Lights and Shadows

Volume 45 Lights and Shadows Volume 45

1-1-2002

Lights and Shadows 2002

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(2002). Lights and Shadows 2002. Lights and Shadows, 45 (1). Retrieved from https://ir.una.edu/lightsandshadows/vol45/iss1/1

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Lights & Shadows
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Art Editor  
Jason Bowie

Literary Editor  
Amy L. Melson

Copy Editors  
Lynne Burris Butler  
Mary C. Jennings

English Faculty Advisor  
Lynne Burris Butler

Art Faculty Advisor  
John Turner

Publications Director  
Mary Beth Eck Campbell

University Photographer  
Shannon Wells

Page Layout & Cover Design  
Jason Bowie

Editor's Note

I recently overhead the conversation of two of my fellow English majors. One woman was concerned about her creative writing class. She didn’t know what to write about. Oh, her friend said, creative writing is easy, not like writing papers for class. “You just write whatever’s in your head.” I cringed.

I have loved creative writing since I was a child. It was something I could imagine myself doing for the rest of my life. I loved writing what was in my head, seeing my words appear on a blank page. I didn’t choose it as my livelihood, though, because I doubted I could feed myself by writing. Then I came to UNA, realized I still favored writing over anything else, and signed up for the writing major. I also loved history, which is, after all, a form of storytelling, and decided I would support myself by teaching history. Writing would be my treat.

In creative writing class, one of the first things the professor said to us was “Writing is work.” No, writing is fun, it’s play, right? The rest of that semester and the next, I learned the truth of her statement. Creative writing is no easier than writing a research paper for history class. I think it’s harder. The history paper is an act of scholarship with, perhaps, creative touches. The creative piece is an act of craft with, perhaps, bits of scholarship. In a history paper, the academic voice comes easily from long exposure. The language comes as a mantle slipped on. It’s familiar and authoritative; readers will recognize it, feel safe, and follow. In creative writing, you have to find your own voice to succeed. You have to capture your readers and hold them hostage with your words until the end.

Every word has to belong to the piece—something else I learned from Ms. Butler. So revision is paramount. If I did not become a better writer in those creative writing classes, I did become a better rewriter. What I once despised, once sneered at the need for, I grew to love: the obsessive twisting and turning of words in search of that perfectly tuned phrase. That phrase is my goal in life. Yes, I’ve changed my mind again. I want to spend my life writing, not because it’s easy, but because it’s hard. It will take at least a lifetime to master the craft. And I’ll love every minute of it, even those achingly long moments of utter frustration.

Creative writing is far from easy. It’s work, but good work. When someone makes it look easy, that writer is a success. As are the writers in this year’s Lights & Shadows. They speak from the following pages in different forms and unique voices on a wide variety of subjects. I love the diversity of this year’s Lights & Shadows; I hope it mirrors the diversity of our campus and, beyond that, of our changing country. One thing it is safe to say these writers have in common is that they all labored lovingly on these pieces. From that labor, these works were born. Enjoy.
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An Afternoon with the Russian SKS Rifle

by Sara Wright
Winner of the 2001-2002 Ferry Prize

"Wear your seat-belt. Be careful. People will run over your ass," said my father, never looking up from Guns and Amo magazine. Sitting at the bar in our kitchen, wearing his black leather motorcycle pants and a green and black camouflage button-up shirt with brown hunting boots, he looked a little bit like a teenager rebelling against society. Had it not been for his thinning hair, that was glinting silver in the sunlight, and the black, thick-rimmed reading glasses held together with green duct tape in the middle, he could almost have passed for a young man, even for his 57 years. He was broad shouldered and tall. His knees were bad from years of track and baseball. He had the stitch of a baseball permanently imprinted above his left eye from a line drive straight to his forehead. When he laughed you couldn't see his gray eyes, only laugh lines from years of storytelling and practical jokes crinkling at the corners. As far as I could tell, he didn't have frown lines, probably because he spent about as much time worrying as he did washing the dishes—not much. Since his retirement in October of 1999 from TVA, my mother called him a househusband partly because it irritated him and partly because it was so ironic—he was anything but a househusband. He didn't know how to make anything in the kitchen except for microwaveable egg-beaters and wheat toast with warmed-over coffee he flavored with milk and honey. (He didn't use white sugar to sweeten anything because it made his ears ring.) As far as housework went, he tried. He would pick things up and put them in their proper places, but as far as sweeping the floors or wiping toast crumbs off the counter—you could forget it. He didn't like to answer the phone either. It wouldn't have mattered if he did because he couldn't hear it half of the time anyway.

He honestly felt that everything he did was for the betterment of the household though. I remember many improvement "projects" he thought of all on his own. One afternoon shortly after his retirement he sat at the kitchen counter cleaning his Russian SKS rifle (have I mentioned that he likes weapons?) when the phone rang. I looked up from my spot at the kitchen table where I sat diagramming sentences to see if he even flinched. After two rings with no reaction, I uncrossed my legs from sitting Indian-style and got up to answer the phone.

"Hello?" I answered, listening. "No, not here. You must have the wrong number." The caller went on as I stretched the cord above the countertop to avoid dragging it through the seedy tomato juice remaining from Daddy's sandwich a half-hour earlier. "Well I know you can usually find pencil post beds at antique stores around here. Actually we do have one, but it's not for sale. Sorry . . . No problem . . . Bye-bye." I must have looked puzzled when I hung up the phone because my father looked over the top of his two-piece glasses and asked who had called and if I had even bothered to look at the caller ID first. When he did actually hear the phone ring, he refused to answer it until he knew who it was. ("Damn salesmen. Should be illegal," he would say.)

"It's the strangest thing," I said, "That's the second time today somebody has called about an ad in the paper with furniture for sale. Must be a misprint."

I had his attention now. He took his glasses off. "They have? Well what did you tell them?" he asked.

"I told them that they had the wrong number," I said simply as I walked to the refrigerator, stopping along the way to peel smashed scrambled egg off my bare foot. Dad had been especially messy that morning.

"Well what in the hell did you tell them that for?" he exclaimed. The man holding the Russian SKS rifle was apparently angry with me. I guess I looked confused because he went on to explain himself. "All we've got left to get rid of is that old bed and the table in the attic," he said. "I cleared the rest of it out yesterday while you and your mother were lollygagging around in town. Didn't I tell ya'll I put that ad in the Tri-cycle Daily?" he asked.

"You did what?" my mother screamed from the living room. Daddy went on to explain how he had managed to "get rid of most of my great-grandmother's antique furniture to make more room in his garage. The only thing my mother could say was, "At least we found out before he sold the bed." We made amends for Daddy's garage sale by eating on paper plates for Christmas dinner. When my grandmother asked where Memaw's fine china was, my mother answered, "Just thought we'd save some time cleaning up this year and keep dinner simple." The way my mother put it to me later was that my grandmother was too old for any sudden shocks. She didn't say anything else about it because it was pointless to pursue done deals with my father. After calling the paper and having them stop running the ad, she sent him outside for the rest of the day to play. I think I caught a glimpse of him hiding in the neighbor's bushes, shooting at squirrels.

Daddy spent his other free time playing with his Harley Davidson knock off motorcycle. Some of my parents' friends called it his mid-life crisis, but my mother and I knew better. Daddy did not have crises. So my mom just called it his mid-life disaster and left it at that. Once again, seeing him ride down our tree-lined street wearing his black leather biking pants with his black L.L. Bean backpack on, I almost saw him as a kid. The backpack wasn't even his. It had belonged to one of my ex-boyfriends and had dingy-white stitched embroidery on it that read "SAM." I had adapted to my father's quirk of adopting anything lying around the house as his own. The backpack didn't really faze me as much as it had when he found an old bottle of Sam's Polo Sport in a bathroom drawer and started wearing
it. I smelled it on him while singing “Onward Christian Soldiers” at the 10:45 a.m. service on Sunday morning. Had we not been in church, I would have blown a gasket right then and there. As things were, my mom and I generally tried hard to be good in church to make up for my father’s bad behavior. My mom didn’t allow him to sit next to Judge Vanderhof anymore because they had created such a spectacle one Sunday trying to see who could say “Amen” the most during the sermon. Most of the younger folks thought it was pretty funny, but the more they carried on, the straighter and stiffer the old blue hairs sat in their pews. Let’s just say that First Methodist is far from charismatic. An old Giants T-shirt, a sorority formal sweatshirt, cologne—the backpack was minor as far as I was concerned. The fact is, he didn’t notice and didn’t seem to understand why I cared so much that he adopted my old boyfriends’ possessions.

Boys were always afraid to come to my house before they got to know my father. I understood why. Over the past year, almost every house in my neighborhood had been broken into except for ours. My mom said that it was because nobody was crazy enough to try and cross a man who was probably crazier than they were themselves. Let’s just say that the Russian rifle was not the only firearm in our house. Our property, beginning a couple of feet past the mailbox, was like a fortress. No boys ever wanted to kiss me when they dropped me off from dates because Daddy had a surveillance camera hidden above the garage that monitored all movement in our yard and driveway, and they knew it. Most of them had heard about “Fort Wright” at school. I once saw an episode of Saturday Night Live that featured a commercial for a fake burglar dummy you were supposed to set up in your house or yard to make a real thief think that your house was already taken. My dad could have invented this idea. I’m glad that he never saw the episode or we would have had one the next day. I had a hard enough time explaining the camera to my friends. My sister and I learned not to ever try and sneak in during the middle of the night—good way to get your head blown off. In fact, any time I entered the house unexpectedly and I couldn’t see or hear Daddy right off, I started identifying myself immediately. “It’s me Daddy! Don’t shoot yet,” I would yell so that he heard me from wherever in the house he might have been crouched and waiting with loaded weapon. Nevertheless, I made it through eighteen years in his house without sustaining any life-threatening injuries and it was actually fun to grow up with the most interesting father in town. While my little girlfriends were off learning to ride ponies with their dads or getting piggyback rides, I was learning to shoot blackbirds off of our telephone lines and to hunt for arrowheads. Daddy could do the Rebel Yell and explain the answer to the entire JFK conspiracy if you had a couple of hours to spare. I had heard all his old deputy sheriff and college stories a thousand times, but they never ceased to interest me all over again when he began with “Let me tell you about this one time . . .” If he was not telling stories, he was walking around singing “Amazing Grace” or the old blues song “St. James Infirmary.”

We did not then, nor do we now, fight about much of anything but my cat. My father hates animals. During a weak spell he consented to letting my mother and me have a cat as long as we promised to keep it out of the house. In spite of the fact that he hated the cat, she actually liked him. It led us to believe that he must have been nicer to her, when he was alone with her than he was letting on to us. We fought sometimes because he argued that we spent too much money feeding her and he also detested that we fed her on our good dishes. “If that damn thing does ever die, it will probably be because it choked to death on a T-bone,” he would say before opening the kitchen door and literally throwing her out of it. Daddy himself was actually pretty similar to a dog. His bark was always worse than his bite.

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An Elephant's Grief

If I were a goddess of the jungle, with bottomless eyes and sagacious brow, I could declare one day to mourn, to caress your bones with my leathery trunk. One day each year I could return to the place you were and look upon what is left of your corpse.

But I live in the skin of a human. So, instead I weep and bite my pillow. I walk alone in the front yard, watching school buses drive by. And at nighttime, I sit on my bed, waiting to grow a trunk.

— Elysia Morasco
Eleven and a Half Months Apart

She was the oldest and can't remember her world without him. They spent their afternoons on safaris through the playroom and camping in tents under their Mama’s dining room table. The only time they got a spanking from their Nana was when they ran away together to the mailbox at the end of her driveway. He doesn't remember the time that she threw the mini red lawn chair at his face for crawling too close to her, and she forgave him for sticking a frog down her dress during the fifth and sixth grade play. But both recall the emptiness of her freshman year of college, and their great-grandma’s house after the funeral.

— Holly R. Dotson

Will He Be Home
Selina Pruitt
Merit Award
The Gold Star Guitar

by Elysia Morasco

Summer nights in Louisiana are filled with musk. Even the mosquitoes can't stand it. They break their wings, even necks, trying to fly through screens on open windows, just to feel the cool breeze of an electric fan. People in the city use their air conditioners from the end of frosts to the weekend after Thanksgiving, when winter becomes official, but in the country we don't use the A.C., as we call it. There aren't enough buildings to block the breeze from the fields and there sure aren't any mountains in Lake Charles to stop the wind. So, we use electric fans, one to each room. My fan is purple, like the grapes winding down my bedspread. I used to set my wild horses on top to slow its constant murmur and to guard the window. Now, the sound of the blades catching the curtains makes like a slow two-step and puts me to sleep.

I got it twelve years ago and I was so excited that I called my best friend Leslie from down the street to come and see it. Before that summer, Leslie didn't have a fan in her room, so when I got my new one, Dad said it sure would be a nice, friendly thing to give my old white box fan to Leslie. She walked in the door of my room and stared at the two fans resting side by side.

"Wow, Elie! You have two fans!" she said, just about high-pitched, which was rare for her. "You ought to be really cool at night, now."

"Well, Leslie," I said, "Dad says you can have my white fan if you want it. My aunt gave me some stickers for being her niece, and we can put them on it for The One with the Train looks."

Leslie smiled so big that all her front teeth shone, and I felt like a champ. We spent the whole afternoon putting stickers on that fan—glittery horses, raccoons, scratch-n-sniff apples and chocolates, race cars, dollies; a little from every page in the sticker book. At dusk, Dad put Leslie's new fan in the back of his Ford truck and drove it three doors down to her place.

Leslie lived in a trailer older than ours, but she never complained. I never really noticed except for the carpet, which was long like spider legs and crawled on my belly when I lay on the floor. The outside was plain brown with white trim, the same as her daddy's old truck. And you could still see the blocks it sat on, though most people in our neighborhood hid them behind plastic so dogs wouldn't dig in the mud. Behind Leslie's house was an oxidation pond. We would run around the fence collecting dragonflies and smashing crawfish mounds. Her daddy always told stories of the one-armed man that lived under the green froth and that the bubbles were him breathing, but all we ever saw were frogs and turtles, and we knew he just didn't want us back there, is all.

Leslie had the best attributes of both her races—long, black hair that wisped past...
her behind, chicken legs and chicken arms that hung for miles from her middle, deep brown eyes somewhat hidden behind long lashes, and beautiful white teeth to complement her creamy coffee-milk complexion. She was petite like her father and hid her mother’s sass—well, most of the time. We used to play “Making Groceries” in her room for hours, and every third or fourth time she would let me win. She always sat quietly, jerking only slightly to the left, when her mother combed her hair back into tight braids. She said that she had to close her eyes so they wouldn’t be pulled open forever. She had seen it happen to her cousin Hazel one time.

Leslie didn’t know we were poor and that Elizabeth down the street was real middle class. She didn’t know that, in a big world, having a Mexican mom and a black dad would make her different. She didn’t even know that outside Louisiana there was a place called the Bible Belt and a place called Haight-Ashbury, where people talked about peace but lived at war with modern ideas. Leslie just knew she was Leslie. Unseen and unheard of by the rest of the world, and it killed her. She wanted to be different, unique in some way. The only problem was that Leslie was as much afraid of sounding proud as she was of being a nobody. So, she made up her mind to be a somebody. That was her first mistake.

Being naive was her second mistake. Leslie thought that if she could find just one thing to set her apart from the crowd, then she would be happy. I guess that’s just part of being the older child. I have an older brother and I know not to be acting out for attention. Some attention is not worth having. But Leslie didn’t ever listen to me. She was smarter than me most of the time and would never admit it when she wasn’t.

Every Sunday that we weren’t catching bass at Toledo Bend, Daddy would let me go with Leslie to her MeeMaw’s. When there wasn’t a gumbo or fried yellow rice, there was catfish. The house was small and hot from all the cooking, so all the kids sat on Miss Moss’s front porch to eat. It was nothing more than a few cement blocks stacked together bridging the creepy screen door and the front walkway, but it was enough of a table for a bunch of kids wearing no shoes on a Sunday. This particular Sunday, Leslie and I were crunching on catfish tails for dessert, making her little cousin Jessie squeal with horror.

“Those bones will cut you!” she cried.

And as I egged her on by grabbing at my sides in pain, Leslie gently held out her hand in disappointment.

“Stop, Elie. You’re gonna scare the willies outta her. She’s okay, Jessie. Just kidding is all. Aren’t you Elie?” She pressed me for an apology.

“Of course we was kidding. Those bones ain’t bigger than a toothpick.” I grumbled. I just couldn’t stand it when that girl would cut her eyes at me. She could rub the back of my spine into jelly with those eyes.

Leslie’s granddad had been watching the whole scene from the mailbox and he cracked a grin when he saw me blush. He knew Leslie was special, even if she didn’t think she was all that different from anybody else in Lake Charles.

“You children look bored out your minds,” he said.

Nobody said anything, just smiled. Grandaddy Moss always had a plan, a scheme for us to sink our teeth into. The problem was, most times we couldn’t get our teeth back out before we got in trouble.

Grandaddy Moss walked past me and Leslie, straight to the screened-in back porch, and we followed, ‘cause he wore a smile so big that it took up most of his face, and you almost have to follow a smile like that. When we met him again, Grandaddy Moss was standing over a dusty black case. Leslie was staring at that case so intently that I thought her eyes would pop out or pierce it, one. I stepped back and just looked at her granddad.

His black eyes, which usually went unnoticed under his soft, curly, salt-and-pepper-hair, had begun to shine, almost sparkle. The man had a large frame and a round belly, making him look like a dark chocolate Santa Claus. He always wore overalls and carpenter boots, though his trade was welding tractors. Grandaddy Moss was jolly most of the time. He was even kind to us after a whipping. But something had come over Leslie’s granddad as he stood over the old black case, like he was suddenly a soldier in God’s army, the owner of the Holy Grail.

“What is it?” Leslie asked.

“Why don’t you tell me?” he answered. “Go on, open her up. Whatever’s inside is yours. Now, go on.”

Grandaddy Moss nudged the case toward us and I stretched my neck forward just a bit, trying to see what was inside. Leslie inched the box open so slowly it creaked and I thought for sure I would die before she got it open. She stopped opening the lid about halfway and peered at what lay inside.

“Wow.” She exhaled.

I was going nuts. I couldn’t see and I didn’t know if it was okay for me to talk yet, since this was her moment. So, I coughed a little to let her know that those of us on the back row couldn’t see. All Leslie did was stare for a whole thirty-four seconds. When I was just about to explode, she pulled something out of the case that neither of us had ever been that close to in real life.

Leslie cradled in her arms an orange and yellow Gold Star guitar. The neck was bruised a little, but it was otherwise good as new. I couldn’t believe it, or understand what a Mexican girl would want with a guitar. I thought only Willie Nelson types played guitar.

Grandaddy Moss was the first to speak. “I put new strings on it this time, but you’ll have to do it yourself from now on. There’s a how-to book in the case, too.

If you practice, you ought to make an all right guitar player.”

“A guitar player,” Leslie whispered to herself, as if it was the first time she was a somebody instead of an anybody.
Leslie’s first encounter with that Gold Star guitar was awkward. She broke a string while attempting a D sharp and broke a fingernail on a C flat. I cringed and smiled at the same time. It was the closest to a live performance I had come and I was dazzled. Leslie made up songs about birds and other elementary things when she learned a few chords. “Mary Had a Little Lamb” was my favorite, mostly because Leslie taught me to play it.

Every Sunday, Leslie would bring her guitar to her MeeMaw’s so her granddad could hear her play. He would rock back and forth with a calm smile whether she was playing a chord or a song, like he felt a rhythm in it either way. He and I were the only ones Leslie played for the first two years she had that guitar. Nobody else really knew or cared that Leslie was a guitar player and she would never tell anybody for fear of seeming proud. She even swore me to secrecy with a spit pact.

“That was ten years ago,” she mumbled under her breath, the way she always did when talking about her guitar. “I am going to Nashville this summer, Elie. And I am not coming back. I am leaving Nashville with that guitar. She didn’t even let you ride your bike past the mailbox when she was here, Leslie.”

“No one thought you would teach you any more songs,” she warned me.

“I smiled. “What if I get a boyfriend, can I tell him?”


I know Leslie always wanted to be unique in some way from everybody else in Louisiana, but that was hard. Our parents were all just a bunch of poor folks trying to make a living, as far as we knew. And the football stars at the elementary school pulled a comb through the same greasy hair as the rest of us. We never had time to worry about race and gender when there were chores to be done and games to play. Besides, mostly your neighbors weren’t brought to New Orleans or the same boat as you, so you just forgot to notice a difference. Leslie thought her guitar made her different from everybody else in the world. She was so naive, that girl.

When Leslie was nineteen, her Aunt Mable invited her to stay the summer at her lakehouse in Greenville, Tennessee. I couldn’t remember where Louisiana was on the map exactly, so I pulled out my National Geographic atlas.

“No wonder it was a free gift. I can’t find nothing on this thing,” I moaned.

Leslie had her head stuck in her closet and she did not bother taking it out to see about my business with this map.

“Aunt Mable is so funny,” she said in a voice muffled by cotton. She assumed the tone of her old aunt. “Your cousin Grace cannot wait to see you. She’s seventeen now, so you two girls can talk about boys instead of Barbies.” We giggled.

All we knew was that Greenville was a small town south of Nashville somewhere on the river.

“Elie, do you know what this means?” she asked with every intention of telling me, whether I cared or not. “Elie, I am spending the summer on the water in a town just minutes away from Nashville, Tennessee. Do you know what that means?”

“Sure,” I replied, still stubborn to find this place on the map. “You’re gonna get fat from laying by the river all day.”

As I giggled, Leslie’s face took on the extra forehead wrinkles that always mean I’m in trouble.

“I am going to Nashville this summer, Elie. And I am not coming back. I am going to be a guitar player. A real guitar player. No more hobby — this is going to be the real thing, Elie. People get paid to play in Nashville.”

My heart fluttered slightly at the thought of her being gone, but then I realized she was crazy. “How’d ya suppose your Aunt Mable is gonna let you go to Nashville with that guitar? She didn’t even let you ride your bike past the mailbox when she was here, Leslie.”

“That was ten years ago,” she mumbled under her breath, the way she always did when I made a good point. “I have to get a job somewhere she says, so I’ll get one in Nashville and find some place to play guitar on weekends. I am sure Aunt Mable won’t mind the extra money.”

“Hmph. If I was you, I would pack an extra bathing suit, ’cause you’re gonna be doing a lot more swimming in that river than you think,” I said. And that was that.

Leslie was gone by the end of the month. I missed her something awful, but she wrote me a letter a week, like she promised. Leslie did get a job in Nashville, as a perfume saleswoman in some hodgepodge store. She gave me advice about citrus fragrances and mentioned every odd bottle shape she found. All that talk made me think she was bored, but she assured me that life was grand. She didn’t mention her guitar career for the first three weeks. It was the fourth week when we heard Leslie had left one morning and hadn’t come back to her Aunt Mable’s. Everybody was worried crazy. Her Aunt Mable thought she had been kidnapped by some fat gypsy, her mother thought she had run away with some fat gypsy, and I thought she was dead. Then I got the letter she wrote the day before she disappeared and I figured, wherever Leslie was, she would rather be dead.

“Elie, I might have a gig. Aunt Mable thinks I am crazy and tells me to get a life. She says a girl like me can’t play guitar in Nashville, Tennessee. What does she mean by ‘a girl like me?’ Ain’t I just another somebody until I become a somebody for real? You know what I mean. The man at the bar on Second Street said I can have an audition tomorrow. I will let you know.”

I could not read anymore. I could just see Leslie starting down some cracked street in the manner of a queen. She would have had on purple pumps, that mauve and lavender dress her momma made her for church, and a big, flashy costume jewelry necklace she’d found somewhere. She would have been beautiful there, but nervous as hell and trying to keep her cool. When she saw the bar, she would have popped a green mint in her mouth for luck, telling herself, “Think green.” She would have been back out in ten minutes. I knew she would have...
been in a rage of fury, her world collapsing around her to the size of a small hatbox.

Her Aunt Mable was right. Leslie was crazy. While Leslie had been dreaming of star-gazed guitar nights, the rest of us in the real world had known nobody nowhere would give some scrawny mixed girl with a beat-up guitar a chance. Problem was, everybody had been afraid to tell her that.

When Leslie crept in through my window that night, I swallowed a scream so loud it would have woken the neighborhood to hear it. Her eyes were red and swollen, and her skin was wasted thin. She must have wept the entire drive home from Nashville, not stopping once to look back. She looked like a ghost, and since that's not uncommon in these parts, I asked her.

“Are you Leslie’s ghost?”

“No, but I wish I was!” she sobbed. “It was horrible, Elie, just horrible. I don’t ever want to leave home again. I don’t ever want to smell perfume. I don’t ever want to play guitar.”

“Well, now that you’re home, you don’t have to.”

“All I wanted was to be different, Elie. I wanted to be more than I ever had been. I wanted to be different.” She would not stop crying.

“Leslie, you were different the day you were born, girl. Who else do you know can catch dragonflies with two fingers or stay quiet while their momma pulls on their hair with a brush? Who else do you know that looks like you. Shoot, even your sister looks full black. Just look in the mirror and you’ll know you’re different.”

Her eyes got wild and deep as a gully, like she was staring at something behind me. “Don’t you ever say that! Don’t talk about how I look, Elie. I don’t want to think about that. I just want to be the same now. Just the same as you and Elizabeth and my mom and dad. The same color as somebody instead of two somebodies!” She dropped to the floor, and, like the wind, fell silent.

She must have been exhausted. After leaving Nashville, she had to have seen the moon and the sun again before she saw the Lake Charles city limit sign. I left her on the floor with a blanket for warmth. The fan blew on her all night, rustling her hair in a midnight shuffle. She dropped to the floor and, like the wind, fell silent.
Deconstruction
Tommy Rowe
Merit Award

Two

I borrowed my lover's skin.  
She was sleeping when  
I slipped it off of her.  

My arms hang past the cuffs, but the  
Fit in the shoulders is nice.  
Walking the street tonight  

People stared at us, probably  
Thinking what a lovely couple we make.  
Her bones are cold by now, time to go back.  

— Brian Lindsey
Lullaby and Goodnight

My daughter has been dead for a month
I sleep with her weight on my chest.
Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale
Stare at the clock
Inhale, exhale
No light
from
the window
Inhale
tick
Time
passed

— Brian Lindsey

Crossing Dark Water

It had one bank it has to have another
Even a sea has two shores
Must get to the other side
Got to cross this dark water

Even a sea has two shores
My night’s work is waiting on the other side
Got to cross this dark water
Entering, no feeling of cold but of being buried

My night’s work is waiting on the other side
No current moves this muddy swamp
Entering, no feeling of cold but of being buried
Its silver skinned blackness covers me

No current moves this muddy swamp
Fighting for balance while moving forward
Its silver skinned blackness covers me
The stars share enough light to see the inches to the surface

Fighting for balance while moving forward
My shoulders are callused from my pack
The stars share enough light to see the inches to the surface
Stay on tiptoes to avoid being trapped

My shoulders are callused from my pack
Slowly so as not to disturb, no wave to show my presence
Stay on tiptoes to avoid being trapped
No sound to make me real, my head slides under

I emerge still moving, still breathing
Must get to the other side
Steam vapor rises from my body
It had one bank it has to have another

— Brian Lindsey
My Constant Companion

"... Night comes at last, and some hours of restlessness and confusion bring me again to a day of solitude. What shall exclude the black dog from a habitation like this?"

Samuel Johnson 1709-84
Letter to Mrs. Thrale,
28 June 1783

I have had a black dog for most of my life. Some of my first memories are of the black fur of a dog that everyone in my family shared. I rested my head on its stomach to watch Saturday morning cartoons; the fiercely beating heart stands out in my memory more than what was on the TV screen. A blanket was a must to cover up with, because no warmth came from my pillow. In elementary school, I got my own dog. Her cold wet nose touching my hand told me it was time to get up. After eating oatmeal and drinking low-fat chocolate milk, we would go out to stand at the end of the driveway, waiting to get on the bus. Some days, when placing my hand in my book bag to look for Mrs. Spiller's spelling homework, which I had not done, I find only congealed drool from my dog. During math class, I was the only one who could hear the bark of a dog: it had to be my dog.

The summer after my eighth grade year, I spent every day playing on the red clay banks of Sinking Creek. Before the dew was gone from the green Johnson grass, we would already have picked out our spot for the day. On my back looking at the blue sky but always shaded from the sun by a tuft of earth, reading Lovecraft, Howard or Poe. My dog would be sleeping nearby. Sometimes she would demand attention by crawling up to me and laying her head on my chest. Forcing me to put the story of the day aside to comfort my dog. After making peace for ignoring her, I would go back to my adventure, keeping one hand on her collar to keep her steady. By sunset each day we would return home to watch TV together. Although Mother didn't allow dogs in her house, she never said anything to me. She knew the dog and I were inseparable.

By the time I went to college, people didn't recognize me without my dog. I did not even know myself without her. You could see the dog in my picture on my student I.D.

Work, marriages, kids and divorce filled my hours; for weeks at a time, we would lose track of each other. Nevertheless, in birthday photos you still can sometimes catch a glimpse of a dark patch of fur. Vacations and holiday evenings made time to play fetch or just walk along the streets together near home. Making more time each year for those walks took away from school plays and the children's ball games. However, if we walked, my dog did not bother other people during the day, as much. Now, as I wait on the kids to drop off my Father's Day present, my black dog's head never leaves its place on my lap.
Mirrored Orchid
Ann Smith
1st Place 2-D Color

The One with the Flower
Jill Crosby
Merit Award
On The Mountain

by Justin Morgan

South on Franklin County Road 83, the mountain looms large in the distance. An ancient hill rising up from a wide, sage grass-covered valley, Newburg Mountain rests peacefully as one of the highest points in Northwest Alabama. Newburg’s only notable change comes when the increasingly shorter days of fall usher in the brilliantly colored death of the leaves that cling to its massive oaks, poplars, and maples. Nestled atop Newburg Mountain is the community of Oak Grove, the most special place in the world to me, my home.

Oak Grove is far from any sprawling metropolis, far from any suburbs, and at least thirty minutes from any hospital. Oak Grove is home to the young and the old, the deacon and the drunkard, the rich and the poor. There is more to this community than meets the eye. One need only scratch away the fallen oak leaves to find a community with a beautiful complexity to it. That is where the true beauty of Oak Grove is, in the complexity of its simplicity.

Mr. Jay’s store has not changed much in the last twenty years. Each time I walk in I feel as if I have walked right back into 1985. Mr. Jay, an elf-like man who resembles Popeye, still gives me chocolate footballs for free, and he still has orange sherbet push-ups. The Pac-Man arcade game resides in the corner as it always has, its tile ceiling has yellowed slightly from cigarette smoke and lies, but looks no worse for wear. Below a bulletin board, displaying pictures of smiling deer hunters with their kills, sits an old Bunn coffeepot. If the old coffeepot could write a book, it would no doubt include an account of the time resident banker Finch Duboise hit his leg. It got worse. The hunger was excruciating. POWs ate anything they could get their hands on, and any stray dogs or pet cats that wandered within reach of the POWs became much-needed nourishment. There were also some monkeys in the Philippines, and occasionally a prisoner would be able to catch one. Dude would readily eat monkey, as long as he did not have to prepare it. Skinned monkeys, he says, look very much like newborn human babies.

After enduring all of this, along with numerous beatings, Dude was loaded onto a Japanese ship for a 63-day journey to Japan. The Americans were stacked in these ships like firewood, one man between another’s legs. There were literally stacks of men, with only a few inches between a man’s face and the next rack. A few buckets were there for relieving oneself, but it was unlikely that a prisoner would actually get to use one. It was a hard feat to accomplish in such tight quarters. The Japanese lowered food and water down to the prisoners in the same buckets. If a POW had to go, he just went. The waste would then spill down through the cracks and onto the prisoners on the stack directly below. Dude Hardy endured 63 days of this, in 110 to 120 degree heat, on the bottom stack. The ship finally reached Japan, where Dude spent 43 months in another POW camp. He was liberated when Japan surrendered.

Each time I see Dude Hardy at Mr. Jay’s store or see him drive by my house with
his wife, I always think of the pain he endured for me, for us, for America. Dude Hardy is a hero indeed.

Bisecting Oak Grove is Highway 81, the community's most traveled byway. The road is scenic, bordered by expansive farms, huge houses and tiny mobile homes. In the springtime, buttercups climb toward the sun and partially hide the Budweiser bottles that litter the ditches. When I roll my windows down while driving, I am reminded of the occupation of a good number of Oak Grove residents: poultry farming. According to my grandpa and grandma, Oak Grove is the home of the oldest chicken house in the county. My grandpa was born in 1919, and he says he has a hard time remembering when that chicken house was not there. Orbie Miller still raises chickens in it today. The smell of chicken houses in the August heat is enough to bring tears to the eyes of those not acclimated to it. "Do you smell that?" my grandpa asks. "That's the smell of money."

When I am in Oak Grove, or "the mountain," as many call it, I feel completely content. I feel blessed to have been raised in Oak Grove, and I thank the Lord every day for it. One day I will own the land that I live on. My grandpa, Buddy Morgan, has told me so. The land is mostly hollows and hills covered with hardwoods and pines, and there is also a terraced pasture with a pond brimming with bluegills and catfish. When Pa Buddy leaves the mountain to be with Jesus, my dad will own the land. When he leaves the mountain, it will become mine. I am in no hurry to become a landowner.

When I leave Newburg Mountain, for whatever reason and no matter how far I go, I can still see it. The hardwood hollows are as deep as ever, and the farm ponds are still a brilliant hue of jade. I can see the old men sitting at Mr. Jay's store, drinking Coca-Colas in glass bottles and eating Little Debbies. I can hear those church bells over the constant blare of my CD player. I can see my dad outside with no shirt on, washing cars, as my stepmom waters the flowers. I can smell my grandma's fried apple pies, straight from heaven, and it all brings a smile to my face. As long as I still have the mountain to come home to, I will always rest easy. The roads are rough in Oak Grove, but they all lead somewhere.
The Escape
by Kris Szebenyi

E mil Szebenyi, my grandfather, was a man who only wanted the best for his family. He and his wife, Clara, were raising their three sons in Communist-controlled Hungary. At 36, Emil was an agronomist (animal geneticist) and a college professor, yet he could not afford to buy necessities for his family. After Russia had taken all the working Hungarian factories to Russia to boost their own economy, Hungary suffered. Emil's family suffered. Despite Emil's lucrative job, his father had to provide the family with the great luxury of butter, an item prized in 1950s Hungary. Besides being poor, the people lived in fear and ignorance. The Communists forbade the Hungarians to listen to Western radio stations broadcast in Hungary, such as Voice of America and Radio Free Europe. Anyone listening to either station promoting Western news and ideas was snitched upon for reward. My grandfather literally saw people disappear from the streets of Budapest, where the Szebenyi's lived in an apartment building. Higher education was a forgotten notion as well. Emil had to teach things at his college that were completely against Mendelian genetics, simply because contrary (and blatantly ridiculous) notions were published by a Communist researcher. Emil's sons attended an elementary school where the entire curriculum was based on the study of Marxism-Leninism. They were not being taught any general information as a basis for learning, only specialized Communist-agreeable information. Emil saw the poverty, fear, and ignorance, and he knew that life for his sons would be stunted.

Emil was not the only person upset by the state into which Hungary was falling. University students and factory workers longed for the freedom they had once known. The constant oppression of Hungary by the USSR led to a spontaneous national uprising. The peaceful demonstration began with students and workers marching on the Budapest radio station and knocking the red star from the top of the building. They shouted, "We are free!" Although that proclamation was a little premature, the uprising was effective. When the Hungarian army came out to dissolve the gathering, they instead joined the revolutionaries because the soldiers refused to shoot Hungarians. Yet the protest did become violent when Russian soldiers opened fire on the people outside the building. From October 23 to October 28, 1956, heavy fighting ensued throughout the country. The Russians brought in their tanks and machine guns and the Hungarians fought them with their fists. "A whole people had risen, without arms, without foreign aid, and had defeated the troops, and overthrown one of the most vicious and efficient political systems in world history (Helmreich 352)."

When the first shot was fired, Emil herded his family into the cellar of their apartment, where they stayed while the fight raged on around them. His middle son, my father, was shot at during the fight as he traveled above ground to use a bathroom. My grandfather recalls walking by a derailed Russian tank directly in front of the apartment after the cease-fire was ordered. Emil's father helped the thousands of wounded, Russian and Hungarian alike, as they fell in the streets.

For the Hungarians, it was all worth it. On October 29, negotiations proceeded for the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. "The entire nation was delirious with hope and freedom (Helmreich 352)." Unfortunately, November 2 brought reports of Soviet troop movements into Hungary. On November 4, the Soviets launched an attack on Budapest at dawn. Retribution was swift as the USSR took back Hungary in just a few days (Lomax 15-17). The Soviets crushed the uprising and thousands were arrested, deported, or executed (History).

Thousands fled Hungary. The Soviets scoured the country, searching for Hungarians trying to cross the border. Among those caught and imprisoned were Emil's sister and niece, who attempted escape in early December. Yet my grandfather knew that he had to risk capture for his family's freedom. To decrease suspicion, Emil obtained false traveling papers stating he was going to inspect an agricultural station. On December 30, the whole family boarded a train that took them within 24 miles of the Austrian border. They had to pack light to look as though they really were only staying the afternoon while Emil conducted his business. Distant relatives fed them and housed them until night fell. Under the cover of night, the family piled into a cart. A hired man was supposed to drive them close to the border. The driver, a little drunk and very afraid, ended up driving mostly parallel to the border. Two hours later, he stopped and said, "That's as far as I can take you." Emil used his compass and they started walking west.

They walked all night. Each time flares shot up in the distance around them, they flung themselves face down in eight inches of snow. These flares were fired whenever the border patrol or policing forces found refugees. Even my uncle Steve, who was only three at the time, understood Emil's quiet command, "Lie down or bad men will hurt us." As dawn broke, they stumbled upon a train switching station. The attendant took one look at them and offered his nearby barn for them to rest. They joined him in his house near dusk and the attendant fed them cherry soup (a Hungarian peasant food) and passed them off as relatives when the border patrol came by. And again they left.

At 11:30 p.m., they came upon another building. Sure that they had crossed the border, they walked in . . . to find the Hungarian Border Patrol having a New Year's Eve party. They were in luck, though. The Hungarian Border Patrol could be bought. Emil's family was guided through the mines set up near the border for the small price of everything valuable they had. Every piece of jewelry they had brought to sell was confiscated. They were allowed to keep only one watch, their wedding bands, and the teddy bear uncle Steve carried. Twenty yards later, they reached Austria.
Conditional Atmosphere

The bag lady whisks past cars
pirouettes around garbage cans
leaps into the sky trailing leaves
plastic cups
broken limbs
raindrops
cigarette butts

I feel the bag lady as she passes
with today's gathering of trash
and nature
and stolen laundry
I feel her hot at my legs
and cold on my face
and I feel her reverse
then reverse again against my body
like a lover whose tongue glides hot
while his eyes remain cold

She moves ahead of the storm
with her back to the clouds
and screams from the sky
a warning to the world:
keep your body
or find yourself scattered to the four corners
with nothing to note your passing
but the debris
the substance
of others.

She clothes herself in slips
stolen from a forgotten wash
and snatches her hats from
the heads of distracted pedestrians
Her voice is a dullness
a throb
without origin
and she finds her voice
in the objects she strikes

— Marc Mitchell
Cats as Social Beings and My Own Domestication

by Elysia Morasco

There are twenty-six species of small, wild cats belonging to the same genus as domestic cats. They are all short with sleek coats, small faces, and long, thin legs. Cats are carnivores theoretically, but will eat whatever is necessary for survival. Research has shown that the main difference between the wild cat and the domestic cat is brain size. The wild cat has a larger brain.

I have half a dozen cats, but they do not know it. They are wild cats, belonging to no one, harboring no responsibility. They wander through the neighborhood, dropping in where they want, just as they please. I have named them accordingly, although I know they cannot accept such a commitment. The white one I call Silly because she bounces and dives and always wants to play. Patch, of course, has white fur over his right eye on an otherwise gray coat. His name is a departure from my creativity, but he does not seem to mind. Whisper is the nervous type, scurrying away at the slightest noise. My boxer Lily likes her the most because when she barks, the cat bolts, and my dog's good nature rarely frightens anyone else. Teeter and Totter are identical and kind enough not to correct me when I confuse them. Momma has earned her name by leading the pack from meal to meal, garbage can to potted plant.

Domestic cats living in the wild can thrive as breeding populations for hundreds of years. Scientifically described as feral, these cats entertain limited human contact, which generally involves food. Although a human may invest considerable time and money into the feeding of feral cats, the species remains true to its nature. Feral cats are usually never domesticated.

My mother used to think that I would never be tamed. That I could never appreciate a simple life or slow down long enough for even a hot bath and a book. She has good reason. I have always chased greater dreams than home life could afford me. I moved six hundred miles to attend the University of North Alabama instead of finding a job at a local newspaper or day care in Lake Charles. I wanted to be a dancer, then an actor, then I wanted to join the Peace Corps and move to England. Finally, I decided to be a writer. It was an art less threatening for my mother, who had grown to worry about my many career plans. I moved eight times during my four years in college, always leaving behind a piece of future or worn clothes. I prided myself in not being a pack rat, but my mother pitied me for never finding a place to call home. I did not want wall hangings and videotapes to clut-
ter my life. I wanted freedom beyond the bounds of home life. I wanted everything in life that my mother did not desire in hers. Never did she miss an opportunity to remind me that I hadn't dated a man in three years, that I had not staked my claim on homo sapiens territory. She found me to be more like the wild cat and it saddened her because she is a dog breeder.

The cats came by unusually late last night, forcing my lackluster guard dog into a fit. Lily insisted that I investigate the sound coming from the other side of the door, an act that horror movies had warned me about.

"Have you ever seen Night of the Face Eater, Lily?" whispered so that the something outside would not hear. "You NEVER go to the door and you NEVER, EVER investigate."

Lily's gaze reflected a promise to protect me, no matter how big the something outside was. "Let's peek through the blinds instead," I suggested. We lowered our heads together and, squinting our eyes, lifted one blind just enough to see what was there. Plop! went Silly, right into the spruce pine lying on the front porch. I watched for a while as the cats put on a playful show. They were completely egocentric, captured in that moment of experience, with no interest in my eyeball peering through the glass.

Cats are characteristically aggressive animals. If threatened, a cat becomes defensive, arching its back and hissing. If attacked, a cat becomes the image of fury. The female is territorial and does not mind biting or scratching for a prize. They show little remorse or affection in the wild as adults, though as kittens they may play and socialize.

I put on my coat and checkered socks and resolved to stand on the front porch with them-as one of them. The front door creaked and Whisper dashed under my car. Momma kept watch from the carport, washing her fur in disregard. Only Patch stayed with me, though my kitty calls did not amuse him. His eyes were clear and stoic, and my presence was nothing more than an invasion of his privacy. For the first time, I noticed in him an absolute truth. My cats were wild.

The summer before I started college, I met a talent scout who invited me to an acting audition in Orlando. I was given lines to mock commercials and soap operas that I was expected to memorize and deliver to the judges. Three weeks later I met with the other participants in Nashville, an hour's drive from my home. My mother merely shook her head in disgust at the thought of me traveling the world in a bikini. When I arrived, I saw an array of people rehearsing lines and distorting their faces. Happy... sad... sexy... tantalizing. I heard actresses speak of luxury hotels and frequent flyer miles, which they were saving up for trips to Tahiti. Then, in the corner, I saw a thin young girl frantically bringing a pill to her mouth with some water. "Nerve pills," she said with a small smile when she noticed me looking. "You'll need them sooner or later, I'm sure," she continued. I was astonished. The girl was a ten-year-old woman. The entire scene made me nauseous and I had to step outside. When I left, all I wanted was a hot bath and a good book. And I wanted to go to college.

I turned from the cats and walked inside. Lily was awaiting my review of the situation outside, wagging her tail with pure delight that I had not joined the cat clan. With her tongue flapping to one side of her mouth, she looked at me as if to say, "It's better being a dog anyway." I knew she was right. I am more of a dog, myself—longing affection, loyalty, and back rubs. I may consider the feral side of life—roaming free through the world, owing nothing to love or responsibility. But, in the end, I am satisfied being domesticated. I am addicted to the warmth of a home.
No Title
Kathy Roush
Merit Award

Solar Orchid
Ann Smith
Merit Award
Through The Looking Glass

Friends we are gathered
today to look into a mirror.
And the young preacher
paused
before his congregation
to begin again.
I say we are toys
on a merry-go-round,
images
going up and down,
frozen
in circling flight
from the catch
of an Almighty Cat
of the night.
Our life is foreplay
for this omniscient Cat.
We are toys wound up,
set to grasp at life
responding to swatting paws,
with rigid dream-like fright.

— Patricia Robinson

Somonka:
The Coyote’s Remains

Friend, don’t look for roads,
they’re patterns traced in sand,
meant to intoxicate the heart.
And like blind moths staggering
in flight, they daub their death-dust
against a swinging lantern’s light.

Thanks, but I’ve moved below.
Here, no light for roads, but know
that one’s hide beaten flat beside a road
fails to trouble any soul. Go, rot nicely
beneath the sun trusting the turning
of your brains, your bones and blood.

— Patricia Robinson
I might do better at Dollar General. Over-priced things, cleaning supplies. But then again, they probably wouldn't have silver polishing cloths. Oh well, what the devil did it matter anyway? Half of the women at the plant wouldn't know real silver from tin, at least not in flatware. Sighing, she threw the package of cloths and the silver canister of chemicals into her cart.

Squeezing by a little old man with a shopping cart, she excused herself, then shuddered as he grinned and peered right through her cotton tank top and blue jeans. I hate dirty old men, she thought to herself as she whipped her cart around the corner to the toiletry aisle. Once again, she squeezed past someone she had sized up within a glance. Loud perfume said it all. Her eyes scanned past the hair spray and gels. Ponytail holders were about as deep as her vanity went. She picked up a pack and headed to the checkout.

"Nice rock," remarked the cashier, glancing at the vintage citrine ring on Lorraine's hand.

"Thanks. Paid next to nothing for it. It belonged to some old lady. Poor thing died with no family or friends. Sold her entire life away on the front lawn of her estate the week after," said Lorraine, half paying attention as she scanned The Enquirer.

"Did you buy anything else?"

"Couldn't afford to," answered Lorraine. "I couldn't afford the ring, to be honest. But it's one of the rare things I felt I couldn't live without. Woman's impulse," she added, laughing.

With her latest sales project in a blue plastic sack, she thanked the cashier and headed out to her rusty blue '87 Bonneville. Throwing her silver-cleaning supplies in the back, she smiled as she glanced at her newly acquired flatware in the passenger seat. Cleaned up, she was certain she could sell it and make a nice profit from one of the older ladies at the plant. It wasn't fair and she knew it. It was all too familiar to her. They worked their whole lives to have nice things. When they did die, they'd only have a few antiques and some second hand silver to give to some ungrateful grandchildren. Selfish things, grandchildren. Good thing she had never had any to deal with in her lifetime. At 56 and still working, she considered herself lucky for having avoided the whole grandmother experience. But sometimes when she had packed a few too many boxes for the day or listened to a few too many loud factory machines and she was tired, she imagined what it would be like to have someone take care of her. She didn't count this as self-pity, just envisioning life had it been a little different.

Lorraine pulled into her gravel driveway, cursing as she avoided the green plastic
garbage cans. Damn kids. I told them to stop moving my garbage cans, she thought to herself as she grabbed her purchases and got out of the car. The mail was already on the front step. She hated it when they did that, too. She didn’t like the idea of other people taking the liberty of checking her mail for her. Opening the door, she walked in to her always spotless kitchen and threw her handfuls on the table. It was a good thing she had a project lined up for the night. It had been a really bad day and she would need something to keep her mind off of things. She sifted through the mail, choosing an envelope and tearing it open. As she began to read, she wished she had chosen something else to open first. It wasn’t that bad. If you moved the decimal place to the left a couple of places, her Visa balance looked pretty good. Anyway, it wasn’t like a failing transmission and faulty plumbing mishaps were frivolous. She prayed to God she could make the payment. The flatware was as good as sold. Every little penny helped. She threw the rest of the bills on the counter. Too much right now. I’ll look at them later. She headed to the cabinet. A drink would be good right about now. Things were bad. Lorraine never drank. She reached for the bottle of Crown—a Christmas gift from a family whose house she had cleaned for a couple of years. Rich people drank rich things. Her eye caught a tan envelope in the stack, not the typical enclosed envelope that required a stamp and a check, she was pretty sure she could handle it. She set her glass down and reached for the letter. The penmanship, she noticed, looked surprisingly like her own. Messy writing—she had always been able to read it. Using a steak knife (she’d bought a whole set of them at a yard sale for a quarter), she ripped the seam of the letter The phone rang, disturbing her mission. "Hello?" she demanded, annoyed. "No, I can’t pay my Visa bill. You probably don’t want me to apply for your credit card." The voice on the other end continued. "Well I don’t buy Christmas presents. And if I did, I’d buy them at yard sales and most of the yard sales go to don’t take plastic. You know what sucks? You don’t do crap and I’m sure you make a lot more money per hour than I do.” She hung up the phone. Guilt pangs. He probably hated his job as much as she hated hers. The things we do to eat, she thought. She laughed out loud in spite of herself and sat down at the table, letter still in hand. She removed the envelope and began to read.

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Lorraine spent the rest of the evening quietly. She managed to choke down a BC Powder for her head, which was throbbing from thinking so much. I don’t want to meet these people, she thought. They have never been a part of my life up until now and I have no desire for them to be a part of it now. That’s the way I wanted it—the way that was best for all of us. Lorraine could not even find escape in polishing her silver. There were still tarnished patches here and there and practically all over the spoons. She just wouldn’t be at home when they came. She brain-stormed as she picked the pretzels out of her bag of Chex-Mix, the only thing she’d eaten all evening. Better yet, she could call and leave a message on the lady’s voice mail, saying that she was terribly sorry, but that she would be indisposed on an out-of-town business trip and would not be available to entertain their visit. No, that wouldn’t work. The girl had obviously gone to the trouble to find her exact address. Chances were, she probably had a clue that what Lorraine did for a living did not involve out-of-town business trips. Oh well, she thought, at least I’ll know that she doesn’t want my money. Lorraine didn’t go to bed that night. She was in an uncharacteristically sentimental mood, which infuriated her. She spent most of the night in the utility room, desperately rummaging through shoeboxes of old articles and pictures she had saved. She could not even remember what the baby had looked like when she was born. She gave up around 4 a.m. and tried to sleep for a couple of hours before having to be at the plant at seven. Work was less than productive for her that day. When she wasn’t screwing up the tape on the boxes, she was spilling creamer all over herself in the break room, and Lorraine didn’t even drink coffee. She wished to God that they weren’t coming the next day. Even though she didn’t get anything productive done at work, she did manage to get a lot of thinking done. She had made up her mind; leaving town for the next day was not an option because the Bonneville probably would not make it very far past the city limit sign. She couldn’t just not answer the door. Lorraine may have been a harsh old lady, but she had too much dignity to cower from her past behind her dead-bolted front door. She swung by her boss’s office as she left and penciled her name in for overtime the next day. On the way home, she stopped by the Dollar General and paid a couple of dollars for some stationery and a gift box big enough to hold a set of flatware. From the envelope the letter had arrived in, Lorraine now had her daughter’s address. She was pretty sure that drawing up a will wasn’t that hard. Who knew? Maybe she would even return the visit one day to make up for her daughter and granddaughter’s forced rain check. If they could forgive her once, surely they could do it again. She was reasonably sure that her granddaughter would not appreciate, at this point in her young life, the gift she was leaving for her on the front step. She laughed out loud—she was already a pro.
Creation

From a Seat in the Band

Third row, fourth chair, trumpets behind, flutes in front, on the sides, my fellow horns, and farther down on the right, the saxophones. Our director holds it together, waving his baton, a fast 1-2-3. His arm flows fluid, but the wrist snaps smart on three invisible spots, solid downbeats in the air. The baton's tip whips back in response, there's the up of one, two, and three. The 'bones stick it every downbeat and we answer back on all the ups. A staccato conversation in eighth notes. The clarinets are tripping lightly up and down runs and the drums are nailing rhythms while the baritones play harmony to the trumpets and flutes that carry the tune. I'm sitting in a song, a taste of what angels around the throne felt when God spoke the world into being.

The Artist's Assistant

I examine the smears of paint and ink her hands have accumulated this day. I have watched these hands at work, mixing colors on a palette with a pinky until the shade is just right, smudging paint on the canvas with the thumb. For hours, I've watched her laying out designs in bright colors or black and white, with paper or ink, watched her cut her finger while cutting mats for her work. I have seen her hands
carefully carving intricate patterns onto blocks for prints. I've sat amazed at the act of creation. Her hands, washed by oozing clay, shaping it on a wheel, enthrall me. I've seen those gentle hands turn brutal and smash a half-finished pot into a lump, frustrated at its imperfections, and I've watched her mold the clay between her hands, as the master potter formed the world.

— Amy L. Melson

Notices to the Public

PLEASE do not throw SILVERWARE into GARBAGE—a sign above the trash can in a local café. The patrons must be unable to decide that on their own, so shouldn't a less confusing choice of words to emphasize have been made? From a few feet away, the larger words beg silverware to leap into the trash.

On the doors of the Shoals Theater, someone has posted signs insisting 'No Alcohol.' How many people tried to sneak in with their cocktails in hand before those notices were made? Does the local cinema have the same problem? Or the Zodiac downtown where community theater puts on plays?

If so, they must deal with it in more subtle ways. Perhaps a tall man in tan trench coat and dark glasses, an ear piece with a wire disappearing into his collar. He stands near the door, radioing the ushers about a six-pack-shaped bulge beneath a woman's prim fur wrap. There will be no immoral beverages in "Our Town."

— Amy L. Melson
Untitled #20
Katie Ruf
1st Place 3-D

Nothing on My Back
Minta Dani
Merit Award

Lights & Shadows
2002
2002 High School Writing Contest Winners

Poetry Division
Daniel Tubbs, Bradshaw High School

Essay Division
1st Place
Jamie Ferguson, Bradshaw High School
2nd Place
Danielle Mallard, East Lawrence High School

Short Story Division
1st Place
Brett Young, Bradshaw High School
2nd Place
Danielle Mallard, East Lawrence High School