"Sure, make it quick though," the guy says and I thank him with a nod. The tip of red you give to a person to say hello when you can’t be friendly.

"Sorry," I say. I am sorry. They welcomed me well and maybe a bit too much. I am the type who doesn’t like to see a lady die. Please tell me the story of your life. I have to have a nice story. The most important stories are stupid last words. I would prefer stories of better ones but I’ll make this one up.

The camera is through the glass. They are the only one looking. I don’t think the trigger like it was being done in a movie in slow motion. Then I hear a bang and feel the pain of my flesh tearing. I fly back, tripping on the stage, and twist head first into the glass, hitting the sidewalk. Pain was everywhere it seemed as I heard another gunshot, and looked up to see the guy on the ground with a
Lights

and

SHADOWS

University of North Alabama

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Table of Contents

1—Anita Collins • Swiftly Flows
2—Patricia Robinson • Redeemed
9—Lee King • Stone Tower
10—April Wright • Isolation
11—Demetrius Pendleton • Thrown and Caught
   “Ms. Annie Blackburn's Cylinder”
12—Patricia Robinson • Growing Wings
13—Jason Fuller • Still Life with Drape
14—Erin McCook • A Childish Christmas
17—Helen Allman • Sugarmill Diamond Ruby Plantation
18—Patricia Robinson • Reincarnation of a Coyote
19—Tim Martin • Untitled
20—Matt Comer • Crayon Ducks
25—Chris Rohling • 452 Cherry Hill
26—Hollie Colella • My Daddy's Way to Juggle
27—Michelle Veque • Killingsworth Inn
28—John Martin • Sweet Arms to Die in
37—Tim Martin • Untitled
38—Billie Medendorp • On a Portrait of Patricia Peece
39—Clay Bedingfield • Untitled
40—Hollie Colella • A Lesson From May
51—Jason Fuller • Feeling Faint
52—Todd Twilley • The Psalm of the Malcontents
53—Angela Moland • Big H
54—Billie Medendorp • Meine Grossmutter
69—Angie Gresham • Self Portrait in Blue and Green
70—Renee Byrnes • Drowning Girl
71—Lee King • Yellow and Black #1
72—Amy Kelly • Aunt Marthie
73—Clay Bedingfield • Flesh and Bone
74—Matt Comer • A Graveyard Song
81—Chris Rohling • March
82—Michell Cadle • From the Gravedigger's Bench
83—Michelle O'Connor • Untitled
84—April Wright • The Dance
85—Wendy Franks • Cows
86—Matt Comer • Figure with Meat
     "in Frances Bacon's Dark Room"
87—Tim Martin • Survival Kit
88—Rebecca Linam • The Appointment
97—Lee King • The Master
98—Wesley Self • Aunt Laura
105—Josh King • March
“Light has need of darkness, for without the darkness, how should we ever know the light?”

Carl Jung
Anita Collins
Swifly Flows
Acrylic
Merit Award
Patricia Robinson

Redeemed

Creative Non-fiction
Second Place

Sweet cream rises to the top of fresh milk, and pleasurable memories seek to turn life into a happy experience. The experience of my baptism was not a sweet-cream memory, nor is the memory filed in the silent portion of my brain. The whole episode hangs around in the front of my thoughts, making a mockery of my life and my God, branding me with an acute feeling of uncertainty.

The picture of the baptizing hole located on Goose Shoals Creek is vivid in my mind. From the edge of the creek, limestone rocks jutted uneven stair steps several yards out into the water, culminating in a room-size outcropping of bedrock and marking the baptizing hole. A small diversion of the creek's normal flow seeped invisibly off to the side and settled in a low pool of thick mud, covered with algae. The place was an amalgam of natural ironies, of purity and poison.

Once a year, in September, the faithful of Lone Cedar Church of Christ accompanied the baptismal candidates to the creek's edge. This year, three old men (recently widowed) increased the group's num-
They were unlikely additions, along for the company more than for spiritual edification. The rest of the group was the usual twelve-year-olds, herded ahead of everyone by the elders and deacons, and Mrs. Merritt's foolish girl, Bessie, a bizarre ornament at every church event.

I was thirteen already, over a year past the age of "accountability." "Going up," a term for the walk down the aisle during the invitation song, took more nerve than I could muster, even though I had finally succumbed to a pervading, silent pressure from my friends and had come prepared this day for baptism. But I avoided the "going up" part of the ceremony, as it was my prerogative to do. After all, no one could "make" me do anything at this point. As the final verse of the invitational hymn pleaded with the lone sinner yet unmoved, I hurried quickly out of the church before anyone could catch me with a disapproving glare.

Shortly, the congregation poured out the front door. The women quickly congregated in tight little wads about the yard. Anticipating the baptizing ceremony, they kept to sanctuary formalities, restrict-
ing their conversation to the end of time and Satan, instead of cotton picking and local gossip. But even the rules of sanctuary conversation allowed for antique gossip, now become legend, like the time Pauline Wiley had drowned herself in the cistern and both of Hiram Oliver’s boys got sent to the penitentiary for a robbing rampage.

Boiling with resentment, I kept to myself over by the old oak. “Bunch a ol’hags,” reverberated in my throat, low and murmuring, more than once. I wasn’t concerned about drowning or robbing or the coming of Jesus. I just didn’t want to burn forever and ever.

Walking to the baptizing hole turned out to be just as torturing as I had imagined “going up” would be. The older women glared disapprovingly at me for having denied the Lord’s call for a whole year. My mother looked sheepish like she had when I confronted her about Santa Claus. Staring at my feet, I marched down the uneven path, hating everyone around me. I especially hated Marsha Rigsby, who walked beside me chattering non-stop the whole way.
She had “gone down” when she was only eight-and-a-half. I'll never forget her piously defending her zeal: “My mother said that eight-and-a-half isn’t too young because that’s old enough to hate the ol’ devil and those evil Japs and Germans.”

As we started descending toward the creek, I suddenly remembered that I was a sinner going to be saved and I must feel remorse and shame, not hate. If I went under the water feeling hate, my baptism wouldn’t take. As we came in sight of the creek, the group began singing the last verse of “Oh Why Not Tonight.” As the harmony rose with the chorus, my mind was in turmoil. How was I to escape damnation into hell without the proper feeling of guilt? Resentment and a solid despising of the entire event engulfed me.

We reached the creek bank as the sun began pull-
ing long shadows from the woods. An afternoon chill settled in the air and filled me with dread as I contemplated the breath-taking surge I was about to undergo. The preacher called to me as “Prepare to Meet Thy God” rang over the creek’s rush. The hesitant voices of the women began the song with a pleading note, but by the time they reached the chorus, their voices swelled with confidence. One of the ladies sang in beautiful alto and fanned herself methodically with a fan from Spry’s Funeral Home.

Somehow I stepped out from the group and walked toward the waiting preacher. By now I was appropriately overcome with holy hysteria. I asked God to take my life the very moment I was raised from the water. Since I knew I couldn’t stop sinning, I figured that way I would be sure to go to heaven. The rock steps felt slick as I inched my way nearer and nearer the drop-off. I reached the preacher’s outstretched hand and he guided me until I stood in place. He held the back of my head with one hand and a folded handkerchief in the other. Grasping me
close, he put the handkerchief over my nose and plunged me into my watery grave. But then I felt the water rush over my face as the preacher pulled me up. Somehow I bumped into his protruding stomach and upset his footing. We both groped to recover, digging wildly into the water with flailing arms. As I recovered my footing, it occurred to me that I hadn't been struck dead. Nothing had happened. The Holy Spirit was nowhere to be seen. The preacher was still tipping to one side and the other, though he was free of me now. I negotiated the current recklessly and clamored up on the bank, drenched and cold. My mother handed me my winter coat to put over my clinging cotton dress. I continued to await the blow, or some miraculous occurrence, or even an obscure
sensation indicating that my baptism had taken. Still, nothing happened. I couldn’t help asking myself how eternity could be determined by this ritual, without my knowing it. As the minutes passed, my expectation turned into confusion. I reacted mechanically, stunned and bewildered.

After the last drenched, saved soul clamored onto the bank, the group began retreating awkwardly up the creek’s edge, slipping on rocks slick from the dripping faithful. The baptizing activities disturbed the seepage pool, its thick surface now a reverberating testament to the holy ritual. In my chilled stupor, I ventured too close, slipping down before I realized where I was. My foot plunged beneath the mire before I could recover myself. This served to interrupt my delirium and bring me back to reality. As I wiped my foot on a patch of grass, my baptism seemed like a dream. God had said “Let there be...,” but nothing had happened. I quietly joined the group, pretending that I had received the gift.
Lee King
Stone Tower
Ceramic Mixed Media
Merit Award
April Wright

Isolation

Poetry

after a painting by Degas

The absinthe drinker is a tree
scratching against the sky
in dry winter.
The burly man beside her
could be in Siberia
instead of the cafe.
The tables beyond are
as bare as the tundra.

The clock as always ticks slowly.
She is the girl at home dressed
in sequins, waiting for her
pimpled Heathcliff, her face
streaked with mascara,
the glass her only escape.
Demetrius Pendleton
Thrown and Caught
Ceramic
Merit Award
Growing Wings

Poetry
Second Place

Papa took a long time turning yellow on his bed. His wore out liver fell apart inside and spilled outside. He wiped his mouth, wiped it off afterward and smiled carefully. I carried chunks of papa’s brown body away in a pan. Mama sighed, saying, “Lizabeth, you have one tiny wing, but you can’t fly away from death’s ritual, the fate of life.”

Papa is out there, outside by the rhododendron, three feet inside. The dirt is cool, soft, and quiet, letting papa rot. Outside took a long time turning inside and I grew another wing.
Jason Fuller
Still Life with Drape
Acrylic
Merit Award
For a child, the anticipation of Christmas is almost unbearable. I remember all the sleepless nights, mindlessly staring at the pile of neatly wrapped packages, barely being able to control my urge to rip off the paper and admire all of my loot. My brothers were the same way, and I am sure my sisters were before them. It was as if there was air in those boxes. Air to breathe for another year, to take us off to magical mountains and make us anything we wanted to be. Of course the disappointment of blue-ringed sweat socks and new sheets for my bed was inevitable. “It can’t be all fun and games,” my mother would tell us. Pessimistic, she had herself forgotten that mystery prevailed.

My parents were old. They had long before rid themselves of that Christmas tingle. Now, for them, it was not much more than a month-long anxiety attack, haunted by dreams of tiny voices begging for more. More candy, more toys, more patience. They had thought four kids would be wonderful, and got one more in the bargain. “Let’s send one back,” they
threatened. I knew that it was too late for them to change their minds. Instead, they were forced to outsmart us, a job far more difficult than they imagined. That is how the boogie man came to spend the holidays at our house, every year showing up and always overstaying his unwelcome welcome.

The entrance to the attic was inside my mother’s closet, with a doorknob any four-year-old could reach. I guess the boogie man was at least that old, too, because each December he would sneak into the house while everyone was sleeping, and spend a month playing with all my new stuff. I never saw the beast directly. After all, he could melt your skin with one glance and my parents told me he liked to feast on children’s fingers and toes for dinner. Christmas Day would come and go, and my poor dad was in charge of confronting the monster and sending him back to the musty cave or swampy pit he came from.

Dad would start on the first floor, and move his way up another two flights of stairs, past mine and Adam’s room, warning the hideous creature of his impending doom, the ultimate hero. I was quick to run and hide in the laundry hamper, covering myself
with dirty clothes, and feeling lucky to not be under
the bed with Farrell and Allison, no doubt the first
place any respectable boogie man would look.

"Get out of here, you," my dad would order, using
the voice I had heard when I got caught playing with
matches behind the garage. This boogie man was in
big trouble. Dad came sweeping down the stairs from
his room, slamming a broom against the walls, ap­
parently giving the phantom a run for his evil money.
Dad rounded the second floor staircase and my heart
would almost stop. I could hear my sisters sobbing
uncontrollably and knew that Adam had already wet
his pants and was standing in the closet with his eyes
squeezed together so tightly his entire head was throbbing. The hamper shook violently as pure child fear
pulsed through me.

Dad chased him down to the basement and out
the cellar door into the backyard, banging his broom
on the ceiling, walls, and floor the whole way, still
yelling long after the boogie man had said his good­
byes and gone, but it made me feel safer.

He stopped coming to my house when I was eight,
the same year that I learned about the misconcep­
tion of the whole Santa hoax. I guess he found some
other kid, with better stuff to play with, and whose
father was not so wonderfully overprotective.
Helen Allman
Sugarmill Diamond Ruby Plantation
Merit Award
Patricia Robinson
Reincarnation of a Coyote
Poetry

Green patches alongside the road mark the spot where nature knows that her map is obsolete. Large green flies and buzzards cry, here is another feast. Cars speed by as the carcass was pushed to the grass. The coyote had spent his natural wit in search of a new way home. A glance its way held no sway on the busy passerby, a wild coyote, another age, no sorrow, no shame, no sigh. All that is left is a haunting sight for those who wonder about life. Two lips arched high above worn teeth, an act of unmerciful time. But wait, don't despair! The coyote lives in spite of obsolete roads, the sun drew it up, it became the essence of matter and time.
Tim Martin
Untitled
Alabaster
Second Place, Three-Dimensional
Matt Comer

Crayon Ducks
Creative Non-Fiction
First Place

My parents sometimes said when I got in trouble, “I’ll jump on you like a duck on a junebug.” A junebug—that green, flying insect with a glossy, green coat that looks cool even in the dead heat of summer.

Didn’t ducks eat wild rice and stuff? Didn’t junebugs eat junebugs, I was sure of it. My friend in the third grade would tell me that he didn’t get it either. “Ducks and junebugs aren’t enemies in nature. I don’t think so anyway,” is what he had said. Ducks and junebugs as adversaries just didn’t pan out. We couldn’t picture the bloodthirsty, ravenous duck flying after the glittering junebug. The junebug must be a very tasty bug if ducks love to eat them—that green exoskeleton probably tastes like crunchy mint with lime-jelly insides.
But... when I was five, my mother would take me to a duck-filled pond in Fountain City, Tennessee. I would feed the ducks around this fountain a steady diet of bread crumbs, popcorn, and such. I fed one waggly-tailed duck some of my M&Ms once. As its orange beak snatched them up hungrily, I received a slap on the back of my hand. "Don't feed them those!" Mom quacked. Why not? They were tasty, and I could tell from the duck's marble-black eyes that he wanted some. Those same beady, black eyes were the eyes of a killer in my parents' world, a destroyer of life. The green
Jand humans that my parents didn’t want me to build.

Sometimes I would play with my friends by the creek with Stompers—battery-powered, pocket-sized monster trucks. The creek was in my backyard; it separated the adventures that the woods held and my tame, green yard. The creek was always full of sparkling cold water that was home to red salamanders, green-spotted frogs, and the occasional yellow-shelled turtle that would find its way to my mother’s marigold-invested garden (a bright picture of yellow with yellow bees in a green yard). I walked in the house with mud all over my new shoes from playing around the creek’s wet, brown banks. I heard the mysterious, aforementioned
threat once again as Dad took off his belt and made sure my butt was not a cool green but a roaring red.

So, in my second-grade class, I once drew some giant ducks that frowned in unison, with bushy black eyebrows, their beaks orange. The many colors and strangeness of the sight, I'm sure, had drawn the teacher's attention to my picture as she walked aisle to aisle, looking for quiet houses and portraits of soft,
sensible members of the animal kingdom. Fire-breathing white ducks that were destroying building-block cities and chasing little red trucks and the little green boys that drove them were what I had captured on notebook paper. The teacher would ask, "What do we have here, Matt?" I would just shrug my shoulders as my mind would fly in blue spaces on the backs of green summer junebugs 🏝️
Chris Rohling
452 Cherry Hill
Photography
Second Place, Two-Dimensional, Black and White
Hollie Colella
My Daddy's Way to Juggle
Poetry
First Place

Renoir paints *Two Little Circus Girls*
innocent porcelain white.
One is the sister
I don't have and don't want,
the other is me.
She twirls in her gold shoes;
she thinks she can be a dancer,
and sometimes a doctor,
or maybe a pilot.
But I hold the oranges.
I know what she can be.
I know what I can be.
We are jugglers, our daddy
told me so.
And if she juggles quickly
and keeps up, then no one
will see the red welted legs
that blister under her tights.
Her job is to keep up,
my job is to be the example.
If my act trips we learn
a whole new lesson.
Michell Veque
Killingsworth Inn
Merit Award
John Martin
Sweet Arms to Die In
Short Story
Third Place

The College Center is full of students chatting and eating. Laughter crosses over the huge room and is ignored by many. Outside the sun shines in its full glory and I can see how it creates life, for it is magical. Science to me is just plain Mother Nature pulling huge magic tricks—like the birth of a child. The birds outside sing their songs of joy and fly free in the cloudless sky. The blue sky is just another ocean, one that stays above us, and we all dream of the beaches when spring break rolls around.

A cool breeze, subtle in the sunlight, but cold in the dark shade. Beautiful women fill the area for guys like me to stare at, hoping for a date.

I sit in the corner trying to blend in with the norm, but I am not normal. There is no normal, I think, for we are all different, so how could there be one? Yes, we are similar, but nowhere near what would make some people normal and others freaks. I ask myself, why do
we care about looks, then catch myself staring at a beautiful lady walking past my table. I am hypocritical, but aren't we all at times? I look down at my clothes, thinking about what people think of me. Then I smile inside, thinking that I don't care what people think, but I do and that makes me mad. I sit here staring at my food getting cold, wondering about things that shouldn't matter.

This place is beginning to bore me, so I get up, throwing my food away and feeling disgusted, not at the food but my attitude. I proceed down the hall, trying not to notice people looking at me, yet I care if they do, wanting not to care.
The room seems to blur as my friend walks toward me, not noticing me yet. She does not know that I like her, but I don't have the guts to ask her out, since I am shy.

Sara, a name that I could write sweet music to, says, “Hey, Joe . . . how are you?” She wears a striped shirt and long heavy bluejeans, which I like. I guess you can say that she is the type of girl who doesn't care and I want that to rub off on me, but I want her to physically rub it on me.

“Sara, I am cool . . . how have you been so far?” I ask, feeling a hold on my throat. I ask myself why I am so shy around girls and I answer myself, because you are an idiot, and I believe it. I notice Sara's ear-to-ear smile and green eyes, as if they were sparkling from the
sunlight coming in from outside.

“Well, I am doing all right ... I got class here in about five minutes so I will talk to you later,” she says with her smile, and she walks past me.

I look at her leaving me, saying, “All right, girl . . . talk to you later.” I quickly look ahead, wanting to look back at Sara walking down the hall, but I fear someone will see me staring and I am angry. Angry that I don’t have enough guts to just turn around and get a quick glance.

A guy who looks as if he had been on “America’s Most Wanted” catches my eye. He looks like he is mad at the world and I stop as he passes me holding a long baseball bag. His long black hair swings back and forth with every long stride he takes. I brush off the thought that he has a gun in that bag and is about to shoot people. I have a feeling he isn’t there to chat and laugh, so I stand keeping an eye on him and watching a blonde talking with the cashier at the counter. The guy stops at a table,
reaching into his bag, and I can't believe it, for he has pulled out a shotgun. I can't believe that my little thought has come true before my eyes and I hope that my eyes are playing tricks on me.

The guy points the gun up to the ceiling, letting a round go to waste, and some ceiling chips fall about two feet from him. The room goes quiet for about two seconds then some sounds of crying begin. Of course, how could we not have a person panicking in a situation like this, I think as I watch the guy look around the room.

"I know you people don't care about my problems, but you will now," the guy says with a hint of pain in his voice. The pain of love, I guess, as he goes on saying, "I feel that my life was taken from me because my girlfriend died last night." I feel sorry for him even though he has the lives of all these people in his skinny hands. I know I am not the only person feeling sorry for the man who holds the shotgun, looking as if he is high. "Now I am going to take a life to feel better. Does anyone
want to be the person who I get to kill?" he asks, as if someone is going to say, "Why, yes, you can blow me away for your pain." Few people in the room look around hoping someone would say it. This guy has lost his grip on reality and I guess I might have too, in his situation. "Then I will have to pick someone here to meet their Maker in heaven," the guy says, looking around for a prize kill I wonder.

Other people now begin to look around, each hoping not to be the person who has that blast tear their body. The guy, looking at a brunette, smiles and whispers, "You there in the red shirt. You will do nicely." The woman whose looks remind me of Demi Moore sits still, crying in her hands, wanting this all to be a dream.

I can't stand this any more and I think of my life — full of mistakes like any other person's, so I reply, "No, here, kill me instead." And as if I had passed gas out loud, the room was staring at
me. The girl who was chosen now sits silent, thanking me silently, most likely thinking that I am a sucker, but I don't care. The guy looks at me, stunned for a second, and walks a few steps toward me. I walk in front of the window, where a small stage lies on the tiled floor.

"Aren't you the brave one," he says with a cold smile. I am sure he didn't expect any person to do what I did.

"I just got one thing to say first . . . please," I asked him, hoping he had a little compassion since I was going to feel more pain than he does now. I stare into the gunman's face, wanting to see a person who could not kill but who would collapse. I saw a rock that stuck with what he thought and put a vengeance to it and do it right.
“Sure, make it quick though,” the guy says and I thank him with a nod. The type of nod you give to a person to say hello when you make eye contact to be friendly.

“Please, someone tell my family that I am sorry. They raised me well and maybe a bit too well. I am the type who doesn’t like to see a lady die. Please tell my family that I love them and to have a nice life,” I said, thinking it was some stupid last words. I could’ve thought of better ones if I’d had more time, I guess.

The sounds of sirens are heard through the glass behind me and I know they are too late. I see the guy pull the trigger like it was being done in a movie in slow motion. Then I hear a bang and feel the pain of my flesh tearing. I fly back, tripping on the stage, and twist head-first into the glass, hitting the sidewalk. Pain was everywhere it seemed, as I heard another gunshot, and looked up to see the guy on the ground with a
puddle of blood coming from his head. He blew his brains out and had a dark look on his face now that he was dead. I lay on the sidewalk, feeling the blood entering my lungs and other organs.

I see Sara kneeling above me, lifting me up in her arms. I think she is saying that I was stupid to do it and that she would never forgive me. I am not sure what she said because my soul was slowly escaping my body. I remember Sara shaking me in her arms, squeezing me against her chest, crying. The birds no longer sing; they are flying away, afraid of the loud blasts from the shotgun. I had wished to die in the arms of a beautiful woman as she cried for me. I now wait to die, looking up at the sky, hearing nothing at all but my own heart beating slower and slower. The laughter and chatter have turned to footsteps walking around to get a better look at my body.
Tim Martin
Untitled
Ceramic
Merit Award
Billie Medendorp  
On a Portrait of Patricia Peece  
Poetry  
Third Place  

Patricia Peece went home one day  
and went to bed never to wake again.  
Seventy cents for every dollar  
her birth an anchor around her neck  
and her shoulders slumped from the weight.  
Reality crept up on her like death,  
each pin prick puncturing her soul  
until all her dreams leaked out.  
So she laughs until she cries,  
and cries until she laughs  
before going back to work  
at the typing pool for minimum wage.  
Do you ever see Patricia Peece?  
Or do you turn a blind eye to her  
as she struggles to pry open the door  
for her sisters to walk through.
Clay Bedingfield

Untitled

Print
First Place, Two-Dimensional, Black and White
Hollie Colella

A Lesson From May

Fiction

People I'm not sure even know me have sent cards, flowers, and dishes of food. I know the Smiths and the Tolberts and Kathy and Tom. But do I know a Jim and Peggy? Besides all my confusion, this house is a mess. Orange mush is crusting the side of a sweet potato casserole dish and grease is remolding itself on the top of some roast beef with carrots. Half-empty glasses of iced tea align the countertops like a bar at closing time. The meringue off a lemon cream pie is bonding to the laminate in a brown sticky goo. I have loosened my belt and pulled at my collar until it's stretched three times its actual size. I sit down; I stand up. But still I can't seem to get comfortable. I am just too full, though I haven't eaten a bite of anything in three days.

Just the other night Kathy and Tom, and I guess Jim and Peggy, and dozens of other people reassured me with pats and hugs that these things take time.
May’s sister had left the mascara blotches on the shoulder of my jacket to prove it. Understanding friends told me terrific things to console me, while I tried to flash them an appreciative smile. My neighbor who is on his fifth marriage, or maybe I should say divorce, said, “She looks so natural, just like she’s sleeping.” I had nodded my head thinking that it doesn’t surprise me that my neighbor said such pathetic things. I just shook his hand, like it didn’t even bother me. Person after person. I went home that night smelling of floral soaps and cheap aftershave. But every person who had clung to me to give or take support had not overcome one person’s smell. May’s smell stuck with me the most. I am having a hard time remembering her actual smell. I breathe into the towel that she had dried her body with less than
a week ago. It compares nothing to the smell of her skin, when I had many times closed my eyes and breathed deep her body and hair. Then I can faintly recall moisturizing soap that she took from a blue-and-white box, and also that hair spray that Sarah had given to her, wrapped with a collage of other things in a basket for Mother’s Day. May had used that hair spray for years now since Sarah bought it for her. She had said it was her favorite when she had opened Sarah’s gift that morning some years before.

Already as I try to picture the exact line of her cheekbone, and the color of her skin, the details are almost impossible to fill in. I can create the outline of her face in my mind. Then I hesitate and check the picture on the credenza, or the nightstand, or our most recent photograph, the one she hung over the mantel two weeks ago.

She asked me if it was straight. That evening I was watching the Eagles recover a fumbled in overtime. She had obviously been trying to catch my attention when I finally realized she was talking to me.

“Henry, I said, ‘Did you hear me?’”

I must have looked confused. She turned her back to me and pushed at the top left corner of the frame.
"I asked you if this looks straight."
"Uh, it's fine."

The Eagles were on their third down and bound to lose, so I flipped channels until I found some wildlife show about tigers' mating habits.

May said, "Will you take a minute and look, please?"
"I said it's fine. Look, why don't you ask Sarah when she comes down this afternoon? She can tell about that kind of stuff."

At that May gave the picture one last look and left the room. I heard her click on the kitchen light. I turned the television volume up; but I could still hear the caps popping. Then silence, though I knew the ritual of sort-
ing out two little white pills, and one pink one, and some new ones the doctor gave her last time she visited. The cabinet door squeaked, and a glass made a muffled clink and slide against the counter. The faucet was on, and I waited. Then silence again. This silence was always the loudest. I turned up the volume some more.

If I could have that chance again, I would turn the TV off with the clicking of the light. I would go stand by the door and listen and try not to breathe too heavy.

It seems strange that my memories of her revolve around pill bottles and doctors' visits. Sometimes I loathed Dr. Bennett when he stuck her with one of his syringes. The needles did not faze May, but I shuddered each time they began the search for a "usable" vein. She would always talk about the kids, or holidays, or the weather. I would choke back the lump in my throat and rub my chin between my thumb and
first finger. May said that always gave away my nervousness. But I kept on until the skin burned with pinhead blotches of red.

I turn my attention from all that and I know I need to get everything in order. I pile the plates into one side of the sink and then open the dishwasher. I line the back rungs on the bottom with crusted-over plates and saucers, then stop. Did she wash them before putting them in here? I snap open the cabinet door under the sink to check for dishwashing liquid. There is none there, only a half-empty green box of dishwasher detergent. I grasp the doorknob of the wall cabinet above the sink and as the light of the kitchen flows to the shelves I know why I had been
avoiding this chore. I let the door thump against the one adjacent. May's pill bottles are lined in a neat row on the shelf. A full sheet of yellow notepad paper is tacked to the inside of the door, along with a small pocket calendar that has each day marked through up until four days ago. The columns of the yellow sheet blur and my eyes sting. I step back and look through the slats of the blinds, letting my eyes clear. Looking away I still see those boxes, each one carefully marked through, throbbing on my brain. I leave the cabinet door open and the dishwasher partly loaded. I click off the kitchen light and walk down the hall and into our bedroom.

The shades are pulled so the room is slightly dim even during the day. I lie down on her side of the bed
and stare around the room. I had complained when she painted the walls this shade of beige. She had finally remarked that she could see better if the rooms were lightened up. Her eyesight had deteriorated swiftly during the past year and now I feel a rush of guilt. She was always explaining what should have been obvious to me. I turn over onto my side and with my eyes follow the lines made by the vacuum cleaner. Some are interrupted by footprints; I examine the sizes to see if one is hers. My eyes follow a set of smaller prints to the crack in May's closet door.

I feel overwhelmed by the need to close it. I shuffle from the bed and have almost pushed the door shut when it rubs up against a shoe that is in the way. I open the door to push the shoe inside the closet and notice that a stack of old shoeboxes has toppled over. Too many shoes lie in the way to allow the door
to close, so I sit down on the floor by the closet and begin putting the shoes back into their boxes. I reach for the box that was on the bottom and notice that there is a box inside it that has a pink flower design. It has a gold ribbon tied loosely around it in a bow.

I don't remember ever seeing that box before. I did not give her that. I take it out of the shoe box and untie the ribbon. I lift the lid and set it on the carpet beside me. Inside there are a stack of thin blue notepads with glossy covers. I take a few out and notice that each is dated with a month and year across the top. I feel like I am snooping, but I wonder what these are for, why did she keep them so tucked away?

I lay out the notepads in the lid of the shoe box until I find the one with the earliest date, November
1988. The numbers make the joints in my fingers cold as I rub them across the handwritten date May had assigned to the book. I open the book and read the first lines.

*Today I visited a new doctor, Dr. Bennett. He said the headaches I have been having are caused by a cancerous lump in my lower neck. He said that this could get better, but I should realize what reality may bring. He suggested that keeping a journal during these difficult times may help me understand and cope with my feelings. So here goes:*

* I plan to tell the family after the Thanksgiving holiday is over. I don't want them to ever have to remember the holidays as a time to think of my sickness
I close the book and then close my eyes. She knew in November.

I put the books back that day and shut the box and tied the ribbon. For weeks I continued to be angry that she had written those journals. But eventually I was drawn back to them.

Today I went into the little drugstore that is on the corner of my block. I passed the pill bottles and the pharmacy window to look at a table of notepads with glossy covers. I chose a white one that I purchased along with a fine-point pen.

Now I sit down at the kitchen table with an old shoebox of mine and the notepad I bought.
Jason Fuller
Feeling Faint
Photography
First place, Two-dimensional, Color
Todd Twilley

The Psalm of the Malcontents

Poetry

Carnival female dwarves and bearded ladies, ballerina circus girls with Monday morning hangovers,

Cowboy hats and Wrangler jeans worn with a ruffled v-neck, governmental paying document in one hand, baby in the other.

Lonely little ladies in bathroom robes, black hair, black past, black eye.

Forgotten daughters with blue hair, wearing studs and Velcro lined leather jackets.

Presidential vegetarian daughter falling blue ten thousand temptations from freaks 🍦
Angela Moland
Big H
Mixed Media
Merit Award
It is 5 a.m. and I awaken to the scrapes and thumps of Grandma and Grandpa rummaging around in the kitchen having coffee. Sleep is now impossible with the commotion of their bickering. I can hear their voices filter up through the vents.

"Ach, Mutter, sit down, sit down and eat. Your breakfast is getting cold. I can get my own coffee. Sit. Sit."

"Now, Padder, I'm already up. It's no trouble. Do you need some more butter? Some sugar?"

"Sit down and eat. Stop hopping around like a grasshopper. You make me dizzy."

Resigned to the fact that I won't be going back to sleep, I make my way downstairs. Upon entering the kitchen, I immediately see Grandma's modified indigo beehive hairdo disappear into the refrigerator. "Peaches? I've got
some fresh peaches. No? How “bout some pears? Pears? Applesauce? The kind with the little cinnamon candies? You like my applesauce. How “bout some applesauce?” I pull out a chair at the kitchen table and say, “Grandma, I’m not hungry.” She then ignores me and proceeds to list all of the contents of her refrigerator. I’ve learned the hard way that she must be stopped at the refrigerator. Otherwise, she will then go on to the table, the pantry, the cellar, the staircase, and the garage, and tell me what each contains.

Most people think of their grandmothers’ kitchens as warm havens filled with love and the smell of chocolate chip cookies. Not mine. My grandmother’s kitchen is a battle zone, and she is out to kill me — not with the kindness of too many cookies, but a slow, painful death from food poisoning. Skipping breakfast is not an option. When I try to skip it, Grandma goes ballistic and starts ranting and raving in German. It goes something like this:

“Ach, Kinder dieser Tage . . . These days! These days! These children . . . wissen nicht, wie wichtig das Fruehstueck ist. Als ich jung war, war ich sehr dankbar altes Brot zu haben.”

I don’t know exactly what it means, but it
starts out along the lines of how breakfast is the most important meal of the day and finishes with when she was my age, there was a Depression going on and she was grateful to have a piece of bread to eat. Needless to say, I will choose something to eat. However, this is not as simple as it sounds.

Grandma starts with the table. The table supports tins of her homemade breads. She never has any simple, identifiable breads like white or wheat, nor any bread that is pre-sliced. Instead, she makes pumpernickel rye and some bread with little red and green objects in it. Could be candy. Could be cherries. I don’t know, don’t want to know. Next comes the pantry. The pantry contains mostly fruit and vegetables from her garden that she has canned. I consider this food pretty safe. From the pantry, Grandma heads to the cellar. The cellar is filled with cases of soft drinks such as Faygo, and older brands that no longer exist. All the glass bottles are covered in a two-inch-thick layer of dust, and all the drinks are older than I am. After exhausting the pantry and the cellar, Grandma then moves to the second-floor stair-
case. The staircase is my favorite. I get to wade through boxes of Crunch-n-Munch and Fiddle Faddle on my way to and from bed. These boxes are probably as old as the soft drinks. As a last resort, Grandma will go out to the garage. The garage is the worst. I usually stop her before she gets this far. I'll just say that there is no refrigerator or freezer in the garage, and that Grandma has been known to keep milk out there. To avoid having Grandma go out to the woodshed, which I wouldn't put past her, I say, "Grandma, I'll have a bowl of applesauce." After that Grandma watches me like a hawk to make sure that I eat every last bite.

Satisfied, Grandma now works on making lunch. From here, the food starts to deteriorate quite rapidly. Lunch usually consists of some unidentifiable meat that has been sitting uncovered in the refrigerat-
tor for too long. My mother and I buy Grandma Tupperware containers in hopes that she will use them. However, she doesn’t, or if she does, she never uses the lids. Sometimes I think that Grandma neglects to cover the food in the refrigerator for the express purpose of drying it out in order to pay me back for not wanting breakfast. So instead, she mixes the dried-out meat, which I pray is beef, with horseradish sauce to spread on sandwiches. I choke down as much of a sandwich as possible, using my Mountain Dew to help wash it down. Usually these sandwiches aren’t too awful and the carbonation in my Mountain Dew makes my stomach feel full. I’m just afraid that I am eating something like Hasenpfister.

After lunch, things go from bad to worse and Grandma tries wholeheartedly to give me food poisoning. She has a battle plan drawn. First, she never uses recipes. Sure, a little pinch
of that, a little dash of this, and a handful of whatever sounds romantically old-fashioned, but try eating the food. Nothing ever tastes the same way twice. My grandmother is 83 years old. Sometimes she leaves out ingredients. Essential ingredients. Like salt or sugar. Or sometimes she gets confused and adds the wrong one. Next, she often prepares a food which I consider high-risk for food poisoning — either pork or chicken. Grandma usually opts for chicken, which she then proceeds to marinate out on the counter all day long. She leaves it out on the counter, uncovered, beside the stove, which is on top of the oven. Both the stove and the oven are in use all day long. I have no choice but to refuse to eat the chicken. I have visions of salmonella bacteria or germs or whatever swarming over it.

I slowly slide back my chair from where I am sitting at the kitchen table. I can't eat this chicken. I have to leave the table or risk becoming sick. Needless to say, this sets off another round of German from Grandma. It is the same lecture as before, only the meal has changed. If this isn't enough, I look over at Grandpa for help, but he is practicing selective deafness. Not that I blame him when Grandma is on the warpath, but just once I wish he'd take my side. Instead, he just calmly munches on fried squirrel and I recoil in horror as if he were eating dog. I can't take any more of Grandma's yelling or watching Grandpa eat a rodent so I leave the kitchen.
and head upstairs.

As I retreat to my bedroom, climbing up past the boxes of Crunch-n-Munch and Fiddle Faddle, I hear Grandma’s voice, harsh and guttural, calling after me. “Kommst du hier-hier. Kommst du hier-hier!” And then I hear Grandpa’s voice. “Ach, Mutter, leave the child alone. If she doesn’t want to eat, she doesn’t want to eat. When she gets hungry enough, she’ll eat.” I silently wish Grandpa would have said something sooner to get Grandma off my back, but he hardly ever contradicts or challenges her.

So I sit on my bed and listen to my stomach growl. It’s beginning to cramp and I feel desperate for some food. Any food. I don’t know how I’ll be able to survive staying at the grandparents’ house without starving to death. A little while later, when I know that Grandma is taking her nap, I sneak down the stairs, careful to avoid the steps that squeak. There has
to be something in this house I can eat. Opening the door just a crack, I can see Grandpa dozing in his recliner. After checking around to make sure that Grandma is not still up, I open the door and start creeping past Grandpa en route to the kitchen.

Just as I'm about past him, suddenly he grabs my arm. I jump back and barely manage to hold back a scream. I thought he was asleep. "Shaving cream," Grandpa pronounces, his eyes popping wide open as his feet hit the floor. He uses the hold on my arm to pull himself upright.

"What? Shaving cream?" I ask.

"I need shaving cream. I have to go to the store to get some shaving cream. You come with me," Grandpa says.
“I don’t want to go to the store, Grandpa.”
“Come. Come. You come with me,” Grandpa says, pulling me toward the door. I try to resist. My stomach is killing me. All I want to do is to find something in the house that I can eat. Instead, Grandpa’s shoving me out the door to go with him to get shaving cream. I don’t want to ride with Grandpa; his driving scares me.

As Grandpa and I drive to the store, I wish desperately for a blindfold. Grandpa should have his driver’s license revoked. As we leave the driveway, he pulls out in front of another car while going 20 miles an hour. I let out a blood-curdling scream, “Grandpa! Watch out!” positive that my life is over, as I hear the guy’s tires squealing to avoid hitting us. Grandpa yells first at me and then the other driver. “Quit screaming! Why are you screaming?
Slow down, you crazy fool! This isn’t some race-track!” The other driver honks his horn and gives Grandpa the finger for cutting him off as he passes us. Of course, this makes Grandpa livid. Grandpa shakes his fist and shouts out the window, “You young whipper-snapper! Watch where you’re going before you kill somebody!” During this exchange, I do what any other teenager in my position would do — I duck down in the seat and pray for a giant hole to swallow me up before anyone I know sees me. We continue on to the store, with Grandpa setting the cruise control at about 35 miles an hour. Heaven forbid we reach the speed limit of 50 miles an hour. The car behind us tailgates Grandpa in hopes of making us go faster. This really ticks Grandpa off, and he mutters under his breath the whole time, “Get off my bumper, you fool. You maniacs can’t drive. You think you’re such a hotshot in that fancy car, don’t you!”

By the time we reach the store, there is a long string of frustrated drivers behind us and I am ready to die. We finally inch into the parking lot of the local Meijers. Meijers is a supermart with aisle upon aisle of anything you need — groceries, hardware, car accessories, toys, furniture, clothing, and more. Grandpa pulls into a parking space near the door and turns off the ignition. Instead of opening the door to get out, he turns to me and says, “Here’s a twenty,” and shoves a crumpled twenty-dollar bill in my direction. “Go in and get me some shaving cream and maybe some things for your-
Whatever you want. Maybe something to eat? Some apples or some chips. You run along. I'm going to take a nap, now." I am stunned. Grandpa? My partner in crime? "Thanks, Grandpa!" I say and give him a big kiss on the cheek on my way out the door.

I run into Meijers and let my nose lead me to the food section. The smells coming from the bakery are pure torture. My stomach howls with hunger as I survey aisle upon aisle of food — fruits, vegetables, meats, boxes of food, bags of food, bottles of drinks, and frozen foods. With only twenty dollars minus a can of shaving cream, I have to choose carefully. I walk down the aisles and pick up some items that won't need refrigerating. Peanut butter, a loaf of bread, some strawberry jam, a can of Pringles, a jumbo box of Junior Mints, and a six-pack of Mountain Dew. All the basic food groups every teenager must have — caffeine, chocolate, and sugar, with a little salt thrown in. I pick up a cheap brand of shaving cream and I also buy a romance novel. I buy a book because *The Sound of Music* is on TV tonight, and Grandma never
passes up an opportunity to watch it again for
the one hundred millionth time. At the check-
out counter I am very lucky. All my purchases
come out to $18.52 and I don't have to put any-
thing back. Fortune is also smiling on me in
that Meijers offers you a choice of paper or plas-
tic. I choose paper so I won't have to worry too
much about sneaking the food past Grandma
since she won't be able to see my stuff. If she
did see what I had bought, especially the junk
food, not only would she hit the roof, but her
feelings would be hurt.

When Grandpa and I arrive home, I dash
in the house as Grandpa is parking the car in
the garage. Grandma is taking a bath so I am
able to take my bag of goodies up to my room
without the third degree of "What did you buy?"
or "What's in the bag?" On my way upstairs, I
am able to grab a knife and a plate as I pass
the kitchen. Now I can fix myself a peanut but-
ter and jelly sandwich in my bedroom. I am so
hungry that I can barely wait until I make a sandwich and so I start eating peanut butter straight from the jar. After I eat my sandwich, or more accurately inhale it, I begin to feel guilty. I know that Grandma loves me and wants the best for me, but her cooking just makes my stomach turn. Maybe I'm just too picky about food. I mean, my mom and her four sisters were able to survive Grandma's cooking for years. I think maybe I'll try to make more of an effort to find something that Grandma makes that I can eat. I don't get to see her very often, and she really does try to make things that she thinks I'll like.

So my decision is this: I'll try to eat most of the fruit and vegetable dishes that she makes, but there is no way that I'm going to eat any of the meat. I can tell Grandma that I've become a vegetarian. Maybe she won't get suspicious. I'll tell her that I don't want to harm animals. She ought to believe me because she
knows that I plan to be a veterinarian, since I love animals. Hopefully she won’t think to wonder why I still wear my leather ropers. I can sneak a peanut butter and jelly sandwich whenever I need to supplement the applesauce, sliced pears, and mashed squash that I’ll be eating for all my meals. This should make us both happy. Having made this decision, I also decide to forego the romance novel. I can read it later. Spending time with my grandmother is more important. I mean, whoever says, “I wish I would have spent more time reading romance novels instead of spending time with my grandmother?”

Feeling better with food in my stomach and less guilt on my conscience, I walk downstairs so that I can watch The Sound of Music with Grandma. She and Grandpa are camped out in their favorite chairs. Grandma has the crushed gold velveteen overstuffed armchair on the left, and Grandpa has the beige Lazyboy recliner on the right. I sit on the floor between them and listen to Julie Andrews sing that song about a doe being a female deer.

“Popcorn! Does anyone want popcorn?” Grandpa asks out of nowhere.

“Sure,” I reply.

Grandpa makes fantastic popcorn. He has to, since it is the only thing Grandma allows him to cook. Grandpa uses an old-fashioned electric popcorn popper. (The popcorn always
comes out light and fluffy. And he puts real butter and salt on it. Not the fake metallic-tasting stuff like microwave popcorn uses.) I love popcorn. Popcorn is one of the most perfect foods. I don’t think popcorn can spoil or anything, so there is little chance of getting food poisoning or becoming sick from popcorn unless you just burn it or just drown it in butter and eat it anyway. Besides, if I work really hard, sometimes I can convince my parents that popcorn is a vegetable. However, it rarely works.

As the three of us munch on popcorn and watch *The Sound of Music*, I stop feeling guilty for sneaking food into the house and not eating my grandmother’s cooking. Everyone is happy. I have peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to live on, Grandpa doesn’t have to listen to me and Grandma fighting, and Grandma gets revenge on me for not eating her cooking, and her revenge is harsh — a guilt trip, having to watch Julie Andrews prance around on the TV screen for a couple of hours being perennially cheerful, and a major headache from looking at the grandparents’ TV screen, which is so old that the picture is blurry and can no longer be brought into focus.
Angie Gresham
Self Portrait in Blue and Green
Computer Graphic
Merit Award
Renee Byrnes

Drowning Girl

Poetry

The comic book waves roll around her,
Threatening to silence her words.
I don't care, she says.
I'd rather sink
Than call Brad for help,
She says.

The tears flow from her eyes,
Like a river of hopelessness.
Brad is there to erase them
With the pencil
Of love.

The beach is empty except for
Brad. No one else will
Rescue her. She must decide to
Sink or swim. Live
Or die.

I loved Brad once.
He wanted to save me, too.
He was my boat
On the ocean of loneliness.
I was washed over the side by
His jealousy.

I was drowning in sorrow.
My choice was to sink,
But instead I was lifted
By my own ambition
To survive.

I did not call out to Brad,
Or to anyone else.
I had to save myself
From myself.
I did 😊
Lee King
Yellow-Black #1
Ceramic, Mixed Media
First Place, Three-Dimensional
Amy Kelly  
Aunt Marthie
Poetry

I had an old Aunt — O.K., she wasn't really my Aunt.  
She was a husbandless, childless old woman  
Who went to our church.  
My father, the preacher, always had a rag-tag collection  
of Mothers, Sisters, Grandmothers, Aunts wherever he went.  
Besides, haven't you noticed that older and smaller congregations  
Are usually made up of women?  
Of course, that always comes in handy  
At church picnics and covered-dish dinners.  
Anyway, Aunt Marthie — as she called herself —  
Had the whole world down the front of her dress.  
I'm not saying that she was huge or had big boobs  
That flopped down to her knees or pooled around her ankles  
As she scuttled behind her walker,  
I'm saying that she put the whole world down the front of her dress —  
Money, handkerchiefs or wadded-up tissues, sticks of gum and peppermints,  
Even her snuffbox, were all down the front of her dress.  
She never carried a purse or pocket book. She didn't need one.  
She had one built in.  
It's been years since I've seen or even talked to Aunt Marthie.  
I grew up. We moved away. She's in a rest home.  
I often think of Aunt Marthie sitting in her worn blue armchair  
Beside her telephone with enormous buttons  
Dressed in a wrinkled nightgown  
With a little drool of snuff trickling out of the corner  
Of her mouth and down the wrinkled canyon to her chin.  
And she used to ask us to give her a kiss!  
Sometimes I am Aunt Marthie,  
Old, cantankerous with a dress full of worries —  
Money or the lack of it, peppermints

Of worry, tissues of care,  
And my little box of snuffed-out dreams,  
The whole world down the front of my dress  
And my bra straps straining.
Clay Bedingfield

Flesh and Bone

Alabaster

Merit Award
Matt Comer
A Graveyard Song
Creative Non-Fiction

"That's the son of a bitch that's done it! James Delafonse, her own husband, disrespecting her grave like this," shouts the Judge, wagging his finger upward as if pointing at God for vengeance. I'd believe God would send lightning to accompany Judge Blackwood's thundering voice if He did anything. But thunder is a sound, a sound that rolls around in this graveyard, a booming sound made by a short red-faced man, dressed in a white suit standing on an audience of dead ears.

"Well... aren't you supposed to DO SOMETHING?" Yelling seems to be the only way the Judge can communicate.

The police can just look at the huge gravestone that has toppled to the ground and know that James is behind it. But do they care? They just seem to wander around, ignoring the Judge, like
blind sheep. The Judge has a way of making them care, I'm sure of it, even though I've heard Sheriff Moss make fun of the "old windbag." The Judge can just rap that shepherd's cane across their head to wake them up to who controls Crossroads, Mississippi.

That huge gravestone has created a great big gash in the ground and destroyed the newly marked grave of Miss Porter, the former third-grade teacher. Her gravestone is shattered just like her skull when the big Hardee's sign split in two and fell on her car while she was sitting by the drive-thru window. The sign supposedly fell because of high winds. It toppled down, crushed her car, and knocked the cup of coffee out of the cashier's hand before she was able to hand it to Miss Porter. I wonder if this huge gravestone that has hit her grave has disturbed her sleep? I could just see her get out of her coffee-colored, dirt bed and shake her fist at these people.

I know that James is the one who
did this. Everyone else in the neighborhood knows it too, but I'm sure that everyone else, like me, won't say anything because they feel sorry for him.

Another gravestone nearby is spotted with puke. I'm sure now that James has made another late-night visit to his wife's grave. People who live around the graveyard tell me that he comes here to the grave, drunk, every night to talk with his wife. The funny thing is, that they say he seems to carry on a half-comprehensible conversation with her in his drunk ramblings.

James Delafonsoe lives next door to the graveyard. Most of his family is buried in the ground I tend to every day. I work in the mornings mowing the grass, and occasionally dig a new grave. Back when I first tended the graveyard, I could hear Gina and James Delafonsoe
singing to one another each morning, unless I was mowing. Their little house was made of brick, music, and happiness. Gina was a beautiful woman, a pure angel. Her tall, slender figure seemed to glide to the clothesline back of their house. I would watch her unending hair that would hang to the back of that sunshine dress she would wear in the summer. James was sort of a devil when he was younger—a charming, young black boy who drank, and laughed loud laughs with the other boys. He played the metal washboard in Boozoo Claveres' zydeco band, The Zydeco Swingers, a well-known band from this backwoods part of southern Mississippi. Yessir, I suppose Gina fell for the charm of James—he was a real smoothie. But she tamed him. He still played with the Swingers, but he settled down. Even when I was sweating from work in the summer, I could smile when I
heard Gina calling to James out back when he was caning chairs, and he would sing back to her.

James always wore that black cowboy hat that seemed to do nothing for him out in the sun. In that hot sun, hiding under that hat, James would move his graceful hands to cane chairs, and I would watch silently. Those hands were instruments for music and creation. My hands are instruments for concealment—to cover up the sadness with dirt, grass, and flowers. But I have eyes just like everyone else, maybe better. I've seen ghosts and foxfire, stuff you can catch in the corner of your eye at night when you are alone with your thoughts. So, I could at least see problems beginning to grow in Gina's and James's lives as they got older together. Often when James was away with his Swingers in
Baton Rouge, that black Cadillac of the Judge would silently find its way to the Delafonsoe house. I would just glance at stuff like that and keep my mouth shut. But everyone soon would know about it. It just didn't make sense to me. Wasn't James supposed to be the wild one, the one that cheated? James never did anything to hurt her, except those trips with the Swingers.

Now all James does is drink and wail in the graveyard at night. Once when I was out here one night, I heard his dog Crabcake yelping, and I knew that James wasn't far behind. So I would walk toward the noises and watch James sitting on the ground with the
ridges of markers all around him—sitting in the darkness, holding his dog, yelping and laughing at the air. Most of the time he is around the marker Judge Blackwood bought for Gina. I found out from William Warrior, a former schoolmate of James’s, that the Judge was an old courter of James’s wife and that there was a long, bitter rivalry between James and the Judge for Gina’s affections. When Gina died, the Judge bought a huge marker, a very expensive one, to overshadow the wood cross that James made for the gravesite. Judge Blackwood bought the grave tract right next to and above the grave and then put the ten-foot marker, that sort of resembles the Washington Monument, on the site.

I’ve seen Crabcake piss on the marker and I wonder if it’s possible to train a dog by example, because James pisses on it, too.

There is no doubt in my mind James has pushed over the tombstone with his creative hands. Creative hands can hold power when the music stops.
Another day; it's raining out.  
"A terrible day for a funeral" 
my mother always says. 
I disagree. I think rain 
is rather appropriate 
for funerals, especially 
in the winter, when 
the leaves have been 
stripped from their branches, 
leaving the trees exposed, naked. 
The cold is piercing to the bone. 
The winds are barbed wire, 
pricking and snagging the skin. 
The ground is hard as stone, 
the sky is empty and gray. 
Clouds hang thick and low. 
The mourner becomes his 
surroundings, embraces their 
miserable comfort. 
The rains have settled in.
Michelle O'Connor

Untitled

Ceramic

Merit Award
April Wright
The Dance
Poetry

Five bangles shimmy on her slender arm predicting the events to come.

She dons her armor for tonight's battle positive that she will conquer the hearts of all.

Competing with daughters, sisters, mothers for attention Won't you note her creamy almond skin?

Disappointment is mirrored in the blue of the others' dresses As men see their errors and flock to her in white.

They sing hosannas to the stars shining in her eyes, And pray for the chance to dance with her next.
Wendy Franks
Three Cows
Mixed Media
Best of Show
Matt Comer

Figure with Meat
in Frances Bacon's Dark Room

Poetry

A movement
a glimpse
when you are half awake
walking in your house at night
past darkened rooms
out of the corner of your eye
in the darkness
a sliding silhouette
that chills your clorox white bones.

A figure with meat is what the artist sees
in his dark room.
Late at night,
a howling man with white meat wings
the slaughtered cow his transport
to the hazy whiteness.
Within the dim shades
surrounding the faded figure,
the dreams and the past,
how does he tell one from the other?

It's when you wake
that you have that branding bright image
on your brain
the one that sticks with you all day
flashing like a burned out bulb in a dark room.
The after image is the negative.
The man that you see in your room
stark awake as you sleep
is your own


Tim Martin
Survival Kit
Mixed Media
Campus Bookstore Award
Rebecca Linam  
Muscle Shoals High School  
The Appointment  
Short Story  
First Place  

Dawn gazed with awe at the new doll in her hand. It was the best doll Mommy had ever given her in her fifteen years of life. She was so happy that she stuck her thumb in her mouth. They were going to the doctor’s office, she and Mommy were. Dawn didn’t usually like to go, but Mommy had told her that this was a new doctor, a special doctor that gave away toys; maybe he would give her another doll. Mommy had been so nice lately. For the past week she had allowed Dawn to do whatever she wanted. She didn’t even have to go to school. The doctor had said she shouldn’t, that it was useless. Dawn had never met the doctor before, but she thought he must be very nice. All her friends had to go to school, but she didn’t. “They must be in school right now,” thought Dawn.  
Outside the sky was a mass of drab
clouds that prevented the sun from shining through. Dawn and Mommy had been driving in the foggy rain for two hours now. Humidity had built up inside the car to the point where it condensed on the windows, only to be gathered into drops of water that rolled downward. Dawn discovered that the windshield next to her was wet as she leaned the side of her face on it, thinking about her new doll. The touch of the fresh water caused her mouth to form an odd-shaped “O” of surprise. “Mommy!” she squealed in delight, her eyes shining, “It’s raining in the car!” Drops of moisture fell from Dawn’s face as she turned toward her mother.

Mommy glanced at the young girl disdainfully, replying, “It’s not rain. It’s condensation.”

“Oh, I see!” Dawn said, pretending to understand. “Condensation” was a big word; it was probably one of those big words Mommy used in her office at work. Mommy worked in a big, tall building that had a lot of elevators and water fountains. Dawn had been there once and had ridden the elevator all the way up to the thirtieth floor. She was
proud that her mother worked at such an important place. Mommy was so important that she always worked late, staying in meetings and conferences. Dawn didn’t know what a conference was, but it sounded like something fun, like a big birthday party!

Dawn thought about her own birthday. She had counted the days on the calendar, and it would be here in five days. Maybe this year she could have a big party. Mommy had been especially nice lately. What if she were planning a secret surprise party for Dawn? What fun it would be! “Mommy?” began Dawn. “Can I have a big birthday party this year?”

“I wouldn’t count on it if I were you,” Mommy said almost inaudibly, more to herself than to Dawn. She sighed impatiently.

Dawn told herself that it wouldn’t matter. Reverently, she lifted the new silky-haired doll. Mommy had bought this for her, and that was all that mattered right now. Happily, she started humming “Jesus Loves Me,” off key.
Once, long ago, she had heard some friendly children on television singing the cheerful tune.

Instantaneously, Mommy switched on the radio. The daily news was broadcasting the latest scandalous events. Two men were discussing some word called “yoophthanazha.” Dawn had never heard that word before. Five seconds later, Mommy turned the radio off just as Dawn asked, “Mommy, what does ‘yoophthanazha’ mean?” Mommy’s face wore an irritated expression. Dawn stuck her other thumb in her mouth. “I love you,” she said, hoping to bring a smile to her mother’s lips.

Mommy looked through the rearview mirror in silence. Finally, she said,
“You can listen to your Disney tape if you want to.”

“Goody!” exclaimed Dawn. Mommy had never liked Dawn’s tape of music from the movie “Aladdin.” Soon the sound of music filled the car. Dawn liked this tape because her sister Jennifer had given it to her for her tenth birthday. Jennifer was two years younger than Dawn. Every day after school they walked home together talking about things that had happened at school. The last time they’d walked home from school was two weeks ago; Dawn had been crying as if her heart were broken.

“What’s wrong?” Jennifer asked with concern.

Dawn’s face crumpled up like a deflating balloon. “T-today . . . I was in the lunchroom . . .” She stopped for a gulp of air. “A-and this boy said . . .” A new wave of tears cascaded down her face.

“What? What did he say?” Jennifer pulled a tissue from her pocket and handed it to her sister.

Dawn wiped her face. “This real mean boy s-said . . . I was ugly and dumb
...” Her chest heaved up and down with sobs.

Jennifer gave Dawn a hug. “Who said this?” Jennifer looked angry.

“... a-and they all laughed at me.” Dawn looked Jennifer in the eyes and asked, “Am I ugly?”

“No!” Jennifer replied. “Of course not. I even think you’re prettier than Jasmine.”

Dawn was surprised. “Jasmine in ‘Aladdin’?” She had never thought anybody could be as pretty as Jasmine, but if Jennifer said so, then it was true, because Jennifer had never lied to Dawn as yet. Automatically, she wished her sister were here with her now; maybe the doctor would give her a toy as well.

“Mommy? Don’t you wish Jennifer was here?”

Mommy coughed but didn’t answer. She just looked out the window.

Before long they had arrived at the
doctor's office. The parking lot was inundated, full of riotous people holding up poster boards. They were saying bad things about the nice doctor Dawn was about to see. He wasn't bad; he had said she didn't have to go to school. Plus, he was going to give her a new toy; Mommy had said so. She told Dawn not to pay any attention to them. Protectively, she guided her daughter toward the door.

Two policemen guarded the entrance. Above it was an elaborately lettered sign. Dawn tried to read the words on it. "E-stab-lished in 1999." The next word was hard. "E-U-T-H-A-"

Within seconds, they were in the waiting room. There weren't any colorful picture books here like there were at most doctors' offices; there were only grownup magazines about grownup things like economy and business. It was also crowded. Dawn saw two old women, in wheelchairs, who reminded her of her grandmother. She hadn't seen her
grandmother for two weeks, since she and Mommy had yelled at each other about something, something having to do with Dawn; she wondered if they would ever see each other again. There were also a couple of small children attached to IVs and feeding tubes. One of them looked like Dawn’s best friend, Trisha. The girl sitting next to her was so thin she couldn’t even hold her head up.

“The nice doctor will make them all better,” thought Dawn. She wondered what kind of toys he gave away. Did the grownups get toys too, or did they get clothes? Maybe the old women who looked like her grandmother would get some new shoes. Dawn’s grandmother loved new shoes.

No one in the waiting room made any conversation. Dawn wished someone would talk to her. She smiled at everyone who made eye contact with her, even the secretary. Occasionally, a nurse would call out someone’s name; that “someone” and his loved one would then follow the nurse down the hall and into a small room. A few minutes later the loved one would return.

“. . . the doctor is making them all better . . .”

Now it was the turn of one of the
old grandmothers. She hobbled into the office with the help of a young woman who looked like her daughter. Dawn waited patiently for her turn as she twisted a lock of hair around her fingers.

“Dawn Phillips.”

It was her turn! Finally she could see the doctor! She reached for Mommy's hand as the two of them walked down the hall. Now they were in a small room with a nurse and the doctor. Dawn smiled.

Suddenly, Mommy turned and left. Dawn gasped. What was happening? “Mommy, come back! Wait here with me!” she begged.

Mommy didn’t even turn around.

“Please come back! I love you!” pleaded Dawn. It was as if the whole world had turned against her.

Now the nurse was holding a long tube. Dawn was frightened. Where was Mommy? “Would you like to smell some nice flowers? They’re here, in the bottom of the tube,” said the nurse.

The last thing Dawn remembered was seeing the needle come toward her arm.
Lee King
The Master
Print
Second Place, Two-Dimensional, Color
Even in my first memories of Aunt Laura, she was quite old. Her wrinkled skin sagged from her bones more each year. She was as deaf as a desktop. Dark bruises covered her chalky arms. She was very tall. When she stood, it seemed that she could fall over any instant, like a tall pine tree swaying in the wind. I remember most a light that stayed in her eyes, even though her body was dying around her. That light was indicative of the magnificent brain and great soul within.

When I was young, she would come to my house often. I remember looking through the glass, seeing her shuffling across my gravel driveway, carrying a container of cheese straws or some other foodstuff. She made good cheese straws. She would sit on the back porch and talk to my mom, my brother, and me.

She told great stories. She talked, and her words painted pictures in my mind. I saw the world through her eyes. Some people lose their wits as they grow old. Aunt Laura remembered the Great Depression as I would remember yesterday. Mom
told me that Aunt Laura read many books each week. That may be part of the reason she retained her intelligence.

Aunt Laura loved to work in the earth. She planted a flower garden, which she tended herself, in the corner of my yard. Every spring she planted a small vegetable garden in her yard.

One day when I was thirteen, my mom picked me up from school with tears in her eyes. She told me that Laura had become entangled in a hose while watering her tomatoes and fallen. Among other injuries, her hip was broken. She would have to have hip replacement surgery in Columbus, Georgia. Surgery for anybody that old is dangerous.

The surgery was successful, but the doctors doubted she would walk again without assistance. She stayed in the hospital for a month.
Then she went to a physical therapy clinic in Birmingham for about six weeks. Finally, it was decided that she would stay in her house, but she would have to hire a nurse, for she still couldn't get around.

An ambulance brought her to Florence. In front of her house, a medic and a nurse rolled her stretcher down the ramp. "Wait a minute," she said as they rolled her onto the sidewalk.

"What?" the medic asked.

"Wait a minute," she repeated. She sat up in her stretcher. The medic stopped pushing it. "I will walk into my own house," she said, her tone matter-of-fact. She took her walker from the nurse. Then she slowly dropped her legs off the stretcher and stood up. Step by step, she inched across her yard, up the two stairs to her front porch, and into her house.

In this period, she was not able to come visit
me, so instead I visited her. She lived about four miles away from me, and often I would ride my bike or go with my mom to her house. It was then that I really got to know her.

She made me feel special. Her fridge was stocked with bottled Coca-Colas just for me. She talked to me as an equal, not as most adults talk to kids. When she asked me questions in her grating voice, it was because she really cared about what I had to say. Everything about her was sincere. Not one moment did I feel uncomfortable around her.

She had a happiness completely independent from the rest of the universe. She had joy in a worn-out body that gave her pain. She had peace
in a country of eight-lane interstates and drive-through windows. She had love in a world filled with hate.

During my ninth-grade year, Aunt Laura had another fall. This time she was not hurt as badly. After a short hospital stay, she returned to her house. She never complained, but she did tell my mom that her hip hurt her.

One day, Aunt Laura told my mom that she would be going back to Columbus, Georgia, for an extensive checkup. One of her friends would drive
her there. At the time, my mom was out of town and I was staying with my grandparents. Over the phone, my mom told me that Aunt Laura would be going out of town. The day before she left, I had my grandpa drop me off at her house to see her.

She was delighted to see me. I got a Coke and then sat down and talked with her. After we had talked a while, she stood up and said, “Come on. I want to show you something.” She walked over to where an old-fashioned clock hung on the wall. It had two faces, one over the other, enframed in wood. The upper face told the time, the bottom face the date. Written on the upper face were the words “Patent 1875.” Aunt Laura lifted a small hook on the side, and the front cover swung open. Then she taught me how to wind it and showed me where there was a piece of paper that gave the name and address of two people able to repair it. Then we heard my grandfather’s truck horn blow
a quick beep that said he was there to pick me up. 
"Goodbye. I love you," told my Aunt Laura light-heartedley, giving her a hug.

"Goodbye. I love you, too," she told me, wrapping her frail arms around my body. Then I turned and hurried out the door, not wishing to keep my grandpa waiting.

Two days later, we got a call from Columbus, Georgia. Aunt Laura had undergone another risky surgery on her hip. She had kept it a secret because she didn't want us to worry about her or feel like we had to go with her. She had developed a blood clot and was on the brink of death. An hour later, my Aunt Laura died.

Today, her antique clock sits in my living room.
Aunt Laura is free. She is free from the constraints of a weak body.

Although her garden in my backyard is overgrown with weeds, her garden in my heart still grows. She planted the seeds of love and compassion. For that, I will love her until the end of time.
Josh king

March

Writer's Conference Poetry Winner

Old age lends itself to wisdom.  
March, in its comforting gray,  
Shrugs off a moist and eager April,  
Giving me a day to walk the hills.  
There the ageless bones of all the earth  
Are piled up one upon another  
To let me know that they are more than me.  
My path winds its way between the scattered boulders  
From August, when Summer dances on the slopes,  
To Winter, closeted in January's snow,  
When the shoulders of the earth are hunched in thought,  
It follows close behind as I  
Wander slowly down the way the hills picked for me  
Long ago with weather-beaten rocks.  
Now, above a broken cleft  
Cradled in between the mountains and the hills,  
I'm offered for awhile to sit  
And ponder with the ages past  
The likelihood of evening bringing rain.
“Light has need of darkness, for without the darkness, how should we ever know the light?”

Carl Jung
**Literary Winners**

**Creative Non-Fiction**
- First Place: *Crayon Ducks* by Matthew Comer
- Second Place: *Redeemed* by Patricia Robinson

**Poetry**
- First Place: *My Daddy's Way to Juggle* by Hollie Colella
- Second Place: *Growing Wings* by Patricia Robinson
- Third Place: *On a Portrait of Patricia Peece* by Billie Medendorp

**Art Winners**

**Best of Show**
- *Cows* by Wendy Franks

**Two-Dimensional Black and White**
- First Place: *Untitled* by Clay Bedingfield
- Second Place: *452 Cherry Hill* by Chris Rohling

**Two-Dimensional Color**
- First Place: *Feeling Faint* by Jason Fuller
- Second Place: *The Master* by Lee King

**Three-Dimensional**
- First Place: *Yellow and Black #1* by Lee King
- Second Place: *Untitled* by Tim Martin

**Campus Bookstore Award**
- *Survival Kit* by Tim Martin
Winners

Highschool Conference Winners

Essay
First Place
   Wesley Self • Aunt Laura
   Bradshaw High School
Second Place
   Katy Lynn Larson • Employees Only
   Bradshaw High School

Short Story
First Place
   Rebecca Lina • The Appointment
   Muscle Shoals High School
Second Place
   Matt Adams • Vision
   East Lawrence High School

Poetry
First Place
   Josh King • March
   Muscle Shoals High School
Second Place
   Courtney Grubbs • Passing Thoughts
   Bradshaw High School
Robert Cox is currently the Art Director and Photographer for Wild Alabama, a non-profit environmental magazine. Formerly an Assistant Professor of Art at both the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa and Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado, he continues to be a practicing visual artist, exhibiting his paintings and drawings throughout the United States in juried and invitational exhibitions. A graduate of the University of North Alabama, he attended Memphis State University for his Master of Fine Arts degree.

Of this year's Lights and Shadows competition he says, "The fires of creative energy continue to burn bright at UNA's Art Department—the work expresses a boldness of approach to a diverse range of media...and exhibits a strong conceptual basis of theme and content."

The judge for the literary contest was Carol Wolfe Konek. Dr. Konek is the author of Daddyboy: A Memoir, and co-author of Women's Careers. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in many journals and magazines. In addition to being a scholar and writer, Dr. Konek is the Associate Dean of Liberal Arts at Wichita State University. Of the students' work, she said: "It was a pleasure to read work written with such clarity of voice and acuteness of vision from promising writers. These writers bring new voices to our craft."
Credits

Production Credits

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