

# River Bluff Review

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A collection of previously unpublished works composed  
by the students of  
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

## Editors

Hannah Anderson	Hilary Pool
Jonathan Blaize	D. Allen Rawson
Ricky Buchanan	Patrick Richardson
Tracy Clark	Scott Schindler
Lindsey DeFevers	Beth Spengler
Debbie Hard	Nicole Stevenson
Amy Kirby	Keigh-Cee Welsch
Shane M. Leary	Laurel A. Williams
Heath Garrett Luster	Matthew Woodiel

Faculty Advisor- Valerie Vogrin

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and the College of Arts and Sciences.

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on the cover: "Untitled #2," Charcoal on Paper,  
Amanda Lea Dickson

Dear Reader,

First of all, each of us would like to thank all the contributors and readers of this magazine. There were close to 200 anonymous submissions this year, and their overall quality made the selection process a very difficult one. We'd each like to thank you for working with us, for trusting us and being patient with our work.

This issue features many writing selections by the SIUE student body, as well as a number of art pieces from varied media. Our 2007 issue left readers with a separation between the written entries and the art – indirectly saying that one form of entry had no place next to the other. This year, we have decided to make literature and art equal in the *River Bluff Review*. We sought to reconnect this publication with SIUE students' artwork, to show that this magazine is open to everything, not just the written word.

We would like to thank Provost Paul Ferguson; Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Narbeth Emmanuel; Dean Kent Neely; English Department Chair Dr. Larry LaFond; manager of Marketing and Communications Heather Kniffel; and Professor Allison Funk.

Sincerely,  
River Bluff Review Editorial Staff

## Gray Matters

A.C. Doty

Today, I will paint myself gray  
before I leave my house. When  
people see me,  
they will say,  
“He is not Black, nor is he White.”

Some will say,  
“He is wise! For he measures his opinions  
and weighs his arguments equally!”

Some will say,  
“He is foolish! He cannot make up his mind!  
This man has no thoughts to conclude with!”

And I will say,  
“I have not yet decided.  
I have far too many things  
to do before I can give thought to that which  
does not affect me.”

And I will continue to my workshop  
to build my canvases  
to make my money  
to buy my bread  
while the big men come  
and buy my canvases  
to paint with their solid colors.

## Filtration

Heath Garrett Luster

1

Beer bottle prisms, draping  
old men's knuckles in the  
diffused amber light of tavern afternoons.  
One of them beating a rhythm  
into the boot-marred patina  
of the bar's wood slatted floor.  
And he is drifting, pushing off,  
stirring some obscene thought  
into the depths of a highball glass.  
An indigent whim turned ursine,  
hunting worlds now, on its own.  
His foot is tapping, transmitting,  
and somewhere something  
beats back freely.

2

She cradles the head of lettuce  
in her hands, then closer to her  
withered peach skins of ears;  
as if discerning a song from  
her lush conch. Isolating some  
wisdom at the root that the  
leaves could never know.  
A salient abstraction, emanating  
in serpentine spirals and whispering  
the carnal knowledge of  
soil and dusk.

# Fountain of Youth

Amanda Lea Dickson



## The Wildfire

Tracy Speakman

He would tell how  
the earth coughed, belching gray smudge into the sky.

He would tell how  
the tongues of flames, omnivorous and piggish,  
consumed everything they licked;  
how the wind like a dry heave, exhaled ash, expelled remains.

It was a long night, he would say, the night the fire ate his land.

He would tell how  
snapping, igniting trees cackled, crackled,  
as his home at the edge was swallowed by red, yellow and black;  
how two horses, confused, ran into the mouth of the thing.

## Who's been sleeping in my head.

George Grenchik

My pale page baby always waits  
in a blue line bustier with bent edges  
spreading her pages wide  
in her spiral bed.

she waits for the black, sticky  
ink that my pen daps.

I grab the bottle on the corner of my desk,  
the one that makes me stupid

I'm not wasted yet,  
but tonight's words binge  
I will remember when I wake up in the morning  
Next to my mysterious muse

She doesn't need Saki.  
I indulge her with ink  
she likes rough verbs  
makes her pages spasm in enjoyment  
we procreate lines  
and create babies that give life to a feeble mind

## Butterfly Nets Bursting with Scorpions

Lauren Gerber

{The day my god died, you were born.}

*I love you like hunger.*

{I breathe you in—star-dew and eternity—hold you in and in and in, until my lungs burst like a blood blister.}

*I love you like the scream of a bullet, I love you like pixie dust dripping from eyelashes. Like peanut butter pie, like venom, like candle-wax and rain colliding with a windowpane. I love you in a weeping willow whirlwind, in a glitter-glam bubble-gum romance.*

{You are an eyelash storm frenzy of honey-suckle-stained lips, a mountain-range of teeth and the inverted scream of my fingernails slow-dancing up and down your spine, making a gasoline-shiver rainbow in your lovely bones.}

*I love you like a sleepy hollow lullaby, like a train-wreck voice. I love you like forget-me-nots in a wasteland, like staccato spoonfuls of star-shine grasshopper shriek, like---*

{There is poetry tattooed in your kisses.}

*I love you like spinning spider-web safety on porcelain, like a crystal wineglass crash, like lollipop lipstick lingerie. I love you like a candy apple necklace or a jellybean jigsaw, like cherry-plum pie and Cinderella slippers, like minx coats without the murder.*

{You feel like infinity.  
You taste like forever.}

*I love you like kaleidoscope vision, like the burn of snow, like silver on a dirt-drenched day. I love you like tearing out the stars with scissors, watching glitter pour from the holes in the sky.*

{We twist like licorice in the sheets.}

*I love you like pretty-pain, like being strangled to death by a feather boa. I love you like rosebud miracles, like the pink pulse of Halloween lights draped across your ceiling. I love you like falling from a burning poinsettia into a snow-cone sunset.*

{My fingertips drip their rabid intent for your pinecone throat, your kite-string arteries and violin-string veins unraveling in a waterfall, your flesh like a trillion fireflies fluttering against mine.}

*I love you like pink cotton candy sugar on strawberry milkshake tangled tongues entwining before the taste dissolves, like chandeliers cascading down from a cob-web ceiling.*

{We stand barefoot in a swan-storm of falling feathers, our serpent lips screaming red, finding the land of milk and honey, lapping it up like kittens, tongue-bathing in the blood-heat.}

*I love you enough to stop sheep slaughter nightmares,  
 enough to regain a paradise lost,  
 enough to burn holes in every petal from every flower in every country,  
 enough to sun-burst and star-shatter entire galaxies.  
 I love you enough to melt clocks and flood the desert where dreams go to die,  
 love you enough to crush dead leaves and create sunshine.*

{We are never-ending.}

## The Brown Recluse

Heath Luster

A violin spider—a recluse  
Has bitten my favorite foot.  
It took hours for the dizziness  
To settle in, but it did.  
Years of drinking taught  
Me just what to do next—  
I hung one leg off the bed,  
Flattening my toes against  
The cool of the hardwood.  
I had an anchor now.  
As the flushes of heat and more  
Dizzying heat broke across  
My body in luxuriant waves.  
I traced the edges of the wound,  
Reddened and slightly raised now.  
I marveled at how rare  
An occasion this really was.  
I had never met a recluse,  
Let alone be bitten by one.  
And I half expect that  
I never will again. I  
Trace the edges of the wound,  
In slow deliberate circles,  
Admiring its ellipse, and  
How if I close my eyes I  
Can feel the separate nerve-endings  
Railing valiantly against the venom.  
Firing with blithe precision  
under the weight of a fingertip.  
I trace the edge of the wound  
And watch dust dance in  
The sheaves of moonlight that  
Trickle through the window blind,

And Letterman pencil-tip tapping  
In New York on a muted television.  
Cigarette smoke curls around  
My moonlit dust-stars—forming  
New galaxies in the air above my head.

Somewhere cool and dark, a recluse lies wondering as  
well.

## It's Hard To Break Bones On Your Own

Megan Hudgins

Can you feel sadness in your elbows? I wanted to. I wanted anguish to eat calcium. I wanted to eat myself blind. Endure the dental stab of that "gold" ring on my fillings. Chew away the hate.

Drywall gave easily because I ached to ache in my hands. Pounded things for Pounding's sake. Pound down the puke and moths fluttering.

Fuck your porcupine love. There are splinters in my chest, just to the left.

Inextractible.

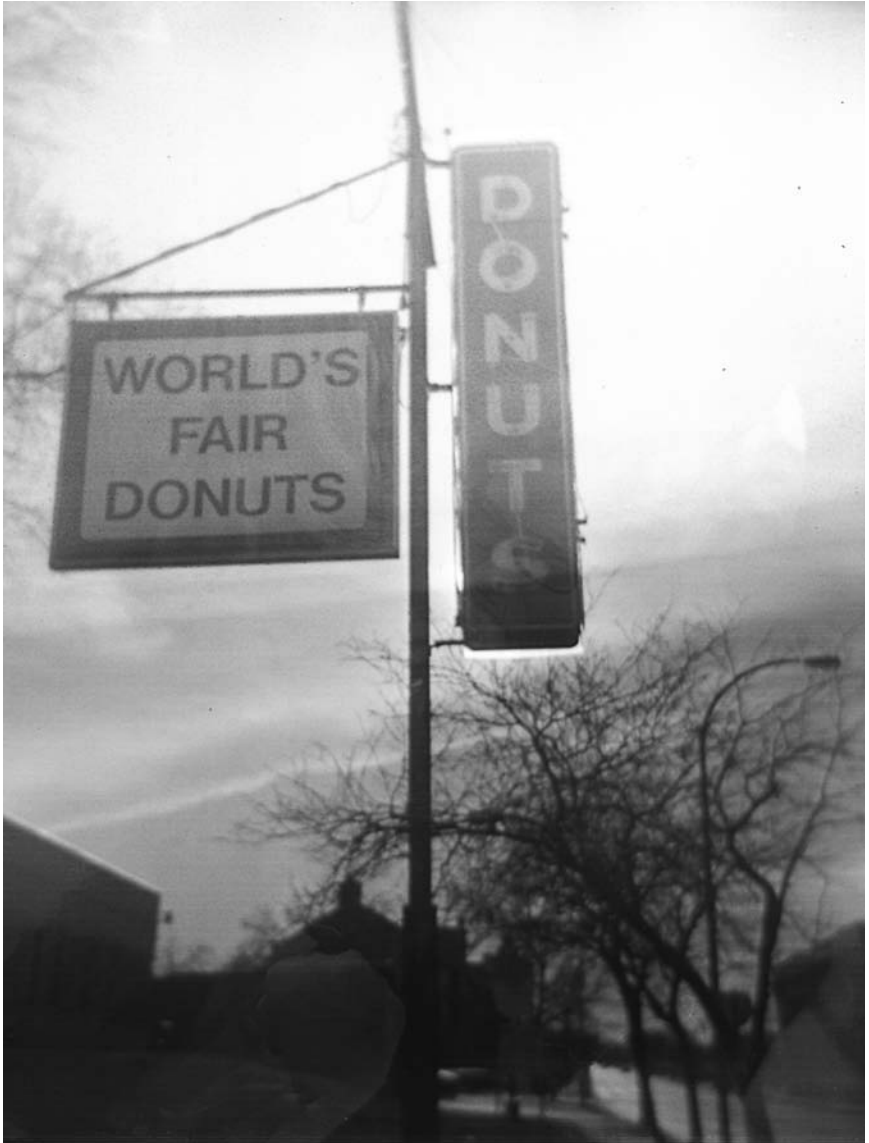
## Fistfight

Heath Garrett Luster

All the decisions that matter are made in the square-off. Whether that quart of slow-drawn chill in the stomach is fear or adrenaline is a lesson in alchemy that fathers and uncles bark beer-mouthed from a park bench in 1987. “You gotta chew ‘em up with your eyes, son.” The crowd is frenzied smiles—gaping mouths with tongues and teeth made longer by the moonlight. They are here only for blood, but there is more honesty in that than in a handshake or a death-bed promise. Keep each grin, pack them in your fist like grains of sand until you swing the edge of the world in your hands. That first impact sings. A bone-spun song, trying to find the current beneath the chin and behind the eyes. It’s about opening each other up—finding what dark pulse we can spill into the grass. A debt paid to the dirt for carrying our weight. What we all came for was this—this explosion. After it we stand calcified like shards of some obsidian stone in the night, waiting to be swallowed back through a tiny hole in the sky.

# World's Fair Donuts

Sarah Rogers



## Bread Alone

D. Allen Rawson

This is the beginning of Side B,  
so if you haven't listened to Side A yet,  
shut the damn thing off and turn it around.  
And this is the last tape I'm sending you,  
and I don't have much time  
    because Paul's coming over in an hour,  
and I haven't told him about Bridgette,  
and I thought tonight would be a good night.  
A good night for that, and a good night for this:  
this is the last tape I'm sending you.

My father who art in Flagstaff,  
clam chowder be thy name.  
Your car broke down;  
in mother's gown  
we found you by the roadside.

Why don't you make bread anymore?  
You seemed so peaceful when you made bread.

I was going through some of Mom's things last night,  
and I found a picture of her dressed in a Halloween outfit.  
She was Sonny, and you were Cher.

The last time I talked to you—  
you called me at 3:17 in the morning  
    to ask me which one was Jerry,  
the cat or the mouse.  
I asked if you were drunk, and you called me Clarice.

Question 15. Do you wish you'd had a girl?

Question 39. Do you sometimes wish  
you'd married mother's sister?

Question 24. Do you know what day my birthday is?

I keep all the questions in a notebook.

I add to it every once in awhile.

Sometimes I show it to girls to get pity sex.

I wrote a song about you, but I've never used it in a set.

It's called "Shame's a two-headed bird: Patricidal Tendencies."

Our bass player Ray thinks "Save the Fast Prance" is about you,  
and I let him think that,

but it's about Bridgette.

I was drinking chocolate milk

and thinking about how I surround myself with people who  
have emotional problems,

and I decided to divide the names of those people with  
"problemmotions" into categories,

based on quality, multitude,

and whether or not they just got some thrill

out of fucking themselves over.

That got me thinking about which category you would fit into  
because by this time I'd divided my friends into fifteen categories,  
these categories including my casual friends as well.

I decided you got a category all to yourself,

and I call it the Shanty of Shame,

in lack of something more bitterly striking.

Monday I'm auditioning for a record label.

Paul told me to keep the harmonica at home and focus more  
on "that angry gold."

Anger sells, even if the anger isn't directed at anything tangible.

But Paul tells me my anger sells

because it's the universal anger aimed at my father.

"Who can't relate to that?" Paul asked me.

"Orphans," I said.

“No, they resent their fathers too.  
In fact, they resent them double.  
Once for dying and leaving them alone,  
and once again for contributing to the birth of the orphan.  
*They know how to capitalize off of their anger.*”

He’s right, they do.  
There’s this band called Oliver’s Fist, and they have this song:  
“Please Sir, I’ll be Your Whore.”  
Gold, Pa. Gold.

## An Affair in Four Parts

Jamie Larson

As a little girl she'd never touch green beans unless they'd been on her sister's plate first. She bought dresses, shoes, jewelry all secondhand through online auctions; she felt satisfied clicking that bid confirmed button, but only if the item was about to end and at least one person had bid for it. She gossiped with the other women in her office about celebrity infidelities as they all condemned the kind of woman who goes after married men like prey. But when the new accountant from three floors up asked her to lunch she pretended not to see the white strip of indented skin on his left ring finger.

They never called it an affair. They had boundaries—no kissing or words they couldn't take back. No messy emotions, no promises. When Sunday morning broke in and cracked their one night a month through the middle, he went home to his wife; she returned to an empty apartment and a boyfriend she'd made up to ease his guilt. At her house she refused to switch on lights; she moved with her head down afraid to catch her eyes in night-black windows. She sat perfectly still with her legs stretched out and toes limp until she fell asleep on her couch.

She met his wife once at the company Christmas party. She recognized her immediately standing near a wall with cheap blinking lights crawling toward the ceiling like ivy. The wife's neck was long and slender, her skin smoothed by the greenish blue Christmas glow behind her. Across the room, slightly drunk, sad and tired of smiling, she wanted to hear the wife speak just once. She moved toward the flashing wall but stumbled in the stilettos she'd bought to make her legs look slimmer. She recognized his smell before she felt his fingers dig deep

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in the soft flesh near her elbow. When they reached the door he leaned close to her ear and hissed hot through his teeth, "What the hell is wrong with you?"

The last time, before she knew it was the very last time, she booked a hotel in Chicago and bought something lacy strung together to conceal select parts of her. He moved over her body distracted with his fingers all wrong and rough against her. The sun came up and they held hands breathless and silent. He squeezed gently once and said, "We're pregnant. I'm going to be a father." She understood immediately and snatched her hand from him like he'd bitten her. Later, she slipped an earring into his coat pocket and hoped his wife would find it. It was the most expensive piece of jewelry she owned.

# Open Eyes

Renee Dow



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## Without Heat

Sarah Hamzeh

It was a school day, a Tuesday or Wednesday morning as the door creaked open. The gusty northern wind whistled and howled and blew through the folds of her thin overcoat and weathered work smock. I'd been up for hours, it was too cold to get comfortable and at this point I was nose deep in a bowl of generic cornflakes, hovering near the open cook stove. I must've looked pathetic bundled in every throw we owned, a human head sprouting from a ball of quilt and afghan because her eyes got weepy as she stood there watching cornflake milk dribble down my chin. I could tell her heart was heavy, could see how she'd wished our lives were different. But they weren't and would never be, and it was okay, and I was just happy my mom was home.

## Snow Globes and Lightning Bugs

Lindsey Schroeder

When I was 6  
I told my mom  
that moments before we spoke  
someone, something  
bigger than us  
planned our every word,  
our every action.

Her reply was, "You think?"  
I could tell she didn't  
believe in that magic  
and I felt sad for her.

I always felt there was  
something spiritual in the way  
lightning bugs glowed in the dark  
like candle wicks spontaneously  
floating in the night.

The consistent wave-like  
siren sound of the crickets  
in summer was a melody to me  
not a relentless annoyance  
as it was to my mother.

I'm curious whether  
she ever scrunched her  
toes around the silky blades  
of summer grass  
grinding her feet all the way  
to the dirt  
just to feel the richness,  
the connection of the green and the brown

I wonder if my mother ever fully  
believed in a world  
where lightning bugs were created  
with built-in flash lights  
and snow globes are able to sustain  
perfect worlds, untainted.

Where small children,  
with pink blushing cheeks  
wearing bright red scarves and  
intricately woven royal blue mittens,  
catch snow flakes on their tongues.

I can't help but wonder if my mother ever saw  
a world where all rain puddles  
are made of glistening rainbows  
having nothing to do with gasoline.  
A world where the stars really are glimpses of heaven.

## Summer #7

D. Allen Rawson

I

Before we learn to comb our hair and to listen to the radio,  
The world is green,  
And the king is a seven year old who refuses to cut his hair  
In an attempt to convince the others he is the reincarnation  
of Elvis.

My brother and I,  
Army rations and Brussels sprouts—  
All frogs are named Carl—  
And our collection, our colony in a jar:  
Shades of green with eyes and legs and mouths—  
We watch a grasshopper eat every one of its children,  
Born in an abandoned wasp nest,  
As a mantis keeps watch on the sky,  
Waiting for the next mate to be lowered in.

Tomorrow I will find my father's battery charger,  
The broken one,  
And I will bring it to life:  
A robot, fellow sojourner of the woods,  
To replace my brother who explores a new terrain:  
Shop windows, driver's permits, public pools—

But I will keep watch on the sky,  
Cover my sideburns when the barber comes,  
And listen to Carl, croaking in the night.

## II

Summer number seven, mom mows over sticks in the front yard,  
My brother takes babysitting classes,  
And that last year at school, I lose every fight.  
Barefoot, I move between apple trees, eyeing the garage  
Where radio and welder met—  
Walking in, I never see Dad, and then:  
Behind a bench, under a car, draining oil, lifting weights,  
Changing batteries, taking old cars and making them run,  
Making deals, making sales.  
Some days are help me here a minute days,  
Pump the pedal and hold days,  
You're not doing it right days,  
I let the piston fall days.  
Today is an I think I'll wash the car day,  
Or just clean out the garage day,  
Want to see how this works?  
Maybe clear out the attic—

Seven years I have lived here,  
And I have never looked up.  
Dust moves in from the front yard and settles on the Honda,  
Drifts into the garage, drifts into me.  
Dad scrapes this ladder against the concrete floor,  
Climbs up and removes a wooden door.  
Up there: my dark rabbit hole.  
Go on up, and so I go, and watch your head, and no I don't.  
Blood quickly dries to my scalp;  
I rub some between my fingers.

Up here is a secret room, a room of the past—  
An old turntable I spin with my thumb,  
Baby's crib that my brother will someday inherit.  
Tires and wheels for all sorts of cars,  
A tripod, lifting weights, and bags—  
Bags full of clothes and books and toys,

Toys from when I was younger, “remember this” toys.

I sit Indian-style with the best of the loot beside me,  
And tell myself it’s all right because I’m only  
Reminiscing—  
Of course I’m older, and this is silly, but I’m  
Reminiscing.

There’s grease on the tires,  
And then on my fingers,  
And then in my hair,  
And I make lines across my face and chant my code word.  
Below, Sailor Hat Man appears  
To swap summer stories with my dad.  
From above, his hat is a sand dollar—  
And this is the first time I hear how men talk  
When Mom’s not around.  
Not Dad, but this man—this man speaks a vocabulary  
That comes from someplace else,  
Outside this garage,  
Outside my secret room.  
I listen, and hear names I’ve heard before—  
He spits and tells dad who’s no good and who’s all right,  
And who cheated him, and who’s likely to next.  
I whisper *shit* and *damn* to a stuffed Dalmatian,  
Now conscious of the summer heat.  
Visible insulation: pink with all sorts of sharp things mixed in,  
Like pieces of glass hidden in cotton candy.

## russell

Jason Holler

testicles swing like the pendulum of a great grandfather clock  
as he leans against his walker.

each second ticks death

anxious death

awaiting home or after life.

losing touch

falling apart in nursing homes

a living skeleton of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1912.

wallpaper mood swings.

breakfast

lunch

dinner

waiting.

my father's father's father

hands like cinder blocks

crossed Atlantic to build railroads

to work like a mule

to retire

to spend a couple decades

hitting nurses

spitting at orderlies.

keeping to strict liquid diet:

jell-o

ice cream

whiskey.

falsely proclaiming big winning in lottery scratch off  
followed by accusations my father stole money  
and bought a new car.

relentless distrust of Catholics

unbroken allegiance to wife

(deceased ten years prior)

and her periodical "visits."

metamucil

diapers

no teeth

all gums

unavoidable return to infancy.

face of Patton staring upward at yellowed ceiling tiles

remembering healthy gardens from healthy times

ripe tomatoes

onions

radishes

mind.

paranoia brought on by old age and world war.

occasional bigotry and massage parlor adultery

kept locked up in a cellar

along with furnace

hot water heater

and hushed allegations of child molestation.

one on one discussions with grandson

about assisted suicide

and secret prayers for cancer.

91 years of life

summed up in a dozen or so cardboard boxes

containing:

dress shirt, slacks, wing tips, spare pair of glasses,

police scanner, nativity scene, sun-damaged photographs,

bedpans, shoe polish and a stained handkerchief

packed up tightly

on their way to charity.

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## polarity

Heath Garrett Luster

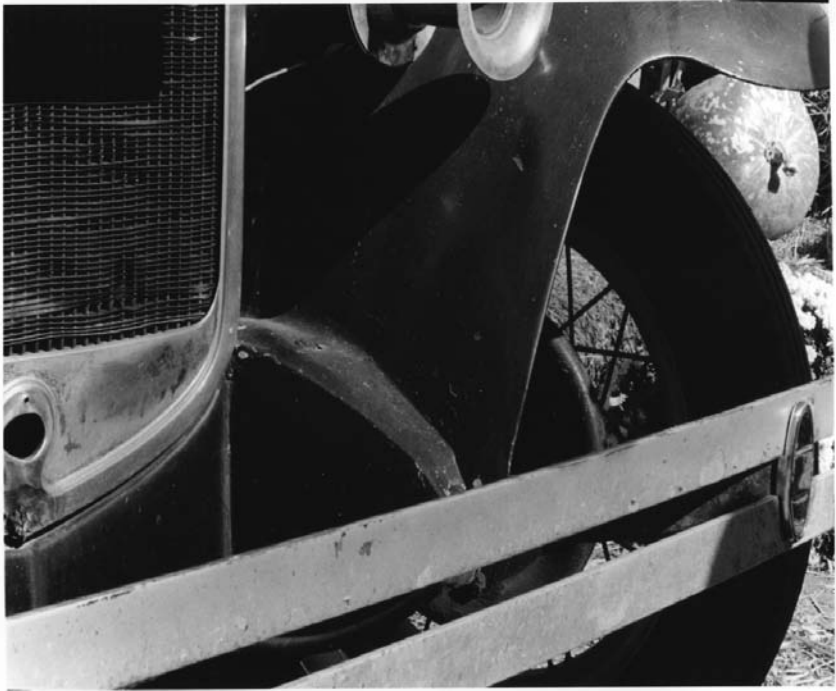
a grifter is born to this world, taking.  
some pestilence of the heart and hands  
that leaves only absence.  
a whirring like gears—a mechanical impulse  
where the soul would be.  
the empty relief in the earth under a stone,  
a police artist's sketch—a rendering

my grandfather was rarely spoken of,  
and I met him only once—as a teenager.  
he was dressed in black cowboy garb.  
he said, "Get a good look, they probably  
won't let you see me again."  
His gin-soaked tenor floating  
down on a blanket of hot cigar smoke,  
and disappearing again.

something had been exchanged,  
the transfer of a charge—a polarity  
that was understood by he and I alone.  
I knew that what he was really saying  
Was that all things are made of light  
Or the absence of it.

# Old Time Nostalgia

Amanda Neudecker



## I See You (I.C.U.)

Keigh-Cee Welsch

Hoses  
slithering down her  
throat like serpents,  
forcing life into her tar  
stained lungs.  
Her hands are strong,  
grabbing at the serpent's  
tail. Tied down  
and with shackle-like  
restraints—she is a  
prisoner.

Thick blood dried under  
her fingernails;  
who does it belong to?  
There are no wounds  
on her soft, sagging flesh....  
that poor nurse.  
Her cerulean eyes are  
wide, turning black as asphalt,  
no hope left in them.  
Thick tears flow  
down her worn cheeks—  
the current is strong today.

This creature, thrashing  
on crisp white cotton,  
chained to taupe painted  
metal bars  
does not even resemble her.  
Where are her glasses?  
She wants to see  
beyond the thick apricot

outlines of people  
hovering over her,  
holding her swollen hands.  
She recognizes one- the one  
wearing black with the  
white collar. The Father.

Let us pray for Betty Jean.

# The Alzheimer's Guide to Confession

Michael Place

Nurse's Aide Gwenyth Elaine Talbott, I had hoped, would take my confession. Already, a visiting priest had been out of the question. "The Plum Grove of Palatine does not reserve funds for individual matters of the Divine," according to the response letter I was given after raising enough of a commotion.

"I've got their Divine right here," I say to Gwen.

"Enough with that," she says. She folds the letter and slides it back into my nightstand drawer.

To top things off, Nurse Brenda Murray up on the Alzheimer's floor had taken two years of catechism. I hesitated to suggest Gwen, and Murray was offered instead. Gwen reaches across me to fill an empty water pitcher. She is off-duty.

"How do you stand that costume?" I ask. All the nurses here wear plum and olive.

"I don't think about it much."

"Plum-pigeons."

"The only bad part, I suppose, is wearing it day after day."

Gwen asks about my motives for wanting to take confession. I change the subject, asking what she read about the night before. She moves a chair next to my bed, tilting her head slightly to the left, reflectively. She is talking about a literature person named Fish. The red of her lips seems to reach out across the room. A plush, overwhelming red.

That Saturday, as becomes our habit, Nurse Murray stops by early in the morning. I am chewing sunflower seeds, watching Bugs Bunny run circles around Elmer Fudd. I have been awake for hours before dawn. Murray asks if I want her to turn the TV down, or to just turn it off?

I hold up the remote and say, "I've got the volume." Murray is pretty the way beetles are pretty. A self-protective little bug. She is probably twenty years older than Gwen, twenty years younger than me. I spit a wet sunflower seed into an empty Altoids tin.

"Now, Bernard," says Murray. "Should you be snacking before meal time?"

I put the tin and the bag of seeds on my nightstand. "Immorality. That's what you're here for, right?"

"Now, Bernard," she repeats, slipping the bag into a pouch on her olive skirt.

She decides to position her chair, facing in the same direction I do, towards the blue wall and the TV. She suggests we get started. Bugs has his finger poked into Elmer's rifle. I anticipate Elmer covered in gun powder . . .

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Lips. Depth. The exterior lip. That lower lip of Sophia Loren's. What is called a full lower lip. From: Italy. Really something else. Maybe honey. Amazing curious sensual appeal. The feeling that she is pouting always. Has been pouting. Maybe because no one has kissed her for the last few minutes. Full urge. Full marvelous lip.

]]Ge T

" . . . Bernard? Bernard?" Murray is turned around in her chair. "Your words are running together," she says. "Speak slower."

The Saturdays roll by and I really don't think much about that particular day. If not cartoons, I turn on baseball, trying to remember when the Cubbies were over .500. With few exceptions, the days blend.

Gwen comes by one afternoon, humming under her breath. She's wearing a button that says Reading for Rainbows in an arch. She winks at me on her way to answer my

roommate Rainer's call light. I don't see or hear much of Rainer. He's one who likes to keep his curtain closed.

I lie perfectly still to hear Gwen's humming. It's hard to pin down exactly what it is: a heaviness, maybe, that makes me feel at peace. I would compare it to the last time I was at Wrigley Field. There was a short rain delay, but when the sun came back out—between the crisp air and the smell of the wet grass—I thought I'd stepped into Eden.

Gwen comes out from behind Rainer's plastic curtain.

"Don't pass by so quickly," I say.

Gwen stops and smiles down at me.

"Don't stop humming either."

She bends down closer.

*"I walked down the hill, sluggishly and frail. The wind blew hard, hard on me. I imagined it your ghost white body, making love with me. I still feel the sting in my hand from when I hit you. Your picture tidy and safe in a shrine. And hope that in time, we'll have a house on the shore that showers my soul, that washes away the violence that runs in my blood, drains the pain that I caused you, down through."*

"Who was that again?"

"Red House Painters."

I nod. "Red House Painters."

Later, after her shift, she explains that the rainbow button is from the library. A little boy had run up to her in the check out line, saying, "Here. I have too many."

"The end of the rainbow," I say, not meaning anything by it.

Gwen has brought me a book on loan, a collection of satire by Richard Armour. In her words, she's trying to enculturate me. Gwen cannot get enough culture, which is a matter of constant tension between Gwen and her mother, Flo. They share an apartment. Flo wants her to either take some night classes, or to start looking for a man. When I asked Gwen if she had any love interest, she said as far as she knew, all men fit neatly into the stumblebum category. And why she wastes time visiting me? "You're my project,

remember?"

Gwen says she didn't stop by just to drop off the book. Earlier, she had overheard a conversation between a few of the other nurses and a doctor from the Alzheimer's floor.

"I didn't hear much. Just your name, really. But I started wondering if Murray possibly has other intentions."

Gwen has on a gold ponytail holder.

"Bernie, you cannot let them move you. I can't believe they'd even consider it. You're the sharpest guy on this floor. You remember I told you they tried to stick me there? That was six years ago—they try that with all the incoming aides—and I'm still trying to forget." She brushes my cheek with the back of her fingers, asking, "Have they said anything to you directly?"

"No. No, they haven't. It's okay, Gwen. Really."

Before she leaves, I tell her what I'm more concerned about is confession. This is the truth. A man in his sixties can't go around just thinking about baseball all day. I have a piece of the afterlife in mind.

Murray's always trying to convince me to attend the Lutheran Service they hold Wednesday nights in the basement lounge. "You might learn about the priesthood of all believers," Murray says. "Then you could talk to God personally." Those Lutherans. I think the reason they tell you God wants a personal relationship is so they don't have to pay any attention to you themselves.

Waiting for Murray the following Saturday, I am too distracted to think very seriously about confession. The cartoons are especially good. And Rainer's family has come to visit. All of them, apparently, forming a new, living curtain around his bed. I've had to turn the volume up pretty loud so I can hear. Besides all the commotion, I have to figure out if Gwen is right about Murray being up to something.

I am reaching over to pour a glass of water when I notice a small girl suddenly standing beside my bed. My

bed is high enough so that I can only see her face above my light blue pajama leg, which is the same blue as my bed sheets, which are the same blue as the wall. The girl seems about seven or eight years old. She has shiny black hair cropped at chin level, a perfect frame for her round, rosy face.

“Your ankles are real thin,” she says.

I hold out my pinky finger, and her round face slowly takes on a confused expression.

“Pull it,” I say, gruffly.

She smiles, giving a good tug on my finger.

“I didn’t hear anything,” she says.

“Silent, but deadly.”

My own grandchildren are out in Arizona. My dumb son Derrick, my only child, the insurance agent, wanted a change. “The Farm will transfer you anywhere,” Derrick said, proudly. What a dope. He and I haven’t gotten along so well since my first stroke. I moved here to the Plum Grove, and, about a year later, they all moved west. He played the good son, wanting me to move with. “There are some nice homes out there. And the weather’s nicer, too.” Derrick’s mother died when he was a small child, and I never remarried. Derrick found a girl named Sue not long after he decided insurance was his true calling. Sue is by far the most boring person I’ve ever met. Now, I don’t mean plain. Plain is fine. Boring means the girl can talk for over an hour about some new cold prevention powder you can mix into your coffee, your milk, your juice, or just about anything. There’s a good chance that Sue is in Arizona now, still boring someone on the same subject. I got out of their house quick, before my grandchildren turned into bores also.

“What’s this?” asks the rosy-faced girl, pointing at the red “C” on the baseball cap sitting on my nightstand.

“You don’t want to touch that,” I say. “I had to kill a roach. It’s covered with bug guts.”

“I like bugs.” She adjusts the strap and puts it on, mat-

ting her bangs across her eyes. I had been kind of down waiting for Murray. But now I'm thinking this is the kind of kid that Gwen would raise. The girl clears her hair, telling me that her grandfather stays here to keep his pacemaker working. I imagine taking her round face to Wrigley, buying her a bag of peanuts.

"Say. You don't have any candy on you, do you?"

"I have some Certs," she says. "Fruit flavor," she adds, digging through a pocket. She pulls out a smiley face pencil eraser—"Oh, that's not it"—just as Murray comes in. Murray quickly adds up the situation, removing my cap and ushering the girl over to her apologetic parents. There are dust particles lit up in a familiar stream of light from Rainer's window.

Murray's hair is pulled back in a tight graying bun. She carries a clipboard. "I tell you, Murray. You should have been in the movies."

"Oh, Bernard."

"Yes, ma'am. No question."

"Well. I don't watch movies much."

Things go pretty well starting off. I stick to minor sins like impatience or flattery, so not to reveal anything too questionable. And every so often, I look over at Rainer's family to see the rosy-faced girl glaring hard at Murray. Things go bad when I notice Murray is reading from her clipboard. I reach over and grab it. The page on top says East Wing Inventory. For a moment, Murray looks at me in pure horror. Then, she grabs the clipboard back, huffing. "I was listening Bernard. A person can do more than one thing at a time."

Rainer's family begins to file out at that point. The rosy-faced girl squirms free of her mother's hand and runs up to the foot of my bed. "Look, Mom," she says. "His sheets are the same as Grandpa's."

It's about a week later that, with one of the plums changing my sheets, a half roll of Certs drops down to the floor. I quickly cover it with a blue slippered foot and

shrug. "I didn't hear anything fall."

The following Wednesday, I am out and about. I use a walker, but I'm a speed demon compared to most of the pigeons in this place. I haven't seen Gwen for a few days, so I've decided to go look for her. Just to say hey.

Down the hall, I take a rest in the seat next to the pay phone. With my index finger, I check the coin return. Empty. I used to come out here a lot to call those 1-800 hotlines. You can get a phone in your room, but it costs extra, so why bother. Anyway, those hotlines are nice, if you just want someone to talk to. There are tons of them: the Alcohol Abuse, the Suicide, the Health Care Financing, the Surgical Second Opinion. One time, I got the numbers mixed up and told the finance lady that I was drinking my whole check away. "I know what you mean," she said.

I tried to call Derrick once, maybe three years ago. Sue wrote one boring letter a year for the first few years after they moved, encouraging me to reconsider Arizona. By the time I called, their number had been changed. I thought of trying to locate them, but, not long after, Gwen was assigned to this floor. Now, I don't bother to call Derrick or those hotlines anymore.

I grab the gray handles of my walker, hoisting my rear . . .

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Screen stars. Sex queens like Clara Bow. Jean Harlow. Eating persimmons, puckered. Looking always all puckered up and ready. To the point of monotony. Forced into an automobile and still puckered, a tiny Cupid's bow. Then Marilyn. Her lips quivering. Always slightly open. Made parted lips popular. All the starlets, imitating. Glistening. Polished. Tinged with imbecility. A helpless willingness. So much the better. Fleshy. The organs of speech. To touch with. Living cells. A dead surface. Flawed. Tight-lipped. Lip-sync. Lip service. Lip readers. Lippy. Lipless. Lipping. Lip-like. Labium. Labellum.

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“ . . . Mr. Brockner. Mr. Brockner.” A nurse is coming toward me.

“His name’s Bernie,” says Agnes from her room. She’s one of the pigeons. Slower than a seven-year itch.

“Mr. Brockner, are you okay?” She pats my arm, flattening wrinkles on my stupid blue pajamas.

“I’m fine, I’m fine. What’s the problem?”

“Well, nothing. But you were swinging your walker around. You could’ve hit someone. Just be more careful, okay?”

Gwen finally comes by to see me a couple of days later. She combs my hair, wearing a pretty white dress. In the six months I’ve known Gwen, I’ve never seen her wear anything but the plum and olive. She’s also brought me another book, a tragedy this time.

“All finished, Red,” she says, putting the comb down. Gwen saw a picture of me as a toddler, holding my balance on someone’s bare legs, and according to her my hair was red. Gwen’s hair, I have only seen tied back. It’s light brown and very straight. She seems to hold light in her dress.

“Where have you been?” I’ve wanted to ask since she walked in.

“It’s an earful,” she begins. The Director of Nursing had called her in for a meeting over two breaches in conduct, the minor breach being the rainbow button. “Accessories of any kind should not be secured or adjoined to a nurse’s uniform.” The director read to Gwen directly from the Plum Grove Nurse’s Conduct Guide. This minor breach might’ve been overlooked if not for the major breach. I, Bernard Brockner, am the major breach. “A professional relationship between nurse and patient should be maintained, exhibiting a courteous, conscientious, and generally businesslike manner in the workplace at all times.” This ordinance keeps going. Gwen gives the shortened

version.

“Those bastards,” I say.

“Hold on, Bern. Let me get to the good part. So, after that whole massacre, I decided I’d take a few days off. I stayed downtown. A hotel called the Gaddis, in the Loop. Flo’s always on my case, anyway, to not simply read about life but to go out and live one. There are some really cool used bookstores on Clark and Belmont. And thrift stores, and I went to a punk concert at the Metro. The Smoking Popes. That was last night. I met a bunch of people, and after the show we went to a body-piercing shop. It’s called The Mad Needle. It was so great. I’d show you if it was at all accessible.”

My jaw feels loose. “Goodness, Gwen, where is it?”

“It’s on my belly button.”

“Sweet lord.”

“Anyway, I took the Conduct Guide with me and read over it at the hotel. It’s about eighty pages, and I don’t know how many people working here have actually read...”

In the background I hear Harry Caray calling the game, suddenly loud enough that I miss some of what Gwen’s saying. I grab the remote to lower the volume, but then I see the TV isn’t on.

“... but this is the part you’re going to really like. Near the back of the guide it’s very clear that those awful uniform colors are only suggested. Everybody just wears it assuming they have to. I got this dress out of the closet this morning, and they’ve been staring at me all day.”

“Plum-pigeons.”

A thin lash of hair has escaped from Gwen’s ponytail holder, wispy and light. “Enough about me.” She tucks it behind her ear. “How’s life in the pen? How’s confession going?”

I start to rub my side, but Gwen moves my hand. “Lately, I’ve been drifting,” I say. She sits on the bed beside me and works over my lower back. “I just sort of tune out.”

"Can you tell me what it's like?"

"That's just it. I come back to myself—like a stranger."

"Has Murray been okay?" I catch a glimpse of a pink cartoon bear peeking from behind Rainer's curtain.

"Murray is a fortress. Pure solid. There's potential when Christ comes, Murray will be the gates of Heaven."

Gwen laughs, which frightens the bear.

"We'll all live inside Murray." She laughs harder and white light seems to explode from behind me.

"Bernie, seriously, I think Murray has to be evaluating."

I suggest we talk about something lighter. Gwen objects. She starts to talk about the Alzheimer's floor, asking about Derrick and Sue, what they'd think. I have never told Gwen that I've lost track of them. I insist again on a lighter subject, picking up the book she brought.

It is only a few days later when I figure out that Murray is withholding my mail. Derrick and Sue have finally sent a package, filled with butterscotch and licorice drops. Murray passes by my door twice in a matter of hours. I decide it's time to demand my package.

448672\*.\*°°78287962963[[[[[ [[[[ [[ [[ [ [ Curious. A girl in high school. Said to have the hottest lips. Sprinkle her lips with pepper. Gives off sparks. An extra thrill, a distinct aftertaste more like spearmint. A kind of intensity. A purposefulness about her kissing. Something really intimate about the whole business. A fifty-cent booth. Kisses for sale. Kiss her three times. I only have a dollar-fifty on me. A curious interest in lips. The word *lip*. Goes back through Middle English. To the Anglo-Saxon *lippa*. Related to the Latin *labium*. A little embarrassing, maybe. That Elizabeth Taylor. Flat and squashed lips. Against Richard Burton. Which is fine, I always identified well with him. Projecting. Contact. A cherry stem. Ancient cosmetic. The ancient Egyptians colored. So men would notice. With overripe berries. Then, lipstick. A

waxy solid. Better for handbags. And when berries aren't in season. Mainly, colored red. Until recently. The revolution. Green, blue, purple. Most recently, gray. The new vogue. Looks chapped, or not there at all. And men stare. Wondering where are her lips? Hooked. Once he's started to stare. He can be hooked. In front of a mirror. You put on lipstick. For hours. The process goes like this. Rub it all over. Then purse your lips. Till they completely disappear. They will pop out again. A finish job with your finger. Around the edges. Rub the upper lip with the lower lip until the lipstick is gone. Start all over again. A suggestion. With lips. It's not so much how they look. As how they feel. Smooth and resilient. A little give. But should bounce right back. Warm. About 98.6 degrees. Moist. Think organic. Like a fully ripe edible berry. That cluster of orange persimmons. Globular and seeded. Tattooed lips. In an unusual place. Any old place, really. Panting. False starts. Faint heart ne'er won fair lips. Shakeypoo. And steal immortal blessing. From her lips. Fair lips. Murderous and healthy. Marlowe. Her lips suck. Forth my soul. Fleшы. Muscular, maybe. Composing the opening of the mouth. In man and many animals. And covering the teeth. Her lips were red. One was thin.

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There are some moments I'm not so sure about. It might have been Gwen who came into the room and asked me to stop calling people pigeons. And then there was someone wanting me to understand about the most rapid cases of dementia, how they can bring on premature senility in less than two weeks (even to people in their twenties, though this isn't as common). I can't put a face to these words, though other moments seem clear, like when I come back to myself naked on the white tile in the floor of the hall, and Gwen, who has bright scratches across her face, is trying to help me stand.

"Don't look at me!"

“Bern. Quiet. I’m trying to get you to your room.”

I push Gwen away when I notice blood and skin under my fingernails.

“Bernie, please stop. They’re right down the hall.”

“Don’t look, oh God, Gwen, don’t.” My skin is blotchy and pale, taking the shape of my bones. I don’t want Gwen to see.

“I’m not looking. Look, I closed my eyes.”

“Get away. Your red dress is blinding me.” There are scratches on Gwen’s arms also. Inside the room, I push away again, and this time I fall to the floor with a thud. I grab on to the lowered metal guardrail of my bed frame.

“Bernie. Let me help.” She pulls the sheets off my bed and tries to cover me.

“You saw me naked. Just leave.”

Gwen closes the door quickly. She unzips her dress and lets it drop to the floor. As it falls, I can see that her dress is white; it’s always been white. She says, “There now. Quiet, honey. Let me hold you.”

“Gwen. Please.”

“I’ll sing to you. How about if I sing?”

I let go of the guardrail, and she rolls me back, setting my head in her lap. Super Grover flies by Rainer’s window. The sun reflects off his silver helmet, his cape a purple streak. Gwen is singing.

*“I can’t let you be, ‘cause your beauty won’t allow me. Wrapped in white sheets like an angel from a bedtime story. You shut out what they say ‘cause your friends are fucked up anyway. And when they come around, somehow they feel up and you feel down.”*

Rainer appears from behind his curtain. His skin is golden brown.

*“When we were kids, we hated things our parents did. We listened low to Casey Kasem’s radio show. That’s when friends were nice, to think of them just makes you feel nice. The smell of grass in spring, and October leaves cover ev-*

*anything. Have you forgotten how to love yourself?"*

A drop of blood moves slowly down Gwen's cheek. She has tears in her eyes.

*"I can't believe all the good things that you do for me. Set back in a chair, like a princess from a faraway place. Nobody's nice. When you're older your heart turns to ice. Shut out what they say, they're too dumb to mean it anyway."*

I notice that the rosy-faced girl has been asleep under my bed just as Murray marches into the room. She does not look up from her clipboard. Other nurses follow behind her.

That was, most likely, the last time I will see Gwen in this life. It has been a good number of months. Since then, I have gone through a long series of testing and been moved to the Alzheimer's floor. I did fine on the house-drawing test, but the doctor said my clock looked a little odd. I looked at the drawing again. The numbers hung down from the right side of the circle. "Looks more like a lumpy balloon," she said.

Today, Erma Lee came into my room and peed in the corner. "I don't want to change my bra," she kept yelling. I pushed my call-light button, but no one came.

Murray doesn't take my confession anymore, and I wouldn't know if it was Saturday, anyway. I don't watch much TV these days. Harry doesn't like a lot of commotion. And then my attention isn't so good. There was a testing section on that, too: attention and calculation. Counting by sevens and spelling "world" backwards. I decide to try again. "D . . . L . . ." A gruff voice whispers could I please be quiet. I lie back and look at the postcard that Gwen sent. I taped it next to my bed. The picture shows two students walking arm in arm at the University of Chicago, where Gwen is now attending. She says the kids are pretty boring, but that she has a good English teacher. I imagine Gwen in class, raising her hand. Her thin, red lips have all the answers.

# Break

Kevin Adkins



**This is what I say when I say it**  
*OR*  
**“Who would create me?”**  
**(a bedtime story in ten parts)**

D. Allen Rawson

I

What do I own outside of my body?  
Books and scraps and treasure maps.  
What do I know outside of my body?  
Debit cards and phonographs.

II

For awhile I've felt something growing inside of me,  
And it's working its way to my hands:  
The Fates are giving tongue to my eyes:  
My pockets in which good intentions hide:  
I've got a ticket—I've got a meeting with a preacher man.

III

I've decided to create, to make him:  
My image, or someone's—it doesn't matter much—  
My Humpty Dumpty—Every world needs a Humpty Dumpty.  
I know how to make a man.  
I know how to give life.  
I know how to make love, take love, break and shake and  
fake love.  
I will scratch him with my nail:  
I make from scratch—

IV

Maybe it's like batter—Maybe it's like yeast,  
And he never knows exactly how much to use—  
Does using half the batter really matter?  
Maybe sometimes you get a bad batch—Sometimes the  
batters come together:  
Two become one:  
Sometimes a girl is born with four arms  
Four legs—  
Some are born with wings: we call them angels.  
Some are born with tails: Don't look  
Don't look -- look away  
Child look away—  
Bless the Heavens, child. Say your prayers, child. Be glad  
you're not like them.  
Be glad.

V

When I tell the story, I don't say *God*.  
I don't want to blame him if he's up there.  
It's like Ecclesiastes.  
It's like the Byrds.  
The Fates must have good intentions—  
As mortals, we cannot see.  
We can only be.

VI

Wait.  
This scientist, working for the government  
Is told to create a  
Crime Fighting Machine.  
From the outside, it'll look normal—  
No—better, it'll look broken.  
Gnarled and twisted and broken.

There will be a word: a word that triggers it—  
That wakes it up, that makes it spring into crime fighting action.

You can say the word now.  
I'm waiting—I'm listening.  
Someone say my word.  
But no one says the word.

## VII

Scratch that.  
I'm getting the story all wrong.

At first they think he is dead—he is too quiet—  
And when he comes out, he cries and cries, and they see:  
They see it.  
And an old woman, an ancient, comes out of the shadows  
and proclaims,  
“This boy. This boy is cursed.  
    He is being punished for his last life.”  
But she tells them to have mercy,  
    that the body does not know the spirit.  
The spirit has deformed the body—  
This spirit murdered.  
Bloodlust, musky-thrust, hoof dust—  
This spirit was hungry.  
This child carries the sins of a former life.  
Now the sins are carried with him:  
Carried in the skin, carried in his gut.

## VIII

But wait—Maybe this is all we have.  
Maybe the darkness is just *darkness*,  
And maybe he was an accident.  
Maybe there is no one to apologize.  
No help number.

No return center.  
No please form line here.  
Well, this is a terrible story.  
There's no plot.  
This is a dreadful story.

IX

Once upon a time, a prince was born.  
He had a happy childhood filled  
    with wonder and musical numbers,  
And then a few chapters were devoted  
    to a bittersweet coming-of-age.  
The prince discovers his body, discovers the beauty in the world,  
marries this saucy number a few kingdoms down,  
And they have children because  
    that's what married couples do,  
And no one is born defected.  
And Thursday is Meatloaf Night.

X

It's getting late.  
I'll tell you the rest tomorrow night.  
You'd better get some sleep.

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## two peas

Jason Holler

she and i  
share a beer  
and the desire  
to sleep with attractive women.

a blues band finishes tuning  
smoke crawls across us  
we smile over a tipped bottle  
not saying a word to each other.

later we dance to oohs and awes  
she is a bullfighter and i  
a matador's moustache  
perched under the nose of courage.

there's no end in sight  
no last song  
no last call  
no last drink.

just electricity  
and the night  
and her  
and me.

## If Fat Was a Color

Megan Hudgins

You'd love me wrinkled  
like a raisin 'cause  
it's the deepest shade  
of grape that you know.  
Scrape up the pulpy  
parts of me in the  
colander and give  
it a sniff like you  
can smell those colors.

And fat's a feeling  
like the slickest fruit  
going down and the  
thumping guttural  
pulse of being just  
barely alive but  
unmistakably  
on the vine. So thank  
you for squeezing me  
for more than just the  
sweet vitamin c.

# Snuggles II

Renee Dow



## A Valediction in 88 Keys

Richard Fore

I don't believe in this world, anymore, anymore  
I don't believe in me  
And if I can rise above this I'll be saved  
Can anybody save me?

"Tongue," by Seether

I only play the piano located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of Thompson University Center because I don't have one at my apartment. I can't afford one, and there isn't any room for a piano even if I could. There isn't anywhere else for me to play. That's why I play here at Thompson. There are a few couches and chairs in the relaxation area with the piano, but they were all empty when I sat down. I only play when I'm alone. I'm not afraid of playing in front of an audience, even though I never really have before. It's just that I don't want to start playing and disturb anyone who's already here studying or doing homework.

It's a short grand piano, probably very old. The black paint has started to chip in places, and there are a lot of scratches all over it. But that doesn't bother me. It only makes me think that it's been here for some time, that a lot of other people before me have used it and enjoyed it. There's a small sign posted on the wall that asks us not to put any food or drink on the piano. I always abide by the suggestion. I hope it will be here for a long time after I'm gone. I hope someone always keeps playing it.

My grandmother taught me how to play. She had a parlor grand piano in her home, and would always play for me whenever I visited. When my mother died and my father became even more an alcoholic and decided he didn't want a son, I went to live with her. That's when she started teaching me. I was 12. She was a good teacher. My grandmother expected a lot out of me, but she was

always very gentle. She never yelled at me or scolded me when I made a mistake. But she always rewarded me when I did well. Sometimes she would bake cookies. Sometimes she would just give me a hug and tell me I did a good job. I lived with her for three years, until she died. Then I went back and lived with my father, who still hadn't decided he wanted a son. He did yell at me and scold me when I made a mistake.

I asked him if we could keep Grandma's piano after she died. He said no. There was nowhere for it to go, he said. He sold it at her estate sale. I don't remember how much he got for it. He said if I was really interested in music that he would get me another instrument that was cheaper and took up less space, even though they all ultimately wound up being too expensive.

The piano isn't the only instrument I can play, but it's my favorite, and what I'm best at. My love for the piano is one reason I became a music major.

"What can you do with that?" my father had asked me after I told him I had gotten into college to study music.

"Learn how to make music," I told him. He wasn't impressed. He never has been.

I called him the other day. There was a long silence after we exchanged hellos. I wanted him to ask me something. Ask me about anything. But he didn't. So I asked him about a few things. How was his job going? How were things with his new girlfriend? "Fine," was what he answered both questions with, without further elaboration. I told him that the semester was ending soon and that summer would be starting. I waited to see if he would ask if I would be coming home, but he didn't. I told him I wouldn't be.

"I have to go now," was his response.

"Yeah, so do I," was mine.

I like playing a large repertoire of music on the piano. The musical score from the film *Halloween*, even a version of Eminem's song "Real Slim Shady," even though I hate the

song, but mostly I play classical.

A girl sits down on one of the couches near me. She's wearing a gray sweatshirt with our school initials. She puts her hair into a ponytail and takes out a few books, a pencil, and paper.

The girl takes off her shoes and drapes her feet over the edge of the couch and begins to read.

I want to play something for her. Something non-obtrusive, that will put her mind at ease and help her study. Something she can enjoy. Beethoven's *Piano Sonata No. 14* in C-sharp minor, the "Moonlight" sonata, is perfect for the occasion. Often I'll listen to this when I'm studying or thinking. Ludwig dedicated this to his pupil, the Countess Giulietta Gucciardi. I've heard that he was in love with her, but it was love that went unreciprocated.

I begin to play for the girl. I don't know if she reacts to it, as I don't look at her. I always close my eyes when I play. She can consider it an anonymous gift. I finish the first part, *Adagio Sostenuto*, as far as I know without a single error, and am going to take a breather before I begin the *Allegretto*.

Someone taps me on the shoulder. It's the girl.

"I'm sorry, but would you mind playing a little quieter? I'm trying to get some studying done and I have a test today."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I'll try to keep it down."

"Thanks." She half smiles at me as she walks back to her books.

I can use this time to work on my fingering. I gently touch the keys with my fingers, making sure I don't press on them firmly enough to elicit sound. I decide to forgo the *Allegretto*, and switch to practicing Mozart's *Requiem*. I don't need the practice, I can already play this piece by heart. There's no need to close my eyes.

## Tiny Shipwrecks

Tracy Clark

There are waves upon the hull that splash into the main.  
It's not raining this time,  
but there are drops, beads like perspiration  
    running down the mast  
onto the imposing deck and dripping through cracks  
    onto the cargo below.

Sails bound by durable gunny, white dresses  
    fluttering against the veins of the ship,  
catch the breeze, swelling against the yard arms.  
The helm turns freely with no one to guide it.

Little beaches off the shore can be seen  
    from the great scope  
sitting upon the slender wooden rail.  
Many younger ships have crashed upon the sand.

The remnants of the small skiffs that have sailed before  
still lie upon the reefs.

## **Rabullione (I: Taking, II: Giving, III: Receiving)**

A.C. Doty

Rabullione unsheathed his sword  
And hollered loud and charged toward  
The City of the Golden Domes,  
Russia's Spirit, heart of Third Rome.  
With hordes of loyal men behind,  
Napoleon's armies defined  
Horizons red and white and blue,  
But Russia had horizons, too.  
They scorched the earth to fend their foes,  
And after ground burned up, it froze.  
But still the army carried on  
Following Rabullione  
As winter came, men drew coats near,  
Provided harsher foe to fear.  
And o'er the hills, there Moscow rose  
With wooden homes all set in rows,  
Like rows of corn, ready for grind,  
But Moscow had another mind.  
Again with fire, they torched the town  
To try to keep the Frenchmen down.  
Napoleon, a snarling mess,  
Surveyed his men and did assess  
The only course of action left:  
Retreating with a heart bereft.  
As Moscow burned and, silent, jeered  
Napoleon just cursed and reared  
His horse to leave the wintry plain  
Ashamed to leave his failed campaign.  
But further woe was yet in store  
As winter gave a harsh downpour  
Of snow and sleet and chilling wind  
The valiant soldiers did rescind  
Their lives to cold and hunger both

They died as men who kept an oath  
To fight for mighty Emperor  
Who hung his head with soft murmur  
“Seven hundred thousand men came,  
Ambitious to promote my name.  
I gave them Russia as a tomb,  
Ten thousand are returned in gloom.”

## The Fire Theft

A.C. Doty

We huddled together for warmth  
In the streets of Moscow, 1812  
Snow fell on our shoulders  
From golden domed spires,  
The tops of our beautiful city

In the bazaar, Napoleon's loyal soldiers  
Made campfires from fruit stands,  
Ate our Russian pears and apples,  
Roasted rabbits and bit them from their bayonets,  
Called themselves the new gods  
Of our holy city

But our own Prometheus came to us

Some mysterious stranger  
He was  
Some magnificent savior

His footprints marked his path  
From the gate of St. Basil's Cathedral.  
Hooded face and robed body,  
None addressed him as he carried his message  
Straight to Napoleon's heart

Stooping at a fire, Prometheus withdrew  
A bouquet of fennel from his sleeve,  
Plunged it into the flames  
And hurled it into an inn

As Napoleon's soldiers rushed  
To extinguish the flames  
Prometheus vanished,

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His exit unseen by all  
His actions visible from the horizon

The Big Village's wooden buildings,  
Piles of kindling,  
Ready for combustion;  
The fire was Moscow's medicine  
To purge the invading virus,  
Its plague of frogs

And Napoleon's golden apple  
Melted in his hands

## Ocean of Tears

Janella Moy

It was January of 1948 when Goon Gum stepped aboard the large ship that would carry her over that ocean of tears to what would become her new home. As she stood on the deck looking back at her homeland, Goon Gum thought of the fortuneteller's reading so many years before. Eight years had passed since her husband had left for America where he remained throughout World War II, leaving her to face the death of their daughter alone. Tears welled in her eyes as she wondered what her future now held; a husband she no longer knew, a country filled with strangers and strange customs, and an ocean that would separate her from the only family and world she had ever known. And then she remembered the final words of the old woman, "...an ocean of tears will bring you happiness." She had certainly cried an ocean of tears since her daughter's death, but in her heart, she knew that it was this ocean, the Pacific Ocean, that would bring her back to happiness, back to her husband and a new world of opportunities and dreams.

Life had always been hard, but what else was to be expected. In the small village of Tao Pei, the daily life of women began before sunrise with starting the fire over which rice mash boiled. With the sunrise, work moved to the rice fields, where the women hoed and weeded, stopping only in time to return to their small thatched houses to fix the evening meal of fried fish, bok choy, and steamed rice. This was Goon Gum's life and had been the life of her mother and her mother's mother before her. It was a long history of work, hardship, and longing, but Goon Gum dreamed, as she pulled weeds from watery fields or washed the supper dishes, of a day when her labors would lessen, of better days and an easier life for her own daughters to come.

Goon Gum was small of frame with a round face, full lips, and beautiful almond shaped eyes. But her husband's family had not seen Goon Gum's beauty when they arranged the marriage of their son to the fourteen-year-old girl. Instead, it was Goon Gum's obedient spirit and her strength of body that told her in-laws she would make a fine wife and could work long hours. Her soft spoken manner and quiet disposition had been taught to her by her mother in preparation for life as a married woman, acquiescing to her husband's demands and desires. Goon Gum had learned well and had easily melded into her husband's family. Now, married almost two years and pregnant with her first child, Goon Gum felt true happiness. As the nine months progressed, she worked shorter days in the field and spent more time at home knitting sweaters, hats, and booties for her baby.

With only a few weeks until the delivery of her child, Goon Gum and her sister went to a fortuneteller well-known to the family; she was a bent back elderly woman possessing the face of a dried apple with two black eyes shining through slits and crooked, knobby hands. The fortuneteller had Goon Gum sit on a low stool before her and she took out a golden coin hung from a red silk string. Dropping the coin from her hand while holding the end of the silk string, the old woman let the coin dangle over Goon Gum's protuberant belly. Observing the swinging motion of the coin closely, the smiling fortuneteller announced that the baby would be a healthy girl. But upon dropping green tea leaves into boiling water, the old woman's face abruptly changed. Goon Gum noticed the difference and became uncomfortable. "What is wrong? Is it something with my child? Please, tell me what misfortune awaits me?"

Noting the young woman's duress, the fortuneteller promptly swirled the cup of water and performed her reading. "There will be difficult times ahead for you and your family. Fear and death will enter your home, and only

an ocean of tears will bring happiness back into your life.” Sadly, the two women paid the elderly woman and left for home.

Upon arriving home, Goon Gum was met by her husband, Poy, pacing in the doorway. Poy was a teacher in their small village, but lately he had become active in local politics. With the recent take over of Canton, China, by Communists, even small farming villages like Tao Pei and its residents were beginning to feel the demands made for more taxes and fear the political backlash that may come to those who fought the harsh taxing of rice and property. Poy, a self-educated man, had spoken loudly at village meetings and amongst the men of the village against the Communist occupation. Goon Gum had feared for her husband's life even as he talked amongst his friends and family about standing up to Communist threats, but she was only a woman and it was not her place to speak to her husband of such issues. But with today's ill fortune and her first child soon to be delivered, Goon Gum decided she must speak with her husband for the welfare of their family. As she approached Poy pacing slowly in the doorway of their small home, she could see that her fears were becoming a reality. She was the first to speak, “Poy, what is it that troubles you? I see you pace with worry in your eyes? I fear that the evil of these days will cast hardship upon our unborn child.”

“It is not for you to worry, woman. Our child is healthy enough, but I must leave this village if I am to stay alive. The Communists have been to Tao Pei and they seek those who speak out against them.”

Goon Gum quietly replied, “Poy, what will we do? Where will you go?”

“I have been thinking that it is time I left China. I will find means to quietly leave Tao Pei and go to my uncle in America. With talk of war across both sides of the ocean, I must leave now before all borders are closed. I will work with my uncle and send back money to bring you and our

child to meet me when times are safer. Until then, you will remain in Tao Pei with your family.”

Thinking of the fortuneteller’s reading, Goon Gum was filled with fear for her husband and her family. She knew that if Poy were caught leaving the country, he would be killed, as would she and her child. And even if Poy successfully escaped the Communists, how would she and the child survive? And what if Poy did not return or send for them, what would she do? Thinking of the future filled Goon Gum with sorrow and she began to cry.

The following months were filled with both sadness and joy. Poy went into hiding from the Communists as he made preparations to leave the country. With the help of his uncle in America and an entire year’s salary, Poy purchased the visa of a young Chinese man who had recently died. He would need the visa to get past the immigration officials when he arrived in America. Meanwhile, Goon Gum continued with her work in the rice fields and her preparations for the birth of her daughter. In early May of 1937, Mai Lee was born, a strong healthy baby girl. Goon Gum vowed to herself that her daughter would grow up happy and prosperous. But this dream would never become reality. Poy left Tao Pei for America in June and Goon Gum was left alone with her daughter and her husband’s family. The hot months of July and August moved slowly and the work in the fields along with caring for her infant left Goon Gum tired and sad. But her sadness was soon to become much greater. In the early weeks of November Mai Lee developed a fever. Goon Gum called for the midwife and the fortuneteller, but nothing could be done. Within days the infant was listless and unresponsive. It was on November 10 that Mai Lee died. A small funeral was held among the family members, but Poy could not be there. Goon Gum stood by the child’s small casket bowing to those who came to honor her dead child. And as the casket was lowered into the earth, money and candies were thrown into the hole for Mai Lee to take with her on her

journey into the next world. Goon Gum wept realizing that the fortuneteller's vision was coming true all too soon.

After the death of Mai Lee, Goon Gum left her husband's family and returned to live with her sister. She heard from her husband through occasional letters and passed on to him the sad news of their child's death. Poy had gotten work at his uncle's dry cleaning shop and was saving money to bring Goon Gum to the states. But the world was now engulfed in a fierce war that would keep Poy and Goon Gum separated for six long years. Following the war, Goon Gum would wait another two years before receiving her visa and the savings from Poy to purchase her boat passage to California.

Sailing into San Francisco harbor one cold January morning, Goon Gum was greeted by Poy and his uncle. The four-week voyage had been the beginning of Goon Gum's dream for a new life. The work in the rice fields was soon replaced by the chores of motherhood. One by one five healthy children, four boys and a girl, were born to Goon Gum and Poy. Although life was far from easy for this family of seven, Goon Gum could see that her dream of a better life for all five of her children, but especially her daughter, had become a reality and finally the words of the fortuneteller had, at last, come true.

# Peace of Mind

Jessica Moore



## The Photograph

Amanda Neudecker

“There it is,” she said, pointing to the old rustic barn on her right as John pulled the red Ford Focus over to the side of the interstate. No sooner had he pulled over, Caroline had jumped out of the car and slammed the door. John moved more cautiously, waiting for the approaching semi to pass, and then he walked around the front of the car to come stand beside her. Caroline was wearing her favorite beige knitted scarf and matching gloves, and her navy blue button down pea coat which enveloped her, keeping her warm. John, who said he didn’t get cold, wore a lighter sports jacket. He had diagnosed Caroline with a sort of winter weather illness, telling her she had abnormalities in body temperature regulation.

Caroline had passed this site on several occasions, sometimes almost on a daily basis—on her way to the university, on her way to work at the local grocery—and she had always wanted to stop. The topic just happened to come up in her and John’s conversation. Admittedly, he didn’t understand her passion completely, but seemed to support it fully, nonetheless, Caroline realized as she scanned the landscape. She had oftentimes debated stopping on her own; in fact, she had thought about it frequently. However, she had been uncertain, partially because she was nervous to stop by herself—she had an unnatural fear of being picked off the side of the highway by an approaching car—and partially because she was always in a hurry and much too busy for such extracurricular activities. When she had mentioned the barn alongside the highway (as it had somehow worked its way into the conversation), John had insisted they stop. Now he stood beside her as she stooped down, resting on one knee while she sifted through lens caps and attachments.

Caroline looked through the viewfinder, turning the

focusing ring, slowly allowing the image before her to come into focus. The barn stood tall, lonely, and abandoned in the middle of the barren cornfield, which had been stripped of its countless rows of corn in the recent fall harvest. As she set the shutter speed and adjusted the aperture for the light meter, she imagined the old barn in a former life. She assumed at one time it had been accompanied by a strong little white farm house, plain aside from its green shutters and a stately lawn. A tractor would have been parked on the side next to a square hen house, where a little girl scattered feed for the hens and rooster.

Now, in the present day, the old barn's only company was a tall, skinny and misshapen tree, which Caroline could not accurately describe, except to say that it looked like something pulled straight from Dr. Suess's *The Lorax*, minus the exotic rainbow of colors present in the book's imaginative scribblings. It was so misshapen, and altogether visually interesting, which she supposed was the main reason she had wanted to photograph it for so long. Every time she passed it, she imagined the scene frozen in a frame, depicted in a stark (and yet timeless) black and white. She liked the feeling she imagined it would leave the viewer with, how aesthetically pleasing to the eye it would be in a moment frozen in time.

Unfortunately, though, the world was not in black and white—the world was in color. The only uncertainties in life were not the rarity of a few shades of gray in between. Instead, in this world of color—vibrant and alive though it was—things blended together. Reds and yellows were oranges, reds and blues were purples. There were so many uncertainties, so many borderline cases, and so many exceptions to rules. She realized this now, as she peered over at John, who had wandered slightly, and had begun to kick at the gravel alongside the edge of the highway with his white New Balance sneakers. They were new, she had noticed. The cars whirred past, and it was almost as if they sped between the two of them, creating an imaginary wall,

or a barrier that couldn't be crossed.

He only wanted to be her friend, he had told her. And still she couldn't help but be attracted to him, even though she didn't want to be. She hadn't known she could care about a single person so much, and yet she wasn't quite sure how to define it. On more than one occasion, she had felt as though they were dating, and if they had labeled it any other way, they very well could have been. She remembered the first weekend after she had asked him to dinner. He was shocked, she could tell, and it terrified her. She hadn't called him after that. He had called her instead, and they had gone to a photo opening, following a dinner at a classy restaurant. But it was not a date. It was what friends did. After all, it was completely normal for two friends to share a delicious meal.

She shifted her mind back to the task at hand. Had her mother been there, she would have scolded her for using an entire roll of film on a rustic barn alongside I-70, placed in the middle of a corn field, all by itself. It wasn't hard to do: she shot from different angles and abstracted portions of the scene, lining everything up in her viewfinder, her very own artistic window to the world. When she had done all she could, she shot photographs of John, who stood slightly slack, his shoulders slightly hunched over, arms crossed. His dark eyes were focused on something else, perhaps a passing car. He was uninterested in the old barn, and didn't see what she saw at all. She brought him into focus, placing his image slightly off to the left, focusing intently on the rule of thirds. The shutter clicked. He was looking at his feet. The shutter clicked again. His watch. And then again. The film advanced a final time, then began to rewind. Suddenly she realized how cold she was, how her fingers stung, even inside her gloves, and how her body was cold, even beneath her coat and sweater. "I'm ready to go," she told him triumphantly, anxious to process her exposed film. The two of them walked back to the car, the barrier still present, the colors still mixed together, with no definitive shapes or lines.

## Contributors' Notes

**Kevin Adkins** is a Sociology major and Art minor.

**Tracy Clark** is a English major and Creative Writing minor. She lives in Gillespie, Illinois and works for her father at a welding company. After college, she wants to join the Peace Corps.

**Amanda Lea Dickson** is currently a second year graduate student in the department of Art and Design Painting program at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. She received her B.F.A. in Studio Arts and a B.A. in Psychology from Wichita State University in Wichita, KS, in 2006. Her work has been shown in numerous national shows within the Midwest region, as well as receiving awards in juried shows, locally. Her work has been included in publications such as Photographer's Forum Magazine. She currently teaches drawing in the Department of Art and Design at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

**A. C. Doty** is a Creative Writing student from Peoria, IL. He plans on attending graduate school in 2009 to acquire a Master of Fine Arts degree, after which he intends to perform extensive original research in examining contemporary song lyrics as poetry. His influences include, among others, Sufjan Stevens, Aaron Weiss, Colin Meloy, Ben Gibbard, and all of the students and faculty involved with the English department at SIUE, whom he would like to thank for their constant support and mentoring.

**Renee Dow** is a freshman Psychology major with a minor in Art from Peoria, Illinois. She aspires to be an art therapist and use her training in missionary work overseas or the inner-city.

**Richard Fore** will graduate this summer with a B.A. in English.

**Lauren Gerber** has recently published her first novel, *Serrated Soul*, under the pen name of Desiree Draven. She was published in the *River Bluff Review* last year, as well as several other magazines. She plans on attending graduate school in Colorado and teaching English at a university.

**George Grenchik** is a senior on the cusp of super seniorhood. His areas of study are psychology and history. He would like to thank his editors, Jesse, Lauren and Kyle, for all their help. He would like to thank his family in the GSA and Alpha Phi Omega too! Cheers to all the readers.

**Sarah Hamzeh** is currently pursuing a degree in English and hopes to teach at a college level. The inspiration for the pieces that she writes comes from the people she meets and the fleeting moments that stay with her during the silence. Her family is a collection of strange and beautiful souls who have always encouraged her to write, and her mother, the muse of "Without Heat," gritty and wide-hearted, will always remain a strong influence, even in absence.

**Megan Hudgins** is currently a junior, majoring in English with a Creative Writing minor. Once she earns her B.A., she plans to earn an M.A. in Creative Writing (Poetry) and never look back. "Thank you, Allison Funk and Adrian Matejka."

**Jason Holler** is graduating this May with a B.F.A. in studio art. His area of concentration is drawing, but he also enjoys other artistic mediums such as sculpture, painting, music, dance and writing. Song lyrics and poetry remain his primary focus when writing. Recently he has been incorporating poetry into his visual work via Haiga.

**Jamie Larson** is a grad student in the creative writing program at SIUE. She is looking forward to this summer when she will load all of her belongings into a truck to head somewhere south for her M.F.A.

**Heath Garrett Luster** is a writer working and living in St. Louis. He plans to pursue an M.F.A. in Creative Writing after graduating with an English degree from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville in the fall.

**Jessica Moore** is a junior Mass Communications major. She has been taking photographs as a hobby for the past two years. The girl in her photo is her little sister Meaghan.

**Janella Dawn Moy** is completing her Master of Arts degree in English. When not teaching composition, working on her thesis, *Robert Lowell: Poetry, Power, and History*, or haunting the halls of Peck, Janella enjoys spending time with family, especially her three sons. “Ocean of Tears” is written in memory of Una Moy—a woman whose children and grandchildren have reaped the rewards of her courage and strength.

**Amanda Neudecker** is a sophomore and is planning to graduate with a B.S. in English. She hopes to pursue a teaching career and thoroughly enjoys writing, photography, and art. She is grateful to her family and friends for their encouragement and support throughout all of her endeavors.

**Michael Place** struggles against his own early onset Alzheimer’s every day. He would like to thank Professor Valerie Vogrin for her unceasing efforts and for being a fiery revelator for all his writing this year. He will be an M.F.A. candidate at Columbia University in the fall.

**D. Allen Rawson**, originally from Johnston City, IL, and now living in Collinsville, IL, is an English major and Creative Writing minor.

**Sarah Rogers** is a mass communications student at SIUE. She took her picture at the oldest donut shop in St. Louis (called World's Fair, off of Tower Grove and Shaw). She used an old toy camera called a Holga 120. The Holga is one of the oldest mass-produced Chinese cameras.

**Lindsey Schroeder** will be graduating this May with a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a minor in Creative Writing. She plans to take at least a year away from school, but will most likely attend graduate school in the not-so-distant future. In the meantime, she will continue to write poetry.

**Tracy Speakman** is a graduate student in Historical and Museum Studies and plans to graduate in the summer, 2008. Finding time between writing her thesis and interning, she enjoys writing poems and short stories. She would like to thank her husband, Sandy, for being a resilient sounding board and her dad for publishing her book of poetry when she was a child.

**Keigh-Cee Welsch** is pursuing her B.A. in English with a minor in Creative Writing for Poetry. She is graduating in August of 2008, after which she plans to get a "real job" and get her M.F.A. in Creative Writing. She wants to thank her family and close friends for always believing that she could write and giving her the courage she needs to pursue it as a profession.