



FRESH INK

2014

The Literary Journal of
Naugatuck Valley Community College

FRESH INK

2014

THE LITERARY JOURNAL OF
NAUGATUCK VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
WATERBURY, CONNECTICUT

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COVER ART: "NAIL IN THE WOOD" ELI HERNANDEZ, NVCC STUDENT
COVER DESIGN: LIZ CAMPBELL, NVCC ALUMNUS

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To our readers,

Our editors are pleased, as always, to offer you our selections for the 2014 edition of *Fresh Ink: the Literary Journal of Naugatuck Valley Community College*. This is our 45th year, and we are grateful to all our contributors and readers for whom we continue trying to provide a meaningful presentation of creativity.

Our contributors are a blend of students from our and other colleges, and writers from the general public who, whether by profession or passion, or perhaps both, have chosen to write, draw, photograph, to create, and who have found us to be a place worthy of sharing their work. We are very happy to see that our reach has been extended even further. New (to us) countries have found us this year, as we have received submissions from France and Maine (just kidding, Maine).

This year has marked a return to our roots in a way, as our editors have decided that we should refocus on our own students. This shift toward home is represented by our structuring the publication in two separate sections, presenting our student work first and in a separate section from the rest of the pieces we have chosen. Our goal, of course, is to maintain our standard of excellence, while growing the scope of submissions, evaluating all submissions by the same standards, and still ensuring that our own students remain proportionally represented in the publication.

Again, we would love to hear your suggestions about a thematic edition as we begin to approach our 50th year. Please enjoy the latest edition of *Fresh Ink*, and consider sending us feedback to freshink@nvcc.comnet.edu.

Appreciatively,

Greg Harding,
Managing Editor

SECTION I:
NVCC STUDENT
SUBMISSIONS
AND
AWARD
WINNERS

Graphic Winner and Cover

NAIL IN THE WOOD
ELI HERNANDEZ



Poetry Winner

Illusion

Molly Verrastro

When I walk through the quiet trees
I hear the whisper of the doves.
Snow falls from the sky
Blanketing the woods with white.
The world flips
And the mirror turns.
The doves are illusions,
Ravens in disguise,
Feasting on carrion.
The snow is not snow but
Ash falling through fog
When the rain falls the fire hisses
Licks it
And smolders
But burns ever brighter through the wood.

Poetry Runner-up

Entwined

Jocelin Albert

I thought I'd be able to reside there
In between you and that wall;
That hold, mixing feelings like witch's brew
You are an ingredient
And I am the wind.

I have a hold of you, something like a newborn.

I am a part of you, something like a rebirth.

Sink into me, something like a rewind.
Something like the earth.

Your branches tall; too high for me to reach
Something like a skyscraper, stretching further than I
can see.

As you stretch, I fall fall fall
For you.

Poetry 2nd Runner Up

Too Much Paper

Tom Clark

Cardboard people, with paper thin veins
Follow paper hallways to paper airplanes
After waiting in single file lines
They are boarded two at a time
Everyone is talking, but few are using their brains
They are all flying south, because they missed the last train
The clouds let them pass, although sense their intentions
But the sun just ignores them; he's working on his pension

A passing by bird admits that he is afraid
"Worry," says his father, "For they are all doomed anyway..."
"...Hell with their

Paper asses in paper jeans, paper pockets and paper dreams
Paper wallets and purses filled with paper money printed by
paper machines
Paper hats, paper masks, paper flaps and paper traps
Paper clocks and paper time, Paper life and paper dying
Paper souls with paper holes and paper bags and paper flags
Paper homes in paper towns in paper states with paper mates
Paper anger and paper love, paper below and paper above

Only in a paper world does paper beat rock
Remove the staples and unwrap some logic

So, Brothers and Sisters reach for the scissors!
We must join by the masses and raise our magnified glasses
Pull out the Zippos and strike up the matches

And burn this paper universe down...

...Or at least this paper verse, for now.

The Measure of All Things

Justin Grey

I begin by drawing a line with a ruler;
 An outline of a timeline of a line of rulers;
Rulers that one of wisdom would never cross
 (especially not those rulers under the cross).
I seek to serve man, but those rulers seek to serve man to other men.
I can't tell you what that means because I don't know what it means.
The one thing I know is that I know no thing,
 but I believe that man should be more than a means.
Man should be an end in and of himself
 but man is going to be the end of himself
 if he doesn't change himself --
 This seems to be an ending in itself.
I began by drawing a line with a ruler
 but I am not even the ruler of my own beginning.
In the beginning was a word: I
 But before "I" was a beginning.
By some unwritten rule, all rulers were ruled by the rulers before them.
 I don't know if there was ever a first ruler
 from which all rulers were measured;
But if man is the measure, the measured, and the measurer
 then why believe in a first ruler aside from I?
I began by drawing a line with a ruler
 and when I stop drawing, the line ends.

The Battle We Won

Michelle Demont

The waves of pain make me pause; him scurry
Each one stronger than the last
Colors black and red, now white-hot fury
Pain immense and fear ocean-vast

Clinging to him my life raft, adrift at sea
Jaws clenched in flesh; nails dug in
His helplessness, becomes part of me
As it began, and will end, skin to skin

Now I feel you; you're there
My little one, murderously slashing through
Death comes, watches us near
Birth's mirror image, so close to you

It's over, this bodily battle that seemed to forever last
Not the war, but the battle where death walked-on past

Graphic Runner Up

CHOSEN

STEPHEN M CODD



Prose Winner

What's a Girl To Do?

Charles Ehrnfelt

In a cushioned bar stool, Lucy told a bad joke surrounded by a dozen gawking boys, a week before the Sadie Hawkins dance. She was wearing a strapless black cocktail dress that her father was unaware of, leather flats that matched, and when she delivered the punchline wrong the boys dispensed polite laughs while she provided a sincere one, teetering like a buoy. After, her legs became straight so she could come down from atop the stool, and when she did, the boy closest to her offered her a hand to help her, which she playfully swatted away. The others made way for her to get through, and as they watched her leave, her perfume haunted their brains.

When she reached the other end of the basement she stopped at a refrigerator that was void of magnets. A lean boy in a jersey who knew her name opened it for her. She told him she was thirsty with her eyes, and he reached in to find something for her. He held up a box of Sunset Blush that belonged to someone else, and she drank from the spout. She forgot to say thank you when she was done.

She grew bored of the dim basement and tried to leave. The stairs challenged her. She scaled them with both hands on the wooden rail that was mounted to the wall to her right, holding it to her bicep like a rifle. She circled the house in search of the girlfriends she came with: in the kitchen, the garage, and even in and out of the bedrooms, but couldn't find them.

"Oh, they left with a few college boys," a classmate gushed. "One of them had a motorcycle." Lucy imagined herself on the bike, hair in the wind, and wondered how warm a college boy's waist could be.

A late Autumn breeze resisted the screen door as she

stepped out onto the front porch. Her legs sprouted goosebumps as she stood on the sandstone, scanning the front yard for her girlfriends. Black silhouettes stood in small circles of four and five, and she heard a few giggles that she didn't recognize before she decided the effort needed to stand was unappealing. Her bottom quickly fell numb against the cold porch as she waited for her girls. Classmates were summoned outside by the blare of car horns, and as they passed by her she got tight hugs from boys in varsity jackets, and fingery waves and chesty hugs from the girls who were oblivious to her secret aversion to them, and this only made her wish she knew where her friends were, even more.

The lawn emptied and was now silent. Soon, from down the driveway, a tall, black blob and a short one made their way towards the house, holding hands. When they came close enough the spotlight flicked on, and revealed them to be Jessy, the girl who lived at the house, and Tommy, the school's star pitcher.

"Hey Luce! Aren't you cold?" Jessy asked.

"A little bit." Her eyes were glued to Tommy, who flashed her a friendly smile, setting her cheeks agleam. He was alleviated of his braces over the summer, and his teeth stood noble like ivory chess pieces, framed by a pair of dimples that she already loved.

"You're welcome inside. We need help cleaning up anyway."

"Aw Jess, I would, but my mother is picking me up in about five minutes."

"Oh." Jessy's lips tightened enough for a whistle.

"Well, hope you had fun! We're going in now. Good night!"

"I did, and good night to you too!" She stood up gave goodbye hugs to the two of them, and watched Tommy pass through the doorway, wishing he was wearing his gray baseball pants.

Lucy started down the street. The night's bluster twinged at her thighs, and the streetlamps buzzed and blinked above as her shoes clacked on the pavement. Her wristlet fell off several times, and each time she nearly fell over when she reached for it.

Down ahead, a pair of blinding headlights turned onto the street from a corner shaded by blackening trees. They hovered towards her, slowly creeping, and pulled up to her and sat idling at her feet, before the prism on its roof lit up. The passenger window buzzed down.

"My goodness gracious, let me see those shoes!" the driver squealed. He was veiled in inky November darkness until he leaned onto his right elbow and neared the window, a clean shaven face beaming beneath rimless glasses.

"Thanks!" She took a shoe off, hobbling on one foot. She presented it to him in the palm of her hand, the way children hold frogs. He gasped at it, and stroked the plastic black oleander that perched on the toe.

"Adorable," meeting her eyes, oscillating his head in serenity. "What's a gal with great taste like you doin' walkin' home at this hour?"

She shrugged. He shook his head, tsk-tsked and waved her into the backseat, and after hearing the locks of the door pop, she opened the door and swung in. After a few stop signs, he started humming a song.

"So was your night as good as you look, honey?" He said fearlessly, in a finesse that glided like a chivalrous figure skater.

She blushed in the dark. "You're so sweet! It was fun. Yes."

"What's the ocasión?"

"There's a dance next wee-"

"Ooh!"

"A Sadie Hawkins."

"Ahh!" He sang. "So? How many contestants?"

"A bunch!"

He chuckled around the gum he was chewing. "Hopefully they're aware of what the winner gets or, what I'm hoping, doesn't get?"

"Hey! They do, they do. I swear."

"Attagirl. Where to, anyhow?"

"Umm. Maidenhair Street. Lane. Maidenhair Lane."

He chuckled again. "Here hon, eat one of these. Put something in your tummy." A paper bag rustled, and he handed her a doughnut coated in pulverized cinnamon. "God knows my fat ass doesn't need 'em." She ate it with two bites.

"Want another?" his eyes asked from the rear-view mirror. She nodded licking her fingers and making sucking sounds. He handed her a chocolate-frosted Bavarian cream through the divisive window, and it disappeared before he looked back at her again. Just as she watched a fresh glob of cream leak from her mouth to corrupt her dress, he said, "Which house, dear?"

"The white one. With the Infiniti inna driveway."

He chuckled again. He popped the locks to the door, and she fiddled for her wristlet.

"Oh, no no no, honey. It's on me."

"Oh, thank you! You're sure?"

"Yes. But," he pivoted around and pondered her for a second, before saying, "You've got to promise me you'll keep them guessing."

"Mhmm," she said, though she misunderstood.

"I mean it, babe. Drives them nuts."

"I will. I promise. Promise."

"Attagirl." He handed her a silver stick of gum like it was a ticket and she left the cab, and he blew her a kiss that went unseen.

She slid into her house after several attempts at the lock, left her shoes at the doormat, and crawled to her room to avoid her detection, and on the way, the gum escaped her mouth, twice. A moonbeam from her window glazed the floor with a thin, white road that led to her bed. She divested herself of her bra, melted into the sheets, watched the ceiling spin, considered all the boys, the doughnuts, Tommy in his baseball slacks, and decided she was too tired to be dwelling on such things and would have plenty of time mull over them tomorrow, during mass.

Prose Runner-Up

Motivation

Justin Hitchcock

“I wanted to start over.” Hands smelling of kerosene, he managed to pull a smile through the thick layer of ash covering his face. His white, well-managed teeth eerily stood out in contrast to the blackness of the soot. A single street-light broke the eternal darkness of the night, reminding him of the flames crackling just a few streets away. Motivation is a funny thing to try and understand. Every action, no matter the size, is set into motion by the initial conceptualization of motivation. Speaking only to the shadows, he searched for the right combination of words to express the raw feeling that possessed him to act. “I wanted a second chance.” He had begun to hear the echo of sirens, and squealing of tires as the response team grew closer. As he realized the faces of the shadows were deaf to his language, the overwhelming feeling of solitude overcame every inch of his mind. Left only to answer to his own conscience, his motivation started to sound unfamiliar. “I only wanted to change.” As he tried to hold on to his last threads of understanding, he could no longer fight off the barrage of unsettling thoughts that were now upon him. The familiar sting of regret paralyzed his legs, and left him facing the repercussions of his actions. Alone, he needed to define his motivation. The one thing that motivation can always be relied on for is forcing change. With no way of telling whether it will be positive or negative. “I just wanted to smile.” With the feeling of paralysis being lifted, he continued walking away from the fire, being particularly careful to take the road least traveled.

GONE

STEPHEN M CODD



Cerulean Wings

Joe Adomavicia

Even in the cold
Beauty stands bold
With leafless trees
And hints of snow
Covering the limbs
And maybe,
Someday soon
Blue jays
Will come and
Sing a song,
Maybe two,
With their
Delightful
Cerulean wings
Blessing thy ears
With songs of
Serenity
Glazing thy heart
Purifying,
Cleansing,
From within.

SECTION II:
SELECTIONS FROM
THE WORLD

Once upon a Snow Day

Sarah Page

Beauty always asks for a rose
I am no fairytale flesh
But I confessed to you
That when you asked
For my hand, yours had
Better offer me just one
Fragrant-petaled cliché.

In slush-narrowed streets
Overflowing with icebergs,
We trudged to what I supposed
Was the restaurant.
I wondered not how you
Would ask me, but why
You were jumping over
Sleet puddles in shoes
Instead of winter boots.

Impatience pricked me
All through dinner and back
To your apartment, where, like Houdini,
You produced a single fuchsia rose
Carefully shielded from frostbite
That you had won from a blizzard
Trudging snow-packed sidewalks
Drenching your boots to the skin—
All for your lady's wish.

But it was your wet soles that pleased me most.

Monkey By The Oven

Parker Towle

Mama didn't want me
she'd had three sons
living in one room
in her mother's house
that was enough

when I only weighed
two pounds doctor said
I couldn't live but
Daddy wanted a girl
took my body more
like a monkey than human
out to the pump forced
water down my throat

I cried
 they fed me with
a dropper lit a low fire
in the kitchen woodstove
fashioned a bed I lived

by the oven I don't know how long
and Mama called me Sister

God Bless Marilyn

Phylis Warady

As I steer homeward, Marilyn, my friend the poet, dissects her latest poem. Actually not the entire poem. A word. Marilyn is weighing the relative merits of a single word.

“Instead of problem, how do you feel about hardship?”
Hardship?

I sense she’s keyed up but my thoughts remain focused at the UC Davis campus where I’ve left my eldest daughter, about to begin her freshman year. Though my head insists Anne is mature for eighteen, my heart worries.

Earlier, we, three, drove nine hours up Interstate 5--counting stops to eat and gas up--and then spent an additional three on campus lugging Anne’s apple boxes, suitcases and plants up two flights.

“I’ll make your bed, Anne,” Marilyn offers, used to waiting on her second husband and three kids hand and foot.

“No!”

Anne’s surfeited with Marilyn’s mother-henning. So, I, sensing a squall developing, kiss Anne and bundle Marilyn into the car, which I aim toward the Pacific Ocean.

“Past that,” Marilyn says, resuming discussion of her poem. “Should I use a dash or three dots at the end of the second stanza?”

She does not expect an answer. She verbalizes her thoughts and will find her own solution.

In the fading light, I notice a bleak stretch of oil refineries border both sides of the highway.

The engine dies. No power brakes. No power steering. No power period. I clutch the wheel and, before the car’s forward glide fizzles, maneuver it onto the roadside shoulder. I pull the emergency brake and peer into the rearview mirror. A truck pops into view from behind a blind curve. My heart thumps madly as it whizzes past.

Marilyn emerges from her metaphysical maze. “What’s up?”

“We’re out of gas.” I meant to fill the tank in Davis, but forgot in my rush to get underway.

Protuberant green eyes regard me quizzically. Poor innocent. This is Marilyn's first trip away from Los Angeles in her entire life, except once to San Jose with her first husband. A man she married in her late teens because his tears made it impossible for her to turn down his proposal. But although tender-hearted, Marilyn's no fool. When caught robbing a bank, she divorced him.

But I digress. Here we sit...stranded on a deserted stretch of highway.

I recall my husband's mention of an emergency blinker. I probe the steering column. Up pops a button which activates an orange flasher. The semis hauling around the blind curve seem a bit less ominous.

To my left, across the six-lane highway, rise clusters of giant storage tanks. To my right, beyond the guardrail and across an access road perches a bungalow, its dark green shades drawn. Still the pickup parked in its driveway says 'somebody's home'.

"Marilyn, I'm hiking to that house. Whoever lives there may sell me some gas."

"Okay, but I'm coming, too."

As daylight fades, we climb over the guardrail and cross the access road. I rap on the door. No response.

"Look!" Marilyn points toward the pickup.

Wrench in hand, a swarthy, bearded man with a navy watch cap pulled down over his ears materializes from beneath the truck's raised hood.

"I've run out of gas," I explain. "Could you let me have enough to get to a station?"

Glowering black eyes sweep over us and then to the highway, their wariness easing as he sights my flashing blinkers. He grunts, and sets down the wrench before wiping greasy hands on a frayed Turkish towel.

"I'll siphon some from my tank. Climb in. I'll drive you back to your car and get you going."

I'm tugging open the truck's passenger door, when Marilyn stage-whispers, "Be ready to jump if he tries any funny business."

I glare at her with such ferocity that for once she's dumb-

struck. The dark-skinned stranger, seemingly oblivious to Marilyn's slur, stows the red gasoline can in the truck bed, climbs aboard.

"We really appreciate your help," I tell him as he backs onto the access road.

"I'll say!" Marilyn chimes in. "Two women stranded with night coming on. Sitting ducks for some sex maniac."

A red blur dances before my eyes. I'd like to kick her shin-bone. Too bad the angle isn't right.

I spot my flashing blinkers just ahead. Our driver eases to a stop a foot short of my rear bumper. Soon, I'm seated behind the wheel, engine purring, Marilyn beside me.

"You've enough gas to get you to the next offramp."

"Thanks. Can I pay you for the gas?"

"No. Glad to help." Our dusky Samaritan grins. "This way I don't have to worry about you, two, falling prey to some sex maniac."

"God bless you," Marilyn calls to him as I pull away.

"God bless you," she says to me just as I'm about to fall asleep later that evening in our motel room.

My eyes fly open.

The following morning, I nose the car toward Monterey Bay where we plan to breakfast. The engine dies at Castroville. Like an old hand, I steer onto the shoulder.

"Out of gas again?" Marilyn asks.

"No, out of water." I frown, wishing I'd had the radiator checked when I gassed up.

"Look!" Marilyn points to a redheaded trucker beyond a tall chainlinked fence. "I'll ask him to give us some water."

I watch her scale the fence, then descend awkwardly clutching a battered can. But even with a radiator full to the brim, the engine won't turn over. A highway patrolman pushes me to the nearest gas station.

"Fuel pump. We don't do repairs. You'll have to be towed."

Forty five minutes later as we clamber into the tow truck, Marilyn remarks, "I've never been in so many strange men's trucks before."

Have I mentioned it's Sunday? The auto supply shop is closed. We're stranded in Castroville until Monday.

Miraculously, our luck turns. The owner drives in for gas and is persuaded to get us a fuel pump from his shop. Two hours later, we drive off, Marilyn having “God blessed” the highway patrolman, the owner of the auto supply shop and the mechanic who installed the fuel pump.

In Monterey, we down a bowl of clam chowder that does wonders for our queasy stomachs. Meandering down Highway 1, whenever we stop, Marilyn tells anyone who’ll listen about her fears of being ravished and about all the strange men’s trucks we scrambled in and out of. Safely home, she broods over the battered water can. It seems she promised to return it to the redheaded trucker.

I’d be happy to oblige, but the highway patrolman drove off with it. So all I can say is “God bless you, Marilyn.”

* * * * *

Snapshot 1956

Deborah Matusko

Clutching me
as though I were Humpty Dumpty
about to crash into reality.
Her lips, soft and moist
velvet on my cheek.

He stands beside her,
his right arm cupping her back
supporting her.
His left hand allows my small
fingers to rest on his
deeply tanned skin,
touching, not touched.

He wanted a son.

Visiting My Grandmother

David Walker

Eventually we would be pulling
up to a large pill-pink building
with a crucified Jesus out front
and nuns pushing patients

around the patio in wheelchairs.
We would be shifting uncomfortably
as we rode up the elevator with an old
man in a baby blue bathrobe; our

mother holding my sister's hand
and I trying not to stare at the old
man's liver spots long enough
to connect them into a distorted

Bugs Bunny with a missing ear.
We would be hovering behind
my mother. My grandmother
would be lying on a bed with too

many blankets over her. Her
limbs would be curling
at the edges like a burnt leaf.
She would shake a hand at me

and motion to a drawer with a purse
in it. I would grab the purse
and bring it to her and she would
say something. My mother would

translate the vowels and hard
 kuh-kuh-kuhs and say, "She wants
 you to take five dollars." I remember
 thinking: So that's the going rate

for a lifetime of memories with
 a grandparent. I get drool-soaked
 linens and hospital-bed pungency,
 an aversion to car rides

down a certain stretch of road
 in northern Connecticut.

* * *

Bus Ride

Mackenzie Hurlbert

The clouded smudge from a forehead
 leers at me from my window.
 I feel as if it can stretch out and lick me--
 its hot, heavy breath taunts my neck.
 It turns the world behind it into a smoggy, distorted blur
 and pressures me to lean against my neighbor.
 She fills up her seat and half of my own
 and the stench of cigarettes and bad, rose perfume
 burns the back of my throat.
 As the bus lumbers on
 sighing and squeaking at every stop,
 the smudge still taunts me from the right
 and I turn left towards the fog of smoke-saturated rose petals.
 My sandal keeps sticking to the floor.
 I glance down and notice
 a long black hair
 on my red cashmere cardigan.
 I'm a brunette with a bob.

Dreaming Skin

Sarah Page

I wonder if dying hurt you as much
As waking up that first morning
Knowing I let doctors harvest your hazel eyes,
Delicate tissues donated in the carnage
Of a blood clot, along with sorted bones,
Cartilage, ligaments, and other flesh.

If I passed somebody in the street
With your eye-light, would I glimpse you
Behind their pupils? I don't think seeing
You would make me ache now, nothing
Like the agony of dreaming you woke up
Gutted in the hospital, bloody and trembling.

I remember how startled I was, guilty
I could go an entire day and night without you
Haunting the edges of my mind.
It's impossible to leave you in the past tense
Yet you aren't a pain that fits me now
I'm not even sure how to trace your silhouette.

Mother and child—your every undone wish sank
Into my pores the second you stopped breathing.

The Boy With the Cheap, Ugly, Green, Army Surplus Tennis Shoes

Arthur Pfister

My father was a room service waiter at the Roosevelt Hotel (we called it the “Rooza-belt”) and my mother worked “out the house” takin’ in sewing. We didn’t have everything that we wanted, but we more or less had most things that we needed. If we didn’t, we just “made doo.” We stretched the beans and baptized the gumbo when an unexpected playmate or family member would linger around for dinnertime, bathed some of the children two-at-a-time (to conserve water), and re-used the DIXIE cups until they crumpled and the bottoms dropped out. We used every bit of clothing we had possession of in the most economical manner we could and thanked God (and big tippers at the hotel) for what we had. We were grateful for the least bit of hand-me-down clothing items my mother would get from the children of the ladies she sewed for and (after whatever necessary alterations) treated them in as prized a manner as we would custom-made clothing from the finest, most eminent tailor shop.

I recall that season when my father was getting stiffed on tips and the cupboard was bare. I had worn out the tongue and heels of my PF Flyer sneakers (we called ‘em “tennis”) down to where they were missing in action. After the cardboard I placed in them to salvage whatever life was left in their pitiful rubber and canvas carcass wore out -- they were officially KIA. It wasn’t like we could go to the shoe repair shop on Prieur and Orleans (across from the Lafitte Project) or by Wilfred’s daddy’s shop (out in Fronta Town) and put a half sole and heel on ‘em. To describe them as shabby would be akin to saying Katrina was a mildly placid waft of wind.

After work one day my father and I walked over to the Army Surplus store on Rampart Street where we had gotten the canteen, commando knife, utility belt, hatchet, and cans of Sterno when I went to Boy Scout camp one summer at Indian Village. Among the leftover stockpiles of goods from the war was a display counter stacked with heaps of cheap, ugly,

green, Army Surplus tennis shoes. I winced at the thought of showing up for school (and basketball practice) in something so coarse and bugar-green that it looked like it should be covering an army truck, but my father -- and THE BELT were the indisputable legal authorities in my young life, and I had to defer my dream of donning a pair of Converse All Stars, U.S. Keds or even another pair of el-cheapo PF Flyers -- and regretted my unavoidable fate as the designated laughingstock of St. Peter Claver Academy's entire schoolyard at the following day's recess.

The next day in school I gathered up my budding, boyish nerve and faced the music, prepared for an unrelenting medley of criticism for my perceived sartorial faux pas, but none was forthcoming. I was expecting a peanut butter sandwich, but I got a chocolate cake. The other children marveled at my inadvertent groundbreaking, trend-setting fashion statement, asked me where I had purchased my pedestrian adornment and vowed that they would pester and beleaguer their parents until they coughed up and procured a pair. Suffice it to say that I strutted around school showin' off and showboatin' for the rest of the afternoon.

On my way home I saw a lil' boy from the Lafitte Project's Johnson Street court. He smiled as he walked with a proud, confident stride, pulling a little red wagon on which he had collected knicks and knacks from French Quarter trash bins and rubbish piles. On his crusty, sockless feet was the pair of tattered, worn and raggedy PF Flyers I had disposed of after we purchased the cheap, ugly, green, Army Surplus tennis shoes.

Ten

Jill Negro

A mousy-haired girl silently
counts stars through her hazy
window-pane, from a tiny
rail bed, in the big red barn,
where she lives,
where her grandparents live,
and where no one has died.

Makes it to ten,
one star for each candle,
and looks to mom and dad
preserved in a wooden box
frame on her baby nightstand;
wonders if they can count stars
to infinity.

Tonight, she made a wish
to be up there, instead of down
here, pulling green wool blanket
over dirt-brown eyes, till
there is no more starlight.

Sub Rosa: Tokens of Secrecy

Sarah Page

Do you know the secret of five leaves?
I'll share it with you free as sun's slant—
How to coax new rose from a stem
Whose gaudy crown has already
Bloomed and withered.
Let your scissors slide over thorn
To the first petiole bearing five leaflets
Gently shear just above it.

None of these coronets will ever be yours
Bribes for the Grecian God of Silence,
But not even Harpocrates can claim
Confidences that lie under the rose—
Deepest mysteries seethe at the root
Of every quick and end thing,
Yet too often our pupils seek only
Easy blaze of flagrant whorls,
Forgetting humble germination.

Sometimes I count the fine
Serration of roseleaves,
Each the shadow of an eye
Against my palm, wondering if
They can tell me if
My efflorescing ink will ever
Petal a single page,
Seed bud linear diadem—
But some secrets will never unfurl
Unless I dare to spell them out
From cane to corolla.

Remodeling the Kitchen

David Walker

Soon after my father moved out,
we stripped the island, painted the walls
a sickly yellow, and installed marble
countertops – something close enough
so no one could tell the difference.

Demo uncovered dust decades old;
our cousin still lived with us then,
took our hot water and eggs.
Grime from when my parents
pretended to be happy.

For weeks we got
our water from a temporary sink:
our old sink pulled from the wall
and wheeled out to the middle
of the kitchen. The hose tethered
from the wall looked like my cat's tail
caught in the sliding door. My father
had closed the door too quickly
when letting her in. Howling,
she clawed the carpet. Piss matted
her hind legs – too scared and too frantic
to let him back near her. When she
had finally worked her way free,
there was fur caught in the track
and a bald spot left on her tail
that has never grown back.

The Diagnosis

Benjamin Chase

Don't panic when you're summoned
To that sanitized little side room
Where the doctor, cloaked in jargon,
Says your body is replacing you
By making more of what isn't you,
Though it seemed to be humming along
As usual, in relative compliance.

Remember that he, too, collects money
For his mutterings and loses time,
Even while he speaks with you.
Perhaps it will comfort you to think
He has chosen you as the subject
Of his little medical homily,
Where he assumes all but a white collar.

Poem from a Haunted New England Landscape

Kenneth DiMaggio

Beer bottles cigarette
butts condoms and other
suburb-abyss muck fill
most of the mouth
of the cave that once
sheltered a fugitive from
Puritan punishment for
the way he did not
compulse himself
to church and after
he was publicly whipped
tried to burn down
his olde colonial village

If his legacy survives it is due
to a new generation of delinquents
or atheists scraping away arguments
against Hell and all that just like
an 18th century Connecticut contrarian
named Will Warren once did

A legacy that despite the
nearby big-box stores and bulldozers
razing ever closer endures
in a crevice still isolated
and deep enough
to shelter
teenage pot smokers

--a truant college student
or recent retiree who
read too much Thoreau
or Rilke

and more recently a confused
(and perhaps soon-to-be-hunted)
bear whose recent wilderness
is a now a McChain-store outlet

My Uncle Mort's Sawed Off And Short

Norman Marshall

Of late, I see a batch of Campbell's Chunky soup television commercials with various and several members of the Green Bay Packers. They remind me of a commercial that I did in nineteen seventy.

The star of the show was Mountain Dew, a renowned belly wash. The featured personality was Joe PoLucco, then a star lineman for the Super Bowl Champ Jets. The shot was in the Shea Stadium dressing room. The set-up was as follows: the game was just over and we 'players' were swigging down Mountain Dew left, right and center so as to replace the precious bodily fluids lost during the scrum with the nowhere-to-be-seen opponent. (Yes, I was wearing a NY Jets uniform, fat ass and all.)

My line was, "I love this stuff," or words to that effect. Sam's line was something to the effect, "Yah! Me, too. I drink lots and lots of it after every game." (Eat yer heart out, Neil Simon.) The camera then zoomed in on him as he bottom-upped the bottle of Mountain Dew and guzzled down the whole damn thing.

Perhaps we should back up a bit and set the scene. The Pepsi-Cola Company, Incorporated, parent company to the aforementioned Mountain Dew product had supplied many, many, many crates of twelve-ounce bottles of the stuff that was being so loudly sung as perhaps the most likely reason for the NY Jets 1969 Super Bowl Championship. It was unrefrigerated.

For my part in this drama, I turned up the bottle with an enthusiasm that only a great, great professional actor could generate. But as the camera forsook my esteemed visage for the seemingly more appealing profile of Super Bowl champ Joe PoLucco I lowered the bottle, off camera, and let the warm swill dribble back into the bottle.

It is perhaps well to note at this point that Joe PoLucco was a lousy actor. A nice guy but he was unable to read the simplest line of copy without it sounding like a third grader reciting the multiplication table. We did many, many, many takes.

Twenty-seven as I recall.

And, oh yes! Did I mention that he was diabetic?

But I digress. Along about the seventh or eighth take, Joe whispered to me, out of ear-shot of the gung-ho account executive, "I don't know how much more I can take. This shit is terrible."

I remonstrated. "Surely, my good man, you are not actually swallowing this stuff?"

"Well, not the whole bottle. Half, maybe two thirds."

Seven takes times six ounces equals forty-three ounces consumed thus far.

I suggested that he turn the bottle up, hold the "Dew" in his mouth until "Cut" and then bee-line it to the shit-house and spit it out.

Not being a trained actor, he found this suggestion unaccomplishable in its purest form. It seemed that once the liquid entered his mouth there was a certain manifest destiny in play. He must swallow. Somewhere around the fourteenth take, he boasted that he had developed the ability to ingest only a third of a bottle per take.

I slapped his ass and said, "Atta boy." My mind whirred with fantasies of becoming a great acting teacher.

On and on, take after take. After the twenty-seventh, Joe collapsed in a diabetic swoon. An ambulance was called. Sam rode away on a gurney and the commercial was never completed.

However, word on the street was that the Pepsi-Cola Company, Incorporated, sued Sam for breach of contract.

Local News

Joe Grillo

Good morning, everyone. Today's forecast calls for mostly sunny skies, with just the slightest chance of toxic wind close to the shore.

••

The Girl Scout fundraiser for the construction of a new leper colony on the outskirts of town has nearly reached its \$20,000 goal.

••

To whoever keeps leaving fresh entrails in Mrs. Winchester's mailbox: please stop. She has plenty already, and no room to store any more.

••

The town library will be closed today for the extermination of rabid books. Yesterday a copy of Moby Dick bit off Anna Michelle's pinky finger.

••

Police are currently investigating multiple reports of voices of dead relatives emanating from various home appliances. The sheriff says the best defense for now is to unplug them, cover your ears with your palms, and hum softly to yourself.

••

On behalf of all of us, I'd like to wish Byron Castavet a happy 213th birthday. When we interviewed him, he attributed his age to a steady diet of leafy greens and fresh infant blood.

••

And now, to close with a breaking story: Pastor Blanc, leader of Soul Temple, has called in proclaiming this to be the last day on Earth. He says the sun has spoken to him, detailing plans to explode this evening at 7:24 p.m. and engulf the planet in a storm of light and flames.

More on this tomorrow, if there is a tomorrow.

Ten-Ten

Norman Marshall

Ten-Ten always comes down Cold Harbor Road from the direction of Mechanicsville and Beaverdam Creek. He pulls his brown colored Hudson up under the shed to the pump, winds back the numbers and puts in some gas. They say that Simpkin's Store was standing here when Robert E. Lee and his boys came down Cold Harbor Road during the War.

Then he lights out straight for the drink box, lifts up the lid, reaches down in all that chopped up ice and cold water and takes a Tiny out of that red Coca-Cola box. A Tiny or maybe sometimes a Grapette, which was the exact same thing as a Tiny only the writing on the bottle is different. He pulls up his sleeve so it don't dip in the water, grabs that Tiny, snaps it open on the opener and pitch a nickel on the counter and tell Robert Simpkins, "Keep the change."

Ten-Ten don't live around here. He lives somewhere else, maybe over town. He drops in every once and a while at the store.

Here at the store they call him 'Doctor' something or another but I never understand what the heck they say. It's a funny name. I don't ask no questions. Children should be seen and not heard. He ain't no doctor for people around here. We already got two of them, Doctor Redd and Doctor Gravett which is just about all we need. We need more veterinarians. Every time you turn around, somebody's cow or mule is dying.

I always say, "Every time you turn around," and so forth, because that's Mama's saying. Daddy says, "Then don't turn around."

Ten-Ten has a baldy head and is old enough to have gray hair but he don't. He always has a dress-up hat on and a necktie and a suit.

Ten-Ten must of been a doctor or at least had an office job or something like that. He looks too soft. Robert Simpkins

one time said that Ten-Ten “looks like a man that would drop dead from a good days work, a piece of pussy and a cold drink of water.” Ten-Ten was a good looking man who looked like that movie star who got drunk then fell down the steps and imagined he saw a bat flying around inside the house. Reminds me of Unk Perk, except that he sees snakes when he gets drunk.

2

How come I started to call him Ten-Ten was because one time he come in the store and say to me, “Ten, ten, double ten, forty-five, fifteen. How much that?” and I say right away, “A hundred,” and he say, “Give that man a drink!” even though I ain’t but nine years old. Then he skedaddles right over to the drink box, pulls out a Tiny, opens it up, hands it to me and slings another nickel across the counter to Robert Simpkins and says “Keep the change” one more time.

Charlie Hall is in the store wearing them blue overhaulers with them straps over his shoulders. His hair is solid white but other than that, he don’t look like an old man.

Charlie Hall don’t like me because he caught me stealing a water bucket full of green peppers out of his field. After that, he never let me work for him again and around the store he never missed the chance to make me feel bad, talking about the “shack” that we live in and saying things like “why don’t your Daddy throw away that whiskey bottle and buy y’all children some shoes instead?” Everybody thinks that if you are poor, your Daddy is a drunk. “Don’t your Mama think that four children is enough to raise in a two-room shack without having any more?” I didn’t answer back, not even the lie about Daddy’s whiskey bottles. Daddy would of whipped me if he caught me back-sassing a grown-up. And I stole them peppers one time when Daddy didn’t have no work for three weeks straight and we didn’t have nothing else to eat.

Anyhow, old Ten-Ten says, “This boy is smart.” Charlie Hall says, “That boy is a thief. White trash.”

Ten-Ten reach down in the side pocket of his suit coat and pulls out one of them little old Bibles that ain’t no bigger

than about half size of a Hershey bar and put it right up where Charlie Hall could see it real good an says, "Let the man who is without sin cast the first stone." Then he put it back. Charlie Hall stood there listening. He had to listen because Ten-Ten was a Doctor and wearing a suit. I am drinking the Tiny. It is very delicious. "You don't know this family. Neither do I. But I know this boy is smart enough to add up a column of figures in his head. I will bet you a dollar that you can't do that."

3

Charlie Hall set down his empty Coca-Cola bottle on the counter and says, "I better get back to work. Them butter beans ain't going to pick themselves." He lets the screen door slam.

I am glad that Ten-Ten stood up for me and my people.

I am glad he had give me a Tiny. It was the best tasting drink that I ever drank. But it was only three ounces. I would rather have a Pepsi-Cola, a Nehi, or a Royal Crown Cola which don't taste so good but they are all twelve full ounces, that's a lot. I wish he would of asked me what I want.

I am glad that daddy had asked me that same question about 'ten, ten' and so forth a few days before. I had set down and figured it out with a paper and a pencil.

Theme #1 from the Composition and Literature Class

Kenneth DiMaggio

While we were worrying about
lost car keys he was praying that
he did not lose his rifle for which
the Army would have fined him
while his fellow soldiers would
ask if he needed help finding his
sphincter and the green wiener
they were going to stick in it but
luckily his new generation M-16
was in mess hall where it felt like he
was eating an earlier generation's
rations and if he never acquired
a taste for meals ready to eat he felt
nothing less than complete with his
automatic weapon that he never
anticipated having to surrender
as a civilian

--for which three years later
as a college student feels
incomplete without his firearm

"It's like I'm amputated,"
--he wrote in the essay
that we both thought
would help him discover
how a book-filled back pack
and potentially losing your keys
would provide reintegration

"But I still keep looking
for my rifle," he concluded

--while his fellow students
and even teacher look
for a free weekend
a movie
or a restaurant
to complete
their lives

Teeth

Alexandra Murray

My therapist says I have an unmanaged oral fixation that manifested sometime during my formative years. He can't be sure when it happened (or even why, he admits) but everything became violent when I was eleven and pried the lid off a paint can with a sharpened incisor. He says that last week I bit the finger of a classmate, just enough to draw a bit of blood and got kicked out of school. I don't remember why I did it.

Doctor Norris says he has a place for "girls like me" and the words hang there in a funny way I can't recognize. When he pushes the door to the waiting room, my mother gets up from her seat. She rubs her hands on her work apron and writes a check for an amount I can't make out from behind the coat rack. This had better be the last time, she says and it scares me. She balances my brother on her hip. You're seventeen years old.

At Broadmoor General, (which used to be called something less menacing, I think – Serenity Pines or Adolescent Behavioral Health Services or Tranquil Gardens) the teachers try to fix me. I share a room with another girl and attend classes everyday. It's not so bad here. Haley is twelve and thin, with bony white shoulders and a long, sloping nose that she picks when she thinks no one's watching. She eats her hair

and nothing else. At night, Haley recites dramatic monologues of her own creation. They detail a dwindling, middle-aged life force and are always in the voice of a washed-up Southern debutante. Lucid, Haley wants to be a star and she talks too much. She's never lucid for long. The nurses try every day to get her to eat, but Haley mashes strands of dishwasher hair between her lips and watches cartoons on the rec room TV instead.

Haley tells me not to bite and to focus on my breathing exercises. She says I'm just a naturally curious person. There's nothing wrong with me. When Haley hides pills under her tongue, I do too. I think it's working. I draw little cartoons, just to use my hands. I suck on grape lollipops from the caf. Haley says we get always get a party when someone leaves Broadmoor, but when I leave (which will be any day now, she says)

she won't eat the cake, if that's alright with me.
I nod my head and sketch her a six-headed
lizard with dull, rounded teeth and a braided tongue.

Control

Joan Kantor

Watching the river
from a window
my mind drifts off
to the constant flow
of water and ice
beneath banks of snow
till I suddenly notice
all motion
has stopped
and that pieces of ice
have gathered together
and filling in gaps
have completed a puzzle
that hadn't existed before
I stare at them
solid yet separate
while sharing
and as if they've partied too long
are done with casual conversation
they begin to break apart
to go their own separate ways
but they're really controlled
by the current
 imperceptibly
pushing them on

The Phoenix Kitchen

Linda Merlino

I took over my father's kitchen in Phoenix, apologized for opening drawers, cabinets, even the refrigerator. All the time marking out my workspace on every inch of counter while pulling out pans, organizing cutting boards and lining up olive oil, breadcrumbs, grated parmesan cheese and beaten eggs. I had spent over five decades imagining what the Phoenix kitchen looked like – never believing I would ever see it--never knowing it would take a lot of dead people to get me there. No disrespect for the deceased, but certainly a high price to pay for admittance. Nonetheless, I was there, deep into my dinner for ten--rolling apple pie dough with an oversized can of corn and cooking my maternal grandmother's recipes like she did without a measuring cup or a 4 X 6 card retrieved from a tin box.

My grandmother taught me that food was an elixir, the one constant that could bring even mortal enemies together. That a kitchen could become a temporary center of the universe, where every guest converged intoxicated by the smells wafting from the oven and under the lids of simmering pots. We were a disconnected family in the Phoenix kitchen, strangers strung together by DNA and an emblematic history trying to discard the mistakes of the past and open our hearts to the present. The magic of turning bags of groceries into a meal was the only way I knew to express love, to go forward with our lives and to forgive.

We shopped in the morning--my dad and me. Taking an old GMC truck, by my request, from the five vehicles in his elaborate garage. He said it was his cheapest car and seemed surprised I wanted to drive it. Press that metal thing over there he said – and when I did a loud melody blasted from the horn bringing back memories of a little girl on her daddy's lap in his antique automobile. I smiled at him and he nodded then we laughed and headed for the butcher shop in search of veal for Italian cutlets. At the local market we combed the aisles for spices, ingredients for tomato sauce, squeezed and sniffed egg-

plant for the freshest picks, and even shared a cheese Danish over coffee in the Starbucks next to the wines and beers. He and I hadn't been alone since I was six. He looked at me as if afraid to blink for fear I might disappear. But he had been Houdini, not me. I wasn't going anywhere.

The hard questions were behind us, the heavy ones, like why did you abandon me--asked in the heat of conversation two nights before--dad answered as best he could--pain printed on his face and tears in his eyes. He escaped the marriage that suffocated him--broke free of the threats of his wife's family and turned his back on me. But he never forgot he said -- not really -- just moved on with his new life, fleeing thousands of miles away with a woman just as determined to sever all ties and begin over.

Our four hands pushed the grocery cart up and down the aisles -- talking--talking as if we would run out of words -- as if we were trying to play catch-up to a dusty, long, line of unspoken sentences. He is engaging. I understand why my mother fell in love with him. Despite his ninety years, I cannot help but like him. Cart full we stand in the check out line, the one designated for twelve items or less. Dad knows the cashier, one of many people he knows and who knows him, a bit like shopping with the mayor, but he wants to introduce me. "This is my daughter," he says, and the woman nods with a nice to meet you and he is beaming.

That evening my father sits at the head of the table arms spread out before him requesting a prayer of thanksgiving from all in attendance. We clasp hands, close our eyes and bow our heads. Steam rises from the platters -- the aroma of baked eggplant and sauted veal forces our gratitude to be brief. The wine is poured, forks clink against the plates and we share stories as if we've done this a hundred times before. Laughter fills the room, the sweetness of its sound pouring into the Phoenix kitchen. My grandmother was right, good food is indeed good medicine--the glue for all things broken. It is the chicken soup when we are ill, the popsicle for missing tonsils, the cake at a wedding and the hot apple pie, fresh from the oven, served with love and vanilla ice cream. Good food is love and love is the answer.

Blood Loss

Alexandra Murray

I had a dream someone
cut off my breasts
with pruning shears
because they were sick
and so was I.

I asked fondly for them back,
(to put in a glass jar or
maybe a china bowl)
but he refused
and stuffed them in between
the waistband of his jeans.

I wondered if I knew him and
why afterwards he kept leaving
messages that said things like
“I wanna adore you” or
“Tamoxifen drip, 20 milligrams”

or “10 ways that you could
logistically live with
two holes in your chest
for longer than a week.”

I asked two strangers with
bald heads and blown-out veins
about this on the Q train
and they said to talk about it later,
and shouldn't I really be
going to a hospital?

I think they handed
me a used hanky
that was kind of salty
and not very helpful,

but the thought was nice.

Song

Joe Grillo

A day after the cicadas emerge from the ground,
so does the dead man.
Still stone-cold in the beating sun,
he climbs to the top of the tallest tree
and begins to sing his love song. Under his palms,
the trilling insects' ruby eyes pop out,
their inch-long bodies crunching.
His frozen throat croaks and croons
over the hum and buzz of flapping wings,
echoing the baseball card clipped between the spokes
of a bicycle wheel that speeds up the block.
The air below refracts,
makes it look like everything—
the coarse patches of yellow grass,
the cicadas perched on roofs,
the children playing in the street—
is underwater. His song's notes crawl
from his mouth and descend,
swim on waves of laughter and hissing,
float in through the open windows
of every house. The cranked ceiling fans
send the sounds spinning.
As he leans away, still clutching the trunk,
he sees an outline in his mind:
a face lost beneath a tide,
but rising. He feels
as if his heart's started to beat again,
thawed by new blood.
His song reaches a crescendo
loud enough to wake the dead.

BARN DOOR BONDAGE

CINDY GALLAGHER



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Who: Anyone may submit; only NVCC students eligible for awards.

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- You may submit no more than three pieces in any single category.
- Prose submissions are limited to a TOTAL word count of 1500.

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