning and dark, shadows lurking just beneath the surface. I slammed my eyes tight, and I saw wildfires – vibrant and burning with a sort of self-destructive brilliance matched only by the stars. I cupped my hands to my ears, yet, louder than ever, I could hear insult and disappointment, bitter voices like black coffee dripping venom and detestation. How was I supposed to believe them! How was I supposed to believe compliments and exaltations when for so long a slideshow of numbers have defined my worth, have told me to get better, have told me that I'm not good enough. When for so long, I have told myself that I am not enough.

Standing there, in front of my bathroom mirror, more than an image of myself or a history of mistakes, I saw something else. I allowed myself a second, a solitary second, to contemplate what it would mean if I was wrong, if I chose to accept those compliments and encouragements rather than immediately throw them to the side. I debated what it would mean if I trusted those kind words, given by both friends and strangers, and decided to walk with a little more honest confidence. Live with a little more respect in myself. Through their eyes I suddenly saw myself – a girl who was friendly and intellectually driven, artistically talented and gorgeous in her own way. My mind felt a pull, the briefest hope that there was a better life waiting for me if only I took a minute to find it. For the briefest moment, I saw a glimmer of freedom, of love, of happiness. Of relief.

And then the glimmer vanished. And I jumped in the shower.



I  
Today, we close the sale.  
I faxed the abstract for my father's house,  
the appraisal, and the survey of the land.

On off-days from the paper mill,  
my father tilled and baled his in-laws' fields.  
He saved and bought land close enough to Harris Brake  
that a lake-fed creek ran through. My newlywed parents  
leased and hauled-in the trailer. I remember its gold shag  
carpet,  
the hole he made in the wall with my mother's forehead,  
and my childhood bedroom on the end—the trailer hitch  
outside my yellow eyelet curtains. I imagined  
acquiring an adult body's strength—pulling my end myself  
into the pine forest where I picked muscadines  
and dug dogwoods to transplant in the yard.

After taking a better-paying job with First Electric,  
my father kept long hours in uniform, reading meters,  
climbing poles—spike-marked from his boots.  
He fixed the charged, overhead lines.

In the trailer, I walked in on my father  
on the toilet. He plunged speed into his veins,  
untied the tourniquet.

From his ecstatic face, I looked  
to the green crayon lines I'd drawn on the door frame  
to mark my height and the dates.

II  
Before they rolled my father's body to the morgue,  
I pulled his shirt and jeans from the plastic personal  
belongings bag. His wallet  
smelled like his saddle. Its thickness—electrical voltage  
and selective service cards, my first-grade and prom pictures,  
and my nine-month-old daughter's picture—had worn a  
square  
of lighter denim threads on his back pocket.

When I told him I conceived Olivia at a fertility clinic  
with anonymous donor sperm, he said I was selfish  
for raising her with two mothers. Olivia's birth certificate  
lists my wife and me as parent and parent.

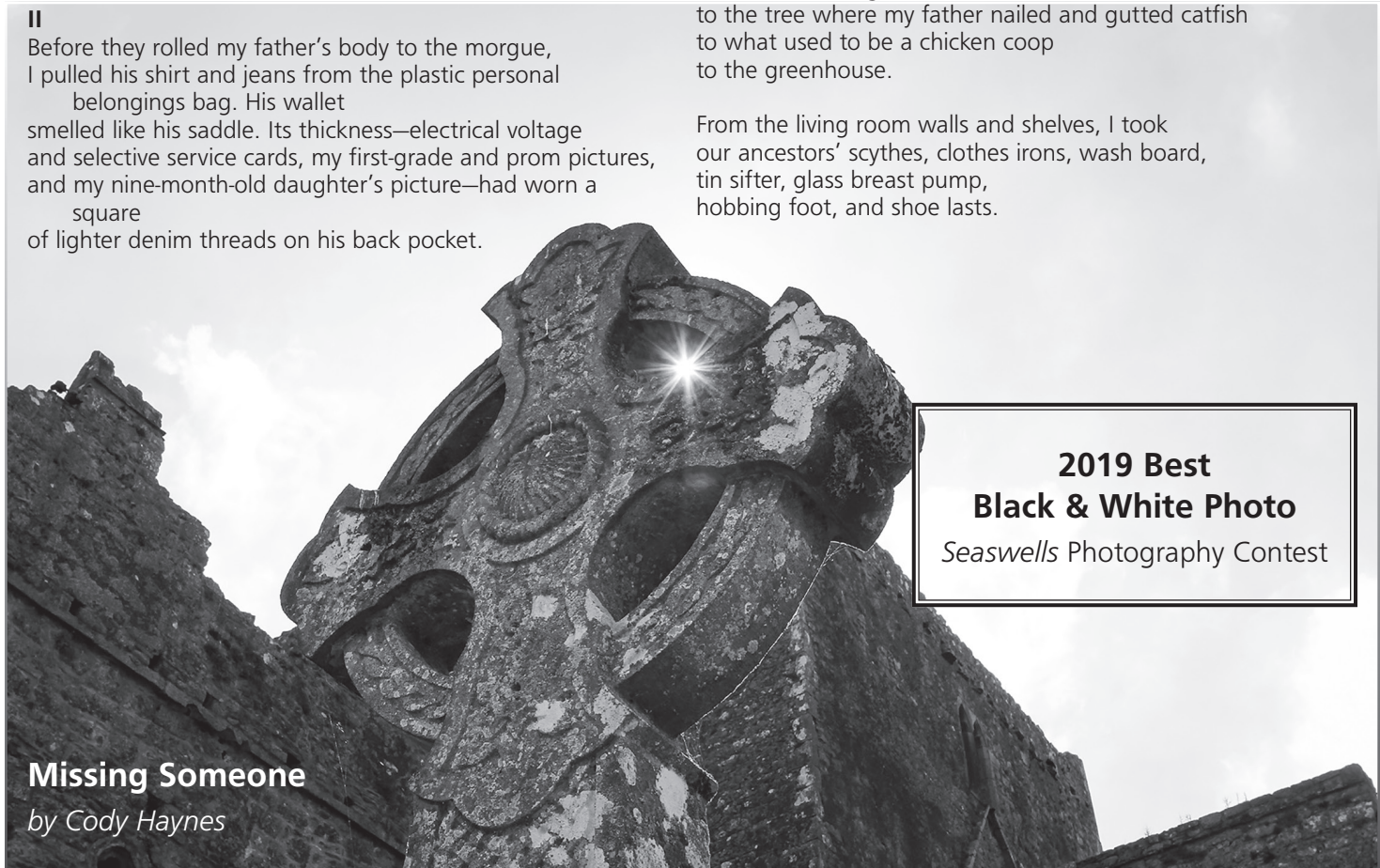
I never asked him about his love for our neighbor  
on the other side of the creek. With round utility poles,  
lumber,  
and concrete, he and my father built the bridge.  
My father carried cinnamon rolls across.  
I found a picture of them kissing by the campfire.

III  
After his cremation, I piled broken chairs,  
boxes of child-support receipts, cut-off jeans, an AA book,  
and dusty *National Geographics* in the yard  
beside the totaled Crown Victoria. Rebecca, his second wife,  
left a party, backed it  
down the winding driveway—rolled it  
into the water-filled ditch and drowned.

In the cabin he built after selling our trailer,  
I pulled up carpet and linoleum  
and covered the new sub-floor with oak.  
Uncle Richard wanted the wood stove.  
My father's friends installed heat-and-air  
and double-pane windows.

They brought in fresh gravel for the driveway  
and spread it from the dogwoods I planted  
to the creek bridge  
to the tree where my father nailed and gutted catfish  
to what used to be a chicken coop  
to the greenhouse.

From the living room walls and shelves, I took  
our ancestors' scythes, clothes irons, wash board,  
tin sifter, glass breast pump,  
hobbing foot, and shoe lasts.



**2019 Best  
Black & White Photo**  
Seaswells Photography Contest

**Missing Someone**  
by Cody Haynes

## How Pride Falls *by Willie Vaughn*

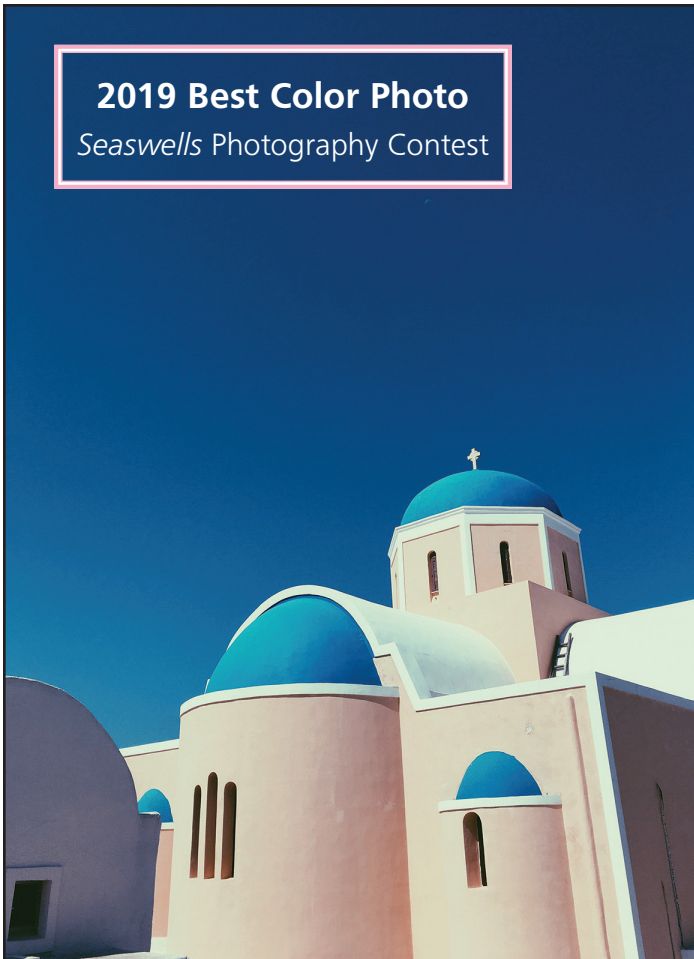
The notes of the piano caressed the ears of the audience.  
Child-like innocence moved in unison with the vibrations.  
A synchronized dance filled to brim with flamboyant cockiness.  
Fingering away at the keys, a youth, caught up in their own  
foundations.

The peripherals of her vision caught the appreciation of the crowd.  
Their heads, as one, swayed with the rhythm as if dancing.  
"Slaves," she thought with slyness creeping into her shroud.  
"My playing is so stunning, so beautiful, so entrancing!"

Her eyes broke away from her sheet, seeking to bask in her praise.  
But out cast in the sea of love and admiration stood an anomaly.  
A familiar face, blank and featureless, a complete maze.  
"What have I done wrong? Does he question my quality?"

Notes turned into pleas  
Cockiness morphed to desperation  
Vibrations no longer played with ease.  
Foundations broken into stagnation

## Inirotnas *by Travis Troutt*



**2019 Best Color Photo**  
*Seaswells Photography Contest*

## 2018 Second Place

*Barr Poetry Contest*

With renewed vigor, small, skilled hands attacked the keys.  
The symphony started to groan and creak, becoming irritated.  
The veil over the audience began to lift, their faces no longer pleased.  
One frown caused a chain reaction; all aimed at a new sound  
unappreciated.

Doubt formed as the boos and shouts reached her ears.  
She stopped playing, her notes' ugliness too great.  
Her world coming down all around her, bringing her to tears.  
Her wet eyes cast down, weighed down by the hate.

The unmoved man from before simply departed.  
A sly smile rose that reveled in her deserved misery.  
"A prideful brat I've raised," the man started.  
"She must learn how to act when her ego is under injury."

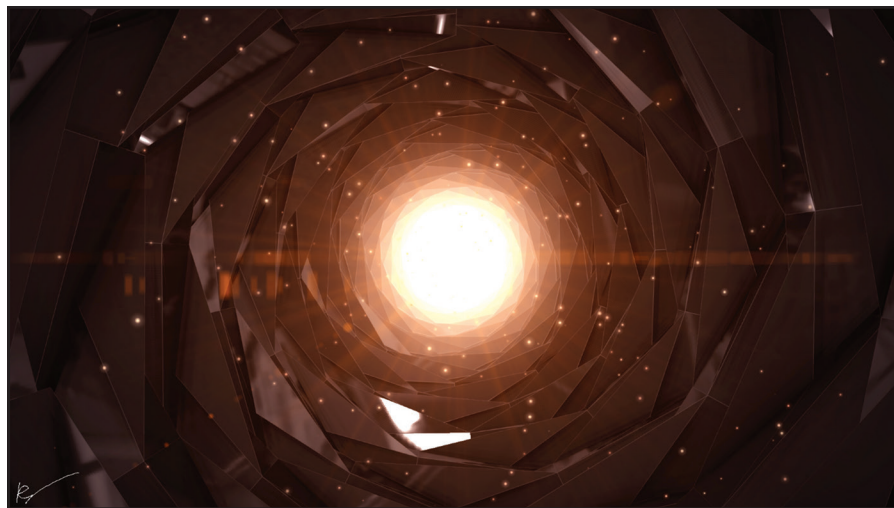
## Glitched Personality *by Ben Platnick*



**2019 Best Computer-Enhanced Photo**  
*Seaswells Photography Contest*

## Obsidian Sunset

Digital Artwork  
by Ben Platnick



**2019  
Second  
Place**

Austin/  
Garner Prose  
Contest

**2019  
Second Place**

Seaswells  
Art Contest

## Sunset on Venus by James Carpenter

The hot winds whistled beneath the creaky metal platform the man stood on, the thick gases constantly moving, the clouds seeming a veritable sea beneath him.

*Sea. Heh.* Like those seas of lava we used to avoid as kids. Only this is real.

He stood there and gazed at the world around him. It was hot, but not unbearably so, with the temperature sitting at a balmy 118 degrees fahrenheit. The sun shone down through the lighter cloud coverage above. Great shades of orange filled the man's view, to be expected considering the atmospheric composition. The horizon was like a painting of the most breathtaking sunset to ever happen on Earth, the colors intermingling and blending together in awesome ways. It was beautiful, a glorious sight few men had seen in person, and would now likely ever see.

The man despised it. He loathed it.

A disgusted grimace twisted his face. Grunting, he got back around to the duty he had tasked himself with when coming out here.

Soon, a great weight was lifted from the man's shoulders as the burden he had been carrying was released into the seething void. It was not long before it was obscured by the clouds and vanished from view; forever.

The man gave a sardonic, half-hearted salute. "It seems you actually will burn in Hell, Henry, or, at the very least, the next best thing."

With that, the man turned on his heels and strode away, back towards the main complex of the floating station. His

boots made a steady *klunk* sound against the platform as he moved. He sighed as he entered the airlock, removed his oxygen supply apparatus, and peeled off his protective covering from his sweat-covered skin.

"Six down, one to go."

*SLAM.* The airlock exit shut. A hiss sounded from all around as the hallway was oxygenated, there soon after seeing the entranceway to the main concourse of the complex slide open.

The final corpse was still bundled up in the quarantine gear it had been wearing in life, collapsed near the stairwell and leaned against the wall. 'Johnson' read the nametag on the baggy orange suit. Johnson had been one mean, cantankerous sonuvagun, but it was bittersweet to see him go. He may have been the person the man had liked least, but he had also been the last person besides the man himself to be alive on the station.

With a flick of the wrist the man checked his watch. *Hour 5,824, day 243.* The skies still held their bright orange hue as the Venusian day drew to a close.

"Screw it." Enough had been accomplished today in maintaining the base and disposing of the vast majority of the corpses. Johnson could be taken care of later. God knows Johnson would have left the man himself to rot for some time before taking him out. The only issue was that Johnson's body was possibly carrying whatever the other bodies had fallen to. The mess hall was located to the left of

*continued on Page 50*

**2019  
First Place**

Seaswells  
Art Contest



## Still Life (Vanitas)

Oil (16" x 20")

by Jacob Billings



this central area. It occurred to the man that he was not only tired, but starving as well. Lugging around and throwing away diseased corpses sure does get a man hungry, but he was extra hungry. He began to make his way over to the hall in order to fulfill this newly noted need for sustenance.

Banging a refrigerator door open, the man rummaged through the icebox contents, simultaneously enjoying the cool air; he had begun to sweat again despite the temperature controlled nature of the base. Much of the contents were starting to go bad if they had not already; no new supply mission had arrived in months, not since the quarantine had been imposed, and it was less and less likely one would ever return. Rancid chicken, moldy cheese, chunky milk; all would have to be disposed of and never replaced. The vast majority of future sustenance for the man would have to come from dehydrated and dried foodstuffs. But while there was still some of the Earth-food still enduring, he might as well enjoy it.

Eventually, his hands landed upon a still sealed frozen dinner package. "Hungry Man Country Fried Chicken" read the packaging. That suited the man just fine, for that was what he was: a very, very hungry man.

Tearing open the cardboard box, the frozen meal itself was extracted, its plastic covering peeled away, and placed inside the dingy, splatter-stained microwave. He set it to 'Hi-Heated' and stood as the time ticked down on the cramped seven-segment display. It was during this time that the man heard it—a shuffling noise.

He whirled around, hand and fork poised to strike as a makeshift weapon, but there was nothing there. The cafeteria was empty. Slowly, cautiously, he made his way to the entrance, peeking around the corner; Johnson's limp body appeared not to have moved an inch from its earlier position next to the stairwell.

"Cabin fever already getting to you, bud?" he murmured to himself. What he had heard must have just been the air settling. Johnson hadn't moved, and there was no other living organism on the station besides the man himself now. But he had heard it, he was sure of it; there had been what sounded like footsteps.

Turning back as the microwave sounded its sharp, whining beeps to let him know his meal was ready, the man shook his head. He was just getting lonely, that was all. The sudden loss of the only people he had known and been able to communicate to for the past couple years was just now starting to seriously affect him after that initial burst of practical activity. God only knew what had caused those men to suddenly die, and if it was any sort of sickness from Earth that could possibly spread to him, the man wanted no part of it; disposal was the wisest course of action he could have taken at the time.

Steam rose out of the microwave as he retrieved his meal and sat down. Immediately, the fork stabbed into the country fried steak and separated a bite; it nearly burned his tongue as he placed it into his mouth, but he was just so goddamn hungry. Unusually hungry, actually, when the man thought about it. More hungry than he had ever felt in his life. He worked his way through the microwave dinner greedily.

As he wolfed down forkful after forkful of unhealthy, processed, months-old Earth food, the man's eyes drifted towards the cafeteria entrance.

Orange. That was the first thing to register in the mind's mind; he had seen a flash of orange, the very same color and material the protective suits on the station were made of. His

eyes traveled further up the doorframe, only to be greeted by the ghoulish grin plastered on the grey, haggard, hollow-cheeked face of a helmetless Johnson.

The man jumped backwards out of his seat. He blinked. There was nothing there.

Inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale. The man took several deep breaths and then sprinted to the counter, throwing the drawers open and pawing through them with abandon, tossing items every which way. Finally, he seized upon what he was searching for: a sharpened chef's knife.

He scrambled and took up a position along the door frame, knife in hand. Once again, he peeked out and into the main concourse; Johnson's body remained limp against the stairwell, suit, helmet, and all.

Nervous laughter sounded from the man as he lowered his knife. *Christ, pull yourself together, man.* Inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale. This time, he calmed himself. *Just a trick of the mind, that's all.*

The food was gone, and the man felt suddenly tired and weak; a headache was coming on. It was time to rest and partake in sleep. When he awoke, the first thing he would do would be to dispose of Johnson's body.

Hurrying up the staircase on the far side from the corpse, the man made his way to his quarters. As he hopped into bed and pulled up the covers, it occurred to him that not only was his head hurting and his body tired and sweating, but that he was still starving. There was little time to ruminate on these thoughts before unconsciousness seized him.

\* \* \*

*BANG. BANG. BANG.*

The man startled awake. Sweat drenched his body; his clothes stuck to him like glue; he shivered. Had he just heard harsh knocking on his door, or was his pounding headache simply thunderous in its strength?

*BANG. BANG. BANG.*

That time he heard it; someone was knocking at the door. Someone was knocking at the door.

The man was nearly paralyzed with fear. He didn't want to answer that door, not even for a free ticket back to Earth. In fact, he found it difficult to move at all; it was as if, during the night, all the strength had been sapped from his body. He felt warm, and he felt cold. He was drenched in sweat, but his skin felt like paper. What was happening to him?

*BANG. BANG. BANG.*

The knocking sounded again.

*BANG. BANG. BANG.*

Again, and again.

*BANG. BANG. BANG.*

Again, and again, and again, the knocks thundered. The man couldn't move, couldn't bring himself to do anything.

*BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG.*

The knocking stopped. There was silence. The man waited. And waited. And waited.

A muffled groan echoed from outside the door. The man caught himself before a whimper of fear could escape.

Five seconds passed. Then ten. Then thirty. Silence, followed by a shuffling, followed by more silence. More sweat poured off the man's body in droves.

More time passed. Seconds stretched into minutes, and minutes stretched into what seemed like hours. The only groans that were heard were of the station itself being buffeted by the winds of the orange world of Venus. It was during this time that the man thought. What scant rationality remained in his fevered brain did permit him to realize that he had indeed failed in avoiding whatever infection or illness had taken the others on the station, but thoughts beyond

that were far from rational. In this fevered state of mind, the man concluded that not only was he ill, but that Johnson had made him ill, because whatever had made the base ill was now Johnson; Johnson was the enemy, and Johnson had to be eliminated. Thus, the most reasonable course of action was to not be afraid, but to go out there and dispose of Johnson.

Eventually, the man could move again; the pounding in his head faded to a dull ache, the torrent of sweat slowed to a trickle, and his muscles were once again capable of their intended function. Tossing aside the covers, he jumped from the bed and nearly collapsed before regaining his balance and ceasing the wobbling in his legs. He took a few tentative steps and established he was serviceable for what he now intended to do.

The knife was taken from the nightstand. The man felt lucky for it to have a rubberized grip, lest the sweat in his palms cause the rudimentary weapon to slip at a most inopportune time.

He took a few deep breaths and prepared himself. He rushed to the door and burst it open, knife held out in an offensive stance. The man was greeted by nothing but silence and the rays of the setting sun streaming in through the few viewports that existed in the main concourse.

Horrible as he felt, he stumbled out into the hallway and scouted out the area. Nothing.

The perspiration that collected on his brow trickled down and stung his eyes, forcing him to blink. It was then that he saw a flash of movement outside the viewing port adjacent the airlock.

*Johnson.*

The man scrambled into a protective suit and raced out the airlock in an attempt to pursue the evil creature that had caused him so much fear. In his fevered rush to the airlock it was not apparent to him that there remained slumped next to

the stairwell a humanoid form.

Once outside, what did become apparent was that the heat of the air and insulation of the protective suit were not conducive to making him, a sweaty, feverish, sick man, comfortable. There was nowhere for the sweat, the moisture, the heat, or any of it to go. His visor began to fog up, and it became hard to see. This was compounded with the fact that the sun was starting to go down, the sky beginning to darken.

His vision was impaired, but his hearing was only inhibited by the material of the helmet. The man decided that he would locate his quarry by sense of sound. He closed his eyes and waited to be alerted to the enemy. There was creaking, there was groaning, and then, the sound he was waiting for. A shuffling sound.

He yelled a bloodcurdling battle cry, swinging his knife blindly. The thing was out there, the thing that was out to kill him, and so he had to kill it. So certain was the man that the harbinger of illness was out there that he stumbled forward so much, flailing his knife at the vague moans and echoes he heard, that he tumbled right off the edge with a yelp of surprise.

He tumbled down, down, down, the last man on Venus, toppled by the same microbes that had toppled other men before him. For however big the man was compared to the lifeforms that had brought about the end of the human experiment on Venus, his mind simply could not compete with the disastrous effects brought about by the illness the microbial life caused. In the end, the man and his weapons were inconsequential compared to the hallucinations and other symptoms that composed the arsenal of the microbe.

The sun sank in the Eastern sky. Venus would not see the sun for another 243 days, and it would be a much longer time before man chose to see Venus itself once more.



**12°06'17''S 76°49'17''W**

*by Hunter Groce*

**2019 Best Overall Photo**

Seaswells Photography Contest



## On *Le Chapeau* (1999) by Michèle Cournoyer

by Whitney Johnston

I was first introduced to the animated short film *Le Chapeau* by Michèle Cournoyer through a guy that I was casually seeing in grad school. "I really think you would enjoy this," he said. "It reminds me a lot of your work." Needless to say, I did end up having a great appreciation for the piece, even if I was left wondering about his use of the word "enjoy" and whether or not he thought I may have been sexually abused as a child.

The emotional impact of this film is hard to avoid, perhaps more so if you are watching as a person all too familiar with the psychological trauma that results from any sort of physical or situational trauma, from degradation and dehumanization, from damage inflicted on one person at the hands of another, or many others. The seamless transitions and transformations—the anguished cry from girl to woman, cause to effect, innocent to "in control," vulnerable to vulnerable and back again—create the picture of a psyche all grown up and very much shaped by the trauma inflicted upon it. Because, regardless of how successful one thinks they have been at reconciling (or repressing) their demons, that internal back-and-forth never really goes away but is merely numbed.

At least that is how I relate to it. And why I envy it. I am not an animator, and thus when the need in me arises for catharsis, for a violent revolt in being, for a breakdown to identify all of the parts and put them on display, I tend to use a lot of words and try to create a live-action equivalent. Even if it were possible to create a live-action doppelganger of *Le Chapeau*, I doubt it would be as successful in representing this unseen reality: the damaged psyche of a fictional character with very real counterparts—although, not Cournoyer herself.

I did not learn the origins of *Le Chapeau* until recently reading the chapter on Cournoyer ("Where Memories Breathe Darkness: Underneath the Hat of Michèle Cournoyer") in Chris Robinson's book *Unsung Heroes of Animation*. Finding out that such an emotionally charged piece was "selected" (as in, Cournoyer chose to portray the unsettling issue of sexual abuse—of a child) and created

out of some sort of feverish dream (or dizzy spells and agoraphobia) was a bit unexpected. Cournoyer's talk of "raping [her] brushes... taking the speed of an urgent rape" and writer Chris Robinson's description of the piece as an "ambivalent endless rape"—a bit violent (and disturbing in relation to the subject matter, you know: the rape of a child). I would not necessarily consider any of this a con, though. I am happy that "she was born" and "her parents liked her." And there are plenty of great (female) artists whose inner demons, whatever their source, have been much greater than anything life could conjure up. Cournoyer rid herself of her own reality, wholly embodied this tortured persona, and approached her demons in alternate form.

However, my own demons do beg to question: why would anyone choose to so severely empathize with the pain—before, during, and long after—of such a trauma? Thinking in my own familiar terms of the video art medium and the psychological drive to reflect on one's histories and memories, there is a historical use of the medium and all that goes along with it—the reliving, writing, voicing, acting out, editing, objectifying, audience, consumption, aftermath—as therapeutic tool. By all outward appearances, it has the conditions of narcissism without being wholly narcissistic. The trauma being reflected upon by Cournoyer in *Le Chapeau* are culled from figments of other people's realities (real or imagined), yet they are taken on so feverishly as if they were her own. A purging of ills—they are dark, cold, and very real... for someone other than herself.

Perhaps, this seemingly heightened ability to empathize through animation is the antithesis to the seemingly narcissistic conditions of (live-action) video art. Psychological associations are not only projections of the viewer, and the claustrophobic invasion of self through sight, sound, and mind is shared equally with the other. Representation begets identification begets participation. Death of the subject, death of the author, death of the narcissist.

2019 First Place

Austin/Garner Prose Contest

Untitled

by Marybelle Caldwell

2020 Best Computer-Enhanced Photo

Seaswells Photography Contest





## Rattling Truths

by Travis Lantrip

Yellow streaks of light speed past  
As the bus pushes onward  
I move my hands too fast  
You don't seem to mind

Our exchange of stories smooth  
We both hate that song  
I want to tell you the truth  
Maybe you wouldn't mind

But what does honesty mean  
In this valley where we live  
To find the in between  
Oh what I wouldn't give

We are one and the same  
Playing our good kid parts  
I'm tired of the game  
And I think that you are too

The glass panes rattle without  
remorse  
The seat we sit on shakes  
And I'm staying right on course  
You're just not ready for me

So take off your glasses  
Let's sing the stupid song  
Sing until this passes  
Maybe next time won't be wrong

**2019 First Place**  
Barr Poetry Contest

## To the Ceramic House before the Second Firing

by Dr. Elizabeth Wurz

~First published in  
*GSU Review Issue 29*~

~Reprinted in *Cuttings*,  
Blast Furnace  
Poetry Chapbook 1st Place~

Into the rubber-banded halves of your  
mold,  
I pour grey slip that takes the shape  
of plaster feature-crevices. Drying  
justifies my releasing you from those hard  
palms.  
I brush your bisque sill, pane,  
lawn with an opaque glaze.  
Fired glaze is more permanent than stain.

On a sodded lawn, my lover married.  
Before her first child's arrival,  
I dolly and roll our years' furniture  
into first and second-story hallways,  
mural her and the groom with black,  
green stain. Her wedding dress is white.  
The veil's white net blends  
with her black hair that drips silver  
beads to the train's seam.

She faces his vows.  
Band exchange,  
communion,  
bouquet in the air.

Inside, I become slip—  
drying inside an urn mold  
like the flowers the bridesmaid kept.

## Spaghetti

by James Carpenter

Strange red goo oozed across the ceramic,  
Making its way past large, starchy rods.  
An unfamiliar scent wafted up to the boy,  
Who exclaimed, "This is no food fit for  
gods!"

A poking and a prodding was given.  
The wet noodles shifted, wiggling, in  
response.  
Hesitant and afraid, the boy retreated,  
Every inch the picture of lacking  
nonchalance.

For this new form of sustenance was  
indeed  
so strange,  
It had unsettled him greatly and  
profoundly.  
That which he was so used to consuming,  
Was now just a memory remembered  
fondly.

"Eat your spaghetti," mom chided.  
The boy couldn't believe what was  
happening,  
He couldn't help but feel blindsided.  
The makeup of this 'food' was baffling.

Nothing like this was what he so  
cherished,  
Those familiar white grains of yore,  
Eaten with anything and everything,  
His only ever concern being getting more.

But that was all from a time before.  
This land of plenty had new things to try,  
Wondrous, life-changing things were they.  
So, for now, to rice he had to bid  
goodbye.

Cautiously was that first bite taken,  
Slowly gathered up upon his utensil,  
A small quantity consumed with  
reluctance.  
To eat more of this, the boy thought, "I  
never will."

But changed his mind did as he took that  
first bite,  
His tastebuds coming near to exploding,  
The experience nearly sending him into  
flight.  
This land was new, this land was good,  
and it seemed everything would be alright.

**2019 Second Place**  
Barr Poetry Contest



**Yowie** by James C. Carpenter

...a pinball wizard, there has to be a twist...

Pebbles and red dust scattered in great plumes as the beaten, weathered pickup roared down the aged dirt road, **The Who's** classic, poppy rhythms dopplering their way through the growing dusk.

The man placing his pedal to the metal of the old pickup held a smoldering cigarette tenuously between his lips, his free foot tip-tap tapping to the beat of the song. His face might once have been handsome, but much like the vehicle he piloted, the years had been less than kind. A prickly shadow of beard graced this unfortunate countenance, and from the neck down he wore the uniform that signified him as a member of S.M.A.R.T. – the Solar Maintenance and Repair Team. He snorted as the radio continued its blaring tunes. *SMART. What an absolutely basic marketing decision. No one falls for that bunk.* And yet here he was, wasn't he? In his tenth year as part of the crew, his tenth year apart from family, his tenth year alone in the vast expanse of the Australian Outback.

Alone.

He hated thinking about how lonely this job made him feel, how small he was in the world.

The volume knob on the radio turned higher.

\* \* \*

Approximately an hour passed before the rusted pickup slowed to a halt. The door swung open with a creak and two large black boots swung outwards to plant themselves firmly upon red earth. The man straightened himself, stood tall, stretched, and breathed in the wretched aroma of corroded solar panels and desert dust. He took one last, cool drag of tobacco before flicking the burnt-out stub into the gathering dusk.

"Hey, Early Earl, here a bit soon for the night shift, ain't ya?" A scrawny little man in overalls hollered out to him.

The man named Earl grunted. Holland was such an annoyance, ever more so since Earl got demoted to the night shift. The night shift that he managed alone. At least during the day S.M.A.R.T. always operated in teams, but for whatever god forsaken reason, upper management felt such a number assigned to nighttime duties to be imprudent.

Holland watched as Earl began to unload his equipment from the bed of the truck. He chuckled, a wheezy laugh. "Eh, maybe you're just here to beat the Yowie to punch, am I right?" He wheezed some more.

Earl shook his head. "Nothing but a bad bit of folklore meant to scare the kiddies, Holland, you know that."

A sharp hiss sounded as a match was struck. The old wizened countenance of Holland the scrawny repairman was illuminated in the dark gloom as he brought the light close, passing the flame to the hand-rolled cigarette clasped between his lips. He dropped the match, ground it out, and took a few thoughtful drags of the smoke before responding. "Oh, don't be so sure there, my good buddy. Just might be that the Yowie's out and about as we speak." A wheezing chuckle followed by a ragged cough sounded before he continued. "Rumor among some of the other night shift crews in the area says the Yowie's the one responsible for the missing tools and parts and such. Some say the Yowie *wants* work to grind to a halt."

Tendrils of smoke rose from that patch of desert as Holland continued to puff away and Earl finished unpacking

his supplies. "Yeah, well, seems to me you've just been listening to too many tall-tales, old man." The calm of the desert evening was broken by a metallic clap as he shut the tailgate. "Now if you'll excuse me, I'd best be getting to fixing what you guys weren't able to. And you should be getting home." He shouldered his kit, paused, looked around. "Say, where is Bryan, anyways?"

Holland took another drag of his cigarette. "Oh, no worries about him. He left early, is all." He took the cigarette from his lips and flicked it onto the ground, stamping his own work boot on it to grind it to ash. "Sure am glad I can get out now, too. Best of luck to you, Early Earl." He turned to go and walked some distance to his own dilapidated pickup before turning back. "And just a friendly reminder, old buddy old pal: not all rumors are false." And with that, he departed.

Earl watched as the pickup's lights came on, the wheels turned, and Holland disappeared into the growing night. He sighed. "Go to hell, Holland. Always trying to scare me with those damn ghost stories." Turning back, he entered the black maze of weather-worn solar panels. It was time for the night shift.

\* \* \*

In spite of the cracked face, the ancient analog watch on Earl's wrist cheerfully tick-tocked with the passage of time. Seconds fast turned to minutes and minutes soon turned to hours as Earl set to the repairs he had been assigned that night. It was more than usual, but that was to be expected. The work of the repair teams had never been hugely efficient, but they had all managed well enough over the last decade. It had only been since the start of this year that operations had begun to break down.

The first issues arose simply because of the age of all the solar farms. It was unsurprising that the wear and tear grew exponentially over time; few truly remembered exactly when the farms had first been constructed, that knowledge being largely reserved for the corporate higher-ups, but there was no doubt the panels were certainly old. So when wires started showing up worn through, panels cracked, and various other bits and bobs damaged, no one took it as anything unusual. Business carried on.

It wasn't long, however, until the first of the stranger occurrences began. Workers began to report wiring being discovered with damage inconsistent with natural wear and tear. Soon thereafter, additional reports began to filter in about missing parts, and later, missing tools. As these were reviewed, corporate overseers chalked them up largely to human error. Surely, they reasoned, some of more aged workers may have lost some of their touch over the years and would lie about accidental damage in the course of their work. Other workers who lost tools or parts wouldn't want to be held responsible either. No, these occurrences must be the result of either natural weathering and overactive imaginations or human error and convincing lies. And so the strangeness was ignored.

Time passed and the oddities continued. The only real concern was the breakdown of productivity, but expanding the role of night shift workers was believed to be a suitable remedy. That was how Earl found himself in his present position, having to make up for the inefficiencies of the day while the sun was away. The day workers complained of a



lack of tools, an abundance of work orders, but Earl paid little credence to them. His only concerns were his complaints with his workload. To him, the day shift was just a bunch of lazy good-for-nothings, like Holland, leaving him to get shafted by corporate policy.

So one hour turned into two, then three. The moon migrated across the nighttime sky, glowing its bright lunar white. Earl dwelled little on Holland's earlier words, preferring to instead focus on his work, the only thoughts at the back of his mind being his various frustrations. That would change quickly as he approached the fourth hour of his work.

He was bridging two frayed ends of a power delivery line back together when it happened. It hadn't been reported earlier, but Earl had happened upon it as he moved between his assignments. The two ends had been sticking out of the dust; they did not appear to have been damaged by natural means. He had ignored this unusual quality and had simply set to repairing it, twisting the frayed copper together before taking out his portable soldering iron. As he heated the copper, he applied the solder liberally. It was while he was in the process of melting solder to more permanently join the two ends that the screeching swept across the dusty red desert.

It was inhuman, otherworldly. If there was any physical experience analogous to such an auditory sensation, it would be the feeling of thousands of fire ants crawling across the skin. The screech was pitched high, painfully high, an undulating yawp that reverberated far longer than was tolerable.

Earl immediately clasped both hands to his ears to mitigate the pain, dropping his iron, the tip wet with solder, in the process. If the pain caused by that demonic shriek hadn't been enough, he soon yelped in reaction to the molten alloy making contact with his knees, presenting a searing pain that fast prompted him to jump up from his crouching position.

"YOWWWIIIEEE!" He hopped around on one foot, clutching the leg that had been burned. Gradually, the pain subsided; the burn would remain, but it would not be so painful as to inhibit his functioning. The shock of pain fast morphed into anger. His face contorting into a mask of rage, he delivered a vicious kick to the soldering iron that sent it flying across the desert sands. He inhaled, exhaled, inhaled, exhaled, anger subsiding. As he stood there, rational thinking returning to him, he attempted to mull over what had transpired.

Turning to gaze outwards from the solar farm, craning his neck to peer into the dusty haze, he wondered aloud, "What the hell was *that*?" Holland's ghost stories of the Yowie capitalized on this opportunity, resurfacing in his mind like indignant corks that had been forced below water popping back up.

"No way is Holland's Yowie real, no way..." Earl muttered to himself. Yet he could not help but feel afraid of whatever had made that noise. Whatever *thing*. That screech was not normal, nothing about could be construed as standard. The sound didn't even have any of the hallmark qualities of metal or glass or rock, the only inorganic things in the vicinity that could have produced such a ruckus by grinding against one another. Whatever had made that noise was living, and it did not sound friendly.

As difficult as front-and-center Earl found it to suspend his disbelief, the primitive, reptilian part of his mind was entirely willing to take control and steer Earl to pack up his

things and make for the truck. For that part of his mind, survival took primacy, and to hell with his duties.

Earl watched as his legs propelled him back to his equipment, arms reaching out to haphazardly collect and stow every important bit and bob in his pack. Very soon, he found himself shouldering his pack and scrambling his way through the maze, towards the edge where he had parked his truck.

He could not have begun soon enough, for the screech came again, an eerie, hair-raising shriek, worse than chalk screaming against slate.

It sounded closer.

He could hardly have been bothered to cover his ears again with fear-induced adrenaline now flowing freely through him. The most frightening thing wasn't the proximity of the screech but whether he had forgotten the way back.

His boots pounded on the ground, kicking up rust-colored dust behind him as he hastened his way through the labyrinth of decaying metal and glass. "Oh no, no, no..." Earl's breath now came in quick pants. He slowed his pace, but only just, quickly glancing between the different paths available to him. What should have been a straight shot to the edge was complicated by the staggered placement of the panels by those who had constructed the facility. Placed at different offsets and at alternating orientations, it was a veritable warren. And Earl was the rabbit trying to break free.

Whichever path looked familiar, he took. Such a strategy would be short-lived, and it was not long until this was proven.

Earl slid to a halt, breath now sharp and quick, as he approached an unknown fork in the path. "Dammit, dammit, dammit..." he mumbled. The screech sounded again, painfully loud. It was closer.

Left? Right? They both had to eventually lead out, right? Shrieking echoed once more, briefly, but yet louder. Earl sprinted down the left passage,

Right. Left. Right. Right. Middle. Left. His breath grew more and more ragged, but he did not stop, could not stop. He would not let *it* get him. He had lived alone, dined alone, worked alone, but he would not let himself die alone.

The screech echoed again; it now sounded only two or three layers back. *Dear God, what is it?*

Just as both his breath and his hope approached exhaustion, he saw salvation: the edge. Never had he been so pleased, so ecstatic to see the shifting desert sands, that empty horizon. This was a second wind, and he used it, hurrying forward. The truck, and escape, was near.

He sprinted to the exit, decreasing the distance between him and freedom meter by meter. It grew closer.

Closer.

Closer.

He was so close; just a few more steps, and he was home free.

A dark silhouette swung into view, blocking much of his vision of the exit.

Earl skidded to a halt, kicking up a thick cloud of dust in the process, serving to only further obscure his vision. His heaving breaths transformed first into a harsh coughing; as his vision cleared and he saw what lay before him, these coughs were choked off in a strangled gasp.

"...Yowie."

It was difficult to tell the source of the screeching as tortured screams echoed through the desert night.

*continued on Page 56*



\* \* \*

The wind was picking up. Bits of tattered cloth joined the sands as they were picked up in the strengthening breeze, both the the color of rust. Holland took his cap off and brought it to his chest, that age-old gesture of respect. Placing his hat back on his head, he turned, hearing footsteps behind him.

"Hellish sight for sure," Bryan murmured. He pursed his lips, shook his head. "Damn shame, indeed.... What do you think got him, Hol?"

Holland responded first with silence, turning back to gaze upon the ghastly scene. He, too, pursed his lips and shook his head before speaking. "Couldn't say for sure, Bri, couldn't rightly say." He exhaled sharply. "Yowie, though, what a sight."



### The Hawk

Ink (14" x 11")

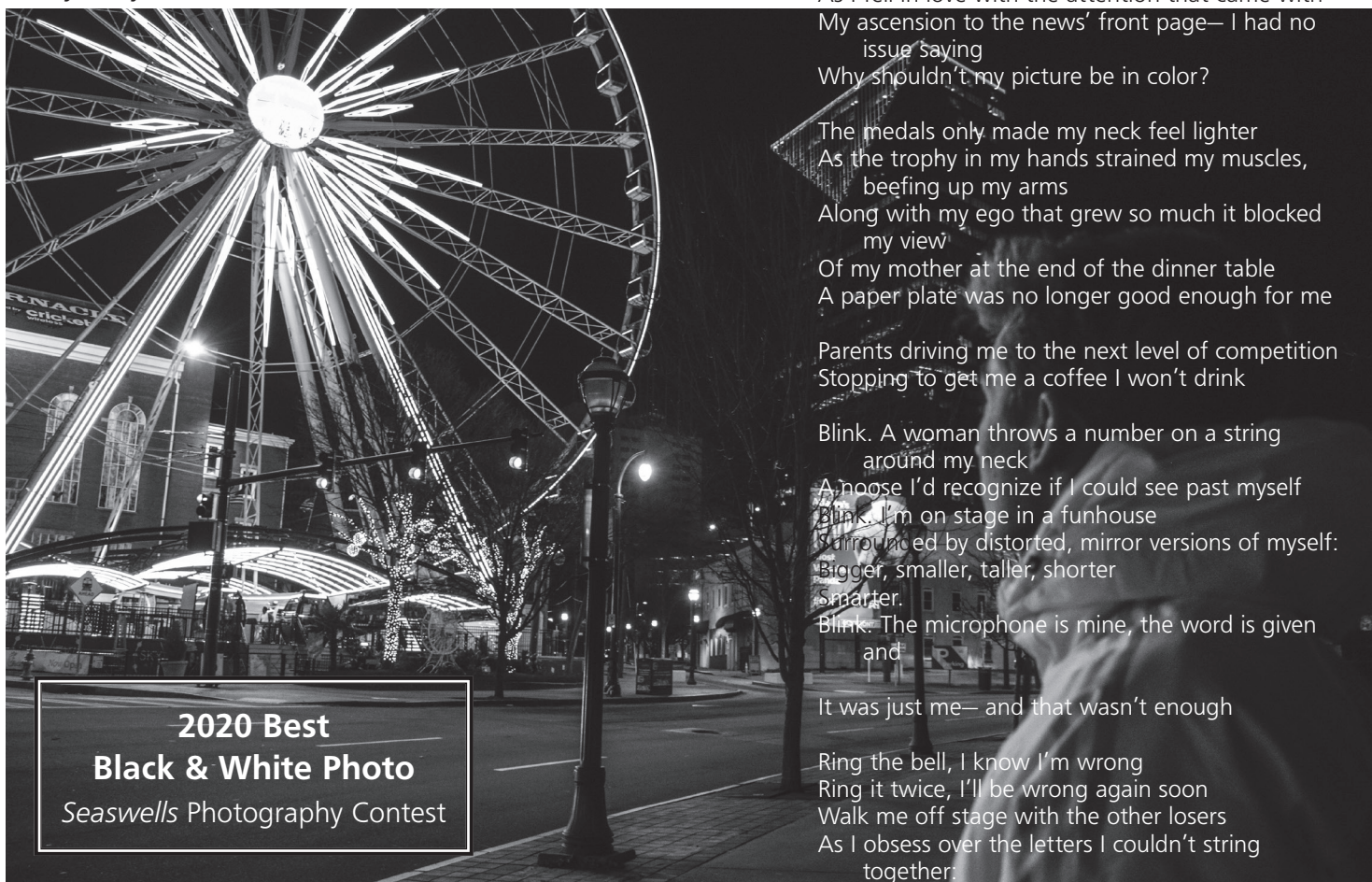
by Zachariah Williams

**2020 First Place**  
Seaswells Art Contest

**2020 First Place**  
Barr Poetry Contest

### View from Below

by Benjamin Davis



**2020 Best  
Black & White Photo**  
Seaswells Photography Contest

### Bee Me by Travis Lantrip

I was raised and drained by the spelling bee  
Inaugurated into an office of pride by the  
Powerball odds of the dictionary  
A word of low self-esteem gave me all the  
confidence I needed  
As I fell in love with the attention that came with  
My ascension to the news' front page— I had no  
issue saying  
Why shouldn't my picture be in color?  
The medals only made my neck feel lighter  
As the trophy in my hands strained my muscles,  
beefing up my arms  
Along with my ego that grew so much it blocked  
my view  
Of my mother at the end of the dinner table  
A paper plate was no longer good enough for me  
Parents driving me to the next level of competition  
Stopping to get me a coffee I won't drink  
Blink. A woman throws a number on a string  
around my neck  
A noose I'd recognize if I could see past myself  
Blink. I'm on stage in a funhouse  
Surrounded by distorted, mirror versions of myself:  
Bigger, smaller, taller, shorter  
Smarter.  
Blink. The microphone is mine, the word is given  
and  
It was just me— and that wasn't enough  
Ring the bell, I know I'm wrong  
Ring it twice, I'll be wrong again soon  
Walk me off stage with the other losers  
As I obsess over the letters I couldn't string  
together:

R-E-A-L  
Was any of it? Am I?

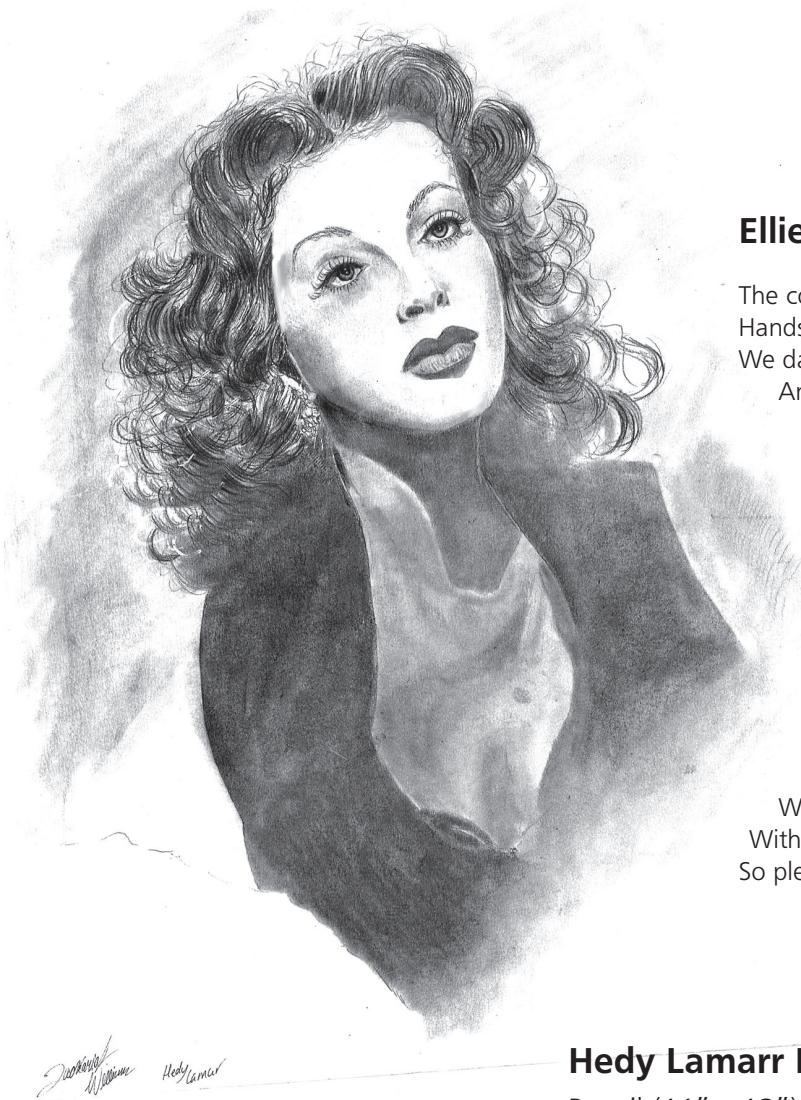


**Bahhh**

*by Mackenzie Buck*

**2020 Best  
Color Photo**

*Seaswells  
Photography  
Contest*



**2020 Second Place**

*Barr Poetry Contest*

**Ellie** *by John Edward Menechino III*

The concerto begins and the crescendo's advent is nigh  
Hands intertwined; I simply can do nothing but comply  
We dance a jig most macabre under the moonlight  
And yet with you, I want but one more night

Your fervent, honeyed words lathered with content  
Equate to the aesthetics of your blonde augment  
You bewitch, you allure, your smile so bright  
All of this and yet, I want but one more night

To dream, to desire, to love, to lust  
Feelings once lost to antiquity now combust  
My body yearns for more and my mind takes flight  
When you cross my mind, I crave just one more night

Twisting and twirling in this endless waltz  
When choosing you there are no faults  
Without a doubt, you are my shining light  
So please, I beg, give me just one more night.

**Hedy Lamarr Portrait**

Pencil (11" x 13")

*by Zachariah Williams*

**2020 Second Place**

*Seaswells Art Contest*



## In Response to the Blood

by Dr. Elizabeth Wurz

~First published in

*Poetry Potion*, Issue 3~

~Featured poem on

poetrypotion.com, 2011~

~Reprinted in *Cuttings*,

Blast Furnace

Poetry Chapbook 1st Place~

I

From the farm, across the cattle guard, I walked down Highway 60 to the Church of Christ. Its well out back was covered with a square board small enough for me to slide away from the opening. I dropped pieces of gravel to test the water's depth.

Ripples extended from where they entered—to the red mud and tree roots around the edge.

My body changed.

In response to the blood, I conjured a terror—uterine tissue forming a web—binding my wrists, ankles and waist—tightening until I could not move.

I could not visualize myself in the roles of the women I tried internalizing.

II

It would have been a felony for me to buy and thaw a vial of semen, inject it close to my own cervix.

On the ultrasound, I saw three Clomid-ripened ovum. The doctor injected thirteen million anonymous donor sperm.

I have ultrasound pictures of the embryo at eight, sixteen, and twenty weeks. At twenty-four weeks, the contractions began.

In the 4-D photo at thirty-six weeks, I saw Olivia's hands eyebrows, eyelashes, lanugo, lips, and the cord.

### 2020 Second Place

Austin/Garner Prose Contest

## On Giving Birth by Rebekah Moore

An event that shaped me and changed my perception was when I became a mother. Going through natural childbirth was one of the most visceral experiences of my life. I genuinely believed I was going to die. I was just a kid; 18 and absolutely terrified.

The contractions started one summer morning in June. I woke to a cramp in the muscles of my stomach that I couldn't get rid of no matter how much walking or stretching I did. My stomach was hard as stone. My water broke about an hour later.

Over the next seven hours at the hospital the contractions became more and more powerful and much more frequent. The pain moved through me like a wave, starting beneath my ribs and undulating through my body to my knees. Once the contractions subsided, I would fall into a blissful momentary stupor and try to rest.

I felt the tightening in my stomach again and woke from a daze to find my mother standing near the head of the birthing bed, looking stoic. I didn't expect her to be there.

She had not been happy about my choice to have the baby. She hadn't been shy about making that known.

This cramp was particularly fierce. Everything started moving very fast. There was noise and chatter and loud machines beeping.

"Okay, momma, it's time to push," the nurse gently told me. So, I did. I pushed with everything I had. Chin to chest, knees near my ears. The pain was overpowering. Once. Twice. Three times. Ten times we repeated the process. Still there was no progress.

"You have to push, honey! Push hard!" the dark haired nurse exclaimed. She and the other nurses had concerned looks about them. The doctor was pressing down on my stomach. I couldn't take it. I was exhausted. I had no more strength left in me. At least that is what I thought. With a deep breath and all my might I bore down again. The pain was searing. I saw stars. My ears were ringing. It felt as though my soul was being ripped from my body. I looked to my mother. At that moment I needed her. "I'm afraid," I told



her breathlessly. "Mom, I'm so scared."

She leaned in close to my face. I could smell the cigarettes on her breath.

"Well this is what happens when you get knocked up." She retorted. I wanted to vomit. I felt rage well up in place of the fear. I wanted to hit her. Beat her with my tired fists. Another powerful surge of pain took away my resolve. I heard the nurses urging me on again. My mother turned from me and sat down in the chair in the corner. She was expressionless.

So I pushed. I pushed harder than I ever thought I could. It was then that I felt this odd lifting feeling. I saw myself, as if my eyes were floating near the ceiling looking down upon it all. There I was, surrounded by women, my face red and contorted and sweaty. I heard their urgent words and pleas. They looked like angels to me. They were all so beautiful. Then I felt a slam and I was back in the bed, the pain as hot as fire. I managed one last guttural sob while bearing down harder than I ever thought I would be able to do.

Suddenly there was a gush of warmth, an exquisite release of pressure and then, finally, a baby.

Everything at that moment stopped. The silence was

deafening. I could hear my own heartbeat in my ears. It sounded like rushing water. The voices of the nurses broke through. I was surrounded by words of adoration for the new little boy and acclamation for me and the hard work I had endured. I smiled and looked over to where my mother had been sitting. The chair was empty.

Nathan's cry was weak at first, like a mewling newborn lamb. He followed up with a bellowing wail so bright and loud that it lit up the room. That sound- the sound of my son's cry- was the most beautiful sound I had ever heard.

When the nurse handed him to me the world disappeared. I held his warm little body to my bare chest. A sense of calm overcame me. I was overwhelmed with emotion. I counted his little fingers and kissed his little toes. I put my nose to his downy head and took in his smell. He smelled like the earth; a deep musty scent that you sometimes smell after the rain. I knew at that moment I would never be the same person I was before. Here was proof of my bravery and fortitude. Here was proof that I could overcome my fears and do anything I set my mind to. I had done this by myself. I had finally learned exactly how strong I really am.

## Untitled by Marybelle Caldwell



**2020 Best Overall Photo**

Seaswells Photography Contest



# Seaswells 2021

*The Best of a Decade*

