



energy

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energy

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Editor's Note by Julie Hambrick

On the headstone of one of the greatest American poets is the phrase "Don't Try." Anyone familiar with Charles Bukowski's poetry is bound to appreciate his cynicism. The irony of this phrase is that Bukowski was on fire, ignited by passion that couldn't help but make its way onto the page in front of him. He literally "tried" his entire life, never giving up, struggling with love and life until he was no more. His gritty writing and sheer honesty make him sometimes less prestigious than his fellow contemporaries. But he was born for writing. Likewise, as writers and artists, something drives us to create. It is a force unstoppable, a conviction that pulls at us until we allow it to take on some sort of life form. There has to be an outlet for our realities, so we try. And try again. For many of us, it appears that "every day turns out to be a little more like Bukowski." I have the distinct opportunity to bring you the second edition of ANC's literary magazine, energy. The response to our first edition of the magazine proved to be just as exciting as the process and publication. Thank you for the support and encouragement.

Student's Note by Brian King

The art of writing, to me, is so many different things. It's an adventure because I get to re-live past experiences and critique my frame of mind from then until now. It's sometimes an emotional rollercoaster with enough twists and turns to leave me drained for days. Writing is the greatest form of expression; it allows me to revisit the past, enjoy the present, and dictate my future. Writing is so liberating and free of boundaries that with the basic essentials, pen and paper, you can be anywhere, anything, any person your imagination can conjure up. From profound pieces to silly slapstick comedy, writing touches every aspect of life. So many avenues of entertainment spin from writing. Just think about your favorite book, movie, or play, not to mention music. Listen to writing in motion, words to a beat. With my pen, I can compose a poem that can have your heart open to the joy of love or I can write a mystery so full of unpredictable happenings you wouldn't ever expect the outcome. When I was younger I looked at writing as punishment assigned by a teacher for misbehaving. Now that I'm older, I know it is a punishment not to be able to write.

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The Heart of Bondero Bay

B.L. Bushong

My true love is miles away,
Down in the waters deep,
She lies below Bondero Bay,
Eternally asleep,

The Merrow swim above her head,
And silent vigil keep,
For she lies there among the dead,
Too sorrowful to weep,

She watches ships that look to glide,
From down within the briny deep,
She knows the secrets locked inside
Her silver sapphire sleep,

My heart is many miles away,
Locked in her coral keep,
I hope I might return someday,
To where my true love sleeps,

That place is many miles away,
Its waters black and deep,
Within the dead Bondero Bay,
I know she waits... and sleeps.



Dragon

Callie Beard



First Kiss

Heather Quinn

First Kiss

Paige Baugh

It's cold outside, it's late October
My heart beats faster, you get closer
I stare down, looking at your feet
Take a step further, you can see my heart beat
Trembling stead, my body starts to shake
You reach out your hand for me to take
Although it's cold my body starts to sweat
I love you already and we haven't even touched yet
As I take your hand you pull me near
Still looking down as you breathe in my ear
You have someone waiting at home
I also have someone sitting alone
I wonder how far this movement is going
But we get closer without knowing
You touch my chin and lift up my head
My eyes saw yours and our lips met
We pull away, eyes still closed
I turn around and start to go
What happens next, what do I do
You love her...and I love you

Poetic Inspiration

Tim Hardin

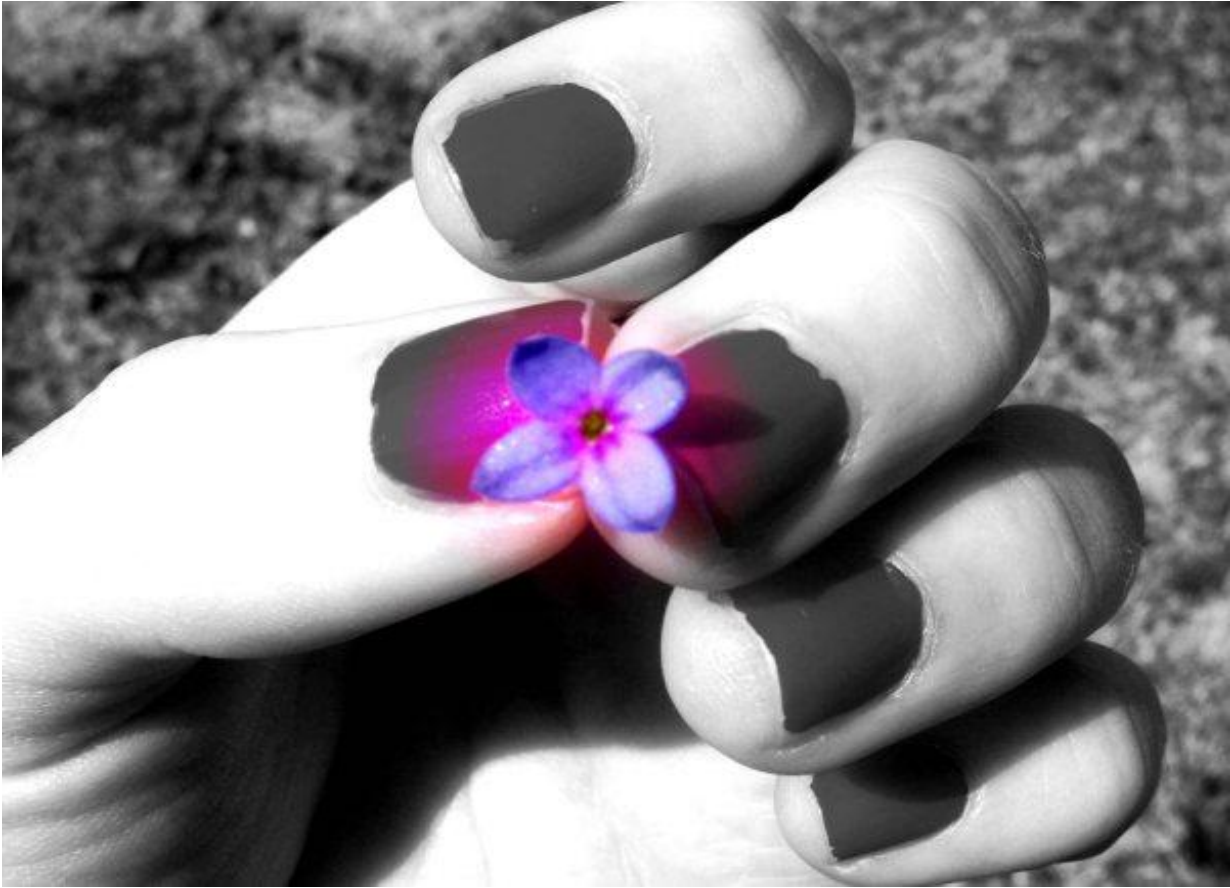
Alas, O' Poetic Inspiration,
Why do you flee from me?
Abandoned, and in desperation,
I boldly beckon Thee!

Come wash over my body and my soul,
All floodgates, do banish-
Stir up my creative waters to flow,
And insipidness, to vanish!

Start a bonfire of imagination,
Ignite my inner spark-
Open windows of illumination;
Gathering daylight from dark!

O' Poetic Inspiration, sadly, I concede,
That my quest, you have deposed!
But Wait! Before my eyes, I perceive,
A poem; metamorphosed!

O' quiet Poetic Inspiration;
Creatively divine-
You flew in under my sense of perception
And dropped this rhyme, in my mind.



Flower

Chelsea Pierce

24/7 Critique

Chelsea Becker

Flash! Pop! The bulb shatters
A still image in black and white
Clothes on racks and on the Floors
Wafer thin models lined up at the door
Hair teased high like the high heels
The life is all about the glitz and the thrills
Only sacrifice makes you a winner
They tell you you've never look thinner
Prada, Gucci, you know them all by name
& if you try hard enough you may discover FAME
If beauty is pain then boy you went through hell
Because your nova status is unattainable
But somehow sells...

Lich, Interrupted

B.L. Bushong

Death and darkness. The two work in concert in my dungeon, my crypt, my sepulcher of solitude. Death has always been present; but the darkness is relatively new to me. I used to sow the seeds of destruction and discord, going everywhere before the Reaper to prepare his grim harvest. Where I walked, there walked Death; where I gazed, Malevolence stared; I was a Necromancer, a living conduit between the living and the dead. But even that conduit eventually crosses over.

Most Necromancers possess a healthy respect for Death, and understanding of his laws and principles, an appreciation for what he does to help preserve the circle of balance. Few dare do as I did, to break that circle of balance and become a Lich, for the price is heavy, and can only be paid in blood.

As part of the ritual, the Necromancer must choose an object, a steadfast and permanent object to contain his soul, the very essence of his being. This phylactery, as it is known, is all that separates the Lich from the lesser undead. As long as the phylactery remains unharmed, the Lich can never truly pass from life, even if the physical body is destroyed.

Knowing this, I chose a small silver music box, of great importance and sentimental value to me in natural life, and now so much more so in life unnatural. When opened, a soft syrupy lullaby played, which had always granted me some degree of comfort in harsh times. It is often the custom of a newly risen Lich to hide its phylactery, to protect it from harm.

I remember the ritual vividly. At the end of it, I went to pick up the precious item, only to receive a nasty shock. The irony! The cruel, cruel irony! As the Fates would have it, my precious music box, so dear to me, and the container of my soul, was crafted from silver, the holiest of metals, and I, as a decidedly unholy being, was incapable of touching it. Much to my dismay, I could not hide my dear phylactery, and the music box simply sat on its pedestal in the center of my crypt.

As I sat and pondered my next move, a cold realization crept over me. I couldn't leave this. I couldn't just walk out and have it sitting here, waiting for some overzealous priest to come and set it aflame, severing my connection to the world, all of my hard work. The Phylactery was everything! Everything I had in the world! I couldn't abandon it. I had to stay and guard it, had to stay and keep it safe. This was the driving force to my unlife. This was my grand purpose.

From the conception of this singular purpose, there was never a doubt in my mind of its validity, of its value. Offering up my immortal soul allowed me to eschew all those bodily functions that would distract me from my sacred purpose: sleep, hunger, thirst, no more would I feel such things. I sat in a corner of the crypt, beginning my long vigil. A great sadness washed over me, as slowly it dawned on me that I might be trapped within the confines of this room for time unending. This tomb had belonged to my family for generations, being built in a time of grand architecture and ornate sensibilities, especially in such a final and solemn thing as a family tomb. It had indeed been beautiful at one time, but had long since succumbed to decay as the last of my

family died off one by one. The structure was holding for now, nothing more than a large room of slate-gray stone. The high ceiling kept out all weather and light, but did nothing to defend me from feeling of cold despair, sharp and penetrating as an assassin's dagger.

Drawers lined the walls of the room, each one containing the slowly decaying remains of a different relative. On each drawer was chiseled a name, and below that, my own hand had drawn different sigils in blood. My ritual had required a great deal of Necromantic energy, drawn from the bodies of my ancestors, former Necromancers all, through my blood.

In the center of the room was a squat stone pillar, only coming up to a height of four and a half feet, which had previously been used to hold a censure while supplications to the spirits of the ancestors were made. The censure told the spirits of your humility, while serving the ever-important purpose of keeping the scent of decaying flesh at bay. This dais was emblazoned with the grotesque and macabre image of Father Death, his skeletal face gazing out imperiously from the deep hood of his iconic robe. In one of his hands was clutched a tall scythe, while in the other hand he held a thick tome. On the forehead of Death's Skull was the thirteen pointed star that represented my family line. It was on this pedestal that my phylactery rested, and never before had Death's expression seemed such a mocking grin. I had violated his precepts, but he had had his justice. Death always wins in the end.

Eventually, the depression slid by as minutes flowed into hours, hours into days, days into weeks. Time seemed at a standstill, but time was moving, always moving in a slow downward spiral into oblivion. My dead flesh had begun to decompose; both of my hands had been reduced to skeletal remains, and a good portion of my face had long since rotted away. For the first time since my transformation, I looked truly horrific. Parts of my body were becoming entirely skeletal.

I paced; I fidgeted; I twitched. Since that slow spiral into years long depression I did anything I could to stay moving. If I stopped, I might stop forever, and then who would protect my music box? What would stop someone from walking in and –

I started; I believed something was stirring in the darkness, some figure bent on destroying me, and all I had worked so hard to achieve! I launched a fireball into the darkness, scarcely thinking of the consequences. A flash illuminated the area, and with a searing pain I found myself blind. Everything was black; I hear a rustle behind me and launch another fireball spell. More pain; this time burning... Has my hand caught fire?!

I began blindly flailing about, the smell of burning, rotted flesh acrid in the air, stinging the nostrils as my own howls of pain rang in my ears, confusing me further. I felt my hand strike something, and then more pain... familiar pain... the pain caused by... silver...

My little music box, my world, clattered to the floor, and so did I, weeping as I groped blindly for my phylactery. My charred hand found it, my palm feeling that familiar silver burn. My vision quickly returned, eyes slowly re-adjusting to the darkness. My phylactery lay turned over under my palm; I quickly righted it on the floor and removed my hand, sobbing heavily over the burnt skeletal fingers.

I lay in the corner and curled up, staring blindly into the darkness.

As years passed, I remained in that position; the weather came and went; rain beat on the roof of the mausoleum; thunder echoed in the distance. A small hole appeared in the roof; when it rained, water dripped onto my skull, now completely devoid of any remains of my face; in the morning a thin beam of sunlight shone in and shined off of the silver of the music box. The light was taunting me, laughing at me. It knew. It knew that I could never venture into it again. Damn it. Damn it! I say damn the light! They mock me. They all mock me. Better I should have died than to have suffered the Hell of Wasted Immortality!

My rage and my sorrow were all that were left to me. All other scraps of humanity had rotted away long ago with my body. Or was it long ago? How long had I been here, neither alive nor dead, I a dark room surrounded by darkness and dust? Dust, dust... so much dust. We all come from dust... We are all going back to dust, and some much sooner than others. If ever I thought this path would lead me to watch myself become dust, I never would have ventured it!

I was mostly skeleton now, my hands merely charred-black bone. I moved occasionally; never far. Biologically speaking, I shouldn't have been able to do such, for I had no muscles, but magic is about knowing the rules of non-magical things and then breaking them. I broke the rules of death... As a result, I was also able to break the rules of anatomy. My phylactery was lying in the floor, still in the same spot decades after I myself had knocked it from its pedestal in a blind fit. I tended to stare at it; the years hadn't changed it, my soul saw to that. Its silver shone as brightly as it had the day I first set eyes on it... The day I bound my soul to it... Was that the first time I saw it? It's getting so hard to remember... For so long, I was preoccupied with my box, my box... Nothing but my box...

It was my property before, wasn't it? I believe... the property of... of... what was my name? Had I been here so long that I had forgotten my own name? How old was I? What circumstance brought me into this place, and what kept me? The box... nothing but the box remained... The box brought me in... The box kept me... My phylactery... It was the only thing keeping me in my crypt. It was the only explanation... It was the box's fault. It was the box's doing. Everything came back to the box and there was nothing I could do about it... I couldn't touch it, for it would burn me... I couldn't destroy it, for it would destroy me... I was powerless before the tiny silver music box. A thought suddenly occurred; in the entire time I spent in this room, I hadn't opened the box... It had been forever since I've heard its tune... I felt compelled... Driven... I had to open the box... I had to hear its tune again... So many memories lost... This was all that remained to me from the life I lived before my present Hell...

My fingers found the latch... It burned... I ignored it... I lifted the lid; there was no tune. No music played, to my great dismay. Had the years robbed this box of its song, but not its shine?! I looked among the box's inner gears and springs. Sitting on top was a shimmering, translucent orb. It lit the room with a soft, comforting light... Was this... my soul?

I gingerly picked the orb out of the box. It fit snugly in my palm; I felt a great comfort

radiating from it. No doubt about it, this small, shimmering orb was me... The thing that had kept me so transfixed, had occupied all of my faculties and my time... Everything that kept me sentient, but no longer sane. What I held in my hands was what I had given up in order to become what I was. I paid this as a price. And now it was back in my hands, again. As I held it, the most interesting thing began to occur... My flesh began to return to the hand that held my soul... Startled, I dropped the orb. It didn't fall normally, but rather slowly, drifting like a feather back into the box, where it rested in its original position. I closed my phylactery, and wept silently in the corner, eyes on my little damned box.

Death and darkness. The two work in concert, keeping me in asylum. Maybe one day I'll be whole again. Maybe one day, sanity will return. Until that day, that glorious, far-off, nigh impossible day, I shall remain here in the darkness. Broken... Shattered... Interrupted.

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Static
Gwen Jacobs



Vernichtungslager

Sheila Wurm

1982 -83 (rewritten May 1998)

VERNICHTUNGSLAGER

(...with pail and shovel -

I dug her grave.)

She is dead now -

but still moves along the marshland -

still feeding geese along the Sola -

hair as blond as German children

bleached now as the bones of elephants

that lie in sacred graveyards lonely as time...

(...with pail and shovel -

I dug her grave.)

My face then like a Slavic girls,

round and innocent like a full moon

...I dug her grave.

It was - too late to -

cast my eyes to the wailing wall -

(her grave now long as buried river beds

snaking their way as if with tired fingers

along this unending graveyard of the world...)

It was the new social order of things

that no one questioned,
when people disappeared,
left early on trains
through desolate fields
where old women stood
unblinking
like reeds along the Vistula
whose sons had left in ribbons and confetti
wearing brilliant uniforms
they stood like owls in trees
whispering in forsaken barns
whispering omens in the eaves...
they stood like - heavy hooded wooden statues
marking graves -
whose simple prayers -uttered from toothless mouths
rose and scattered like wood smoke
like sleeping birds shook loose from trees
aimless souls with heavy wings
they stood, like groves of Poplars marking time
along a swollen earth of rotting corps ...
It was all the same really,
It was every ones death. You and I
in our innocence

with our self-indulgent fat faces

we dug her grave.

And with pail and shovel

I found my bones

(in graveyards long as buried rivers -
snaking their way - as if with tired fingers...
along this unending graveyard of the world)

...and with pail and shovel I dug my grave

Word Salad

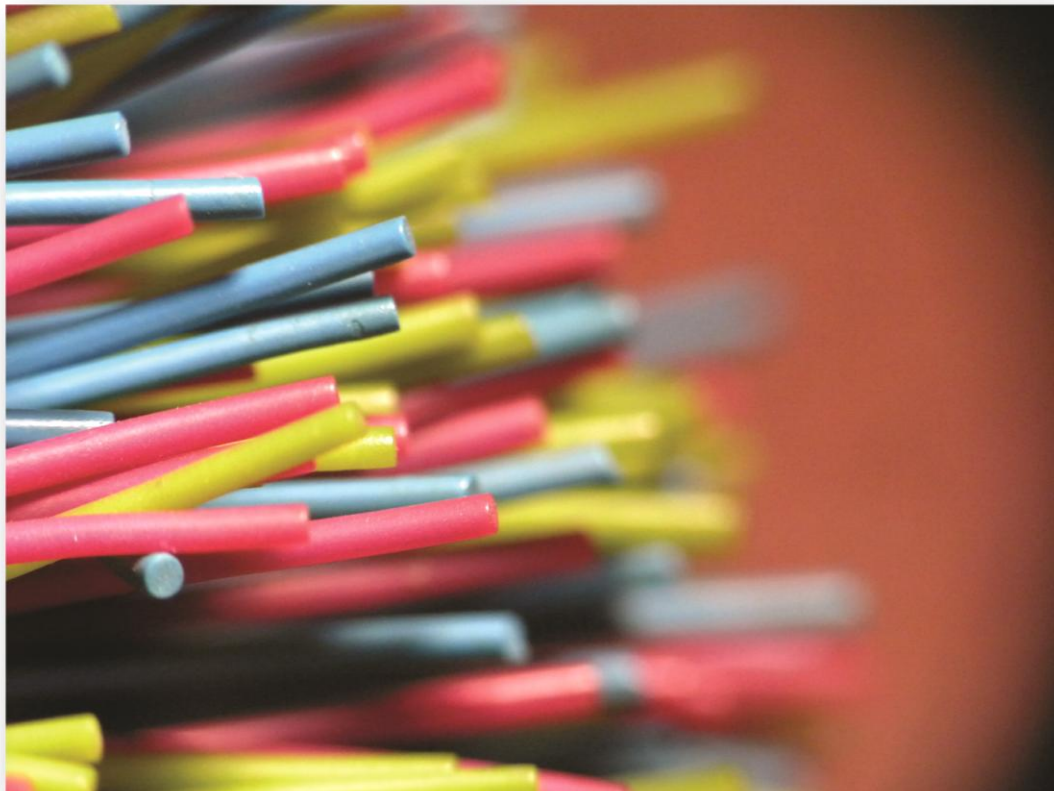
B.L. Bushong

Dancing along the blade of a knife Master Sun and Madame Moon and their babies the Stars fell tumbling downwards towards Mother Earth falling endlessly towards the final oblivion that the children foretold drawing on the walls of their fathers study in crayon Little Prophets came marching to the beat of a bass drum rolling up thru the valley til the break of day that never came because the parents had their say to keep their babies in line as the world hurtled toward them and they were caught complete unawares by sudden impact Kings and Queens and Knights and Rooks and Jokers and Sinners and even the Saints couldnt deal with the monsters their fast and loose living created for them to deal with Gods tears raining endlessly down on a poor little world and the monsters of monsters and the sun and the moon and the stars in the sky came clattering to the floor like so many plates dropped from dowels their spinning interrupted because the man with the microphone is ready to cut the program short because hes in our living rooms looking wholesome for a living and sleeping with the entirety of the production staff like golfers and senators and presidents and patriots adult situations that they say are a sin but they keep doing them anyway the worlds gonna stop and let these people off some day and I can only pray that EARTH DONT STOP FOR ME Ive had too much for too long but I just cant stop and all I can hope is they dont tell me Im the only one they say is crazy...

I'm the only one who's sane.

Old Fun

Lance
Nettles



Room for Improvement

Brian King

Outraged, dazed and confused trapped inside this circle.
A time consuming maze where skies are cloudy gray and thoughts are color purple.
Ferocious, insecure, petty but dominant, how can we have so many characteristics?
As youth, life goals were so promising our beliefs may not have been realistic.
From Shiites to Sunni, Baptist, Christian still lives inside us all a side that's wicked.
Instead of casting judgment being stubborn, why not identify the problem and lift it?
Maybe the solution is too easy, we need a more complex remedy.
How about everyone play their role instead of numbing the pain with drugs and Hennessy?
But which would you prefer to fix the pain or pretend it doesn't exist?
For my pain is everlasting and can only be hidden by an eclipse.
It takes something of great magnitude to awake us and show we are all gagged and bound.
Now it's up to us to shake free and put our feet back on solid ground.

in comfortable recline

Vince Shemwell

in comfortable recline
and trying on a mad red dress thaumaturgy blessed in Kant's bones.
ranganatha smiles on novalis - only to ease his heart down adisesha's spine.

"read me that thing you were talking about when we used to look eye to eye."

"do you have a light?"

imprudent moment that feeds shesha percocet - now she is a place to rest his head.

"i hate marlboros..."

both withdrawn like mass and open mouthed, turned the unease of familiarity to pretending
invulnerability

"roads are God's way of saying nothing's true."

"but you said it with that look of tired water. it was different and strange."

ghosts leave scratches and sticky notes saying things like "not until you taste the filter"

"everything is quick to get stoned, matter-of-fact, and deaf tongue and ear to God each time we slip
inside of one another. and yet fortunately, we are forgetful - lessons but half learned ... and lesser
kept."

"I like the way you dance, but you should talk a little less." she said
sleeping.



George Harrison
Gregg Kemp

Chapter 1: A Strange Beginning
Excerpt from *How To Make A Freak*
Whitney Cooper

Darkness expanded leaving only a small rim of brown showing. He pressed his olive finger tip to his nostril sucking in air with all his might. Frances's pupils expanded wider as the residual cocaine hit his blood stream. He closed his eyes and his heart beat heavily against his chest. Everything in the room felt new. The carpeting felt like small feathers dancing under his fingers, as he leaned back on his hands. Frances swayed back and forth hearing the soft music play that was not there.

The wooden table was covered with a large mirror. Razor blades, plastic baggies, and McDonald's straw littered the top the powder covered mirror. Tiny white particles stuck to the glass as the only reminder of the previous five lines.

"You wanna nother hit?" he rasped as he pointed to the last line. Frances continued to sway to the beat of his imaginary music.

"No," her voice was strained " I, I," she struggled with her words. Pain had began to take over. It was not the pains of want, which she knew all too well. These pains came from deep within her stomach. Serenity could feel the small life inside of her kicking, fighting against the pain. "Something is wrong." her voice was only a whisper. As the meek words existed her mouth, pain reached it's tortures hand out and pulled and on her insides.

"What?" Frances opened his now black eyes "What do you mean something's wrong. This is the best shit the guy had. Do you know how much I paid for this blow?" his voice began to grow louder as anger consumed him. "Do you?" silence overwhelmed the living room. He leapt from the grown to his feet. He was looming over Serenity. It was too late for her to give any answer.

Frances grabbed her red ponytail, curling the hair tightly between his plump fingers. "Do you?" he yanked her hair downward so her face would meet his. Serenity began to tremble as her eyes met his gapping black holes. Sweat began to bead from her freckled forehead.

"There's something wrong with the baby, Frances. I need a doctor!" Her voice was meek and trembled with fear. Serenity placed a hand on her swollen stomach and felt the life in her kick and move.

Frances's grip loosened with her words. He knew he had to act and act quick. Their lives and lively hood all depended on this child. Frances wrapped one arm around Serenity's shoulders and placed the other one under her blue jean clad legs. With strength he never felt before he was driven by something. An emotion foreign to him, it started in his chest and spread throughout his being. Every muscle in him tightened as he lifted Serenity from the blue couch and rushed her to the car.

Frances fumbled with his keys, he knew time was slipping. The nearest town was at least thirty miles away. Time was moving at alarming rates, every second counted.

Frances was lost in thought until Serenity cried "Oh dear God," blood was quickly covering her lap. The cloth seats in the Ford Probe absorbed some of the blood while the remainder began to spill into the floor board. Once again pain reached up its hand and pulled at her insides. This time it was followed by fluttering against the sides of her belly. Serenity knew as long as the baby was kicking everything would be fine. She convinced herself the baby was fine.

One of the first skills Serenity acquired from being a new mother was lying to herself. From the moment she knew she was pregnant she filled her own head full of lies. The first lie was she did not know how she had gotten pregnant, when really she knew the exact day she had gotten pregnant; it was when Frances and she took ecstasy for the first time. Everything just felt so good.

To Serenity, being on ecstasy was having the world turned on vibrate. The world was so breathtaking on ecstasy- the colors, the sounds, and the feelings; especially the feelings.

The biggest lie Serenity managed to tell herself was that her drug addiction would not affect her child. Doctors began questioning Serenity's lifestyle when she was seven months pregnant and had not gained a pound. "I have horrible morning sickness" she would lie. At what cost had she lied to herself and the doctors? Would her own selfishness cost them everything? No more did the heaviness of these thoughts settle on her mind, then they had arrived at the hospital's emergency entrance.

"I need some help!" Frances screamed as he stormed into the emergency room. The waiting room was white with pink chairs. All of the nurses, standing behind a glassed in desk, wore pink. The white tile faded away as Serenity's blood slowly hit the ground. With each motion more blood began to splatter on to the floor. All of the pink in the room surged around Frances; he just knew it was Serenity's blood covering the chairs and the nurses. Frances turned in circles unsure of where to go; all he could see was blood.

"Sir," a tall, brunette nurse called through the glass, "sir, what can I do for you? What is the problem?" Her voice had already grown impatient. Frances was spinning around while hold Serenity close to his chest. Serenity was beginning to grow pale. "Sir! What has happened to your wife?" The nurse began to beat on the double paned glass.

"She's pregnant and, and..." Frances could not find the words. How do you tell a stranger you have murdered your unborn child? Tears began to form in his still black eyes, "Please, please help us." For the first time in his life, guilt flooded him. He was facing the nurse as he offered up Serenity's lifeless body.

A tall blonde male nurse came running through the swinging doors; he was pushing a pink clad gurney with all his force. The nameless man grabbed Serenity from Frances's arms and placed

her on the gurney. Her eyes fluttered; she felt powerless even though her heart was beating rapidly against her chest. Serenity's mind was blank as she was vigorously moved back through the emergency doors. Frances left behind his Guns and Roses t-shirt glued to his body with blood, stood there frozen as Serenity disappeared.

"Ma'am I need to know your name and how far along you are?" The male nurse had a calm and tranquil voice. Light glimmered through his blonde hair as he rushed Serenity to the OB wing. "Ma'am have you taken anything today? Ma'am?" Serenity began to float in and out of consciousness. The male nurse began to take the form of an angel, the fluorescent lights forming a halo around his head. Serenity reached out a blood soaked hand toward his cheek.

"My name is Serenity Stuart. Are you here to take my baby? God has sent you for my baby because I didn't have it three days ago." Serenity had a look of peace on her face. The thought of not having to raise this child brought her peace of mind. Before the nurse could answer, darkness surrounded Serenity, and she gladly welcomed it.

"Sir," the dark haired nurse had taken Frances's arm in her hand. She could feel his pulse vibrating through his skin. There was blood up to his elbows; it covered the front of his pale blue jeans and stained his t-shirt. Frances looked like a killer. He slowly turned his head to the nurse who he knew was wearing Serenity's blood. His enlarged pupils met her cold eyes. "Your wife informed the other nurse of who you are." She bit down on her thin pink bottom lip "We have already contacted them and they are on their way. If you will just have a seat, Frances, it will all be over soon."

Frances ripped his arm from her hands. "Who are you? Who are you to call them, who gave you the right?" His blood covered index finger met her pointed nose. "Answer me!" His voice was frantic but he knew the answer, he knew the deal Serenity and he had made. Why would the hospital not notify them? They were paying the bills.

"Sir, you need to come with me and clean up," her eyes narrowed. "They will not be happy with you, especially not in this condition." The nurse turned and headed up the long hallway while Frances reluctantly followed. Time had lost all boundaries; the cocaine was hitting him hard. His body felt light and powerful as he zipped by the patients' rooms. Everything was a blur, doorways moved like rail cars, the lights buzzed crazily. To Frances the hospital was alive. Finally, the nurse stopped at a pink clad washroom.

"Frances, there are towels along with everything else you need in here" her voice was void of any human emotion. "Go get cleaned up and someone will come and get you when they arrive."

"I am not going in there" Frances violently shook his head. "It is covered in blood! Everything here is covered in blood." The nurse closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She knew she was not paid enough to deal with someone on a bad trip.

"Frances, there is not any blood;" She paused, looking Frances over, "well not in there. Go clean up, sober up, and someone will come get you." Her tone was firm as though she was scolding a child. She was not going to be pulled into his delusion; she turned on her white Nikes and walked away.

Frances reached in a blood covered left hand to turn on the light. The walls were covered in pink wall paper. There was a shower with a sliding glass door and a white toilet. Large white towels filled a wicker basket on the floor and a solitary yellow daisy sat in a vase next to the sink. The room was filled with the refreshing smell of eucalyptus. Frances walked toward the mirror above the sink.

The man staring back at him was a monstrous reflection. Frances leaned over the sink pressing his large bulbous nose to the mirror. He studied the reflection, the man in the mirror was his Mr. Hyde and he Dr. Jekyll. Frances reasoned; he only wanted to have fun, make his life full of

laughter and be surrounded by friends. So was it his fault whenever he took a magical substance and this crazed wide eyed manic appeared?

Frances turned on the water. Steam rose up from the white sink as he dipped his blood ensconced hands. He picked up the soap and began to scrub. Frances lathered his entire forearm with soap, and with one hand rubbed as hard as he could. Clusters of small pink bubbles filled the sink and were washed away by the boiling water. Frances began to scrub harder, tearing at his skin with his nails. Still pink suds fell into the sink and then disappeared into nothingness. "If only I could wash everything away" Frances said in a lonesome whisper.

A heavy knock came on the bathroom door. "Frances, their car is about to arrive." Frances did not even make it into the shower. His clothing was still soaked in blood but his arms were clean. Frances took one last look at the monster in the mirror and left. He was going to meet them. He was going to be forced to face them with the truth; no lies could cover his and Serenity's activities.

Frances made his way down the long hallway. As he reached the emergency room entrance they were standing in front of the sliding glass doors. The man was in his fifties with chestnut curly hair parted on the side. He wore a white button up shirt with black slacks and a black suit jacket. A pipe hung from the right side of his mouth, and his slack jaw tightened at the sight of Frances. On the man's right arm was a woman who appeared to be in her thirties. She was wearing a fur shawl on top of a black dress. She had short blonde hair which framed her wicked face. She placed one black stiletto in front of the other as her plump breast lead the way into the hospital.

"Frances," her ruby lips oozed with his name, "I think you boys should go outside and talk about this mess." The ladies male counterpart released his hold over her. He turned on a booted heel and marched back out the sliding glass doors and out of sight. Frances slipped pass the blonde debutant. Her eyes narrowed with disapproval as she studied him walking away.

The air outside was cool for March. The spring wind brought a refreshing sensation to Frances and for a moment he forgot what was happening. Frances made his way around the brick laden building taking deep breaths. A knot formed in his chest as he walked. Just as Frances's anticipation reached its peak a hand reached out from an alleyway and grabbed his blood sodden t-shirt.

"You have really messed things up this time." The man's grip tightened around Frances's shirt. Pushing Frances against a brick wall, he placed his free fist next to Frances's head. "Did you think we would not find out, did you think you could hide this?" The man bit down harder on his wooden pipe. "Of all the things we have come to expect from you, this tops them all!" A look of disgust washed over the man's soft features. "I want you to know if the child does not make it, this is the end of you!" The man pulled Frances from the wall and slammed him back into it the hard brick as though to make his point.

Tears began to flow from Frances's eyes. The older man pushed him against the wall again, harder this time, knocking out all of Frances's breath. He began to sob and try with all his might to catch his breath and to wrangle in his thoughts. The man pushed his forehead against Frances's face. Frances could feel the heat from his wooden pipe on his cheek, and he was able to see the anger in the man's eyes. Silent tears streaked down Frances's olive skin.

"We had a deal," the man said and released his grip on Frances. The man in the black suit turned and walked out of the alley way.

"But Dad," Frances cried. With his back pressed against the brick wall, Frances let his legs give way. His hands and knees were now touching the cool white gravel walk way. Frances could no longer hear his father's heavy boots nor could he smell the sweet aroma of vanilla tobacco. Frances's father, Jesse Stuart, had already entered the hospital, leaving Frances alone.

In the distance, Frances could hear small birds calling out to one another. The wind carried a faint smell of rain and tulips to his damaged nostrils. The world around him was tranquil, but the world inside him was at war. Frances, still kneeling, tried to calm his thoughts. The path leading up to this day was unrecognizable to him.

While most men would try to reason what they could change, or ponder if they could just go back, or maybe beg for a second chance; Frances did neither. Frances was a stranger to empathy. In fact, Frances was a stranger to all emotions except for jealousy, lust, anger, hatred, and, at brief moments, happiness. For Frances, it was rare if the thought of another individual ever even entered his mind.

"God," Frances called out "I know I said I would not call you again, but I need your help." He took a deep breath and felt the chat underneath his hands and knees pushing into him. "You see I am up here at this hospital and well," Frances stopped and looked around before continuing "I need something to get through this. It does not have to be coke, it can be anything. This is just all too real for me, so if you could send me something I would be grateful." A small quiver spread throughout Frances's body.

After completing his half hearted prayer, Frances picked up a piece of white stone with his left hand. He turned it around in front of his face and thought of all the things he could do with a rock of coke so large. For Frances now had long forgotten the frightening circumstances which brought him to the hospital, and all he could think of was getting high. Maybe, Frances thought, he could find a phone and contact a dealer he knew in Newport. Or he could just get in the car and leave. His parents would take care of Serenity and if the child was born they could take care of it, too. All that really mattered was getting stoned as soon as possible.

As Frances set out on his adventure, the rest of the Stuarts were in the hospital. Serenity was still in surgery while Jesse Stuart and his wife, Bethany, sat in the pink clad waiting room.

“So, what do you think?” Bethany asked as she held out her right hand examining her perfectly manicured red fingernails. “Do you think he is using again?” She pursed her lips out and turned her head as though she was looking into a mirror.

“Yes, I know he is, and I do not know what to do about it,” Jesse answered, turning his pipe sideways in his mouth and chewing on it. “We sent them both to rehab, we bought them a house; we gave them fifteen thousand dollars to get started. I just do not know what else to do.” Jesse sat there staring across the room.

“Well,” Bethany looked around the room “where is our dear son Frances?”

“Gone, I am sure.” Jesse took a deep breath and shook his head.

As his wife began to prattle on about her thoughts on the subject, Jesse was engulfed by his own. He was the owner of a multimillion dollar construction company. He traveled all over the world building and buying up property. Most problems, as he had learned in business, would go away with enough money. In most circumstances, that is how the Stuarts dealt with problems; they paid for them to disappear. Yet, he thought, how much money would it take to stop this? Do I have enough money to fix this, or is there enough money in the world to fix it? Just as swiftly as the thought had come into Jesse’s mind, he pushed it aside. He knew there was no other option but to fix things. By now, Jesse had stopped listening to Bethany. Faintly he heard every few words she spoke. He began to nod his head in agreement with whatever useless suggestion his wife had. He was engulfed by his own thoughts, leaving Bethany to talk on to no one.

Hours crept by. Nurses passed silently down the brightly lit hallway, each of them wearing bright pink scrubs and white tennis shoes. Some delivered medications, others flowers and some had the daunting task of removing individuals who had passed. The hospital was alive and humming with life.

Bethany and Jesse Stuart sat in the waiting room. Jesse fell under the spell of the deep hum coming from the soda machine. His eyes grew heavier by the moment while Bethany flipped through a year old edition of *Cosmo*. Jesse pressed his head against the cement walls of the hospital waiting room. His eye lids grew heavy and began to flutter. The waiting room slowly disappeared around him, and he was beginning to fall into the warm safety of sleep.

Suddenly, there was a hand pressing against Jesse's right arm. He could feel someone watching him. Jesse jolted up right to find an unfamiliar face staring back at him. The room swirled as the dregs of sleep frittered away.

"Mr. Stuart, I am so sorry. I have some news."

"What?" Jesse pushed himself up in the straight back chair. The stranger's face was now coming into focus. It was Dr. Lawrence, a close family friend and Serenity's attending doctor. The doctor's black hair was pulled into a tight pony tail. Her white scrubs were covered in maroon stains.

"Jesse, I am so sorry to wake you." she was still leaning in close to Jesse's face talking in a whisper.

"What is," Jesse struggled through the fog of sleep. "Is the baby all right? Did something happen?" His heart beat hastened just as the realization of not leaving the hospital hit him. Panic washed over Jesse as he turned away from Dr. Lawrence's unwavering stare to see Bethany. She was sitting in the exact same position as when Jesse drifted off to sleep. Bethany was not alarmed by Dr. Lawrence's arrival; Jesse could see that clearly, as she continued to thumb through a magazine. Jesse blinked several times in an attempt to wash away the events unfolding before him.

"Jesse, Jesse" A smile broke upon Dr. Lawrence's tired tan face. "It is a girl." The smile on her face grew wider.

For the Stuart family, at this moment, the sins of Serenity and Frances disappeared. Now a new life entered the twisted situation. A beautiful baby girl swaddled in innocence was now their focus. The hard decisions that faced Jesse Stuart now disappeared as he looked through the glass into the hospital's nursery. He scanned all of the bassinets until he saw her. Her name, to Bethany's dismay, was Tyrannie Lynn Stuart, and she wore a small, pink hat and was wrapped in a tiny, white blanket. She was the most beautiful baby in the nursery. No, Jesse thought, in the world.

Tyrannie's tiny right hand laid by her smooth pallid face, and she moved the fingers of her right hand as though she were waving to Jesse. From this very moment, Jesse was in love, a love greater than the love felt for Frances, or his sister, Jesse Jane; a love greater than the one that tied Jesse to Bethany. The love was deeper than the obligatory love of a parent to a child and even stronger than the weathered love of marriage. This love, for Tyrannie, was not forced by nature but was just as deep as and more powerful than any love Jesse knew. Jesse, was put on this earth to protect this child, he told himself. All the money and power Jesse had was to give Tyrannie the best life possible.

Jesse looked over at Bethany's face. He did not know what she was thinking and really was not concerned with it. I make the money, Jesse told himself, and I am the head of this family. Jesse stood up straight and smiled at Bethany while she peered into the nursery with him. Neither of them spoke. They each continued to stare at the new life before them. Taking Bethany's left hand in his right they made a silent vow. No matter what struggles would come or hardships they would face being older parents, Tyrannie would be theirs.

I am tossed around lightly every day

Chelsea Pierce

I am tossed around lightly every day.
I become more meaningless with every second,
As people use me for merely an effective emotion.
Slipping off of tongues through unfamiliar lips and whispers,
Reaching out and wrapping insecurities with a false sense of stability.
Giving people what they want, because I am strong enough to do so.
I have the potential to hurt someone and am feared by many.
Yet, I am nothing but a four-letter word,
Used excessively in a meaningless three-worded sentence.

Lucy

April Walker





Antithetic

Demonta Waters

In a parallel existence
I dwell unnoticed
Yet I occupy the same world as you
Life treats you well I see
You radiate in the ambient sunlight
Dancing gracefully on the soft earth
While I soak under an ominous storm cloud
Seeing you wonderfully singing loud and proud
You blossom like a beautiful flower
I cringe like a frightened little boy
I cower as if a Meer Kat
Hiding from trials that come my way
I so envy your perpetual bliss
You are the embodiment of harmony
I can only hope to find serenity as you
I'll remain housed in the shadows
Far from where I can be a spectacle
And inhabit the murky shadows of the world

At this Particular Moment

Brian King

At this particular moment in time I knew my life had to change. Everything I considered to be normal was abnormal. No sixteen year old should have been dealt this hand in life or forced to play it out. As I laid in and out of consciousness I thought about how I ended up in this emergency room bed.

I grew up in a middle class family, the youngest of six children in Benton Harbor, MI. Although we were a middle class family, I never wanted for anything. Financially, we were a blessed family. By the age of seven, during the summer I worked with my father doing construction. The work was very hard, but it embedded a strong work ethic and responsibilities in me at a young age. Also, it gave me a sense of how hard my parents worked to provide for my sister and brothers, which made me not want to accept handouts or take advantage of their hard work.

By the time I was eleven, I had inherited the talent of mimicking and could duplicate whatever I had seen. Since the next sibling in age to me is my brother Andre, his being seven and a half years older than I am made me see a lot. Andre was incredibly book smart. He hung around with a lot of street smart guys, so he combined the two and was a dominate for in whatever he chose to do. First, he began shooting dice. He quickly learned that gambling was a 50/50 change of winning or losing. He began pad rolling and shooting combinations, a proven scientific way to increase your odds of winning by 85%. I was like a sponge; I soaked up everything I saw and duplicated it.

At the age of twelve, I was making so much money. I bought my friends and myself school clothes for the entire year just off my winnings from shooting dice. With my parents working so hard, it was easy for me to be sneaky. All I had to do was keep my grades up and I could continue hustling, undetected. School, to me, came naturally. I never applied myself and was a honor roll student, so I had plenty of time to hone my skill of gambling. Until I was introduced to the drug game.

It accidentally happened, but it changed my life forever. Still at the tender age of twelve, I spent a night at my sister Kyna's house who was nine years my senior. My sister was book and street smart. She fell in love with a low level crack dealer by the name of Cass. Within a year's time, Kyna had transformed Cass's operation into their operation and into a five hundred dollars a day operation. In the early nineties, that was a very productive operation. Those numbers would be very productive today, even. But the night I spent in Kyna's house, I woke in the middle of the night and saw Cass in the kitchen. It looked as if he were baking a cake of some sort on top of the

stove. He wasn't; he was making crack cocaine. I watched his every move in amazement, the fascination alone had me ready to try a new hustle. Not to mention, my brother Andre who everyone said I was a little version of was already deep in the drug game, making an average of a thousand dollars a day. I don't know if it was my siblings or the movie *New Jack City*, but in my mind it felt natural to switch from gambling to grinding.

I purchased a half ounce of powder cocaine from an associate of my brother and used my best friend Marcus's home to convert the powder into crack. I repeated the process I had seen Cass do and I successfully took the fourteen grams of powder and covered it into a solid twenty eight grams of crack cocaine. I started selling and recruiting friends to sell for me. The money was easy and fast from selling drugs. When I turned fourteen, I had my own fully furnished apartment. I was not afraid of police or being caught by them because I didn't make sales anymore myself. All I did was buy the powder, cook it, and distribute it to my friends and wait for them to bring my money back. The only thing I was afraid of was the hurt and devastation my parents would encounter if they found out about my "other life." So I made it my business to sleep at their house every night throughout the week to eliminate any suspicions.

By the age of sixteen, I was going strong. I had lost four friends, three to jail and one was killed, but I had accumulated a lot of riches. I had a convertible top 5.0 Mustang, a Chevy suburban, and two sea doo's. In my mind, all these things compensated for those other losses. Those other losses did force me to start back making sells myself. It didn't bother me because I felt no one could out hustle me anyway.

On a cold October night, I got a page that read 1220450911, which meant a person at 1220 Main St. had \$450 dollars to spend and 911 was an emergency come quick. I was with my girlfriend, Sharese, at this time, and she was already complaining that I didn't spend any time with her, which meant that she would definitely be coming on this sale. I stopped by my stash house and picked up five hundred dollars worth of crack and proceeded to make the delivery. On the ride over, Sharese complained, "when are you going to stop, don't you have enough money? You need to quit for me, please." I just shrugged her comments off because I felt she only wanted me to quit to spend more time with her not when I was buying her things or taking her on trips. So we arrived at the destination in about twelve minutes; I prided myself on being quick. When I got out of the car, the chill of the night almost forced me to back into the warmth of the car. I would later find out that was my mind first speaking to me. I went to the front door of the house, and it was so dark along with the entire

neighborhood. It almost looked like a ghost town. I knocked once and was greeted by a stick figure man named JC who let me in. JC asked "Did you take care of me, B?" Don't I always I responded. He threw me the money, so I threw him the package. I turned and walked back towards the door. He had already begun to light up some of the dope. I tried to get out quickly because the smell of it made my stomach turn. I left and was counting the money, not focused on my path back to the car. I glanced up for a second and a masked man wearing all black appeared before me. I almost didn't have time to react because he was already in motion swing the blade towards my face. I ducked, my adrenaline pumping so hard I didn't realize he had hit me with the razor blade. I had dropped the money and reached for his mask. He swung the blade towards my face again. I ducked and uppercut him. He staggered back and took off running. I gathered the bloody money and got into the car, happy to escape the attempted robbery.

Sharese screamed hysterically, "you're bleeding!" I cut the light on and looked in the mirror; blood gushed from my neck and my ear, which was cut in half. Instantly I felt the pain. Driving to the emergency room, I just thought whether JC tried to set me up or not. I don't know if the rage I felt now caused the blood to squirt out more, but I looked like a geyser at this point the way I dispensed blood. When I made it to the ER, they would not give me service because I was under age and refused to give my parents' names, so I passed out due to the loss of blood. I couldn't believe how horribly wrong this night was. I couldn't believe how horribly wrong my life was. A very intelligent child destined for greatness, excelling in everything I applied myself in, ruined by illogical beliefs and success. I knew if God felt my life to be worthy enough to survive the attack, I would change my life around for the better. I woke up heavily bandaged and stitched later that morning. Looking at the scars, I knew selling crack was no longer an option.



Water Lillies

Hunter Vandergriff

Haiku

Rob Shirk

"The Cat"

Cat in the window
Ears back, tail swishing, focused
Bird outside taunting.

"Stranded"

Cold, desolate night
Sinister, foreboding, bleak
No one hears your cries.

"A Strangers Eyes"

Eyes that follow you
Watching, wanting, and waiting
Don't go home tonight.

Tone

Rachel Thieme



Thunderstorm
Chris Cloninger



Lessons Learned

Hamzah Goodson

I have never felt the suffering that my grandmother had felt; she was from a world much different than the one I live in. In my younger years we would load our family of five into an old Ford Bronco and make our way through rural Arkansas to visit my grandparents in the summer. My grandparents were not wealthy by any means. My grandfather had held several jobs from sharecropper, to tractor driver. For fifteen years he worked for the county as a road grader until he suffered a stroke, leaving him paralyzed on his right side. In the winter he would be able to earn a few extra dollars by clearing the runways of ice at a local Air Force base so that the B-52 bombers could land and take off. He was a kind and joyful man. He could always be found in a pair of overalls and almost always had the signature darkened streak from the corner of his mouth to the bottom of his chin, where the snuff didn't quite make it all the way into the spittoon. He passed away a year after I graduated high school. The Red Cross had delivered the message to my Command while I was serving with the Marines in Okinawa, Japan.

My grandmother had always been a survivor and it has taken me many years to learn to admire her for the struggles she had to overcome. When I was in the ninth grade she suffered a massive stroke. While she was making a slow recovery and being rehabilitated, my family and I moved to Arkansas to help take care of her and her husband. We had been living in Dallas since I was very little so I was not prepared in the least for what was awaiting me. The school I had been attending was a AAA school and the school I transferred to was all but a triple-A school. I remember when I first arrived; the first thing I noticed was that the school campus was cornered in on two sides by cotton fields and the parking lot was filled with pickup trucks, most painted with some type of camouflaged pattern. After time I made it work. I didn't want to, but I made it work.

My grandmother did not need supervision, and my best guess is that she didn't want it either. She was very strong willed and independent, spending many hours working in her garden and making minor repairs to her now aging mobile home. She was very resourceful; you could not deny her that. In her world, it didn't matter much how something appeared from the outside, everything was based strictly on function. If a piece of old plywood could cover a hole, it mattered little that it had once been painted bright yellow and stuck out like a sore thumb. There is a distinct divider between the older and younger population when it comes to dealing with commodities and resources. We have truly become a dispensable society, where anything and everything can be replaced. In general, we don't spend much time caring for the things we have because, things have become overwhelmingly available to us. My grandmother, as with most of the older generation, did not see the world in these terms. That's why an old Aunt Jemima syrup bottle or a gallon pickle jar later served as storage containers for everything from buttons to beans. The containers she was able to put a seal on would shelter her harvest of fruits and vegetables for the winter.

If you had asked me twenty years ago if I thought my family was poor, I would have told you we were the poorest people on earth. It is true that we were below the poverty line for most of my childhood, but the poorest we were not. We did not live in the best houses or eat the best of food; but I have also not had to run to the neighbor's chicken coup during a rain storm because it was more structurally sound than the one room tin shack that my grandparents called home. I believe that is why my grandmother collected things. She did not collect fine china, or precious metals,

coins, or antique items. She collected *stuff*. If you no longer wanted it, she was happy to take it off of your hands. After she had passed, it took weeks of cleaning and sorting through things just to get the clutter to a manageable level. But, that was my grandmother; she saw value in the things that others would discard.

When I was younger, I was ashamed of her behavior. Now, I am only ashamed of myself. It is a taboo in American society, to dig through trash. We have an understanding that once something is discarded it is of no use, to anyone, for anything. That is why I would become hesitant when invited, by her, to *go dumping*. That's what she called it. Not dumpster diving, or rummaging through other people's trash, but simply dumping. She would put on her old gray velcro shoes, grab her wooden cane (no doubt found on a previous dumping outing) and set out on her route to check out the dumpsters for things she could put to use. Working or broken, it mattered not. A picture frame with someone else's family in it? A keeper. It was as if she had lived through the Great Depression and just kept on living in it, as if there had been no recovery. But, how do you blame someone who has never had anything for wanting everything within their means? She had led a hard life, working excessively for little to nothing. And now was a time to make up for that.

She was one of eight siblings born to poor migrant farm laborers. Her parents, my great grandparents, would travel from farm to farm looking for a full days work. There is little said about the white working poor in the south. For some, their conditions were no better than the sons and daughters of former slaves who worked beside them. My grandmother, along with her brothers and sisters, spent ten to twelve hour days chopping cotton, shoulder to shoulder and barefoot to barefoot with the poor minority laborers. There was little education, and the education they did receive was based mostly on how to perform menial tasks, raise children, and to survive in general. My grandmother managed to make it until the third grade. The level of poverty she lived in is surprising and her perseverance admirable. I have heard stories of how after working in the fields, she would collect pokeweeds to be taken home and cooked in a large pot. Her brother, Jody, was five years her senior and did what allot of poor people did at the time (and still continue to do), to escape their conditions. He joined the army. In 1941 he became a casualty in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The government in their abundant generosity and undying gratitude offered to ship the bodies of service men to the port in New York City. The families were then responsible for proving the transportation of the deceased from New York to their home town. Needless to say, my great uncle was left in Hawaii to be buried.

She later married my grandfather and together they had nine children. Their first home, made of pieces of pressed tin, had a floor made of dirt and a cardboard box that served as a table. It was "third-world" conditions, right here in America. Nine children sounds amazing by today's standards but, in those days, another child didn't mean only another mouth to feed but another set of hands that could go out into the cotton fields and earn a few pennies for the family. My mother and her siblings would also work in the fields earning fifty-cents an hour, before a federal minimum wage went into effect. The children never saw a penny of those wages. When my mother was thirteen and my aunt twelve, they would share a row of cotton and be paid the wages of one adult.

Now that she is gone I regret not spending more time with her; if not for her sake, for my own. I could have learned more about the world she had lived in, and tried to understand how those conditions shaped her ideals and behaviors. It's hard to believe in a world of five-dollar

coffees and disposable everything that there are still some who have absolutely nothing. In the end, my grandmother left behind an eighth of an acre of land, over eight thousand dollars in her bank account, and not a penny of unpaid debt. She didn't own a car or want a bigger house. It was conservation without a cause. It was just her and her garden, where she could make most anything grow. And she was happy. Conserving purely for the sake of conservation, because it was simply the right thing to do.

It is hard to make a distinction of what I have learned from her most. It could be that everything is assigned its own value and is preferable when compared to having nothing. Or, it may be that it is better not to work at obtaining things that you think will make you happy but rather work at being content and happy with the things you already have. Or more importantly, any day not spent surrounded by cotton - breaking your back in the sweltering heat, with blistered hands and an empty stomach, and nothing to show for it, is an excellent day indeed.

Sometimes Old Looks Better Than New

Lance Nettles

