

Pathways

Literary and Arts Journal of
Owens Community College

Pathways Committee

<i>Steve Utterback</i>	<i>Sarah Rodgers</i>
<i>Eric Reed</i>	<i>Eric Wallack</i>
<i>Shannon Smith</i>	<i>Kevin Schroeder</i>
<i>Ruth Foote</i>	<i>Renton Rathbun</i>
<i>Carl Dietrich</i>	<i>Leonard Kress</i>
<i>Charlie Ballard</i>	<i>Genesis Downey</i>
<i>Joy Parker</i>	<i>Ann-Marie Paulin</i>

Spring 2008

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Owens Community College

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**Literary and Arts Journal of
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Teri Birtwhistle

Gramma's Attic

a summer storm cages us until a notion occurs...
scramble the stairway, quickly we go
into a mysterious adventure,
surrounded by antique wooden chests,
filled with memories, engulfed in letters,
wrapped with ribbon.
with lamps and a rocking chair from days gone by,
forming shadows that shape our thoughts,
as webs and floating dust fill the air,
freeing our psyche to experience unknown secrets
hiding in the corners of our mind,
in the murk, with feather boas, shoes too big,
hats with flowers and puffy gowns.
our wits expanding,
soaking up the magic,
enjoying our retreat,
shrouded with concealment from a watchful eye,
realizing a dream to make our own
rainbows
and fresh air await us when we leave...
gramma's attic.

Carl Dietrich

Market Day

“O for a voice of thunder, and a tongue to drown the
throat of war!” William Blake

Pomegranates shred then crisp. Juice evaporates into
black. Metals rust, scorch, jag. Ball bearings rush toward
a large hole. Red rounds fall; a child laughs.

The living stare at the dead. Shades ask where they
should go and why is there no light but fire.

Doorknob dusted with flour. Shoe shod in tobacco. A
man with one leg squints at sky. He whispers small into
stilling air, “It’s impossibly blue.”

Janice L. Dingess

Don’t Hang Up

It sounds like a heartbeat:
waves hitting the ocean shore.
But my heart, which was beating wildly
doesn't beat for you anymore.

Scratch that.

You have it sedated.

And my body, once cold, sought your heat (and not your hatred).

But it was that look in your eyes that made me turn away
'cause I'm not really sure what to feel now
but you made me feel dismay.

I'm just kidding.
I wasn't even looking at your eyes, so how the hell would
I know?
I just write poetry as texts in my telephone.
And maybe I should always sleep alone alone alone.

It Had to Be You

Stepping out of the shower I have a headache.
And I wonder for how long I can fake it.
I'll leave the door unlocked, I'm freshly showered,
hoping you'll come at an unreasonable hour.

In the meantime I'll paint a canvas the color of koi.
And when you cuddle up next to me I'll smell like a boy.
As we lie in the shelter I created.
As I lie in your arms, sated.
And smoke curls around us, but not from cigarettes.
And washes away the worst of our regrets.

I'm not Serena & you're not Nate
but baby when I met you it sure felt like FATE.

Repeat Offender

I'm a repeat offender.
I enjoy coming back for more.
I enjoy being your whore
with no perks.

I enjoy the work
it takes just to be your friend.
I love our beginning but hate our end.

I enjoy your silent violence and your smile,
and your body always makes my dreams worthwhile.
I like your sharp, silver tongue.

It always makes me come undone.

Hod Doering

Book Marks

Mostly nowadays and so
I mark my place
My reading place
With a scrap of toilet tissue

Easy to find
Quick to replace
Disposable recyclable
Overall quite effective

I had
And still keep
Elaborate bookmarks
Though I can rarely find one
When I need it

Construction paper marks
Laminated bookmarks
Hand made and mass produced bookmarkers
Each and all effective

For many years
Through highschool-and-college
I used a fairly unusual marker
That held both my bookish place
And some not so fond memories

This was a small sheath knife
About four inches long
That I acquired my first day of junior high

Standing in line to go into my new school
A smallish guy of migrant ethnicity
Took exception
To the proximity of my body space to his

He whipped out this sheath knife
Lovely little thing
With imitation mother-of-pearl handle
And a razor-sharp blade about two inches long

He stabbed me
Stabbed toward my belly
But I intercepted it on my right forearm
Or maybe he was aiming there
Aim to maim . . . not kill?

It dug in about half an inch
And he swept-dragged it down
From just below my elbow
Almost to my wrist

In his fear or glee he
Left himself wide open
For my overhand left cross

Propelled not merely by muscle
But amplified by the pain in my right arm
He went down like a hot bag of soggy

I took the pretty little knife
From his limp right hand
And examined it closely

I patted him down for other weapons
And found the scaled-down leather sheath
In his left front pocket

I wiped my blood off the knife
On his cheap shirt
And tied my hanky tightly round
The deepest portion of my wound

I sheathed the knife
And put it in my left back pocket
Where my hanky had been

But that isn't the memorable part
Stuff like that happened almost daily
In those formative days to me

Just as the line-crush began to move forward
To let us in to our Junior High Experience
This little jerk wakes up
And jumps to his feet
Still a bit shaky

He checks his pockets
Notices his knife is gone
And begins to whine-threaten me
To give it back to him

I told him that he
Should have thought of that
Before he took it out to stick me

If you can't keep it
It never was yours
I explained

You gonna complain to the Teachers
I asked sneering

He nodded-shook his head
And stared down at the floor
As we all shuffled into our new school

I never saw him again
Despite rumors that he was going to find me
With his five brothers and . . .

I kept the knife for decades after that
It might still be in a junk drawer somewhere

I would have kept the scar on my forearm for life
Except that it got sanded off

The summer I was seventeen
By an unfortuitous intersection
Of forearm and asphalt

When my motorcycle had
A major disagreement with some stones
On a too-fast turn

Which removed all the skin
And eventually created a scar so large
You can't detect it at all anymore

All that flowed-shocked past and through me
Every time I removed
That pretty little knife from a book
And slid it back into its well-worn sleeve

Odd some what

How we all collect mementoes
As we move through life

And gain scars
Along with wisdom
Or t'other round way

To re-mind us
Of our lessons
Failures and successes

Otherwise
After forty-five or fifty years
We forget completely

Bad Fit Me

My room is too little
For my head
It cramps my brain
Puts wrinkles in my style

Outdoors is way too big for my feet
Too many places to go
That I don't know
Suck energy from my soul

Jeannine Dotts

Journey Home

The driver dropped him at the edge of town as he requested. The dawn hadn't yet broken and the sky still held the darkness of the night, but it was receding, a lighter shade of grey replacing it. The driver, a young, unseasoned marine never questioned his instructions to stop. He knew how to take orders and his passenger couldn't decide if he felt sorry for the younger man because of his inexperience and enthusiasm or if he was envious of him. The driver was fresh out of boot camp and anxious to start his first deployment. Filling the first thirty minutes of the ride from the airport with endless questions about his passenger's years in the corps, the young marine finally lapsed into silence when the man refused to offer anything more than occasional grunts and steely stares.

He'd sat in silence, gripping his sea bag and ignoring the driver until he was finally able to get out of the car. He'd also been excited at first. He'd been antsy, ready to fight, but he'd also been scared which was good. To not be scared was stupid and dangerous. But for all the fear he'd felt then, it was nothing compared to the terror he felt now, going home. He'd known what was waiting for him halfway around the world and he'd been trained to deal with it. Here he was clueless and left to his own devices without backup from his unit.

The car drove away as the marine looked around him, scouting for anything out of the norm. But what was the norm anymore? Eight years as a marine trained him to look for the unexpected, to expect the unexpected, and to deal with the unexpected. There just wasn't anything unexpected here. He walked slowly over to the sign that read "Welcome To Homeville" and read the letters that he'd so often in the past noticed without actually seeing. Funny how years ago he thought the town's name was stupid, but now, standing in front of the sign, the name sounded right.

The road he stood upon led straight into town. A few miles, maybe a thirty minute walk and he would be standing in the center of the downtown area, but he wasn't ready for that yet. He didn't want to see the town as it woke; he wanted to skirt around it and avoid its people. He needed to go home but he needed to do it slowly. The driver could've dropped him off at the house but it seemed too fast after all

this time. No, he needed to go slowly, to savor the feel and get reoriented in his own mind.

To his right the lake was hidden beyond the trees. He knew there was a path that led around the lake, veering off here and there leading to other destinations. The lake is the way to go, he decided. He hiked up his green, marine issued bag, adjusting the strap over his left shoulder with his right hand. He tried wrapping the fingers of his left hand around the strap but they could only hold tight for a few seconds at time. Slowly the grip would loosen until eventually the fingers would stay in place only because the strap itself had trapped them. The hand, and the arm it was attached to, was practically useless thanks to flying shrapnel. There were nights he woke with the sounds of fragmented metal screaming through the air, sirens blaring, men yelling orders, the ping of bullets and the rat-a-tat-tat of rapid gunfire, as clear to him as it had been that day in desert. Still, it was the left arm and not his head that had been torn and shredded and he supposed he should feel lucky. Others hadn't been so lucky and it was those sounds of death that haunted him.

The ground sloped as he made his way through the small stand of trees. The grass was slippery with dew and old leaves, pine needles covering the patches where grass didn't grow. It smelled like pine which would always smell like home to him. He missed the smell, more than he realized.

It didn't take long to work his way down to the lake. The old graveled path was still there. He stopped now to look out over the water. He'd seen the lake twice in the last year. Not in person but in his own head. The first time was right after his second tour had begun. He'd been in the desert for less than a week and the heat was something he'd forgotten after the first time. He'd been out on maneuvers, nothing hard or dangerous, just scouting and reporting, normal routines. But the sun, the heat, the desert itself had reached out and grabbed him so quickly he never knew he'd been caught and dehydration happened swiftly. Dazed, disoriented, feeling sick and unable to think clearly, he wandered around with the sand flying in his face, down his boots, cutting through the very clothes he wore. It was when he fell to his knees that he saw the lake, his lake, shimmering invitingly just beyond a small dune. The waters called to him, teased and beckoned, promising relief in her cool, silky waters. He heard her. He listened and obeyed her commands to come. Down on hands and knees he crawled forward, falling flat on his face and dragging his body through the hot sand until finally three other men had found and forced him back to the makeshift

camp. He fought them, putting up a hell of a fight from what he was told, alternating between mumbling and screaming about the lake. That was the first time.

The second time happened while the surgeons were trying to repair his arm. They say you don't dream while under anesthetic but they're wrong. He dreamt of the lake. He dreamt of his being here except it was summer, not fall. It was hot and the sun was high in the sky and he could feel the water around him, hear the muted sounds of people around him as he swam underwater. He could see the water, cloudy from where numerous feet kicked up the muddy bottom, taste its musty, fishy, coolness in his mouth. His arms cut through the water as he swam, both arms working perfectly in a way they never would again.

Now, here he stood in the darkness without a bright sun to warm him. He could hear the sounds of the night, frogs and crickets, the sound of the water as it slapped against the rocks. If the moon was full he would see it reflecting in the stretch of lake, but tonight the moon had all but disappeared. There were stars though, he realized as he looked heavenward.

Turning from the lake he followed the path until it came to the beach area. The sand here was different than the sand of the desert. Coarser, bigger, hardly sand at all compared to the fine, dusty, soot he had grown accustomed to. His footprints here would stay until the water washed them away or until the sun came and dried the damp sand. His footprints would disappear taking the evidence of his existence here with it. Like so many men, he knew the proof of his presence would vanish into nothing more than a memory.

He had choices here on which way to go. Up the old concrete steps with the railing that would leave orange rust on the palm of his hands. The stairs connected to the sidewalk that would lead him past the small, wooden buildings that held pit toilets and sinks with water that smelled like rotten eggs. From there he could cut through the parking lot and back to the road he just left or he could continue down the beach, where another path led through the woods and would eventually lead him to the opposite end of town. He would be further from his eventual destination but he'd still get there.

Hitching the bag up more on his back he gave one more glance at the cement steps and smiled as he began walking away from them. Every spring the railings would be sanded and painted and by mid summer the paint would begin flaking off as numerous hands ran up and down their lengths. Hands would turn orange from the rust that would begin to corrode the metal bars, fingers would pick up the larger

pieces of paint in order to find familiar shapes in the flakes or they would use the rusty color to paint streaks on their faces and become Indian children on a buffalo hunt.

As he remembered using the rust to paint a heart on the back of sixteen year old Susie's hand, he came to the end of the beach. The trees began to dominate once again, and he had to walk up and down the tree line in search of the path. Once he found it, he hesitated. He teased Susie about the Wolfman that same summer evening, egged on by the full moon that hovered in the sky. He not only scared her but himself as well and the uneasiness of being inside the woods stayed with him for years. Mrs. Wright's untimely death didn't help either, he thought as he entered the trail. Poor Mrs. Wright, he remembered, she snuck out to meet a man that wasn't her husband and tripped over a large rock or a tree root or perhaps her own two feet. He wasn't sure of the details of her fall other than her head connecting with a tree hard enough to snap her head backwards and injuring the spinal cord. She'd been found the next day, dried blood from her scraped face and nose covering her once pretty face. She was alive for a while, they said, but eventually she died right here on the trail, and he supposed there were still ghost stories told about her haunting the woods and the beach.

He shook his head to clear his thoughts of death. He'd witnessed enough death to last him a lifetime. An owl called out, momentarily startling him and a rustling came from his left. The woods were darker than the beach and there was no sign of the approaching dawn from the shadowy figures of the trees. Eventually he came to end of this particular trail and he let out a breath he hadn't even been aware of holding.

The clearing he entered held two baseball diamonds. Bleachers set along the side looked empty and forlorn at this time of night. He looked up at the sky and noticed that it was even lighter than it had been back on the beach. Maybe another fifteen minutes till sunrise. He walked through the first baseball field and thought of the cheering parents, his own included, during the numerous games he played growing up. Of course, that was before his dad had the stroke. The stroke left him helpless. It happened just before he entered high school, making it impossible for his father to attend any more games.

Amazingly enough, his father was still alive and doing well. He was confined to a wheelchair, as he had been for years, but with time and therapy his speech had improved dramatically. They were told that he would never walk or talk or bear any resemblance to the man he'd once been and to expect his death within the year, but they were wrong

as his mother reminded him not so long ago. It was that reminder, during a phone call home after his surgery that convinced him to come home. They didn't know he was coming; he only told them that he would think about it. And think about it he did. He couldn't stop thinking about it as he lay in a foreign hospital bed in a foreign country. The very thought made his stomach tie up in knots as he thought about facing his parents, his sister, his old friends and the rest of the small town. What would they think of him with his arm that would never be the same? He left them all to join the marines and fight for his country. To protect the land and her people, he had stated full of arrogance and patriotic pride. How could he go home with his arm as it was and a head full of doubts about the war he was so gung-ho on at one time? But even as the knot in his stomach grew tighter, bigger, heavier, he still couldn't stop thinking about coming home. Come home to heal, his mom had said. After a week, he couldn't think of any place else except home.

Past the diamond, past the benches that served as the dugout, past the bleachers, the old metal garbage can and through the gravel parking lot he walked. He picked up his pace, feeling the bag bump along his back with every step he took. Out on the street he looked right to see the new subdivisions his sister told him about but instead of houses he could only see the dark, sinister outline of shapes with unknown enemies hiding inside the rooms, armed with weapons meant to kill. He turned left and walked along the sidewalk. Most of the houses were dark but every now and again he'd see light filtering through the curtains. Four houses past where his best friend in elementary school lived, a dog either caught his scent or saw him through the fence because the air was suddenly filled with the loud, frantic barking. The sound was accompanied by the scratching of toenails on wood as the dog jumped at the high wooden fence that surrounded his territory. He picked up his pace but it was no use, the dog had alerted other dogs in the neighborhood and now there were a number of growls, barks and snarls adding to the broken silence.

Out of the neighborhood where the lights had begun popping on, he came to an intersection. Main Street ran from north to south through town, and it was the only downtown area the small village could claim. Hanging above him and to the right was the flashing red lights that signaled the four way stop. At the other end of Main Street hung an identical light, and they were the only two streetlights in the whole place. He crossed the street to look at the businesses within his line of vision. They hadn't changed much. A new coat of paint on a storefront

or two but the area looked as he remembered it looking all of his life. There were lights on further down the road and he reasoned it was the doughnut shop and the café getting ready to open for the day.

He lingered, torn between wanting to walk and see if things were truly the same and wanting to get home. Knowing he would most likely be back later in the day, he turned back to his original destination. His mother would take him through town and make sure everyone got a good look at him, the war hero, she would call him while inside he cringed and people would glance at him and look away unsure of who he was today when compared to the boy who left them all those years ago. They would look at his arm, some in hopes of seeing its injury, and there would be a few who'd ask questions, and more than a few who would start the gossiping just as soon as his back was turned. It's the way a small town worked. He knew and understood, but he didn't think he'd like being the one that was discussed and dissected. What would these people say if they knew what he'd done, what he'd witnessed? What would they think if they knew he'd been forced to kill, to witness the death of friends and fellow soldiers as well as civilians? He could testify to the complex nature of human beings. He saw the bravery, the willingness to do what's right, the sacrifices and the compassion but he also saw the pain and carnage, the unbelievable horror of what people were willing to do to others. It was something the people of this town could never fully understand.

He was back in the neighborhoods again. The dogs on this street were either lazy or deaf because not once did they raise their voices at his appearance on their street. He slowed as he walked by the high school thinking about how a lifetime had passed in the years since he graduated.

He cut through an alley and noticed that he was able to make out more of the houses and yards as the sky began to lighten. The sun was coming to chase away the night with its shadows and dark images. He picked up his pace again, anxious to make it home before the day finally broke. He paused only long enough to switch his bag from one shoulder to the other.

He came out of the alley and took a left, seeing his house sitting at the end of the road. He couldn't take his eyes off the house, and the closer he got the more it felt as if it had been waiting for him. Like most of the houses in this neighborhood, it was a two story home with large, cement front porch. The only real difference was that the backyard opened up to a meadow instead of another yard. The blue siding wasn't any better or worse than the siding on any other house,

but he could've sworn it glowed in the early morning light and while a few houses he passed had occupants getting up and starting their day, his was still dark beyond the windows.

Finally he stopped and just stood in front of the house. He could find the spare key under the fake rock that laid by the stairs leading to the porch, but instead he chose to go round to the back. Following the flagstone path his dad had laid years ago, before the stroke, he came to the side of the house. He opened the chain-link gate and made sure to close it behind him once he walked through. The back of the house sported a wooden deck with a ramp so that his mother could bring her husband in and out of the house without maneuvering the wheelchair up and down the steps out front.

Slowly he walked up the ramp and turned to look at the view over the meadow. The sun was rising, spreading its golden hues over the ground before him. Yellow, orange and a twinge of pink began spreading through the sky, and now he could hear the birds begin their morning sounds. With a sigh he heaved the bag off of his shoulder and set it on the floor of the deck. He stood, refusing to look away until the sun became a blur of yellow in the horizon.

Thirty minutes later he heard the sounds of his mother entering the kitchen. She would start the coffee, having a single cup in the morning silence before taking care of his father's needs. Without taking his eyes off the sky in front of him he waited to be noticed. He could've sworn he heard her gasp as she glanced out the kitchen window. He turned as she fumbled to open the door, taking a deep breath and trying his best to resemble the man she thought she knew. He watched as she hesitated at the open door while trying to decide if he was real or a figment of her imagination. As soon as she knew he was really there, she nearly flew across the deck, her robe looking like a cape as it trailed behind her. He caught her mid-air, not sure if he was swinging her around or vice versa. His right arm wrapped around her tight and his left arm seemed to be trying but for the most part it lay awkwardly against her back.

As they walked into the house, her promising him a real breakfast of eggs and bacon, sausage, hash browns, toast, flapjacks or anything else he wanted, instead of the rationed portions she imagined he ate the late few years, she noticed his bag sitting on the deck. She told him to bring it in and he looked at her and then the bag as if he'd forgotten about it was there. Later, he told her with a wave of his right hand, I'll get it later.

Justin Gainor

Holy Mesas Leveled

Illegal smoke persists in small towns
Puppeted youth deny their complacency
In their own destruction

Perpetual war is ill-disguised
And Truth is denied
As liberation is forced upon
A people that are tortured and bombed

The Overlords of Civilization
Deal in wages of slavery
And are fueled by
Concentrated Death Sludge
They battle over an Earth
Soaked in Blood spilled for profit

The sacred is lacking in
common transactions
Holy Mesas Leveled in the ongoing
Effort to sever life
From the plentiful Earth

Ancient ideals are denigrated
While modern slants choke
The Desperate cry for sanity
So longed for and desired
By the few that carry
Umbilical Connection
To the Fire

From which we are Flung

Many are the disasters
That man invites upon the earth
Advice goes unheeded
By those entranced with desire
Men with untold power
Choose to lead others
Down a path fraught with dangers
And littered with untimely Death

Those with the eyes to see
Must focus on an inner power
That once thus inspired, could truly
Save us from this Tragedy

We are not brought into being
To fulfill some desperate struggle
Or to be puppeted by the will
Of some sanitized bureaucracy
Instead let us envision
An alternative of this reality
And Embody ourselves as protectors
Of this wondrous creation
Biodiversity

Samantha Harris

Foggy Poem

Thick fog descends on me like a net catching a butterfly.
I drive along through this sea of mist, not thinking, just driving.

Tiredness threatens to overtake me; I'm only ten minutes from home.

Instead of giving in, I marvel at the swirling images in front of me.

All is quiet except for the music pulsating against my windows.

I sing as I drive, letting the lyrics, both silly and strange fill me.

Amazed at how far I've come, no longer a country girl in the city.

I've carved my home, an equal fit to my heart.

The fog breaks as I pull up to my house.

I go inside, do the mundane things we do when alone.

I give in to exhaustion.

Time for bed.

I Am Judy

The clouds glide like ghosts across the pale moon. They mirror my thoughts, my inner demons ghosting my mind. For years I have been the big voice in what MGM thought was too big a body. The voice that took on a life of its own. It made me who I was. But the pressures of

fame ravaged me body, mind, and spirit. Too often I was never seen for who I was. Too often I was in and out of rehab due to the pill popping habit I just couldn't break. As I sit here staring at an incoming storm, lightning orange against the black sky, I can't help but compare it to the storm going on inside me. I feel so alone now, despite my comebacks. I think of my children, lights of my life. I think of my husbands, the only ones who made me feel special. Mr. Minelli who was the first man who saw me for me. He saw me for the age I was and loved me for it. Then there was Mr. Luft; the first one to protect me, to honor me in a way like no other. Me, Baby Gumm turned Judy Garland. Oh, what a ride it was. It was tough and my emotions failed me on more than one occasion. But to be JUDY, that powerful presence with a voice to match! I've been over the rainbow and back again and now I am just plain tired. Tired of the stress and strain of who I am. Tired of being in and out of hospitals. Tired of media and press saying that I am "all over" when there is so much more for me to give to the world. Why, why won't they let me? A show here, a television spot there, but nothing that sticks. To go through the torrent of my life and come out feeling like an empty shell; it is too desperate a situation to even contemplate. So here I sit, the rain starts and the thunder pounds the skies. The storm feels like a purge of my long held in feelings. I know now that I am truly alone, as I have been all my life, nothing ever staying longer than a few fleeting years. As I sit here in the downpour only one thought crosses my mind: I'm off to see the wizard.

Poem of Panic

A whisper, a ghosting, and tension rushes.
Rocking slowly, eyes tight shut.
Softly, softly, she cries and shushes.

All through the day the norm plays out.
A whisper, a ghosting, and tension rushes.
She wears the mask till home is reached.
Softly, softly, she cries and shushes.

So natural this feeling, she fights for control.
A whisper, a ghosting, and tension rushes.
She breathes deep and even, playing a part.
Softly, softly, she cries and shushes.

The panic mounts, she lets it take hold.
A whisper, a ghosting, and tension rushes.
She lays quite still, breathe in, breathe out.
Softly, softly, she cries and shushes.

Later she'll look back when peace resumes.
A whisper, a ghosting, and tension rushes.
But for now this attack rules her soul.
Softly, softly, she cries and shushes.

A whisper, a ghosting, and tension rushes.
Rocking slowly, eyes tight shut.
Softly, softly, she cries and shushes.

Angela Jankowski

A Smashed Pomegranate

a smashed pomegranate
broken in a bowl
eternity bound to picking at each seed
sucking off the sanguine gel
hundreds of glistening glassy kernels
like little fish eggs
rolling into corners and falling down stairs
the pale juice dripping off the lip
down the chin staining
draining collecting into a puddle
a drop soundless
just like a single raindrop but
when all together—the loudest storm
each drop, a kiss that happened at that exact
time that it fell onto my window
feeding you a crimson drink
a crimson kiss
a crimson drop

Teenage Baby

she's my teenage baby turned beauty queen
 who knew that this couldn't turn out well?
the ribbon's cut
can't you feel his hand on hers
her shying eyes
she's my teenage baby turned beauty queen
standing in front of a powered blue sky
her golden orange dress
so green
so true
I'm not one just to keep on breathing
but she keeps drinking the poison I pour
and says a half 'a cup will do this time
I find her in a bed with golden green flowing onto the floor
she says, my baby says,
just some things can't wait mamma
 and who knew that this wouldn't turn out well?
 (they say that when a frog is dropped into a boiling pot
 it will jump out, but when slowly warmed into a rolling boil
 the frog will stay, welcoming the warmth, until death)
you do not allow the stranger to call your baby a whore
 but her father can
she is so fake, so medicated
my baby is drugged
drug out to the car with the window cracked
he turns the ignition
goes back into the kitchen with a kiss and
says
 sorry sweetheart
 but it was just for fun
 who knew that this wouldn't turn out well?

Leonard Kress

Oratorio

In Krakow, I was tutoring the great composer's son and daughter, under the baleful gaze of his mother-in-law. Conversational English for her, literary English for him, Blake and Keats and Milton had been suggested. I added Allen Ginsburg into the mix, and together we struggled valiantly to bring *Howl* home, coaxing it back from its journey into Polish. At the *Akademia Muzyczna* where he ruled, it was rumored that his new work might actually bring the government down.

They lived beyond the city, in a section known for its burial mound, by an old plank church, its silvery Byzantine cupolas always coated in hoarfrost. Their parents were always granted travel visas and spent most of the time abroad--a gift by the more pragmatic apparatchiks of the disintegrating communist authorities, devised to keep them in Poland. Besides the composer's mother-in-law, a teenaged girl, Alina, a poor relative or servant, or both, looked after them. She always seemed to be raking leaves or burning husks in the garden. And sometimes she hid in the steamy kitchen, trying to listen in. The boy had a watch from France, a gift from some conductor or soloist that chimed the first few sentencing bars of the A-flat Polonaise hourly. The girl had her Paddington Bear.

Their house was stocked with Moravian chocolates, Moldavian wine, herring from the Baltic, wax effigies from her mother's village for the Day of the Dead. Alina served them all, before and after lessons. Alina with her gap-tooth smile which the medieval astrologer Maturnus might read as the mark of Venus, *an ardent desire for coition and prone to shed tears*. Dominika always with her forbidden *jettes* and secret cursive notebooks. Lukasz always sucking on double reeds.

They are grown-ups now, hardly remarkable. They lived through it all--Solidarnosc, State of War, Show Trials.

Guilt, Foreign Investment, Nostalgia for the Party. Nato, The European Union... Noisy, ear-splitting history, one side drowning out the other's screams, pleadings, recriminations. Echo/parody // babble/nonsense. And this is just the way his latest oratorio begins. Until the final movement when it all changes. A children's choir aloft—high atop decorated scaffolding. They must be scared silly as they dump their voices down into the laps of the audience. How can I describe this sound? It is neither animal, human, nor divine. It seems as though it is not emanating from them--and at the same time not from not-them.

Sheree Madison-Emery

For Our Youth

Imagine your parents being kidnapped in the middle of the night, kicking and screaming and putting up a fight, trying to hold on with all their might, but yet still taken by a face that was white...taken to a foreign land, whose language they didn't understand, and made to work until hard and tough became their hands... and then you were born into this thing called slavery, you worked just as hard but for your parents you tried to show bravery, to learn to count and read, you had to use trickery, it was a shame to see, but you were making history... but then you fought and overcame the odds, you prayed to God in the name of his son, and you became Booker T Washington...

Now imagine... after finally being allowed to go to school, you had to make a choice, education or your family's food... do you work or do you learn, your parents make the choice for you to learn so a better way of life you can earn... but at school you see something's just not right, you get old books and the new goes to the whites... they are in the front you are in the back, they rode the bus from a house you walked from a shack, 20 miles and barefoot just to get treated bad because your skin is black...

But again, you overcame the odds, and you prayed to God to help you soon, and by his grace you became Mary McLeod Bethune...

But now... when schools in session in 2007, our children are not learning some of them are compellin to be future felons you see, by trying to sell drugs and be thugs, pants saggin walkin around braggin, about things they are too young to understand... like true love between a woman and a man... our babies are having babies and I know our ancestors wouldn't comprehend how that mind set exists, or that our children are sittin in class not learning but sending text messages... and instead of fighting for equal rights or equal pay they're at the mall fighting at chic-fil-a ... so now who do they become, it seems just teen parents who are still trying to kick it with no income, research and statistcis show, lucas county has the highest teen birthrate in all of ohio, and let's talk about stds... because every year 3 million teens get a sexually transmitted disease, its like it comes from a rain shower because children between 13 and 24 get HIV at the rate of 2 per hour... 2 per hour? we need to empower our youth because we are loosing our power, so how are our children on this track, we as blacks overcame set back after set back, so what is it that our children lack...

Maybe they lack the knowledge of what some of our ancestors did, like 399 black men were used as lab animals for 40 years, and that was just to see the time it takes to be killed by syphilis... a deadly std... or maybe they don't know that america is run by the inventions of black creators, for it was a black man alexander mils who invented the elevator, and later another black man john standard invented the refrigerator and that's just to name a slight few... so with our history why is that our children are always mad and blue, and only seems to be worried about gettin new shoes...

Maybe that's just it! our children **don't lack** enough stuff, they have the best name brand shoes and clothes causing them to think they're hot stuff...making their eyes glassy, they start acting sassy, and by the way young ladies... you can be classy without looking nasty... they have xbox 360 cellphones and PSPs, laptops PDAs ninetendos and playstation 3s... when they graduate from high school they get **presidential** acknowledgement, but I was taught graduating is a **requirement...** more than an **accomplishment...** so with no job, where do children get the money they spend? I know some is from

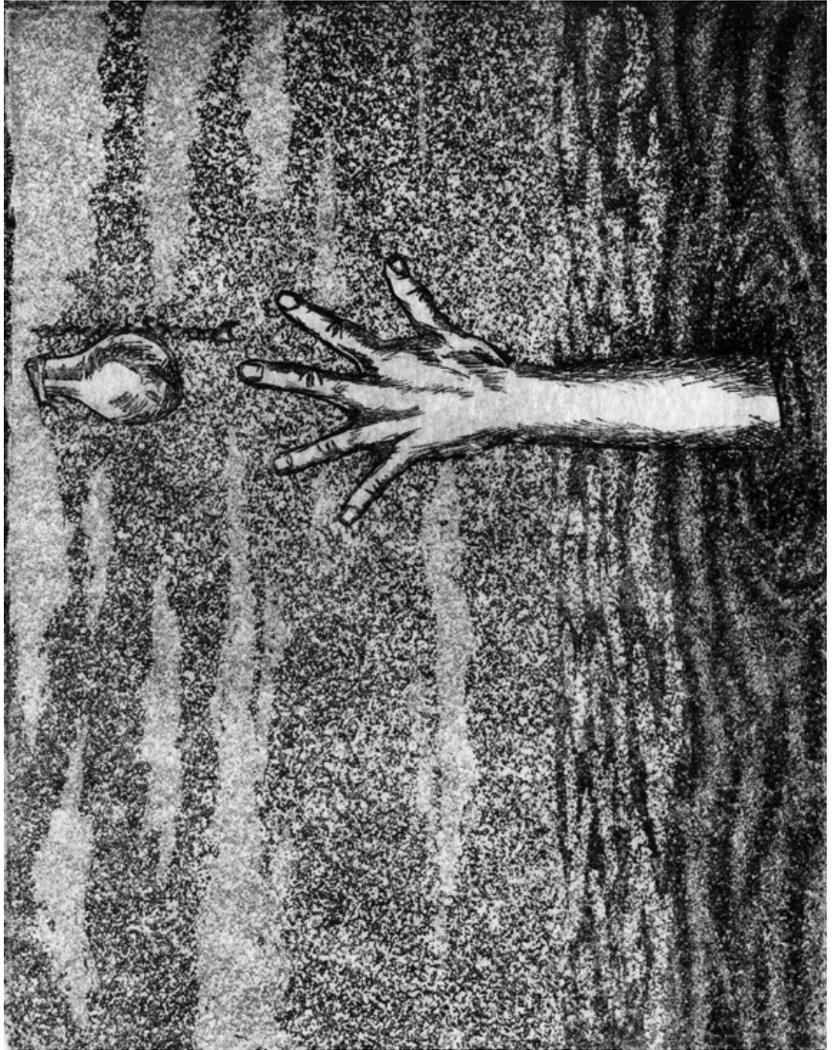
adults who'd rather not be parents but their child's best friend... not being a parent myself I don't have much to say, just that along with giving to your children, please show them the way

Now I have to be real and say yeah I was spoiled as a kid, I received a lot of things but my parents paid attention to what my friends and I did, when I was in high school I had a lot of fun, but my parents instilled in me to keep God as priority number one... then came my school work which of course I didn't like, but with my priorities straight I graduated top 20 of my class, me and my friends alike... now being smart doesn't make you a nerd, what it does is gets you that good job, because that's what employers prefer... and to keep it real the fun didn't stop when I went to college, but again I kept my grades tight because I was the one paying for that knowledge... I have a bachelors and a masters degree, and it wasn't easy, but compared to what our ancestors have done.. it was a breeze to achieve my dream... I asked the Lord one day to place me where he thought best, I took one step and then he made the rest... he has allowed me a chance to teach and maybe even inspire one to continue to climb, and that's why I always say hallelujah! I will bless the Lord at all times!

I want end by encouraging our youth...take a break from myspace and facebook and search for the truth, don't just go with the flow have a mind of your own, stay in school and yes you'll be okay, you can live without that cell phone... challenge yourself and aspire to be all that you can, sometimes, turn off the radio and try to listen to the plans that God has in store for your life, and when you see that a lot of those little things didn't matter after all, you'll have less strife... go to college work hard and shoot for the stars but most importantly keep God first and I promise you'll go far!



Danielle Parsons
The Wall
Solarized BW Photograph



Katie Keaveny
Something More
Etching



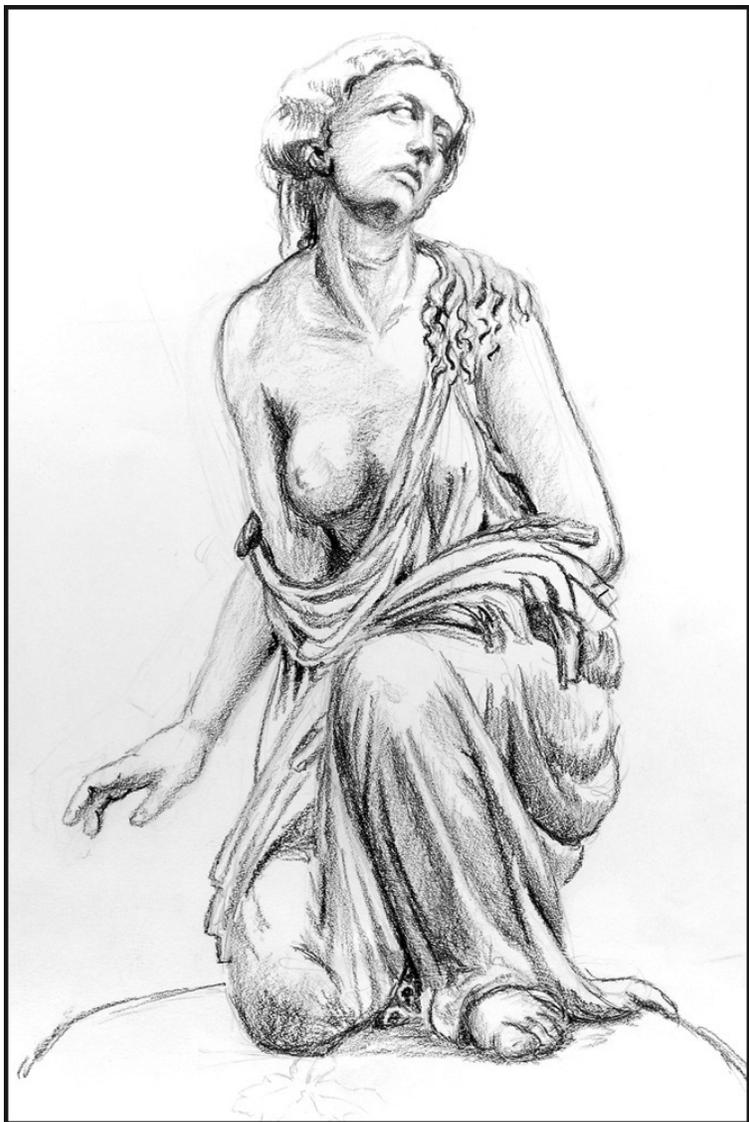
Joshua Blackfoot
Abandoned
Digital Photograph



Alisha Reyes
Tattoo Review
Digital Photograph



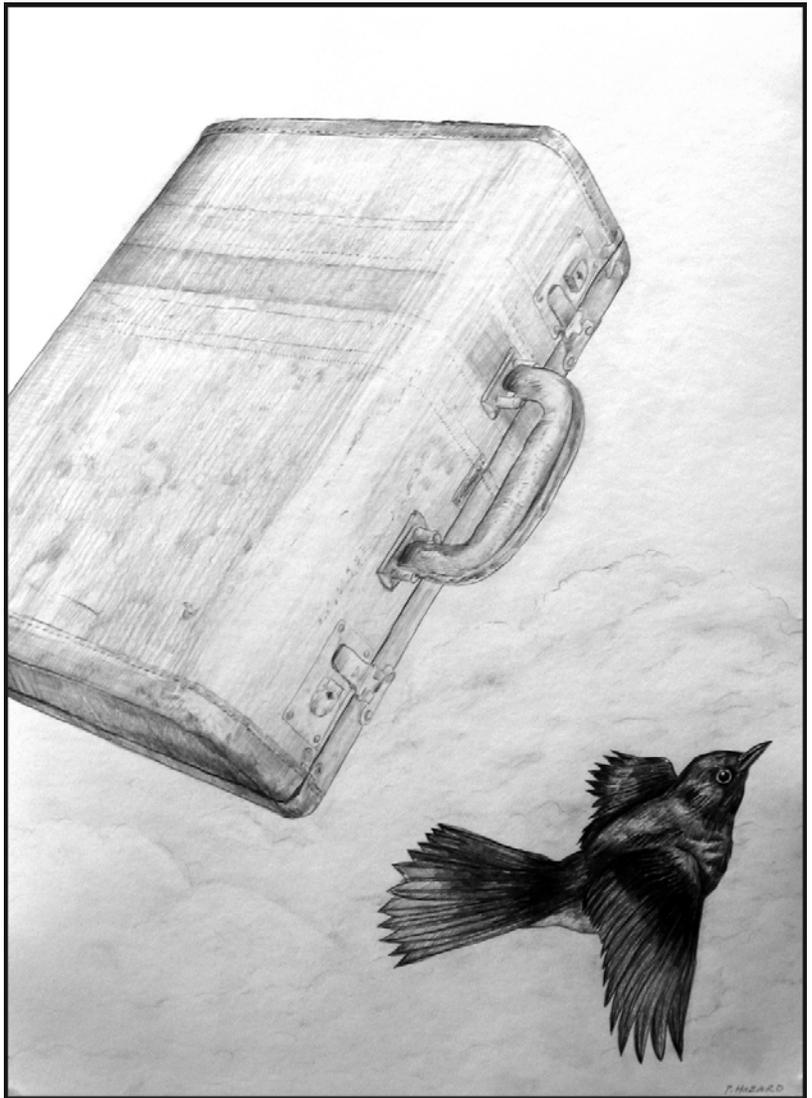
Christine Karamol
Against the Wall
Charcoal



Debra Helwig
Museum Trip-Randolph Rogers, Ruth Gleaning
Graphite



Brittany Kaelber
After the Party
Digital Photograph



Philip Hazard
Flight
Graphite



Clayton Peterson
Red Shelter
Oil Painting



Megan Merrill
Dirty Blonde



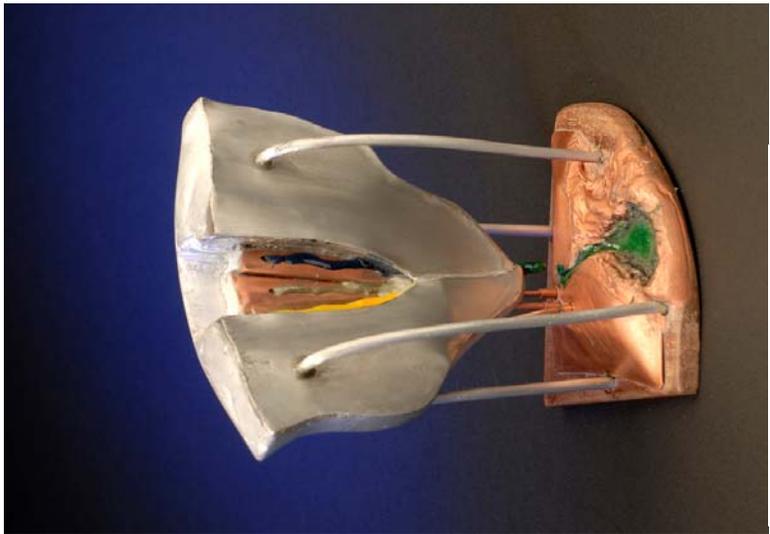
Brenda Guss
Afternoon Delight
Digital Photo



Brittany Kaelber
Pirates of the Mediterranean
Digital Photo



Vanessa Young
Untitled
Digital Photo



Steve Utterback
Crucible for Metallic Green
Mixed Media



Tiffany Miller
Brian
Digital Photo



Mandy Hen
Self Portrait III
Oil Paint

Erica Rupple
Silent Transition
Solar Plate





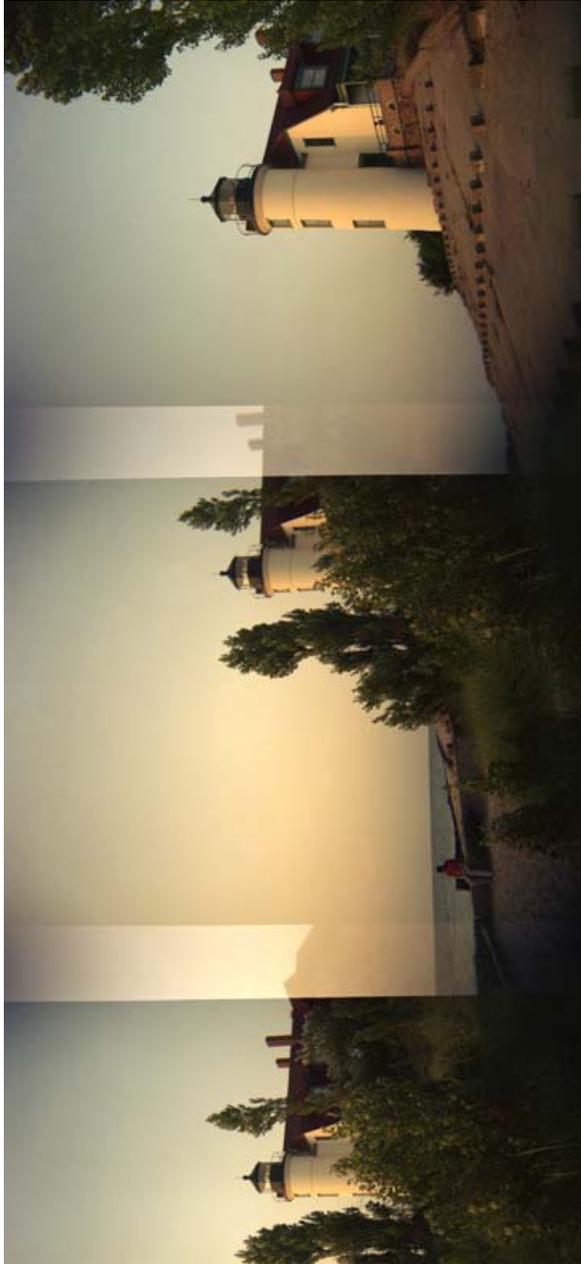
Ruth Foote
Chaco Canyon, NM
Color Photograph



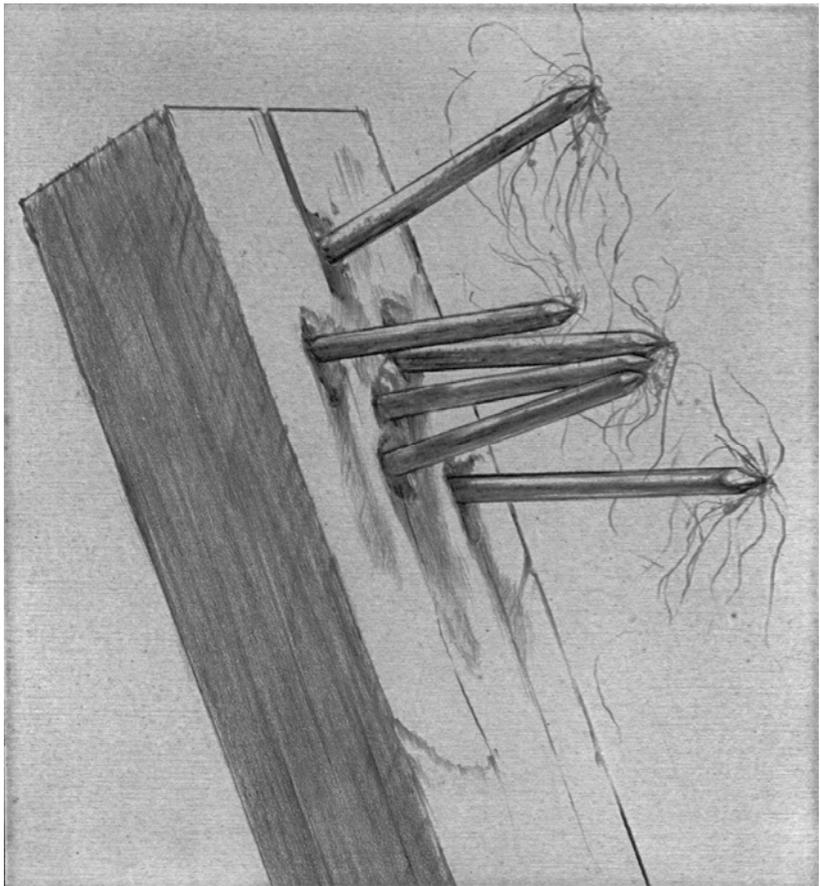
Katie Keaveny
Into the Mind
Relief



Janice Dingess
Wet-Dream
Acrylic



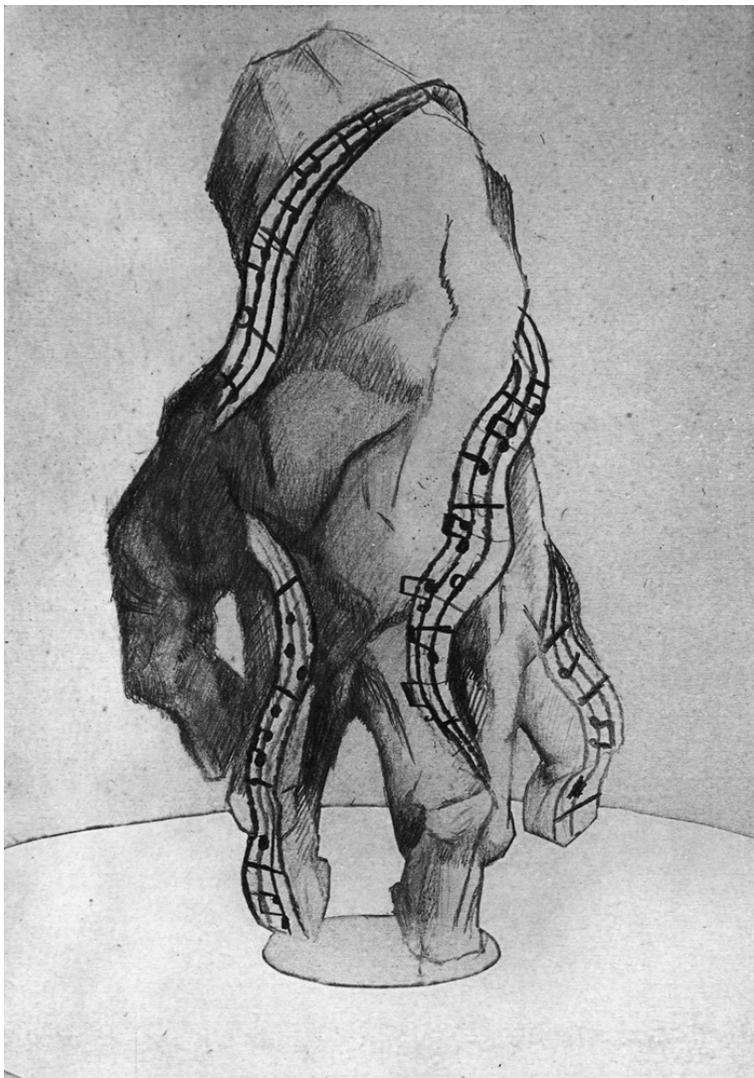
Margaret Lockwood-Lass
It is Sometimes Better to Travel Hopefully than to Arrive
Plastic Camera Photograph



Kevin Schroeder
Gratuitous Violence
Solar Plate Etching



Jennifer Rufenacht
"S" is for Swimming
Digital Photograph



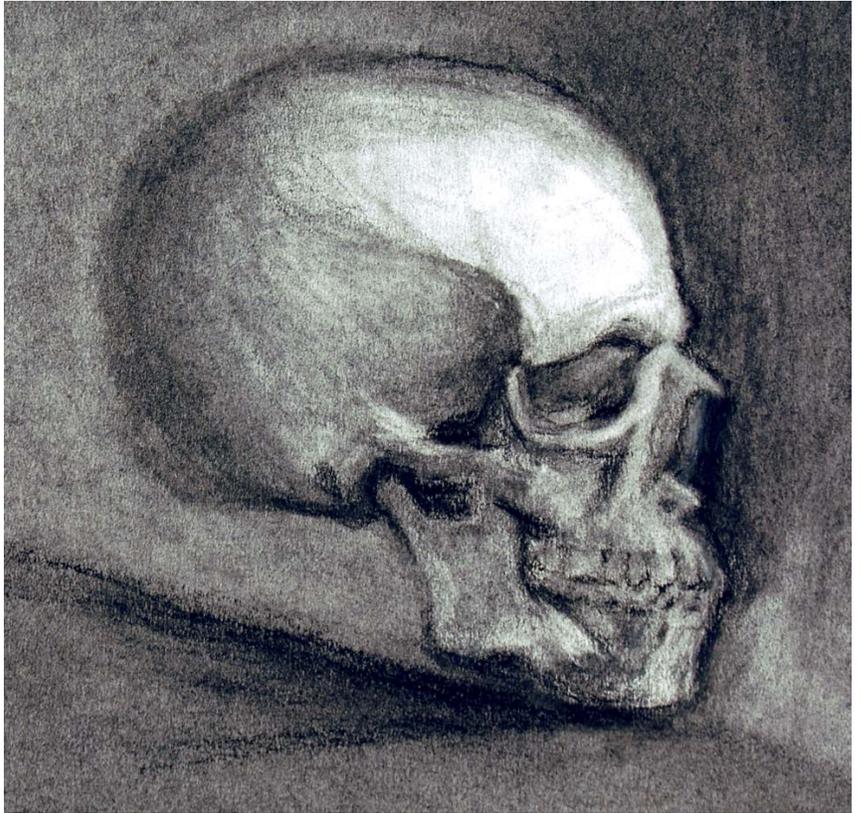
Ian Welch
Clutch
Solar Plate Etching



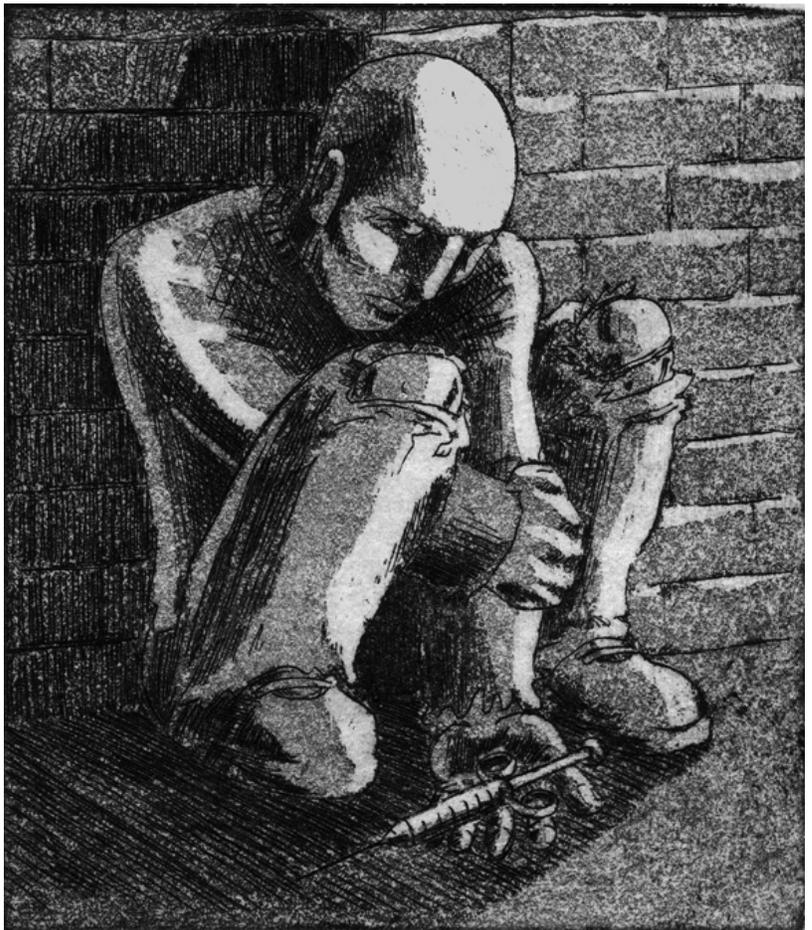
Beth Getz
Sidecut Park
Digital Photograph



Carla Willis
Untitled
Drypoint



Joy Goodall
Vanitas
Charcoal



Zack Lyons
Dependence
Etching



Lorri Smith
Beautiful Madonna
Black and White Photograph



MacKenzie MuKiira
Knees
Charcoal

Joy Parker

Body MUSIC

I.

"Protean Shapes"

The toilet is one of those high ones and so
I grab the bar and twist around pull up and then
slap my butt up there finding that I am too far forward
and the inside edges of the seat are digging
into my the backs of my thighs
because of the pull of my legs hanging down so now
I have to pull up and slide back and then oh god the toilet tissue
is on the wall behind and to the left of my right shoulder so now I
have to reach across and try to grab with my right hand while
rocking precariously on this seat and oh crap I can just about
reach I'll have to twist sideways and now I have a long strip that I
managed to pull but can't tear off because the angle is wrong--
WHY DID YOU DO THIS TO ME!

He says: It's your gift
I say: Some gift
He says: Have you seen how the flowers twist around the rocks
to reach the sun?
It's your dance on a razor with Kali and
If you dance you've won.

II.

"Highlander and Highway"

Dozing while Dad drives and dreaming of Duncan
Watching him work out with whirling sword
Thinking of nothing but thick dark
Hair hanging hot down his neck
Free for fingers to fondle and stroke

the kick comes quick as a cough unconscious
Opened and out from inside my soul
Stretched strait and strong it snake-strikes
feeling the force in my foot like fire
Knowing the nature of neural paths
For a few fleeting free moments
I ask the important ultimate question
Does Duncan dodge, damn don't
Wake up where is the wind-power
Past proving, petered out
Gone, to grapple and to grab
At the edges avails not at all
Heaving up heartsick still hanging
And groaning in gravity's grasp
I awake along the interstate

The Lake of Fire

Mary Tudor never had her father's love.
So, she decided her Heavenly Father would do
Just as well.

She made Him burnt offerings
Of Protestant heretics
She lit them like candles before an altar,

Or anyway her servants did.
The black, oily smoke drifted up
On screams.

Elizabeth, her sister,
You know, the famous one,
Not to be outdone,
Burned Catholic heretics.
Priests shriveled in the crackling
Orange flames
Like old sticks,

Their praying hands uplifted.
That was the golden age.

That was a long time ago, you say.

True.

Last week, a man invited his ex-wife
Out to breakfast.
When she was in the car,
He poured gas on her
And on himself
And lit them both
On fire with his lighter.

A week or so before that,
Al Qaida operatives
Gave two girls with Down Syndrome
Bombs to carry.

Maybe they were smiling at the gifts
Some nice men gave them
When they walked into the Pet Market
And exploded.

“I don’t believe in Hell,”
My friend, Lyn, says,
“How could a compassionate God send His children
To the fire?”

This doesn’t worry me as much these days.

Instead I wonder:

Why does a compassionate God
Bother to save us from the hells
We create
For ourselves?

Dave Parker

Individuals

Heart Attack Jack
Climbed up the Social Stack
Made it big, just to fall face first
In a pile of dirt

Little Old Joe
Tried his best
Ended a nobody
With a purple heart on his chest

Blueberry Heavy Betty
Loved her strawberry jelly
Choked on a pastry
Rolled in her grave early

Cute Coy Roy
Ended up a person's toy
Sold himself for a better life
Until one night he met a knife

Bizarre Funky Mikey
Cut up his family
Kids in class made him unhappy
Their song drove him nutty

Time Capsule

Years ago when the sun was sharing
Before the cold was so cruel
And time took so much from us
It's a punch in the stomach to imagine

That this time capsule is the only thing worth having

Let's hold hands my friends and fall forever
I swear I can hear all the laughter if I try hard enough
Peach fuzz on smooth skin
Not a care in the universe
This Time Capsule is no longer it

Don't understand why all good things must come to an end
Do you know if you will survive your life?
Only to beg for death
Those single moments of our youth
Held in this time Capsule

I'd give my life to dive into its sea
And bath in old memories
Let the laughter and joy
Heal my wounds
Let the pain and hurt rekindle old love

But this Time Capsule doesn't have a price
And money isn't an option
Capture the moments each day until they all slip away
In one fair and obsolete moment I'll be gone into the night
Breathing no more and remembered even less

So please let me dive in, the after life can be feelings
But I'm not sure if I can cross that road
I'm not chicken but these time capsules I create
Are parts of me I'll never get back
And although I miss the mirage they create
I still want my old reflection back
And if I can't even spare the time for love
Why do I care about these Time Capsules
That have been so cruel
Taken away youth in them
And stolen truth

Melissa Pamploni

Reprieve

I was standing in the kitchen of our rented house in my softball uniform getting my juice box out of the fridge, while my mother was sitting at our table looking nervous. I was probably whining about how I didn't think I should have to go to my game, seeing as I hated it and I never wanted to play in the first place. Which is completely untrue, because every year I would beg to play softball. I would cry and scream and talk about nothing else while my Mom would say things like, "No, because you will want to quit after the first game!" Then I would have to tell her how unfair it was that I was being punished for something that happened the year before, when this year was clearly different and I was more mature. Unfortunately, this is a trait I have carried over into my adult life as well. We had been playing out this scenario every year since I was seven. On this particular day, I was eleven years old, whining about hating softball while my Mom couldn't have been farther away with her thoughts.

"Honey, come over here," she said quietly. I was slamming cupboard doors, and had no time for such things like talking if I was going to get out of this softball game. I was focused, but she kept trying because she is the most patient person I know. You can't raise someone like me without being patient. I kept on ignoring her. Finally, she made a proclamation that would change my life.

"Honey, Matt died today. He was hit by a car in front of their house..." and I don't remember anything else. My Mom says I fell on my knees to the ground. I can't tell you if that's what happened. It must have been.

I was overcome with a need to go to my softball game now. I *had* to go now; I had no other choice in my mind. The one softball game I could have successfully avoided in my life, and now I was the one screaming at my Mom to get in the car. I sobbed the entire way there. I was so pissed off, and I felt like I was in a fog. I didn't fully understand what was even happening.

A little background on my softball playing abilities. I have none, and I never have. I have always been the type of person who gets really revved up when I watch a movie, and the movie *Major League* made me believe I could be a great softball player if I just gave it a shot. I was a very experienced right fielder in regard to picking

dandelions and doing cartwheels; however, despite those gifts the only hit I ever made in a game was in high school. I was so used to striking out, that I didn't even look to see if I had hit the ball or not. Everyone was screaming "Run!" and I had no idea why. I just started walking back to the dugout, defeated. But on the day Matt died, on this day I was absolutely knocking the stuffing out of the ball in practice. My coach could not believe it! He was so excited, and kept asking what in the world was going on? Had I been practicing? I creamed every ball that came at me, hitting it with everything I had. I was ready.

When it was my turn up at bat, I went and stood at the plate and stared at the pitcher like she had just killed my puppy and I was only here for my revenge. In my head, I said to the universe "This one's for you Matt." Then I struck out. I could've sworn I heard him laughing. He would have loved that.

I met Matt when my Mom started dating his Dad. I hated everyone my Mom dated as a rule, and Bill was no exception. He was a very good person, but I was way too young and wrapped up in my own world to see that. Now that I am older, I realize that is something that children with no siblings are known for. We live in our own worlds, where your parents are the only people who matter, cars drive themselves to and from places with no passengers, and the moon follows you home at night. Looking back, I have no idea how Bill stayed with my mother for as long as he did, almost a decade, simply because of my presence in the world. I made them miserable, and I was really good at it.

I don't remember the first time I met Matt. He was a year older than I was and an only child as well. His Mother had died a few years earlier of a brain aneurysm in their kitchen. All you had to do was look into his eyes to know it was always on his mind. He used to tell me he had dreams about getting hit by a car, and that they scared him. Those dreams scared me too.

I remember we used to have so much fun together, and we thought the silliest things were funny.

"What's my favorite gas station?"

"What?"

"Taco Bell." And he would laugh like he hadn't heard that joke eight hundred times before, and like nothing in the world had ever been funnier. I loved to make him laugh. One of the things that made our friendship so special is that we liked to make each other laugh and luckily we both thought everything was funny.

Bill's basement had silver walls, a pinball machine, and a case with a grenade in it. We used to sit down there and stare at that grenade for hours speculating on what kind of Army it came from. Was it real? And always, "Do you ever wonder who else has held it before us?" To our parent's dismay, our favorite activity was carving in the silver insulation. We used to write our names, jokes, poke holes and draw pictures. Using our fingers for the most part or anything sharp we could get our hands on. We absolutely destroyed that basement. We used to complain that it was always cold down there, never quite catching onto the fact that it was our fault.

Matt's best friend was a boy named Scott. He used to come over a lot, and so did the girl who lived next door, named Regina. I thought she was the most sophisticated girl I had ever seen. She was a diver, and she had this towel that dried her off quickly that she called a "Sammie" which I thought was amazing. Like I said, I am easily amused. I had a huge crush on Scott, who eventually would be my first kiss years later, and we used to get together to poke holes in the insulation and set off water rockets in the back yard. Matt's Dad collected guns, and we used to shoot holes in his vegetable garden with a BB gun. One day my Mom joined in the fun, and she shot the same eggplant about five hundred times. She turned and looked at me with a straight face and said, "Oh no. Now he'll be a vegetable for the rest of his life." To this day, it is the funniest thing I have ever heard my Mom say.

My Mom has told me that I didn't know Matt all that long before he died. Despite this fact, I felt like I had known him forever. I still do, even knowing that he and I were friends only a few precious months, in my mind it went on for years. My childhood seems to be encompassed with Matt, even though I know this is probably what happens when you have a friend who dies as a child. I still can't help but feel that we were special. The last time I saw him alive, he was standing in his garage putting air in the tires of the bike that he would meet his end riding. I was in the backseat of his Dad's car, and he was taking my Mom and I home. I remember looking out the window at Matt, and I swear I knew. In some small way I knew that I had better get a good look, and I couldn't tell you why, but it had to be that way. He looked up from his bike and waved to us. I waved back and rested my fingers on the edge of the car window as we drove away, while I just stared at him. The next time I would see him, he would be in a casket.

At his son's funeral, Bill was a gracious and entertaining host. Smiling, shaking hands, and thanking everyone for coming. I didn't understand at all. My Mom and I were in the bathroom of the funeral home when I told her I was mad at him. "It's like it doesn't even bother him," I said through clenched teeth. My Mom calmly explained to me how she didn't think it had "hit him" yet, and he was just trying to get through any way he could. She did such a great job of explaining it, that honestly my words cannot do it justice. She told me about how people do funny things when they are grieving, and I knew Bill well enough to know how much he loved Matt. I tried to wrap my eleven year-old mind around the grieving process, and was coming up short. I told her that I hadn't looked at him yet, that I didn't think I could even. I didn't want to cry, not in front of all of these people. She held me close and told me it wasn't him in that casket. "That's just his body, sweetie. He doesn't live there anymore." Now that was something I understood.

When we left the bathroom, I went to look at the body that used to be my friend. My friend's body, that was wearing entirely too much makeup. I felt myself starting to cry and repeated, "That's not him, that's just a body, that's not him," to myself with my eyes closed until I felt my tears retreat. But when I opened my eyes again, it was no good and I ended up back in the bathroom. Matt was the second body I had ever seen, and the first I had known well. The first was my Great-Grandpa, who I was terrified of because he was so old. Matt's body was shocking to me. There was something perverse about a twelve-year old in a casket, something so wrong. It was the first time I ever remember being mad at God and thinking how I didn't want to be alive if this was the way the world worked. Then the injustice of Matt's Dad's life hit home, and I realized at the funeral that in a few short years, Bill had lost his entire family. His whole family, gone. Like they never even happened, and my heart was broken more than I understood. Something vital inside of me was violated that day, and I am still waiting for it to heal.

My life for the most part surrounding Matt's death is lost to my memory. There is one thing I remember about school, and it is still one of the most horrible things that has ever happened to me. I used to carry Matt's obituary in my pocket after he died because if I could touch it, I felt better. I have no idea why, eleven year olds do funny things to try and cope. It fell out of my pocket at school, and one of the boys in my class picked it up and looked at it. I have no idea why a person would do this, even knowing that children can be cruel, but

he started making fun of me about it. Then the rest of the kids in the class joined in. I felt everything spinning in my head until I started crying, which made them laugh even harder. I don't remember how it ended, but I hardly said another word until we moved to a new school two years later. I would never trust anyone in that room again, and unfortunately it became habit to not really trust anyone entirely. I seem to spend my entire life waiting for someone to laugh at my pain.

In the seventh grade at my new school, my English teacher asked us to write a poem about anything we wanted. I chose Matt, and I never thought anyone but my teacher would see it. It was a poem that literally changed the course of my life.

Gone Forever

*The squeal of the tires,
the race of his heart.
He knew too well,
it was his time to part.
Sitting in my bedroom,
Knowing that he'd died.
I'm not afraid to admit,
Admit that I cried.
Seeing him on white satin,
never to see him again.
I know I'll join him someday,
but no one can tell me when.
And now I know
he's gone forever.*

My teacher thought it was great. She read it to the entire class while she cried, and I was terrified. I was the new kid, and I thought that would cement my reputation forever as, if not a loser, then at least as the teacher's pet. She asked me to read my poem at "Author's Night" for our school district, and I obliged. The next year I was placed in Advanced English, where I remained. I love books and words because of my English classes in high school, which eventually turned into an incredible love of music, and now I know I have Matt to thank for that.

I don't know how to ride a bike because of Matt's death. They say you never forget how to ride a bike, but I am living proof that statement is not true. I was playing disc golf with my cousin one day

when he had ridden his bike to the park. It was going to rain, so we decided to put his bike in my car so I could drive him home. The plan was for me to ride the bike back to my car, but when I got on I practically fell on my face. I couldn't pedal, so I just tried to stand up and walk it back to the car. My cousin was laughing hysterically and said, "Don't tell me you don't know how to ride a bike!" I was laughing because I was so embarrassed, but it was amazingly true. Twenty-six years old and I couldn't ride a bike. He, of course, immediately called my Mom so they could laugh on the phone about this new development, and all I could think about was Matt. I realized that I had never ridden a bike after he died.

After Matt was killed, I still hung around Regina and Scott for quite a long time when we would go to see Bill. Something had shifted with us though. There was always a sadness that hung in the air around our group after that. Regina and I used to spend hours sitting in Matt's bedroom, which Bill had never cleaned up for reasons that we were too young to fully understand. We would just sit on his bed and look around, talking about anything we could think of at the time. When we would stay the night at Bill's house, I slept in Matt's room, which I hated whole-heartedly. I think my Mom thought I would like it, but it scared me. I don't think I actually slept many of the nights we would stay overnight. While my Mom couldn't understand what scared me about it, Regina justified my fear. She told me that she was always afraid that she would see his ghost, and even though it was Matt, it was still terrifying. She told me she saw him on the road when he got hit, and she didn't want to see him looking like that again. I can't even imagine what that poor girl must have gone through.

There is a small part of me that always has wondered if Matt meant to get hit by that car. I knew he missed his Mother, and he was always talking about the dreams he had about getting hit. I wish I was always imagining the sadness in his eyes, but I know I wasn't. The woman who hit Matt said that he looked right at her, and then swerved into the road. I don't want to think these things, but it keeps popping up in my head. It was a few years after his death that I confided in my Mom about my suspicions. She told me that she had them too. Those thoughts are what set off a chain reaction in my life that I refer to as my own personal "blue period." I spent my teenage years surrounded by, and obsessed with death.

After Matt died, I knew at least two people who died almost every year until I was about twenty-four. I have been to more

funerals than I can even remember. The kids in my graduating class thought we were cursed, and to be honest, I sort of think maybe we were. Kids from my high school, and our teachers seemed to drop like flies. In some cases in very unusual ways, some not so much. I look back on things I wrote during that time period and I am shocked. For a cheerleader, I certainly was dark. Almost all of the stories I wrote for my classes had to do with death or dying, or coping with one of those. Funny, considering I don't know if I ever really learned how to cope with them myself. I still don't handle the notion of death well.

More recently, I went to Boston for my job, and almost passed out in the mall because I was on the second floor and you could see down to the first. I feel like I am dying if I get too high up, even on a ladder. It feels like I am actually falling, even though I know I am standing firmly on the ground. Getting to Boston in itself was bad enough, since I am convinced my plane is going to crash every time I fly. I cannot drive in winter for fear of being killed by some maniac driver, and sometimes I still wake up in the middle of the night having panic attacks for no known reason. Those are the worst ones of all, waking up not being able to catch my breath even in the slightest bit. Most of the time, I just feel a little crazy. My entire adult life is filled with unexplainable and sometimes uncontrollable anxiety.

The one car accident I was in when I actually could have been killed, I felt like Matt was there. I was twenty, and it was Easter Sunday. My car had flipped over, and I remember my first thought was, "My Dad is going to kill me." My second thought was, "I am upside down. If I undo my seatbelt I am going to fall onto my head." I swear to you, I felt like he was there and everything went very calm. I knew if I unbuckled my seatbelt, I would be just fine. I didn't expect to slowly tumble to the ground, but thankfully I did. As soon as I was out of my seat, I immediately began to have a panic attack. The entire car was crushed all around me, and I escaped with nothing more than a bruise on my chest. I didn't know how bad the car was until I was in the hospital and an unbelieving nurse showed me the Polaroid of my car. She couldn't believe I was fine, and after seeing that picture, neither could I. I felt like Matt had protected me, and sometimes I still feel like he is. During the worst times of my life, I have felt like he was there. I'm lucky to have such a diligent guardian angel.

It seems strange to be able to actually pinpoint once instance in my life that literally changed my entire world, but it's just such a part of me now that I can't even imagine my life without Matt in it. I don't think this is what people mean when they tell you that someday you will meet someone and spend the rest of your life with them, but this is the closest I have come to that, unfortunately. He is my angel and the weight I carry at the same time, and I am still trying to figure out exactly what to do with that. He was my best friend. Knowing Matt has shaped my life. I am the person I am, for better or worse, because I was lucky enough to have known him.

Patricia Petro

At First and 1st

Here
you cross on red with caution
heads turned in watchful wait
rouged cheeks and ruby lips
on models matrons mothers men
wearing red and heads in shades
from flaming copper coin
to fire engine red sirens blaring
to the orange glow below a fire lit
or it's long black dipped in burgundy
like a painter's brush
and still called red

We patiently wait out the red
crossing at the curb
the start of a race
red rover red rover
on red alert eyes a void

avoid meeting each other
instead seeing red
annoyance creeping crimson
tail lights a blur and each horn blast
prickly as a raspberry bush
as cars rush past

Red neon blazing uptown
red dragon down
where ribbons of red meat
hang in shop windows charred
scarred and remembering red
valentines hearts roses
deep and pure
the color of true love rich
and red as the stripes
on the flag at ground zero
still hanging there

And somewhere in between
business as usual
the bloodshot masses
spill out of buildings
amidst merlot laughter
and rouge rot rosso rojo
a rash of foreign sounds
and strawberry fields forever
slapping the senses
dusk to dawn
in a city that never sleeps

We wait keeping watch
for green light go
suspended in the animation

patiently impatient
eyes darting to and fro
wanting to part traffic
like the red sea
all of us in a desperate
got-to-get-there hurry to be
on our way to
somewhere

Danielle Sindel

Flight

Standing at the edge
wanting, waiting, searching
I close my eyes
finding only you
The wind caresses me
the sun warm upon my skin
my heart no longer aching
I jump
you are there
engulfed in you
my soul sings
and I fly

Controlled Burn

A spark
turned into a flame
The dry, brittle
lifelessness
caught easily and
quickly became
a burning
entity
of its own
each touch
refuels desire
as the flame
burns
brighter
deeper
than before
this eternal fire
began
with only
a spark

Marci Singer

Bees

The drones were dripping like bloody tears,
spilling out of the eyes of the sun sculpture,
gathering like a dust storm.
Forced together out of innate necessity,
all working tirelessly towards the same goal.
Like a duvet of down, they protect their queen,
spinning and buzzing like whirling dervishes.
Creating sweet nectar,
that is as pure as filigrees of gold,
culminating in precious honey.

In the Name of God?

We are God's unholy warriors waging war,
in the name of religious redemption.
It is a dogmatically delivered drama,
with the world for its sanctimonious stage.
Our inner compass motivated by morbid morals,
not derived from peace and perseverance.
Children in school are persecuted, punished if they pray,
forced removal from our courthouses of any ambiguous
artifacts.
Does it matter who, what, or where we worship,
as long as we have a backbone of belief.
We are all God's kindred, consummate, creations,
not malicious, malevolent, mortals.

Hide and Seek

Silent,
crouched beneath the stairs,
in a secret hidden space.
Silent,
how much loner will it be?
a meager crumb of challa.
Silent,
necessary to survive,
my mind is screaming.
Silent,
I feel like a mouse,
caught in an endless trap.
Silent,
no sign of light,
the darkness surrounds me.
Silent,
my stomach revolts,
my throat feels scorched.
Silent,
I count the cracks in the floor,
my mind is drifting away.
Silent,
a teaspoon of farfel,
maybe I can hold on.
Silent,
where has the world gone?
my bones ache with hollowness.
Silent,
I close my eyes and dream,
nobody has come in too long.
Silent,
why me? I am but a child.

I want to see the sun.
Silent,
I fear for release,
and embrace it as well.
Silent.

Adrienne Sliwinski

Nympholepsy

Unable to witness his presence first hand
I become erratically engaged
In intimate longing

I'll never understand the experience
Of his edacious vibrations
Fervently floating through air

Savagely penetrating through
My skin and hair
My blood and brainwaves

Instead I'm force fed
A generic, photocopied version
Through radio waves and camera lenses
Television screens and stereo speakers

Fierce proliferation
Of unsatisfied desire
Undestroyed and unsubsidized

Commitment

I'm so lonely with you
Your boredom with myself
Words lost in the wind

The oblivion of being
With you
Growing apart together
United by inseparable dissatisfaction

Steve Utterback

Ecce Homo

The hammer strokes will bark,
thick iron driven
into oak, still to come
the route, the hill, the hole,
but for now there is the soul
waiting to be shriven,
last thoughts of home
and the last look into the dark.
Forgotten are the rook, the lark,
the slights forgiven,
good deeds undone
and the long-unmanaged goal
as those distant bells begin to toll,
the quiet riven
clean to the bone,
right down to the last fading spark.

Do, in the suburbs of heaven, sing
the roosted birds,
the moon-stupid dog,
for us the ponderous songs of night,
the airs of solitude at its height,
a canine monologue,
that chorus of feathered words
that leprous, lyric evenings bring?
Does the hammer know the sting
of the muted third,
hear the echo's dialog
as it nails us to our oaken plight,
and does it know the taste of light,
the jukes and jogs
of sleepers lured
into the awakened everything?

And what at the center do we behold
but ourselves
hammers raised,
and on the third we strike the blow,
bark the only word for cross we know,
the nail-point delves,
the head unfazed
by the stories waiting to be told?
And how then do night songs unfold,
to our crying selves,
moon-stupid praise,
stirred into morning's feathered flow
becoming as all things here below,
bibles on their shelves,
our wasted days,
our oaken, unmanaged lives consoled?

Hole in the Big Top

do you know Gastini
who wanted to be billed
The Great got the charge
and trajectory too great
how he soared
goggled and fire-flung
wildly into the yonder blue
do you know Tatiana
looking up at the hole
her man had gone through
just another filler act
how she tripped
abstracted and bereft
over one of her dancing dogs
do you know Petrov
catcher on the flying trapeze
happy to see a certain
someone kissing the sky
how he imagined
naughty and buoyant
the kiss of the distant ground
do you know Angelica
fallen from the high wire
in tutu and tights
gossamer as smoke
how she lay
disarticulated and open
to an applause of wide eyes
do you know Rolfie
grieving in abject silence
the clown who loved her
unrequited in his happy face
how it ran
storm-water and grease-paint
into a frown of liquid red

do you know Manfred
the tiger-tamer she loved
but who just went right on
cracking his whip
how it kept down
repetitious and shrill
the great heads of the cats
do you know Paulette
whom he would gladly have ridden
like one of her Percherons
in circle after circle
how he'd have leapt
bareback and backbent
if she was not the clown's fool
and do you know Claude
there in tails and topper
master of the three rings
all now quiet as the dead
how he reached
mustachioed and godlike
toward the holes in his big show
toward a hole in the big top

The Long View

Find me in the sand. I am neither
pretty shell nor lost coin. I will not be spent nor kept
on a chain around your neck. The sea
is a distant roar as I am falling from your hand
and when your feet pass on, the sky
will still be blue, the sun will still
glisten on me wet, be I pebble, button
or bit of glass worn smooth, as the tide
fills and then washes all signs of you away.

Eric Wallack

cutting us into mirrors

we are born as diamonds
waiting to be cut
into our final shape
by the moon
but it takes so long
for her powdery bluntness
and apathy
she doesn't care for heaving
and desire for change
she won't recognize beauty
fearing her usurper
the curtain
she does what she's told
but takes her time
sharpened enough
only for a moment
each month
so many stones to hew
and we all demanding
not knowing the source of
precisely calculated blows
not some hasidic
mystic with a loop and
torah studying cleavage
and light under candles
at night
no that creaking mechanical
globe rickety spinning
to and away
cutting us into mirrors of

gold green or blues
is awe measured by
ahhs reflecting nothing
having anything to do
with truth
or beauty
only the ironic inevitability
of dust
green or yellow
which means gray

in reality

Chris Zasada

I Beat My Girlfriend Because a T-Shirt Told Me To!

Honestly, you wouldn't know this is an article about a t-shirt, but we'll get to that in a dozen paragraphs or less.

Here in America, we pride ourselves on being the land of the free, home of the brave, where as far as we're concerned, you can give us liberty or give us death. We also consider all people (well, men, but the old phrasing is obsolete) to be created equal, and we pride ourselves on our strides towards equality. We routinely march into other people's countries, whether as an army or as tourists, and brag about how equal everyone is, and how they should be equal too. Too bad we're basically full of crap.

Not to undermine civil rights movements, which have taken great strides in making the playing field more level over the last century. The problem is, we still take some ideals from the old guard and apply them in more casual, yet still dangerous ways. We don't hang black people because they're black, but many of us white folk still feel a certain unease around those with dark skin, even though we know we shouldn't. We don't arrest people for being poor, but too

many of us who are better off would rather pretend poor people simply aren't there. We don't treat women as property of men, but some men still consider women to be toys for their amusement.

And yet sometimes the discrimination goes the other way, a phenomenon sometimes known as reverse discrimination. This is when a minority does or says something that discriminates against the majority. As politically pleasing and ironic as this term may sound, there is no such thing as reverse discrimination. Even if you're a poor, black, Islamic, teenage lesbian, if you make a crack at rich, white, Christian, middle-aged straights, you're just as evil as any other prejudiced pig.

I just want to pause and point out how stupid the minority-majority term is. Women are considered a minority when compared to men, even though there are more women in the world. Black and Hispanic populations are on the rise, and the mixing of races will phase out the white man as we know him, as if that term really means anything, when you come right down to it. Therefore, since calling a larger group a minority is just stupid, the meaning I'm trying to convey is "power majority" and "power minority," indicating which group has more political power. Of course, as we grow into a more PN (politically nervous) society, who can really say which group has the true power?

I believe it to be a sad state of affairs when the most minor of offensive imagery causes an outcry when applied to a minority group, but when the same imagery is reversed to apply to the majority, everyone seems to think it's a cute joke. Now, I'm not exactly a PC freak that believes that children should be referred to as age-challenged and everyone should be referred to by their exact ancestral background (he's a German, adopted Polish, possibly Native American-American). For example, I've long since abandoned the term "African American" and just use "black" because it's convenient and closer to being correct, though I still use Native American because it's more accurate.

I also believe the idea of equality is a bunch of bull plop. While I'm all for striving for equal rights, I also realize that it's a journey, not a destination. We can never achieve true equality because of one

simple factor in the convoluted equation of human existence: humans.

Humans naturally find comfort in the familiar and fear anything that's strange to them. If you try to tell me that you've never been nervous around someone from a different race, someone with a handicap, or even the opposite sex, I'd have to throw you in prison for perjury. That doesn't mean that you're not a decent human being; it just means that you're, and there's nothing wrong with this, a human being. And human beings tend to develop an eventual loathing towards the things that scare them, despite themselves.

Even if scientists engineered everybody to look exactly the same, dress the same way, and make them do all of the same things at the same time, and live in a big building several thousand miles in size, those people would still form cliques and divide themselves up on some moronically minor difference, like who sits closest to the windows at lunchtime and comes in direct contact with the sun's rays.

But that doesn't mean we can't try, which is more or less the entire point of the civil rights movements. While we will never be equal, we can at least hope that one day we'll treat everyone with respect. That means taking the good with the bad.

Back to the point at hand, which is about offensive imagery; we have reached a point in our society where we are deeply concerned about offending people, whether by offending their religious beliefs, racial identity, or any other such factors that people hold dear. Unfortunately, while we fight against certain things that offend the perceived minority, we don't have any problems with ignoring the personal needs of the majority. In fact, we generally don't even acknowledge such issues.

Such a politically unbalanced incident began at a Toledo K-Mart, where a grassroots group of protestors sprung up, picketing a single t-shirt the store was selling. The t-shirt, made by Route 66 and pictured below, features two stick figures, a boy and a girl. The girl is yelling and jumping up and down while the boy rolls his eyes. The caption under this panel reads "Problem." The next panel has the boy, looking very satisfied with himself, pushing the girl through the

panel border and down to her apparent death (or out of the confines of the shirt; who can say?). The caption here reads “Solved.”



The shirt drew a protest of about fifty people who claim that the shirt makes light of domestic violence. Protest organizer Pat Rizzi, a former employee of K-Mart, and the mother of a woman who was killed in a domestic dispute, gathered together the protestors in an attempt to get the shirt off of store shelves. Protestors believe “people need to speak out about corporations selling violence” and claim “that shirt undoes everything” that violence prevention groups have accomplished. They conclude, “No wonder kids do the things they do.”

With all due respect, this is one of the stupidest things I have ever heard. Don’t get me wrong, domestic violence in any form is unacceptable, and those who try to control their partner with threats of violence deserve swift persecution and punishment. I don’t mean to undermine the tragic reality of domestic abuse or the good intentions of these protestors; it’s just my opinion that they’re being shortsighted and overdramatic.

First of all, this t-shirt isn’t the cornerstone of domestic violence. It’s not even a mild suggestion. It’s a shirt featuring cartoon characters that are acting out what is known as “mild cartoon violence.” If you watch cartoons on television, shows marketed at children, you’ll see

more violence than this, sometimes acted out against women. Frankly, I think there are better ways to protest against this issue.

I don't consider the shirt to be that funny, and I doubt anyone would even pay it much mind if it weren't for the protests, who have inadvertently erected a big sign over the shirt that says "Look at me! I'm bad! You have to have me!" Now I sort of want one...

Which leads me to my main point: why is it that a cartoon depicting men-on-women violence considered absolutely morally reprehensible, but a shirt depicting women-on-men violence is a cute little joke to casually flaunt grrl power?

The very day this story broke, I happened to notice a similar shirt at my local Wal-Mart. After the story aired, I immediately recalled the shirt I saw, so the next day, I marched into Wal-Mart, camera phone at ready, and snapped a shot of not one, but two anti-men shirts, which I left prominently displayed in hopes someone would say something about the similarities and start a protest. Or not, since men really don't care because they know it's a JOKE. Anyway, check out these babies:



The one on the left is more of a male-submission fantasy, but you can tell that the poor guy in this picture is not a willing participant, and may, in fact, be worried that the girl is going to smash his skull.

The one on the right, the one I originally spotted, is a bit more telling. It's very similar to the offending shirt, with the panel and stick figure format, with the roles reversed. In fact, the guy in this one doesn't seem to be doing anything at all, just standing around, in

awe that he could be sexually interested in an organism that deeply detests violence against its own kind, but is more than willing to inflict it on other beings for no apparent reason. In fact, this t-shirt seems to be more violent, because the girl is actually punching the guy out, whereas the guy in the evil t-shirt is just pushing the girl through a cartoon panel, a scenario that statistics show is rather uncommon in domestic violence situations.

So the lesson here is that it's okay to beat up men because they're annoying (or just standing there, it seems), but beating up women is equal to four mortal sins. This kind of mentality pretty much spells doom for the equality civil rights groups believe they are fighting for. Double standards like this that guarantee equal rights are a pipe dream. If we want to be equal in this case, then any depiction of violence against anyone or anything must be eliminated.

Frankly, I'm not willing to make this shift into this humorless, manically PN universe where no one talks or even moves because they're afraid of making an offensive remark or gesture. As for now, we seem content to dwell in our hypocrisy, living in a world where those classed as "minorities," are vindicated from insensitive pigs, and anyone who is white, middle-class (or upper-class), straight, or male is the enemy, and God help you if you happen to be all four.

There are far too many examples of such double standards in pop culture America than I care to research, and you can definitely expect an article about some of those in the future. The point is, to put it into pathetically simple terms, you can't logically condemn one concept that pits majority-against-minority, but celebrate a concept of minority-against-majority, and expect it to equal equality. Either allow both offenses or neither, and you already know where I stand on that one.

Now I am willing to concede that women are the victim of domestic violence far more often than men, so the issue is clearly more sensitive to them. However, the shift from the culture of public dirty jokes and casual flirtation to abject paranoia and fear of sexual harassment lawsuits should, ideally, come with a sustained general respect for men as people, not proportionately lower respect for those who happen to be male as general respect for women continues to rise.

I, of course, am aware that in some ways, women still aren't treated as well as men. This has always perplexed me. I can't honestly remember any time in my life where I thought poorly of a person because they happened to be female. If someone irritates me, I never attribute it to their gender. I just consider them to be jerks.

And don't try to play the ogling card. Yes, I enjoy looking at pretty girls, especially the parts they would probably rather not have me look at. Yes, I like seeing girls without clothes on. So what? Welcome to Human Condition 101, wherein people have SEXUAL ATTRACTIONS TOWARD EACH OTHER. If a girl has a genuine interest in seeing my parts, even when I don't have clothes on, I would be flattered. And on a personal note, just because I have interests in my girlfriend doesn't mean I don't respect her and think of her as a normal human being. That's where the trick lies: even if men occasionally (and I use this in the loosest sense of the word) want to climb on top of our mates, grunt a few times, roll off, and fall asleep, any decent man is still fully capable of respecting his partner.

We're all human, and we should treat each other as fairly as we can. I'm not saying that we can't make fun of one another, because, let's face it, things would be pretty boring that way. To that end, we can't regard one gender or race as an endangered species, protected from the playful assaults of others and expect everyone to be on an even playing field.

My suggestion is this: lighten up and stop looking for scapegoats. I can't possibly imagine the pain of losing a child or loved one to domestic violence, or any violent act, but just because a t-shirt pokes fun at nagging women and the casual dream of men to just make them go away instead of dealing with them doesn't mean men are going to suddenly decide that it's a good idea. That's kind of like banning the Bible because someone takes offense to the parts about people being nailed to trees or tossed into the sea, because their loved ones were killed that way.

So instead of pretending the problem isn't there, let's make fun of it (not the victims, you cad) and create an open dialogue to help prevent the problem from spreading. And let's come to the realization that normal, rational people are not going to justify their

actions because a shirt told them to. I should know, because my “Go Away, Moron!” t-shirt has yet to repel any actual moron.

I can't state this enough: we may have our differences, but just because someone has a different skin color or gender doesn't automatically make them superior or inferior to anyone else. While I believe we can make fun of our differences in order to downplay them, we have to make sure the mockery is dished out in a balanced way, because the moment the scales are tipped too far one way, the other side gets thrown off, and that's when the problems begin. Everyone has a right to be on that scale. Thank you.