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FICTION POETRY VISUAL ARTS

THE ANNE HORTON WRITING AWARDS

Spring 2010 Film Review Contest

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Lieutenant Karlan Arellano
by Philip Arellano

I remember when you told me about the dream you had, the one where
you heard a tune.

Emotive cadence of the piano wove in and out of musical intervals like
the wind we watched carry the tops of dandelions when we were young-
er brothers.

The notes journeyed from the liveliness of mountaintops to the void in
the valley.

You said it was more than an empathetic song.

You said it was familiar.

No previous melody had so seemed to echo the sentiments of your heart.

Waking up, you tried to hum the simple tune, but even in its despera-
tion, your voice could not capture it.

It was gone.

And so are the sentiments of dreams, swept away by the severity of life.

I remember when we promised to never let kindred blood dictate our
loyalty to one another.

We swore to use any adherent brotherly bias for loving others without
reserve, like our fathers taught us.

But I failed you brother.

There has never been another like you.

Like the song that you'll never hear again, you are so familiar to me.

No one has so echoed the sentiments of my heart like your impression
on me.

In tandem with your inadequate attempt to preserve the tune, I will fail
in trying to express your influence with this humming of words.

I will learn to love everyone like you.

And I love you brother.

I wish I could be where you are, fighting alongside you.

Wherever it is, I hope that God keeps your faith strong,

As it was in the days before you left.



South Africa #6

by Heather Dowd

His Name Was Vinny
by Chris Snyder

I remember Vinny. Every time I set foot on the deck of the pool, Vinny was there. It wasn't hard for me to understand why he had such an obsession with the public pool. It wasn't hard for me to understand why anyone would have an obsession with the pool. What could be more fun on a warm day than diving head first into a cool drink of water? Well, in this case a rainy or snowy day. You see, the pool was inside which meant no sunscreen, no lawn chairs, and certainly no risk of skin cancer. But this story isn't about the public pool; this story is about Vinny.

Day in and day out, Vinny would sit quietly on the cold steel benches in his red swim trunks just watching the ripples in the water. He paid no attention to who was in the pool for he wasn't interested in much of anything, aside from the water itself. Vinny didn't have much of a personality either or what would amount to normal people skills. When most folks go to the pool, they bring along a friend or a loved one or at the very least, try to make a friend or two while swimming. Vinny was the opposite. He was open to the idea of friends but lacked the confidence to interject into a conversation. He thought his life was boring and didn't think that he had anything of interest to talk about, so he just remained quiet and alone and safe secluded on his bench.

Vinny spent the majority of his time just thinking, wishing he could have the courage to jump in to what he considered a beautiful blue abyss. You see, Vinny wasn't much of a swimmer. Oh, how he longed to get up from his cold bench and dip his foot deep into the cool water. He wanted so badly for the opportunity to stand on the edge of the pool, yell, "Cannonball" and jump in causing a momentary liquid mushroom cloud and for the few seconds he'd spend underwater feeling like a god. This was Vinny's greatest wish. But his lack of courage wouldn't allow it. So there he would just sit, watching the water ripple and bleed off into the gutter, leaving his dreams unfulfilled.

Vinny's favorite time at the pool was swimming lessons. He loved watching them. Vinny admired the bravery of the children. Even at such a young age, they had no fear of jumping feet first into the dark blue sea totally unaware of the dangers present. Vinny knew that one day it would be his turn, but he decided to himself that maybe it should be another time. "Keep your chin up," he thought to himself as he leaned back against the upper seat of the steel bench.

Everyone that went into the pool knew Vinny. Even if they never met, they understood him and his purpose. Adults were fine with Vinny. They had no problems with him sitting on the bench, staring into the pool that their loved ones swam in for he was no more a threat to them than a kiss on the cheek from a loving grandparent.

It was the teenagers who Vinny disliked. They had no respect for him or his right to be there. They would call him mean names to no extent. Twisting and pulling his arms and legs, they would mock his inability to defend himself. Very often the lifeguard would intervene and reprimand the kids for being so heartless; and all the while Vinny would try to ignore them, holding back and urge to raise his hand and lower it on the face of some unsuspecting child who feels the need to

violate his personal space. But most of the time, Vinny sat ignoring the harsh actions of the patrons and holding back the tears he wished could be welling up in the corners of his eyes.

At night he would watch the night guard disconnect the rope from the hooks inside the pool. They would fold it neatly and hang in on a hook next to the locker room door. The guard would then drag the lane lines the length of the pool and attach them at both ends. Vinny always thought the lane lines made the pool look smaller but knew that it would always be the same size. When the guard would return to the steel benches where they placed their belongings, readying themselves to embark on their adventure home, Vinny would make sure to remain extra still so as not to be noticed. He would sit quietly as the guard replaced articles of clothing with new ones and try to hold his composure the very best he could. For the most part, Vinny was very good about holding still. He would watch the guard exit to deck and know that he could relax for the rest of the night. However on the rare occasion when Vinny would notice his arm starting to slip, he would strain his body to keep it from smacking the hard steel, causing a frightening boom that echoes for seconds throughout pool area. When his happened, Vinny knew what he was in for. The spooked guard would walk over to Vinny and scoop him into their arms. With no sign of remorse, they would walk over to the edge of the pool and drop Vinny in. They knew that Vinny couldn't swim but had no problem leaving him there as they walked out of the pool deck. Vinny would sit motionless in the black water staring up at the ceiling. He couldn't do anything but wait for his body to fill up with water and sink to the bottom of the deep pool. And there he would wait until the opening guard would pull his lifeless body out of the water and place it back on the cold steel bench where he would await the new day.

Untitled

by Doug Tindall



State of Undress

by Rose Zaccone

I left the left shoe with a man with a parrot on his arm

I left the right shoe with a girl with a shriveled hand

I left my shirt with a group of hippies living by the Seine

I left my jeans out in the desert to dry

I left my bra on a lamppost in London's finest square

I left my purple polka dotted panties in the basement of a friends

And then--

I was barer than a fish with a hook inside its mouth

Basking in the glory of their stares

Listening to my hair

Growing roughly from my skin

And wind

Whisking through the crevice of my legs

I was this little naked mass

Sweating through each pore

As insecure as insecure can get.

I took the public transportation

Sitting on a magazine

Mandy Moore plastered between the cellulite of each thigh

Stopped at a beach that neither God nor I had been to
Filled to the brim with every kind of vacationer and foreigner
Pushing my bare toes into the sun baked sand of Hollywood
The warmth of the grains of dirtiness
Sticking to my dirtiness
This grin spreading across the nakedness of my facelessness
And I knew my fingers could trace my soul
Drawing it right down to the sand
The look on everyone's faces was more than I could stand
So I sat
Like this hairless fat cat yoga mat army brat
And I think I knew from their gazes
That my beautiful mass of molecules was mostly amazing maybe even magnificent,
might even be marvelous
But that might be going a little bit too far.

The sun was hot with anger
As it stared down at my pasty form,
The clothes not worn,
The clandestine porn
I apologized as sweetly as chocolate to the fat
Stood up and stretched,
Impressed the high school boys

And stole away to my jungle

Public transportation,

Not Mandy Moore but Lindsay Lohan

Stopped at my place

My space of air and rock and loud foreboding neighbors

All speaking Spanish at me

Went home to pee

Sat in my easy chair and was too happy to observe

The only piece of clothing I had on

Was my words.

What Love Feels Like

by Angie Dunn

When you watch the sunrise over the horizon
I like to follow the movement of your eyes
It means the whole world to me
It really means the world to me
That you would wake up that early
And not at all mind
Just to wake up that early and watch the sunrise
With me
I would do the same thing for you
Stay up late just to stare at the moon
And I'm sure you would watch me
Like I watch you now
You would look into my eyes to see
How I really feel
And you would know like I know
That we would both stay up late
And then wake up early
Just to be with each other
Because sometimes it feels like we need no other
When we are together
In my head I think
That we are destined to wake up early
Just to watch the sunrise
And then stay up late
To watch the moon in the dark velvet sky



Untitled

by Doug Tindall

I'll never be worthy of you, so I wrote this in free-verse

by James Salstrom

I know you. You are the shadow of every sunset and the shade of every starry night. The moon was your smile, the waving long grass was your hair. I heard your voice in the wind, I heard your laughter in the trees. Breaking tides of the ocean were your heart-beat. The sand running from my palm between my fingers was the embrace of our hands. The warmth of the summer sun was the radiance of your face, framed by the clear blue sky. The leaves of autumn were your sorrow. The snow of winter was your song. The buds of spring were your love which is ever-green and ever-growing. You are the essence of all that is fair. Wherever you are, I hope you're happy, I hope your life is full of music and laughter, I hope your waiting for me, I hope your eyes are open to the magic that God has woven into your world. I hope you sing, run, and dance your way through the days toward the place where we will first meet. I wish I could tell you this, but since you can't hear me, I'll whisper my love to the shadows and perhaps the secrets they are bound to hold will form a tear of sorrow in the darkness. I hope you sleep well at night in the shelter of angels wings. I hope when you wake up tomorrow cherubim will fly to your side to hear what new song the Lord has put in your head. Even though I've never seen you, I know you're beautiful. Even though I've never met you, I know you're wonderful. I hope we meet soon, but if we don't I'll still be here, waiting for you.

Save the Last Dance for Me
by Len Michaels

The wet lonely country road blended seamlessly into the adjacent gray pallor landscape making driving difficult. The windshield wipers took snapshots before the rain blurred the view once more. These alternating strobe-like flashes of reality interspersed with pervasive uncertainty mocked my life.

My journey was long overdue and my anticipation increased with the intensifying rain. *So close – just a hundred miles more!* Without thinking, I increased my speed a few miles per hour. My racing mind was obsessed with seeing her again.

The “click-slash” of the wipers whisked me back to a dance in the distant past, where I first met her. I heard the strains of Glen Miller’s Band providing the musical overlay to the rhythm of the rain.

“Would you like to dance?” I asked the attractive slim blond girl nestled with several of her friends on the edge of the dance floor. She didn’t answer but gave me her hand together with a shy smile and a twinkle from the brightest, deepest eyes I ever encountered. They burned a hole in my soul that never healed.

We danced that number – and the next one – and every dance the rest of the night. Sense of time disappeared and the world dissolved around us as we eagerly explored the strong feelings set afire in each of us. I never discovered words to describe the peace and comfort I found that night – a feeling of belonging – of being home – a sense of eternity.

Young, impressionable and away at college, we were unsure of ourselves or where we were going. But life had a new meaning when we were together. After that first night we became inseparable. We danced and laughed and did everything as a couple for the rest of our college years. Eventually, June and I moved into an apartment and began to talk of marriage, kids and where to settle down after I received my graduate degree. We were living the classic love story scripted with a happy ending. But it was not to be.

I understand more about the bittersweet ending of those days now. But at the time I was unaware of the inner demons that were forming and shaping my reactions – reactions that would rip us apart.

I could blame what happened on an unhappy childhood in an alcoholic home, an experience that left me insecure and defensive. I could use ugly lumped words like being selfish or not caring, or of being critical and domineering. I could invent character flaws that didn’t exist to feed the pains of the self-pity and regrets I felt afterwards – and I did exactly that at times after the break up.

But the truth is far simpler – too obvious for an impetuous youth to see. I was simply too immature to give or even understand love. I was neither ready nor able to have a deep meaningful relationship. Was she the right girl? Perhaps – but the timing was wrong.

The early part of our relationship was ablaze with the freshness of youth, lust, and idealized romance. They became indelible milestones,

references for comparison, for the rest of my life. But with increasing intimacy our differences and character defects became more apparent. Infatuation faded into disappointments, misunderstandings and frustrations.

Instead of compromising, accepting and curbing expectations, I aggressively strove to maintain the perfect relationship. I became more demanding and critical of June. I loved her for what I wanted her to be, not for what she was. I started to hide my real feelings, afraid to reveal my weaknesses – afraid to become vulnerable.

Our parting volley was both predictable and tragic. I screamed “I don’t need this! I don’t need you! I don’t need anyone!” while June cried softly in the background.

There may have been a chance for reconciliation after the breakup, but I’ll never know. Pride, distance, and then the passing years soon made the possibility remote. But in the many years that followed I never forgot her.

The rain stopped as I drove into the town where we were to meet. I found the place with no difficulty and parked in the nearby lot shaking like a kid. The doorman welcomed me and I walked into the lobby.

I entered the large room off the hallway where I knew she would be. She looked much older, but I recognized her immediately across the large room and rushed to her side. A tear ran down my face as I took her hand and asked her if she would like to dance.

As I closed my eyes I felt that unique peace of long ago fill my soul. I was home again! In my mind, her shy smile reappeared, and the twinkle in her eyes told me that she understood and loved me, sharing the joy I felt. Nothing more needed to be said. We were inseparable once more - forever.

June rose from her bed of white satin gliding gently into my arms. We spun around the floor like kids again, dancing to our music as if we never stopped. The smell of her perfume and the freshly cut flowers around us awakened the old, but very live memories of an enduring first love that never died.

June had, after all, saved the last dance for me.

An Ode to Hand Sanitizer
by Jessica Weller

Oh antibacterial deep cleansing hand gel
Thank you for keeping me healthy
By enticing germs to their demise
With little blue bullets that cleanse each crease
There's no way I could ever catch the swine flu

Oh fragrant sweet pea slime
Just one fluid ounce oozing and
Trapped between flimsy plastic walls
Looking sharp in your snap-on twisty cap
So that you don't spill all over my purse

Oh Bath & Body works hand sanitizer
What danger lurks within your concoction?
With all that alcohol the potential flame dies
You put such a strain on our relationship
Yet I bought five more on sale

Unlikely Romance
by Shayna Cardwell

Another evening on the couch
Spent watching all his favorite shows
She smiles and pretends it's cool
Too bad that he already knows.
The absence of her happiness
Has been apparent for a while
And sadly he's begun to see
That frankly, he's just not her style.
He sees her twitching restlessly
She softly hums her favorite song
He'll let her hit the town alone'
But he will never go along.
He knows that he should set her free
But she would fall apart for sure
And he just doesn't want to deal
With anything, including her.
And as she turns to glance his way,

The same thoughts running through her mind,
She knows she really shouldn't stay
And she should leave him far behind.
'Cause he will never budge for her
And clearly she can see that now
She tries to be the one to change
But finds that she does not know how.
Still unprepared to face the truth
Beside him on the couch she'll stay
He sees her torn, yet still decides
He'll feel the guilt another day.

Sex Talk
by Tom Irish

My Dad did such a shitty job of talking to me about sex when I was thirteen that, when my own wife got pregnant, I immediately started planning when and how I'd have that conversation with my own son. It became a sort of contest in my own mind; I was gonna kick the crap out of my old man in the sex talk department. I decided that I would do it in three stages. When my boy was four, I would tell him the basic mechanics of sex so he'd know where babies come from. When he was ten, I would review the physical mechanics and tell him about the emotional aspects, which would lay the groundwork for the conversation we would have about respect and dangers when he was thirteen. I was sure that I could teach the kid to avoid a lot of awkward, messy, and even outright dangerous sexual snafus. My son was going to be a better man than I was, and he was *sure* going to be better than his rough-as-sandpaper grandpa. The whole idea became a point of pride with me. I was going to be the best sex-talk dad there ever was.

Then my wife gave birth. To a daughter.

I mean, obviously, I love my girl. In fact, I think I might love her more than I would have a son. That sounds terrible, I know, but all the old clichés are true: she's Daddy's little girl, she has me wrapped around her little finger, all that other bullshit. Sometimes I think that the main reason that dads love their daughters is that they're relieved and happy to know a woman they don't feel like they ought to try to screw. Whatever the reason, though, what Katie and I have works.

But, for some reason that I could never understand, Katie turned four, five, then six, and I still hadn't had the talk with her. She was a girl, so I was sure her mother would handle it. When Katie was eight, I finally forced myself to remember that the sex talk is the father's job. I still felt that obligation to better my own emotionally stunted father, too. I decided to have the talk with her as soon as possible.

I guess I expected the talk to happen naturally, and when it didn't, I kept trying to force it. Once, when Katie was twelve, I had it all planned out. She ended up inviting a friend over for a sleepover that night, though, so I couldn't do it. Another time, when she was eleven, the day I picked got scrapped because she got her first period. When she was nine, I rationalized that she was too young.

We finally talked this morning, over breakfast. I can actually see her right now, as I write this, sitting on the couch and listening to her iPod. She's almost a woman already: fifteen and tall with short black hair and her mother's huge eyes. I knew that she was probably too old for the talk before I started. Maybe she's even had sex already, I dunno. I just knew that something was compelling me to talk to her right then.

"So, honey," I began "we should probably talk, about something. It's something we should already have done, but I was, I dunno, shy . . . that's not the right word . . . ok, so, let me start over. Can we talk for a minute?"

She looked horrified. Why wouldn't she? I was botching it already, and I hadn't even said the s-word yet. She said "Ooookay. Why are you shy?"

"No, like I said, 'shy's' not right, exactly." I blew out my lips

dramatically, and noticed a pinpoint of spittle that landed on the counter next to my daughter's index finger. I forced myself to look away from it and meet Katie's eyes. "Ok, so, we need to talk about sex." I thought about stopping there, letting her vent over the awkwardness of the whole situation, having a laugh, and then getting into it, but instead I heard myself keep going. It was like I wasn't even in control of myself. I said: "So, I think that what you need to know—there's a lot of it, a lot of things that people should hear, and, and do, about sex—Christ!—ok, so, you know where babies come from, right?"

"Dad . . . OH . . . mygod.

"No, look, we have to do this. You just . . . ok, so you know the basics, where to put the . . . oh, my God, this sucks . . . wow, 'sucks', that's funny . . . ok . . . ok. So, my dad told me a story. I think that this story sums it all up, although maybe not directly. Ok, look, here it is."

And then I did it. I launched into that raunchy old joke about the stranded motorist and the farmer's daughter. I was appalled at myself even while I was talking. It was *not* better than the talk my dad had with me. In fact, it was worse, in its way: it was *exactly the same* talk Dad had with me.

It's one thing for a father to tell that joke to a son, right? When my dad told it, he said that if I could figure it out why he'd told it, I'd never have a problem "bagging a chick." Christ, that old man was desperate to be a member of the Rat Pack. I never did figure out what he meant, and I could kill the old sonofabitch for saddling me with that. But guys do things that way, right? While that joke was an awful way of teaching me something, at least it wasn't entirely inappropriate. But for a father to tell that to a *daughter*? It was ridiculous, laughable, the worst thing I could possibly have done.

But I couldn't stop, even though I wanted to. I told the whole, disgusting thing, straight through to the end. When I hit the punchline, neither of us laughed. Katie shifted her weight back and forth like she was standing on the deck of a cruise ship in the middle of a hurricane. There was dead silence in the kitchen and all I could think about was how my spectacular failure had probably damaged my daughter forever. She started to turn away.

But then my kid turned back around and faced me like an adult, and she said "Ok, you wanna know what I know? Here's what I know." Then she laid it all out: penis in the vagina but oh, so much more than that. Respect. Love. Responsibility. Pleasure. With each new thing she said, I wanted to slap my forehead and ask myself why I hadn't just said exactly that, in exactly that way.

When she was done, I said "Ok, then. I guess it . . . it sounds like you're all set." I didn't know what to add. She didn't need me, she was going to be fine, and she probably thought I was not only ineffectual, but a total asshole. I wanted to tell her that I was proud of her, that I thought that she was going to make an excellent woman, but I figured it would just sound hollow.

She stood there looking at me for what was probably only a minute or two. Once, I was sure that she was going to put her hand in mine. But eventually she just sat back on the couch and put her earphones in. In spite of her heroic attempt to salvage the situation there at the end, I still couldn't think of anything to say that would make anything better. So I just didn't say anything at all.



Champion Rose

by James Salstrom

The Sky Flower

by Debi Hill

Deidre tried to imagine her father in his uniform with a rifle slung over his shoulder, heavy rucksack in tow, marching with other soldiers over the fields in Belgium, far across the ocean. Her father's absence left an ache that glowed like an ember in her chest.

Deidre's mother had always been aloof. She found parenting unnatural, and though dutifully tried, when the girl's father was no longer present, the pretense dissolved and she parceled her daughter off to an aunt in the countryside. "You'll be so much safer there, Dee Dee. And now that your father has left me to pay the bills and handle everything myself, well, I'll be working and won't be able to care for you like I have been."

The girl couldn't imagine *less* caring from her mother, and missing her wasn't the problem. At her aunt's, Deidre had no friends, no familiar surroundings, no father. Her aunt was a bit fussy and only mildly masked the inconvenience of this stranger's intrusion on her patterned and rigid days. Deidre hadn't seen the woman for a decade and scarcely recalled her. She had been three? They might as well be strangers.

"Mind the cats now, Deirdre; don't be shooing them out of their favorite spots. There are other chairs." At least the woman called her by her given name, but it didn't sound as pretty as when her father said it. "I imagine you have your morning and evening routine. I'm not going to have to be reminding you to keep proper hygiene and all now, am I?"

"No ma'am."

"Well no need to make me feel like an old lady. Call me Aunt, for that's what I am to you."

"Yes, Aunt."

Ever since she had arrived two days earlier, Deidre felt a marked detachment from her surroundings, as though she were only partly there, a spirit hovering inches from the ground in serious danger of floating off without anyone noticing.

After getting settled, she explored the town and discovered it to be unremarkable. But on the third afternoon, she turned down a dirt road skirted by a sparse wood. This is where and when the flower appeared.

Deidre had always been interested in plants. Her father called her "the curious botanist" to tease her, and though she turned away and threw her chin in the air with a "humph", inside she felt the thrill of her father's understanding.

Spotting it at a distance, she was drawn to its singularity. *That can't be a growing thing; it's too blue.* Curiosity pulled her off the road through low stickery bushes to the blue spot.

She pulled from her pocket a miniature magnifying glass her father

had sent her for her birthday. "...for my curious botanist" he'd written on the card. The girl looked closely and spied tiny shining sparkles like mica catching and reflecting light. The plant looked like a poppy, but *blue* petals?

Immediately, she put too much stock in that flower. No matter its delicate and ephemeral nature, it was something to cling to where she found no other anchors. Deidre stayed with the flower for some time before returning to the town.

Back at the house, she looked in her aunt's poorly stocked library and found an old dusty book called *Plants of Virginia*. She turned every page looking closely for photographs or drawings that resembled her flower. She saw a photograph of an orange poppy that looked nearly identical, but the index of the book gave her no clues about whether poppies came in colors other than orange. She'd never seen such a flower in all her treks through the park and neighborhood gardens of her home. And any photos of blue flowers did not match the shape of *her* flower; all of the blues looked pale in comparison to the deep sky blue with just a hint of violet that were the petals of her flower. She named it her "sky flower" because it captured a clear blue day like the reflection in a tiny pond. Flipping the pages of the book, she recalled the flowering bushes and tulips of her father's garden back home.

She determined she'd go to the town library that afternoon and research further, but her aunt asked for her help with errands. So, as life so often goes, Deidre became distracted and didn't recall her errand until that evening. Standing in front of the bathroom mirror in her old cotton pajamas, brushing her teeth and staring into her own blue eyes, the flower returned to her awareness. Her hand froze on the brush momentarily, then slowly returned to the mechanical motion, back and forth and back and forth, as she contemplated the surreal nature of those stunning petals. The image was still sharp in her mind as she fell asleep with the hope of something important to return to tomorrow.

Before Deidre had left home, when she'd resigned herself to the looming forced exile of her aunt's village, she'd written her father the new address. He needed to know where to write her, and she couldn't afford to miss even one of his precious letters.

That was weeks ago now, and no word from him. The post was unreliable even in the city, and she wondered if his letters would *ever* find her here in the country.

That next morning was Sunday and her aunt insisted they attend church and take their noon meal with a friend of her aunt's. In her Sunday best, Deidre endured the adult company in silence, other than the occasional patronizing question. The minutes dragged by and the only pleasure was the family's dog, a lazy and unpretentious mutt, who hovered near the girl for the occasional secreted treat.

When finally in her dungarees again and free to return to the dirt road, she hurried to the flower. On her way, she considered digging up the plant and giving it a new home in an out-of-the-way spot of her aunt's yard, but it seemed wrong to remove it from its natural surroundings. After all, it

had chosen to grow in the scant woods and had thrived.

As she came upon the spot, she felt a choking cry welling up. The plant had altered. The remaining petals were drooping and several had already fallen among the leaves and dirt, withered and diminished. She knelt down and surveyed the plant through watery eyes. Slowly she gathered the fallen delicate petals and carefully placed them in a handkerchief as though they were an injured bird.

Back in her room Deidre spread open the cloth and gently laid the flower's remains in the open volume of *Plants of Virginia*. She slowly closed the book, making sure the petals remained flat as the utter darkness of the book's pages folded and held them.

The next week, Deidre started school. She'd made the acquaintance of a boy her age who lived a few doors down. Her aunt, she discovered, had a spark of kindness under the gruff façade, and they began to form a routine. And the one grey cat, whose unfortunate facial features gave him a permanent scowl, had discovered a favorite spot on the girl's lap.

Sitting in her room after school that first day, the girl wrote her father a letter, sharing the day's events. Before she sealed the envelope, she opened *Plants of Virginia* and turned to the pressed petals. Some of their brilliant color had faded, and their former fresh aroma was now replaced with a slight sweet and musty smell. Placing them on the letter, she folded the edges around the dried petals and sealed them in the envelope.

Walking into the house after her first full week of school, the girl's aunt handed her a letter from her father that had traveled all the way from Belgium. As the girl opened the rice paper envelope, the slight sweet and musty scent preceded the petals he had placed within his letter to her. There in her hands rested the same type of now dusty grey-blue dried petals she had sent him only days before. Their letters had crossed in the mail.

Turning 20
by Abby Frye

She's always known her days were numbered

And despite that truth she stood like steel

Still on a day like today she's feeling salty

No one would blame her for having no strength

Every now and then you gotta bend

And in the midst of all this she's turning twenty

It's not like that's old – twenty

There are those around her who truly are numbered

It's just time to turn down another bend

Most of her years were already a steal

She's heard that numbers bring strength

And that salt will always be salty

But why is it that not everyone is salty

And why don't we all make it to twenty

These are questions she asks will lose strength

But answers like good sayings are numbered

And without questions and answers we wouldn't have steel

But only cold hard facts never bend

How far, though, must she bend?

Or deal with those who are always salty

While her joy they steal

Each week she deals with more than twenty

Their view of what life has to offer is numbered

How do people like that find strength

She receives hand delivered strength

But things can change a lot with each new bend

She thinks a lot about things that are numbered

And about the challenges that come with being salty

On this Earth each year is a blessing, especially twenty

She hopes that not another year will she steal

In life, we've been given so much, what more could we steal

Why would we ever give up strength?

When nothing is up to us, not even the next twenty

That doesn't mean that we can't bend

But do we always have to be so salty,

When the days we are here on Earth are numbered?

Who knew contemplating twenty would be such a bend

Still with Gods strength, she will remain salty,

Always standing tall like steel, though those that stand with her are numbered.

Untitled

by Angie Dunn



Happy New Year
by Anne Hoffman

Edward was at war with his phone. He hated it. He bought a new phone every two years and paid for the most expensive calling plan available. He wanted to be ready for every emergency, apparently even one that where he would be forced to call China, but he never actually used his phone. The phone hardly ever rang; the people who knew Edward knew better. If anyone did call he would spend the first two minutes of the call explaining to the unfortunate caller exactly how much their call was costing him. He hated his phone, but he promised.

“Useless, complete waste of time.” He muttered to the phone as he glared at it. Last week Edward met his girlfriend Valerie for lunch and she asked him to make a New Year’s resolution.

“You should resolve to call your brother once a month. You have a good family you should get to know them.” She said.

“Why would I want to spend half my day talking to a self absorbed Neanderthal?” Edward was convinced that their mother had dropped Trent on his head when he was a baby.

“To be human. What else do you have to do that is so important that you don’t have time to make one little phone call?” Valerie spread her hands wide as she asked.

“We have nothing in common! Just chromosomes, he probably doesn’t know what chromosomes are.” Edward had not seen or talked to his brother since Aunt Stella’s funeral, when Trent had claimed that air traffic was causing global warming. While Edward was trying to educate the cretin and the undertaker came over to ask him to be more respectful to his family.

“Ask about your nephews and nieces.” Valerie suggested narrowly.

“Oh no. He’ll yabber on about those kids for hours. Like I care! Oh, oh and Christmas. You just know he’ll want to talk about Christmas. Waste of my time, talking about stockings and Elmo dolls, and, and Jesus was most likely born in summer anyway. Why would I waste hours of my time listening to them talk about Christmas?” Edward spent Christmas reorganizing his 200 aviation magazines according to the Dewey Decimal System.

“Edward. He’ll be talking to you. He’ll be getting off the phone after two minutes. Just promise me you’ll call him. At least once this month, please.” Valerie had given him a small hopeful smile.

Edward glared even harder at his phone, but it still didn’t burst into flames. He was going to meet Valerie the next day and he knew she would ask if he had called. Finally he picked up the phone and dialed. He heard the phone ring and then pick up, but nobody said anything. He said “Hello?” impatiently.

“Hi” said a small voice.

“Wha- Where’s Trent?” Edward demanded.

“I’m Cody.” The voice answered helpfully.

“Where’s Trent?” Edward demanded again, trying to remember the names of his brother’s grandchildren.

“I-I’m four years old.” Cody said proudly.

“Where’s your grandfather? Useless lump can’t be left to supervise

children.” Edward’s mind was creating derisive remarks to throw at his little brother.

“What’s your name?” Cody asked happily.

“Edward. I’m Trent’s brother and I would like to speak to him right now young man.” Edward told himself that his stern tone would convince Cody to do what he was told.

“I got a, um a airplane for Christmas. A D fifty-two army plane.” Cody sounded disinterested in his great uncle.

“It’s a B fifty-two.” Edward corrected immediately.

“Na-uh. D fifty two.” Cody said in a sing-songy voice.

“B fifty-two! The B fifty-two Stratofortress was produced by Boeing during the Cold War as a nuclear deterrent, and it’s still the Air Force’s best bomber.” Edward almost headed to his shelf to grab his “History of American Fighter Jets.”

“Papa said D fifty-two.” Cody was insistent.

“Your papa’s an idiot.” Edward retorted.

“That’s a bad word. You take a time-out.” Click.

Edward stared at the phone for a second. “Useless twits.” He slammed the phone down and walked out of the room.

The next day Edward arrived at the Cellar Café at 11:45, but Valerie never arrived before noon. Edward sat down and ordered a coffee; he also made a mental note to complain to the manager about how slow the waitress was. Valerie arrived precisely at noon and said hello to the waitress as she made her way to the table.

“Hello. Oh, it’s such a beautiful day I decided to walk today. How are you today?”

“Hmm. I already ordered. I ordered the chicken sandwich for you, the turkey here is terrible.” Edward told her while still studying the menu.

“Oh. I guess that’s alright. I talked to Julia this morning.” She said happily.

“Who?” Edward asked.

“My oldest... She’s in Italy on a business trip...” Valerie looked quizzically at Edward. “Anyway, she got to see the Coliseum.”

“The Coliseum is in Greece.” Edward interrupted.

“Oh, that’s right. I meant the Vatican. She said it was really beautiful she took tons of pictures.” Valerie continued.

“Humph, these people preach humility and charity and then they go and build monuments to themselves.” Edward was convinced that anyone who could be duped into believing in a god was a chimp with better hair.

“Well. Did you call your brother?” She asked hopefully.

“I called.” He shifted back in his chair.

“How did it go? How is he?” She asked smiling again.

Edward paused for a moment. “Well. This little brat answered the phone. And, Trent, Trent shouldn’t be left to supervise gold fish and there’s a four year old running wild in his house. See this, this is why I don’t visit the place must be chaos. This kid is just like him too. Same IQ and everything. I mean this pipsqueak insisted that he got a model D fifty-two airplane. A D fifty-two!” He stopped to measure Valerie’s disbelief, but her face was blank. “The B fifty-two Stratofortress is the most famous fighter jet in American history how can anyone not know that!?” Edward demanded.

“So,” Valerie said slowly, “You had an argument with a four year old?”

“Well he was wrong. I mean he said a D fifty-two!” Edward sputtered.

“Did you even talk to Trent at all?” Valerie asked angrily.

“No, he didn’t come to the phone his idiot descendant was babbling and then the kid hung up on me! No respect, he just hung up.” Edward tried to explain.

Valerie wasn’t looking at him she just shook her head. “You have no interest in your family.” She finally said.

“No.” Edward blurted out. “Trent is a moron and he has nothing in common with me. He talks about his kids incessantly and he has no interest in my life.”

“You don’t have a life.” Valerie snapped. Edward blinked and his mouth opened slightly. Valerie was always kind, to a fault. “You don’t care about anyone but yourself, you are convinced that everyone else is wrong that everybody is beneath you.”

“That’s not true!” Edward interjected, but he for once he couldn’t think of an argument.

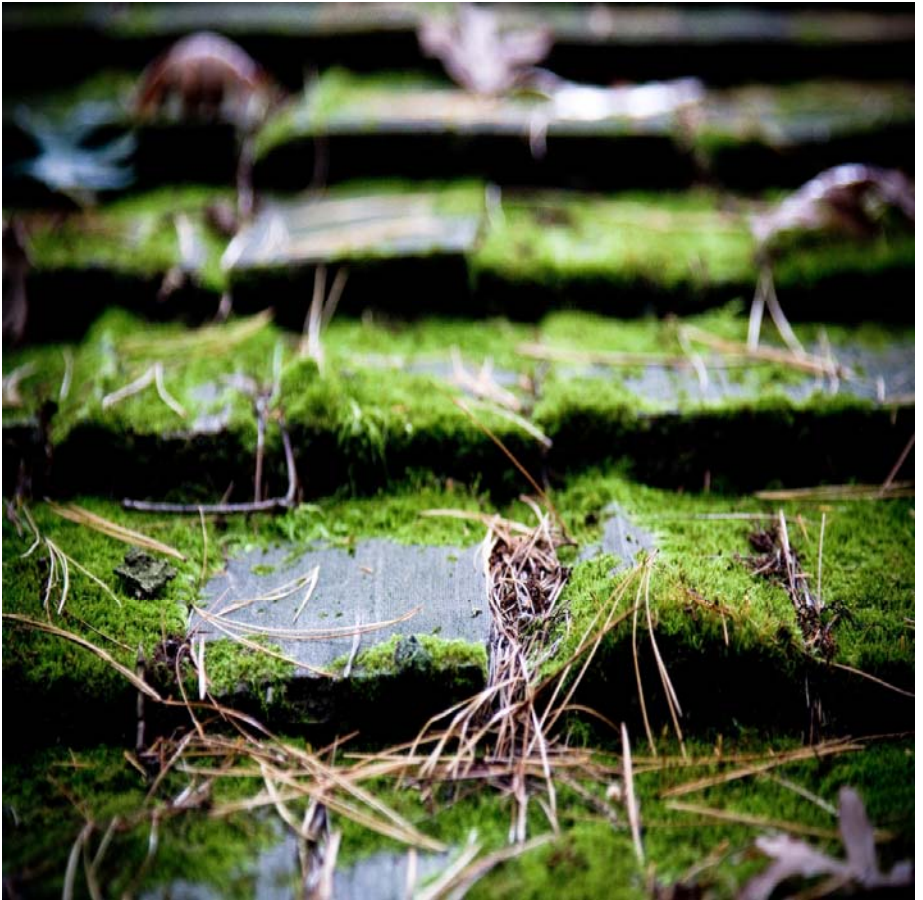
“Two years we’ve known each other and I swear the only reason you even put up with my faults is so that you have someone to rant at.” Valerie was still shaking her head as she stood up.

“What?” Edward was completely bewildered. He wondered how he was supposed to react when women got overly emotional.

“I’m done listening to you Edward. Goodbye.” Valerie grabbed her purse and walked out the door. The waitress came over with two chicken sandwiches Edward insisted he would only pay for one and fought her until the manager came over. Then Edward ate his sandwich paid for the one sandwich as the waitress glared at him. On his way out the door Edward realized he was leaving twenty minutes earlier than usual. He took a cab home and contemplated what he could do to fill the rest of the day.

White Pines, IL #2

by Heather Dowd



Solace Railroad
by Philip Arellano

I come here to escape the everywhere.

I go because no one else is there.

I throw a rock into the wood,
Never wondering where it goes.
It probably stops by the thicket,
Forgotten when it snows.

I come here to entertain my guests,
Loosely acquainted memories.
I welcome them like friends,
And dwell on thoughts of them

I know a few things for those concerned,
Of heaven, home, hope and sea,
The deepest pain from lessons learned,
And how happy two can be.

Of lungs, lying, loss and lore,
I think of my friends,
And what we don't say anymore.

A hero to one in a cold, black pit,
Or a constant, endless hypocrite,
I've been everything to someone.
Still, I am nothing to some.

I've thought nothing could be forgiven
From the wrongs that I've done,

But for the things I've learned
From what's never new under the sun.

Indeed, God has a plan
For everything and everyone.

If Life lacks this commodity,
A mere necessity
In lifting such a load.
Know the tracks mean more to me
Than the empty irony
Of sitting on a road.



Braided Water

by Cassandra Francisco

Bagpipes

by Angie Dunn

The bagpipes sounded an eerie melody
As we sat on the porch
Wondering what fate summer would bring

And here I am once again
But standing in a silence so profound
You would never know there used to be a sound
Of bagpipes

That summer is gone now
When we first heard them play
A solitary man outside the church
Mourning through song
In remembrance of a loved one

Summer has come around again
And I still wonder while the bagpipes echo
In the recesses of my mind
What this season has in store

I know it's a gentle reminder
To play when times are hard
And to look up and smile when times get rough
Smile at the sound of the bagpipes
Even through tears
Even though their presence means a soul is passing
They have left us for a better place

So we go on
Hoping through each passing summer
Sitting on the porch on starlit nights
And sunny days
Wondering what fates summer would bring
While off in the distance
Bagpipes continue to play

I PICK UP THE GUN

by Rebekah Megill

I turn around and walk, beginning with my right foot. Right, left, right, left. When I get to the end of the alley, I hold the gun above my head and stand on my tiptoes. I mean on my *very* tiptoes, until my shirt rises above my belt and the heels of my shoes slip off. Then I yell, at the top of my lungs, "COME AND GET ME!" I take off running. After three blocks I take a left. I cock my gun. As soon as I reach the end of the block, there's a chair on my right and I shoot whoever's sitting there right between the eyes. The chair is empty. But that's okay. The gun wasn't loaded anyway.

Jack is going to kill me. Jack is going to kill me.

I turn around and run, until I get back to the alley I started from. Then I do the whole thing again. End of the alley. On my tiptoes, my *very* tiptoes, until the shirt goes up and the shoes go off. "COME AND GET ME!" Run. Three blocks. Left. Turn and shoot. *Jack is going to kill me.* I turn and run back. I have to do it again, exactly the right way. I have to do it over and over again because if I don't I'm afraid Jack is going to kill me. I don't know why. I know Jack isn't going to kill me. He's my best friend and he's been my best friend my entire life. The other kids used to tease us and say that we were going to get married someday because we're such good friends. I know he cares about me and doesn't want me to die.

But what if...

I know in my head Jack would never kill anyone. But I can't get rid of the fear that...well, what if he *did*? What if he had always hated me? I have to do exactly this, over and over again, until I know I'm safe from Jack. And Jack is safe from becoming a killer.

Oh. And I forgot to mention it's 4:30 in the morning.

I had a dream about Jack. In the dream he tried to poison me. I had to come down and do this. I've done it eight times already. People keep yelling at me when I scream, "COME AND GET ME!" They lean out their windows and curse at me. But the alley isn't too close to where I live, so I don't think any of these people know who I am. So my mom doesn't even know what's going on.

I annoyed all these people. Jack is going to kill me.

I have to do it again.

When I ran out the door to come do it, I was still in my pajamas. And I didn't put on shoes. I have been running and walking and standing on tiptoe for about forty minutes now. I'm exhausted and my feet are killing me. I turn and shoot, right on cue.

I've done it nine times. Nine. I have to do it again or it will be uneven. It can't be uneven or Jack will kill me. I turn and run. Back to the same alley. I can't even stop to let myself breathe. I turn. Right, left, right, left.

"Tracy! What happened to your feet?" My mom sounds both concerned and scolding. I tried not to complain about my feet so she wouldn't notice, but I guess she did anyway.

"Nothing," I mumble. "Must be my shoes. Maybe they're too tight."

"I thought we fixed that when we got your last pair of shoes."

"I don't know. Maybe they're too loose."

Mom stands with her hands on her hips but a worried expression on her face. "Well...come over here. I want to put something on your feet."

"But I have to get to school."

"School can wait. You need to be safe. Come here."

I follow. I worry about what will happen when I get to school. I wonder what everyone will think of me, going in late. They'll think I'm horrible. None of them will want to be my friend anymore.

My mom drives me to school. I don't know what will happen. I don't know what I can do. I stare at the floor, my face burning, as I hand the teacher the note from my mom and sit down. Everyone's staring. Everyone hates me. Jack hates me.

Jack is going to kill me.

The bell rings and I run from class. Crying, sweating, panting, and bleeding inside my shoes, I run to the alley. The gun lies there, waiting for me. I pick it up and begin my routine.

I got the gun a long time ago from my mom's dad. He thinks every house should have a gun for protection, but Mom doesn't want to own one. Grandpa once gave me one behind my mom's back, saying only to use it for emergencies to protect me or Mom. But I told her he gave it to me and she threw it away. We were walking home then, and as we passed this dumpster she threw it in.

Then Jack and I and some other kids were playing a game we made up, sort of like Hide-and-Seek, on our way home from school. Jack and I were on the same team. I hid at the back of the alley. I saw the gun. I picked it up, not to hurt anyone, just to see what it was like to hold a gun like I was going to shoot it. A scene popped into my head. A scene from a movie or TV show or something I had seen once. A man held a gun in an alley just like this one. He turned. Right, left, right, left, until he reached the end of the alley. He stood on his tiptoes, his *very* tiptoes....

And, standing there with the gun in my hand, I decided to do it. Just for fun, to see what it would be like to be a criminal. But when I was done, Jack yelled at me because I had blown our cover. That was when I had started thinking Jack was going to kill me. That was when I had to do the routine over and over again. Somehow, even though it made no sense, I knew I couldn't stop being scared that Jack would kill me unless I did this.

At first, Jack kept trying to get me to stop but I couldn't. But I didn't want to tell him that, because if I made him mad he would kill me. I couldn't stop. I couldn't interrupt myself. If I did I would have to start over. Then it would be uneven. I would have done the beginning more than the end. It would be uneven and Jack would kill me. But if I didn't talk to Jack in the first place he would kill me. *Jack is going to kill me. Jack is going to kill me.*

So I ran faster. I raised the gun higher. I screamed louder. And I did it again. And again. And again.

"COME AND GET ME!" I scream. Since I've run out of school in the middle of the day, most people are at work or school, so no one yells at me as I take off running. Three blocks, take a left. Turn and shoot.

Only this time it's different. There are two things that have changed. There is a person in the chair. And there is a bullet in the gun.

And suddenly, from then on, I have to kill.

Jack is going to kill me. Jack is going to kill...somebody.

I just had a night full of dreams I couldn't wake up from. At first Jack held my head underwater and waited for me to drown. But in the next one, I came home from school to see that my mom was dead and Jack was still holding the knife in his hand. I know what he was thinking: *You killed a man with your little gun game. You killed him! So I'm gonna kill you, and I'm gonna kill everyone else in the world. Starting with everyone you know.*

When I woke up, I was sweating. I climb out of bed and begin to make my way, running, out of the house and toward the alley.

This isn't smart. I killed a man down there. There are probably cops everywhere. I could get arrested, or killed even before Jack has a chance at me. *Jack is going to kill somebody. Jack is going to kill everybody. And then he'll kill me.* I have to do it.

I have no idea how the bullet got in the gun. Maybe something was wrong with the gun so at first it didn't fire the one bullet it had left. Maybe someone used it and then brought it back. Maybe it's a different gun that just happens to be in the same spot. But the gun waits for me at the end of the alley. I check the gun for bullets. It's empty. I panic. I need bullets or Jack will kill my mom. I look in the dumpster. I search every corner. Finally I find a few, and I put just one in the gun. Just one. When I realize I know how to load the gun, I feel like crying. In fact, as I turn and walk, I am crying. I don't *want* to do what I did again. I don't *want* to kill somebody. Maybe more like ten people. I don't *want* to go to jail.

"COME AND GET ME!" I scream, not just saying it this time. I mean it. I'm beggin in my head for someone, anyone, to stop me from hurting anyone. And take away my fear of Jack. I'm worse than Jack, even the one in my dream. I am running to kill someone. And I don't even know why.

I hear sirens. I see lights. As I take a left I see "Crime Scene Do Not Cross" tape across the alley. But I keep running. No one sees me at first, as I duck under the tape. Until I turn and shoot. No one is in the chair. I turn and run back. I have to start over and do it again. But now it will be uneven.

Jack is going to kill me.

I hear grownups running after me. But I know where I'm going. It's dark and I've run to this alley more than two hundred times in the middle of the night. Two hundred thirty times, to be exact. It's even.

I don't know how, but I shake off whoever's following me, reload the gun with just one bullet, and begin again. The police hear me when I scream, "COME AND GET ME!" They chase me as I run. They're much faster than me. They catch up and grab at my shoulders to stop me. I can't stop. I can't start over or Jack will become a killer, too. I duck and one man slips and falls. But when I try to turn left the other one is fighting against me.

I never knew I could be this strong. Or angry. Suddenly I don't care what happens to this policeman. I just want him to *leave me alone*. I bite his hand. When that doesn't work, I turn around and stab him with the gun. I don't know then if I meant to or not, but the gun fires. The officer falls, twitching and screaming, to my side. But he can't stop me now as I turn and run back to the alley to reload the gun.

I try it again. I end up shooting someone else and smashing a third man into a building. Suddenly people are shooting at me as I run back to the alley. My stomach turns as I think that it could be Jack shooting at me, trying to kill me, and I

would have been right. And I'll have to keep doing this forever because Jack really is going to kill me. I hear an ambulance coming as I start again, running faster.

Finally I make it through to the chair. I shoot - but there's no one in it. I feel like screaming. I want to scream until I die and all my insides come out and my fears come out and lie on the ground with them. But I don't say anything so I'm not interrupted. I turn and run. I have to do it again.

The next time I wake up, I wake up in a strange room. From what I know about hospitals, I can tell this looks like one of them, but I can also tell it's a prison. I don't remember when I passed out last night but I remember getting hurt a lot. Suddenly a thought occurs to me, and I begin to panic. I try to count the amount of times and places I've been hurt. I remember eleven places. Eleven. I look around but don't see anything sharp, so I reach over to my left arm and use my fingernails to dig into it until I can see blood. There. Twelve. Now Jack won't kill me for it being uneven.

I see a needle stuck up my arm. I think this is probably to keep me sedated and lying here, so I won't kill anyone else. But a thought pops into my head...I remember last night thinking that Jack was shooting at me. And now I have something in my arm. Jack could be trying to poison me.

You didn't finish, I could hear the Jack in my dreams saying to me. You let them stop you. You quitter. Now you're locked away, so what can stop me? I am going to kill-

"No!" I shout. I am out of my bed and running before he can finish his sentence. I run out of the room and keep running. Doctors and guards see me and chase me, but I am not going to let that stop me this time. I keep running, pumping my arms faster and faster. I collide into a guard, but get right back up and grab his gun. I'm hurting everywhere and I'm limping but I am driven. I wouldn't be able to stop even if I want to. Which I do.

Suddenly I realize I don't know where to go. I have no idea how to get out of the building, and even if I did I would not be able to get back to the alley. Looking around frantically for anything I can do, I turn down into a dark hallway that dead-ends. Before I turn around I realize something. I stop. *This hallway looks familiar...*It looks exactly like the alley.

I check to see if the gun is loaded and empty it of all the bullets except one. Then I turn. Right, left, right, left, until I get to the end of the hallway. On my tiptoes, my *very* tiptoes. "COME AND GET ME!" My voice is full of tears, the saddest sound I've ever heard. I take off running. I don't know if people are chasing me or not. I don't know anything that's going on around me. I'm crying as I run. Why? Why am I afraid Jack is going to kill me? Why does doing this routine help? Why is it that the only way I can feel better is to become a murderer? It's not fair. nothing's fair. Why should I be willing to sacrifice someone else's life for mine? Am I just going to keep killing forever, until Jack has nobody left to kill?

I wonder if I would be willing to stop if I knew Jack would only kill me. Would I be willing to die to let someone else live?

But I know how it feels, to be a murderer. It's awful. I'm certain there can be nothing worse in the whole world. Am I doing this to keep me alive anymore, or Jack?

I'm doing this for you, Jack. You don't want to be a killer. I won't let you.

Turn and shoot. I freeze. No. No, no, no, no, no.

"Mom!!" I scream. I stare unbelieving at my mom's body. I didn't know she was here. I don't know how the police found out who I was. She must have been sitting, waiting for me to wake up. Or maybe she just came down to talk to the police because she couldn't find me. She probably expected to be happy when she saw me. Well, she did see me. With a gun pointed straight at her head. I scream. And again. And again. Just like everything else I do. I have to do it over and over, because that's the only way I can feel better. But I don't feel better. I will never feel better.

I don't know what else to do. I turn and dash for the hallway. I need to do it again. I'm stopped by police, but I keep pushing. I don't care what happens. I don't care about anything anymore. My mother is dead and my world is over. I feel like I've been shot in the head ten times for every person I killed. I'm angry. I hate everything in the world, especially Jack. Especially myself. I bite. I kick. I stab with the gun. All of a sudden I want to kill more people. I want to kill everybody. And then I want to kill me. Just like Jack.

I scream again. I keep screaming while I'm knocked out by a policeman. I go out on an uneven number.

I see myself walking. Right, left, right, left. I say it out loud. "Right, left, right, left." I see the end of the alley. "End of the alley." I see the confused and frightened faces as I scream, "COME AND GET ME!" I see myself running and name each step out loud. Three blocks. Take a left. Turn and shoot.

"BANG!!" I scream desperately at the top of my lungs. No one is here. Just like last time. And the time before that. And the time before that. I'm alone in my padded cell and straightjacket with my thoughts. My sick, twisted, hating thoughts.

Soon the door opens and two people rush in and pin me to the floor. "Turn and shoot. BANG!!" I shout. But no one dies. "BANG!! BANG!! BANG!!" I shoot ten times. A nurse walks in with a syringe as I go through the routine again. "BANG!! BANG!!" She doesn't die either. I want her to. I want them all to die. I have to make them die or Jack will get to them all before I do.

The stuff in the syringe sedated me. I can feel myself falling asleep, shouting, "Bang, bang, bang..." I will never be able to get out of this padded cell. I will never be able to kill them. But I will never stop trying. I'm angry, but I'm also driven by a new fear.

Jack is never going to kill me. I'm going to live a long, long time.

And that's scarier than anything in the world.

The Plastic Fire Hydrant Red Chair

by Erica Brown

As any other chair eventually molds into the shape of a person's ass, the chair chosen by Audrey Miller was a toddler's plastic chair. It didn't conform to her buttocks like a fresh leather cushion or even have the misleading fragrance of pleather. It was a plastic, fire hydrant red chair that smelled of urine and glue. It's once like new gloss was now ruined with splashes and drips of paint. Onion yellow dripped on the sides of the wobbly legs. The back of the chair was broken in the shapes of tiny craters. The chair's silver metallic skeleton was exposed by chips of peeling paint. The two arms, once the most comfortable part of the chair, were now a bouquet of jagged broken plastics that were seen as a safety hazard.

Audrey Miller sat quietly in the chair, letting her flabby arms dangle at her sides. Her forest green eyes stared out aimlessly while her auburn hair curled out in all directions like sunflower pedals. She was a wreck. Her lively pink flamingo blouse was a rotting shade of its former self. Her black leggings were torn at the ends with smudges of chalk and gold stars creating a constellation on her upper thighs. With what little skin she exposed on her ankles and hands, these parts were etched by teeth and nails. Her usual wallflower face was showered with today's snack, apple slices with vanilla yogurt and caramel dipping sauce. The remains of an apple core perched itself in her cleavage.

It was already two hours after closing time, but Audrey couldn't leave. The door remained unlocked. The sun was beginning to set. The automatic lights had flicked on a couple of minutes ago. She could leave. She could walk out the doors and never look back. She really could do this too and run from this breeding ground for future demons, devils, and succubus.

Five years of her life would have been wasted then. She was drowning at the depths of this black hole to even escape. She tried to leave, but something would always pull her back into this wasteland. She can't even think of any reasons to stay except for that one and possibly two reasons.

Yes, the daycare supplied her life with content. Her life lacked abnormalities, providing a very safe and stable environment. Watching children was a mindless task. It was a thoughtless process like filing folders in a draw that no one will see again. Taking care of children was just another simple job. Children only did so many little things.

They ran. They smiled. They played. They fell. They cried. They yelled. They hit. They pulled. They screamed. They stole. They lie. They cheat. They hide. They break. They destroy.

While so simple, children carried the torch of annoyance proudly. After quitting time, she still couldn't move any part of her body. She was soar from having to escape from a mountain of children. Of course, whatever the evil creatures had on them would always rub off on her.

Because of this, Audrey quit doing laundry. She couldn't get the paint out, the piss, the vomit, or the grape juice.

She especially HATED grape juice.

A meaningless thoughtless job is doing the same routine over and over again. This job, if it didn't suit her comfortable life style, she would quit. The

reasons to leave weighed heavier than the ones to stay. There was nothing that could tip the scale so outrageously that it would force her to leave.

It was getting late. She needed to finish closing up the building.

As soon as she stood up, she knew there was something horribly wrong. She was standing straight up with her arms still dangling at her sides. Her posture was the same. The daycare still was fogged by a blanket of deep sangria, burnt yellows, and a haze of indigo from the approaching night. The toys still cluttered the shelves and were scattered on the floor. All was still in place.

The chair, the once beautiful fire hydrant chair, was different. She had sat in this chair while on breaks. She sat in this chair to watch the children. She sat in this chair hoping some epiphany would interrupt her routine thoughts.

And yet, this chair seemed to have been another cause of unhappiness for her as it was glue to her ass.

Then, she felt something cold drip down the back of her stick like legs.

It made a small puddle on the floor. A purplish liquid tint stung her eyes.

It was grape juice. One of those evil, ungodly horrid children had spilled grape juice onto her precious chair...

“DIE!!!”

Audrey’s voice bounced off all the walls in the daycare. In some part of her mind, she had hoped the building would have collapsed; however, she thought if that happened, she wouldn’t have the pleasure of using her own hands to destroy what was so precious to these children.

The toys.

The first thing in Audrey’s close proximity was the alphabet blocks that spelled out the phrase *I Love You Audie*.

“Stupid brats! My name is Audrey!”

She hurled each block in different corners of the room. A few of the blocks landed in the housing area breaking and shattering glass cups, picture frames, and vases. The other blocks had flown into windows of the buildings as well as her boss’s office. Her boss’s office not only suffered damage from a broken window, but also a broken computer monitor. It had been knocked off his desk when the block came smashing through his window.

As Audrey stuck her arms out to sweep everything off the shelves, she spotted the collection of Carebears. They were perfectly clean. They didn’t smell of urine or have any sparkly gold stars on them!

“AHHH! Each head must go!” Audrey screamed.

With ease, Audrey yanked the heads off from their bodies. The bear’s stuffing bloomed like the happy clouds on their stomachs. Of course, Audrey was not completely content. They were still missing a certain color.

Audrey ran over to the fridge and gathered gallons and gallons of grape juice. She lined up the bears as if preparing for a bonfire. To save her supply, she first started with the juice packs. She poked the straws into each one of them and then squeezed and wrung out every last drop. A wide smile carved into Audrey’s lips.

She never looked so happy.

Once she sprayed and soaked the stuffed bears, she saw a sharp edge of some kind of plastic object underneath the mats in the napping area. She quickly skipped over and flipped the mat over. It was a broken part of her favorite chair that

still remained glued to her ass.

“Ah, you will make a fine weapon. . .”

After several hours, Audrey sat in her precious chair staring at the sight she had created in just one night. She was horrified by the sight.

Skins of popped rubber balls stuck to the floor like chewed bubble gum. The breeze flowing from outside through the broken glass windows blew puffs of cotton. The carpets were stained in heavy buckets of grape juice that made squish sounds like a sponge. The wheels of the toy fire trucks and tractors rolled across the floor. The plaid furniture in the lounge area was sliced and gutted. The playhouse was tipped over and missing its door. The doll’s hairs had been removed along with their clothes. The mats were all glued to the ceiling and peeling off. The sink was clogged up with paint brushes and colored construction paper. And, the sparkly gold stars ravaged the walls.

“This is . . . probably a bad thing . . . I need to clean up. . .”

Audrey checked the time. The daycare was supposed to be open at this time. Her boss would show up at any time now to do his daily routine.

At the very least, Audrey would sneak out before her boss arrived.

“Whoa. . .”

It was too late. Her boss walked in through the doors that were barely attached to their hinges.

“Good Mor—“

The boss examined the room. His bushy eye brows mashed together as his eyes wondered. He rubbed his brow and scratched his double chin.

“I can explain sir. . . I was here late last night, and I just—“

“Nicely done, Audie.”

She stared very confused.

“For the remodeling? We were planning to trash this place anyways and replace some of the old stuff with some more updated toys and furniture. It’s great that you took an initiative.”

She pressed her lips tightly together suppressing the urge to laugh. She clamped her hands together and shook her head. This tipped the scale just a little more. She turned around to face her boss. Enough was enough.

“I quit.”

She briefly grinned at him and quickly rushed out of the daycare with her precious chair still glued firmly to her ass.

Cultural Sensitivity
by Jessica Weller

It's two in the morning before my final paper is due
I click on Spell Check since I'm almost through
The suggestions correct my grammar and spelling
The end is in sight, which is most compelling

Changing 'their' to 'his or her' causes an increase
Then something different shows up for the 'police'
He's now a 'law enforcement administrator'
Leading away a bothersome 'trouble creator'

Other suggestions are just trying to be polite
Trying to upturn someone's unfortunate plight
But 'custodial-' and 'sanitation-engineers'
Are more repulsive than their names appear

For 'ignorant intellectual pupil' taking a quiz
'Failure' is not an option, but a 'deferred success' is
The phrase does sound a bit cruel, but then again,
'Elderly' isn't as respectful as 'senior citizen'

The poor country of Haiti wasn't hit by an earthquake:
The tectonic plates just made a geographical mistake
Instead of using words like 'humans' or 'mankind'
Simply 'homo sapien' will keep you out of a bind

Microsoft Word is now using 'selective language'
Using the most corrective phrases it can gauge
A bubble appears: "Now the Spell Check is complete;
There are no more phrases that I suggest you delete."

But now my paper's final message is askew
All these 'improvements' say something new
Why won't you let me write about what I mean?
Instead of trying to make everything sound 'clean'

Fart
by Zach Johnson

Pressure inside
Builds and subsides
People around
Lack of sound
Nowhere to hide
Humanity denied

Digestion produced
This methane noose
Diner I blame
Fear of malodorous fame
God strike me down
Before elongating this frown

Paranoid possibilities
Sense of vulnerability
Will it be model glue
Or a closet's old shoe
No sly way to escape
I know my fate

Then the moment quietly passes
With no reaction from the judging masses
As my guilt wafts through the unventilated room
It takes with it my impending doom
None will discover the source
Of this silent but deadly force

Devi8ed

by Nick Novak

Let me spell out the A-R-K that Noah played on a Sunday afternoon.
I bellow the gloom in lofty situations taking a look around the grinning calculations, wagering the ratio of heart palpitations to smoke inhalations.

For the price is deadly with each breath.

So said Seth speaking in tongs with lungs the size of bar stools.

The tools we use to build a brighter future are the underground sub-culture water supply in times of famine.

Spray painting wall foundations of white Russian vodka.

Rhinoplasty blast beats of black metal, cold steal heal me inside and out of bounds.

This vision sits and contemplates orgasms on box top collections for cold war kids in mixed up imaginations.

They say that feeling is an illusion based on how your heart beats to and fro pick combs, shalom silent one, this is not your time to rhyme the words of God.

I ponder your awakening form and contort the mystic xylophone drone, for home is where your head rests and my chest has become heavy foot notes to carry on my name in the grace of existence.

This shit has me on guarded gates while the open bar scene screams for the birth of righteous contradictions of the soul, for when you are full of shit it seems to hit the fan with a little less disruption in the full effect of a good talk between father and son.

I've just been waiting to feel your hand upon my life telling me where to go from here on out...can you even talk less when you drink you self into disorder?

Has the problem fixed itself since the last time you pathetically tried to deal with the weight of the world?

The question poses itself in the most unlikely of configured mathematical equations because, like most of us, you choose to equalize your mentality with the demon drink. But think about the children of the path, they live to give you a chance to die intelligent and loved. For we as human beings make extremely vast assumptions in cases where they think their integrity seems unsurpassed.

But I'm using metaphors as my magnificent measurement of truth, for the truth is much too tough to handle.

Cause in the heat of the night you'll shed the parts of your skin you value most.

Good times gone bad cell structure mother fucker! Tell me what you grasp outcast, cut the test line and let go of that totem pole.

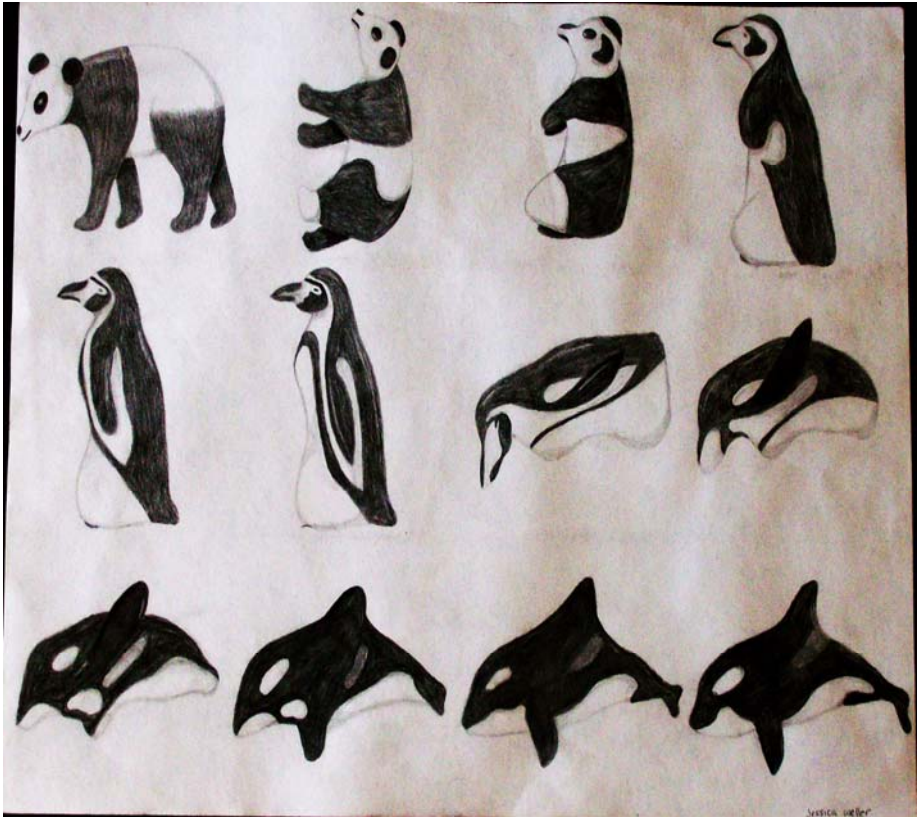
Middle Earth will prevail leading to the dark ages, leaving us to ponder the thoughts of the sages for centuries to come.

So come with me, see reality bite hard upon a criminal mind set up to dress the part of a reality check mate.

And fold back to the forward motion so that living won't be as hard as killing off the worst parts of yourself to once again be whole.

Friendship

by Jessica Weller



Dreams
by Angie Dunn

Night sky twinkles when held in my hands
With much spontaneity I abandon old plans
In one swift motion I release my treasure
Explosions of stars occur much to my pleasure

My mind screams at me that this isn't real
This is how dreams are supposed to feel
I smile and sigh because I know my mind is right
But explosions of stars remain a delight

Scenes soon shift to the ocean's tide
Where land and water are about to collide
As a colossal wave crashes onto the shore
I stand spellbound like I've never seen this before

Blink once and it will all be gone
Leaving me here where I've been all along
But I can still remember that fateful night
When my eyes saw an explosion of light

And when I fall back into the arms of sleep
 May dreams like memories keep
 Before I wake to face the day
 Leave this world to rejoin the fray
 Clouds now grace an open sky
 And mountains tower miles high
 Holding the peak in the palm of my hand
This dream of mine needs just one more chance

 Oh how I do love a dream
 That shows me things as they ought to seem
Like explosions of stars in the middle of the night
 As the thunder rolls while the lightning strikes

 Dreams are the key that breaks the seal
As my mind traces night paths through the unreal
 And while I rest in soft slumber tonight
 The fireflies in the sky will keep shining bright

Time Reflections
by Charles Atchley

We wrap ourselves in days,
as if they're revelations of ancient tusks
washed from mammoths in the ice,

And record the years in journals,
with perishable details of life's passage,
as if we're anemones hoisted onto crabs with wanderlust.

Traveler's Song
by Angie Dunn

Don't leave this place with a heavy heart
Some memories end so new ones can start
Now I have started along the trail
That leads away from home
But I have no doubt
I will not fail
Though on this trail I may roam
It's my goal to make you proud
And in the end I'll make it back
In five or ten years down the road
After I've seen the world
I'll follow the trail
The very same trail
That leads to my humble abode
The place where I've hung my heart
Meaning I'm here to stay
And I hope you all will miss me
While I wander the world away



CELTIC KNOT 052
BY KAREN DONOHUE

Wondering

by Angie Dunn

Cramped desk and a blank test

Thoughts fade in and out

Facts dance around out of reach

Finally the pencil drops from my hands

And in an instant I'm gone

Welcome to the city of carefree

With a towering skyline of palms

And a population unknown

It springs to life with an ocean vibe

On days like these

Bust open the oceanfront door

Race along the beaches and crash into the shore

Feel emotion surge through every muscle fiber

As I dive headfirst into tossing waves

Then hunt for treasures on the beach

Skirt the gentle tide that licks my feet

Hear the lulling sound of surf

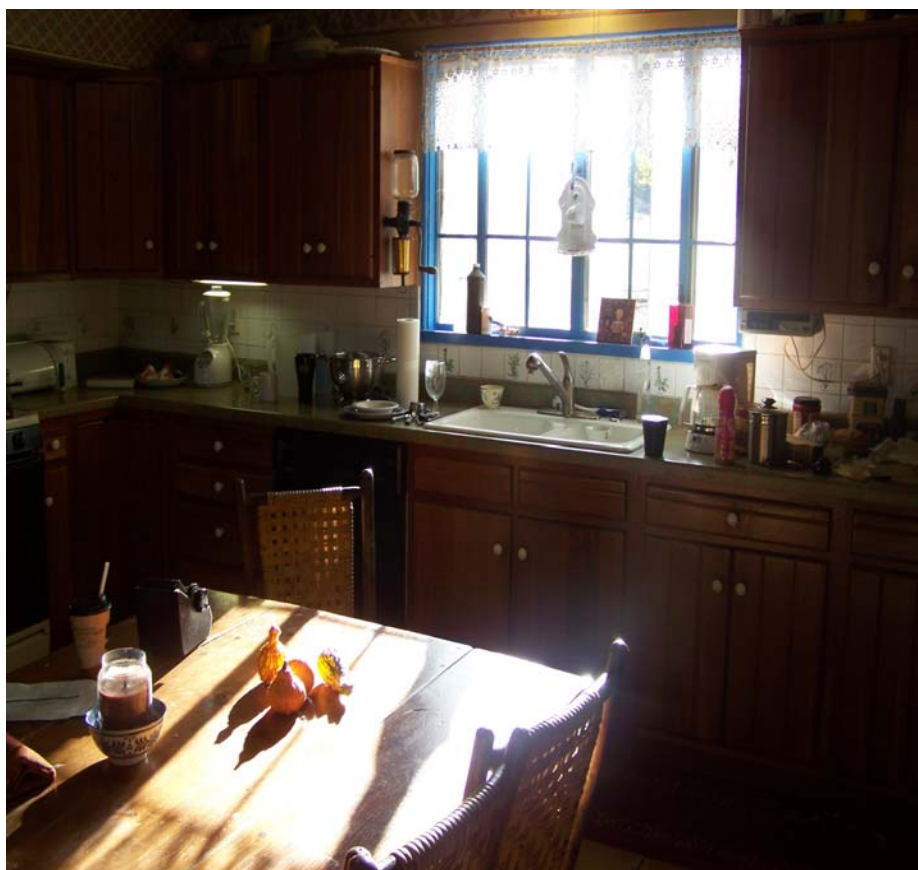
Echoed in the mouth of a seashell

Sandcastles and plastic shovels
Oversized coolers and umbrellas
Stare out at the horizon for hours
At the line where the ocean is swallowed
By an open expanse of sky

Trace the lines of shapes and letters
On a blank slate of sand
Let the coming tide wipe it clean
And start again

Swaying fronds in the ocean's breeze
The scent of salt pours over me
Winds from a distant paradise
Make palm trees dance in waning light

Rest my body in soft sparkling sand
Life flashes in my head again and again
Sunglasses off and watch the sun dip lower
Sky ablaze with every imaginable color
Still feel the heat of the day simmering at dusk
I think what I need is a day at the beach



Daylight #3

by James Salstrom

THE ANNE HORTON WRITING AWARDS:

THE FOLLOWING ESSAYS ARE NON-FICTION. THEY ARE THE WINNERS OF SVCC'S ANNUAL WRITING CONTEST, NAMED FOR A FORMER CHAIR OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AND A FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE SCHOOL'S FAULTY.

FIRST PLACE:

My Secret
by Antoinette Brown

“You have Anorexia.”

I must be hearing things, I thought. The doctor repeated himself. “You have Anorexia.” No, this can’t be right. I’m not thin enough, I’m not good enough to have that. I was so sure that he was wrong. But I did not want to face the reality of the situation until it was almost too late.

It started in the spring of my sophomore year in high school. Let us say I was sort of a follower. I was never sure of who I was, personally. I often imitated others to please them, to feel accepted (i.e. dressing a certain way, listening to certain music, etc.).

Then there was this boy. He was two years older than I and was *British*. I believe that is the main reason I was enamored with him in the first place. Anyway, I tried everything to get him to like me, though it was wasted attempts, considering we never dated or anything. One fateful day, we were joking around, and he said the one line that brought my world to a screeching halt: “You’re fat, so don’t eat until I tell you to.”

I could not believe it. Was it true? No one had ever said *anything* to me. Judging by his remorseful reaction, he could tell I was hurt.....he just didn’t know how far beyond repair I was at that point. He apologized, but the damage was done. Because I liked him

so much, I valued his opinion greatly. I don't like a lot of boys, so when I like someone, I like them a lot. Of course, I acted like it was nothing. But inside, I began formulating a plan.

Deciding that I could lose some weight, I went on a diet. Nothing too drastic. Cut out all sweets, fried foods, junk, the usual "bad" foods. Along with the new eating pattern, I thought "Why not start exercising more?" I signed up for some classes at the YMCA, and began going to the gym in my free time: Pilates; kickboxing; step; you name it, I more than likely took it. But it wasn't enough.

As the weeks went on, I made more changes to my diet. I cut out red meat, pork, and excessive fatty foods. Additionally, I began to portion everything out, so I knew exactly how much I was getting. It was necessary to have exactly level half-cups, exactly level table-spoons. That way, I could keep track of the calories down to the decimal. On the exercise level, I attended at least one class a night, every night, as well as the actual gym itself. I could tell I had dropped some weight, but I was still not satisfied.

The end of the school year came, and with that came Memorial Day. Playing French Horn, I marched with the Municipal Band in the parade. I remember it was a hot day--very, very hot. But I don't remember much else because, when we were standing in the cemetery during the speeches, I blacked out. Now, I don't mean I fell over or anything. No...I just couldn't see anything. My eyes were wide open, yet *all* was black. My ears were ringing and I felt really clammy and cold all of a sudden. I had to fake playing the music, attempting to move my fingers in the note positions, so no one would know something was wrong. One can imagine how scared I was. Luckily, it happened toward the end of the ceremony, so we were finished soon. I stayed in one spot until my sister came over. I quietly told her that I couldn't see anything and I needed a bit of help. My parents were quite concerned, as most parents would be, but I brushed it off. I told them I didn't drink enough water and was dehydrated. They accepted that. Looking back, I wish they would not have, because the worst was still to come.

Summer was upon us, which only meant one thing to me: more time at the gym. With school out, I could spend all of my time there if I wanted to. And I did. I went there multiple times a day, everyday. Of course, I was still watching everything I ate. Portioning and

calorie-counting became my hobbies. I would constantly think about food all hours of the day. I wrote down everything that I ate, and if I felt guilty about something, I would just go to the gym and work it off. My life was becoming all about food and exercise. There was no room for anything-- or anyone--else. Family, friends, and a social life were placed on the back-burner.

One may be wondering, where the parents are in all of this. Didn't they notice? Didn't they try to stop you? I'm coming to that. My mother was the one who noticed the most. I have always been the closest to her; I can tell her anything. We are more friends than mother and daughter. She detected something was going on just by being, well, motherly. She observed the way I acted at meal times, how many times I went to the gym, how my personality changed, how my body changed. She knew something was wrong. But she didn't say anything, at least not right away. From time to time now, she says she wishes she would have.

I did begin to wonder if I had a problem. I refused to eat anything that anyone else made; I refused to eat out; I even began to refuse eating in the presence of other people. I chose to be alone. I had to exercise after I ate anything--and I mean anything. If I ate one grape, I had to do something to get rid of the calories. NO excuses. And meal times became more difficult. I had rituals now that I had to do. I just could not eat without doing them. It was becoming harder to get away with them in front of my family. My parents kept telling me to eat some more. Of course I didn't. There were rules upon rules that dictated my life.

Something wasn't exactly right, and I wanted to do something about it. My first cry for help came about midway through the summer. I told my mom that I felt like I needed a little help on trying to eat normally again. She seemed pleased that I came to her and, of course, she agreed. I got off on the right track and kept it up...for a week. I could not take it anymore after that. I needed control, stability again (though my behavior was the farthest thing from it). I resorted back to my old habits, but put a little more effort into them. I took it just a little bit farther.

August was approaching. My father was a partner in a trucking business and had to take a trip down to Lasalle-Peru one day. He asked me if I wanted to go with him, and out of personal obligation, I

agreed. I hadn't eaten anything that morning; I had added a new rule to my already too-long list: go for as long as you can without eating something. Around 2 P.M. or so, the business was finished and he decided we should get a late lunch at Cracker Barrel. Panic flooded me. There was *no way* I could eat out, let alone there of all places, and with people. Of course there was no way out of going. But I could avoid eating. I knew I could.

Lucky for me, my Dad's friend was dining with us. Good, I thought, less attention on me. I ordered a grilled cheese and green beans. It had to be something easy to get rid of. Nothing sloppy or saucy. The food arrived, and the two men kept right on talking. I *very* strategically took one bite of the sandwich to show them that, yes, I was eating it. I held it in my mouth, almost gagging from it, as I tore the rest of the sandwich into bits and pieces. I had placed my napkin in my lap so they wouldn't notice me putting the sandwich particles in it. Mind you, this took quite a while. I couldn't just do it all at once; I had to make it look like I was eating it, not getting rid of it. Once a large amount of the sandwich had been "disposed of," I said, "I have to go to the bathroom." Getting up, I hid the napkin in front of me and turned so they wouldn't see it. But I shouldn't have worried; they continued with the conversation like I wasn't even there. All the better for me. Once in the bathroom, I spit out the hunk of sandwich that had been in my mouth for the better half of an hour. I rinsed my mouth with water; I had to get the unhealthiness, the fat, the unwanted, out. Tossing the sandwich-filled napkin in the trash, I felt a sense of pride. Not many people could get away with that, I thought. I walked back to the table and spent the remainder of the meal pushing the green beans around, mushing them up a bit to make it look as if I had made a dent. Inside, I knew this was all wrong. I knew that it was wrong to be happy that I could get away with these behaviors. But it had to be done.

A few weeks followed with things gradually getting worse. I knew I was harming my body multiple ways just from the symptoms I began to suffer from. My back hurt *all* the time. Not like I pulled a muscle or something, it hurt about where the kidneys are. My whole body was in pain; it hurt just to stand. I was tired the majority of the day, wanting to sleep a lot. My fingernails turned blue and began to stay like that. When I worked out, I pushed harder and harder, feeling

like I was going to pass out; I refrained from drinking water when exercising, feeling that it made me look and feel fat--but I kept going. On the total opposite side of the spectrum, I would drink liquids constantly to fill my stomach; this way, I wouldn't have to eat. Lying in bed at night, I could feel my heart pounding so hard, I feared sleeping; I thought I was going to have a heart attack. The thing I remember the most is being cold. All the time. I had to wear multiple layers in 80-degree weather. Something had to be done.

I went to my mom a second time. I recall her crying and saying she didn't know what to do. She was tired of seeing me hurt myself. I insisted I was not hurting myself *that* much; I just needed to get back on track, that was all. Just like before, I attempted normalcy. And, like before, I failed after a week. And this time, when I relapsed, it was much worse.

My junior year started the third week in August. I hadn't seen any of my friends over the summer, so they had no idea what I looked like. But no one said anything. I still conceived myself as fat, so them not saying something *obviously* meant I still had a lot of weight to lose. Sitting in those hard desks, my body hurt worse than it ever did. But this meant nothing to me. Or I blocked it out.

My mother had secretly made an appointment with my doctor. I flat-out refused to go. There's no need, I thought. But, her being the parent and me, well, not, I had to attend. Sitting in the office, I was a nervous wreck. What was he going to say? What was he going to do?

He did the usual check-up procedures, and then sent me down to get blood work and an EKG. I freaked out. I am deathly afraid of needles, so I was less than thrilled about the blood test. And an EKG? What in the world is that? I wondered. I was scared the whole time, but I endured the tests. Back in his office, the doctor looked more serious than I'd ever seen him as he gave the diagnosis. Anorexia? It can't be. I didn't want to believe him. I still believed I wasn't thin enough; I wasn't perfect yet! I couldn't have that until I was perfect; couldn't he see?

He gave directions as to what we should do; my mom was to facilitate my meals, and I was to cease all exercise. I was also given the number of a certified eating disorder therapist in Rockford. "These things should get you back on track," he explained. He took one final look at me and we scheduled another appointment for the next month. But it would never be fulfilled.

For the first few days, things were pretty much the same as they had been. I perked up a little bit, saying that I was happy I was getting help, and that “since I weigh 100, I’m fine with that.” I wanted to stay that weight, not gain, not lose. But 100 pounds is not healthy weight for a five foot-five inch person--not even close. And things were to go downhill soon.

Following those few days, I went from bad to just plain worse. I hit rock bottom. During lunch at school, I played the same games as in August at the restaurant, every single day. I was too depressed to care anymore, about anything. I didn’t care how anyone else was feeling or was affected by what I was doing to myself. I didn’t care if I lived or died. Come to think of it, I might have preferred the latter; at least I wouldn’t have to suffer anymore. Meal times became a living hell. I would sit on the floor in the kitchen, bawling, because I couldn’t eat; I just couldn’t. The only thing I wanted to do was curl into a ball and sleep, because sleeping kept my mind off of what I had to do, what I had to face. Besides, that was all I had the energy to do. I was torn between wanting help and being scared to get help. I couldn’t give up this disease that brought me comfort, that had been a part of me for so long.

My dad went to see my doctor on his own because he was at a loss of what to do. Nothing was working, he told him. The doctor suggested that my parents look into Linden Oaks Hospital at Edwards Hospital in Naperville because they had a specific eating disorder treatment program. I remember going to sleep after marching in the home football game. It was so cold that night (to me). I was so dizzy. I came home and lay on my stomach; that was the only way I could; every other way was too painful. My mom was lying beside me, telling me I needed to eat something. I would, I insisted; I just wanted to rest a bit. Lies. All lies. I woke up around midnight or so, and my mom brought me to the kitchen for some food. As I choked down peanut butter toast, something that I had forbidden myself *long ago*, my dad came home.

He raised his voice and began yelling, telling me he wasn’t going to have me kill myself anymore. “You have an evaluation appointment on Tuesday, no excuses.” I didn’t argue; I didn’t cry; I did nothing. I was emotionless. I had become unemotional over the months. It was easier that way.

Saturday came, and my mom and I attended my sister's middle school football game to watch her cheer. Sitting in the sun wrapped in two sweatshirts, I told my mom I felt like maybe we should move the evaluation to tomorrow. "Are you sure about this?" she asked.

"Yeah. I'm sure."

Sunday: *The day.* I woke, early, using all my strength just to get out of bed. The evaluation was at 4 P.M. I spent my morning working on homework and packing--just in case. Of course, I didn't eat anything. The drive up there was an awkward one. My grandmother had come along for support, but I was in a sort of daze. And cold. So cold.

Pulling into the hospital, I was nervous. Who wouldn't be? My aunts had decided to meet us there as well. Great, I thought. More support. All I really wanted was to be left alone. We sat in the entrance, and I took it all in. Decent enough, I thought. My turn came. Here we go.

The evaluator "Maria" talked to my parents, to me, to me and my parents, and then to the whole group. The questions escape me now, but I know they were very repetitive. Same ones over and over. She took me to get weighed and get vitals done. Whatever, I thought. Same as usual. Then, something new.

"I'm going to send you over to the emergency room at Edwards and have them check you over." Huh? Why? I thought. I didn't protest, though; we went over. Upon arriving there, I was asked to change into a gown and wait. I was freezing and my back hurt, so they let me lie down on a bed and placed one of those heated blankets over me. It still wasn't enough. So, another blanket. The doctor came in and did the routine checks, including blood tests (my favorite) and an EKG. After he finished, he told us it would be a while, so I was free to change back into my clothes. He didn't have to tell me twice. Dressed and wrapped up in two blankets, a sweater, and two heavy coats, I waited with my family.

The doctor came back in. He looked very concerned. "Yes, you have Anorexia." Really, Einstein? I thought. Tell us something we don't know. That he did: "You are extremely dehydrated, and your electrolyte count is dangerously low. Because of this, your kidneys are starting to fail and the lack of potassium is putting a strain on your heart." He informed us that I had dropped eight pounds in a little less than one week, bringing me down to 92.

“Your body temperature is very low also, around 92 degrees. Your heart rate is dangerously low as well. We did two EKGs to make sure; your heart rate is 40 bpm, which is like the heart rate of someone like Lance Armstrong. However, you don’t seem to be an immediate risk, so you’re cleared to go back to Linden Oaks.”

I sat in silence, letting it all sink in. Cleared. They had to medically clear me before I could be admitted, because they were afraid I would--to be quite frank--*die*. And do you want to know the sad part? I didn’t even *care*. I didn’t even *cry*. I was just told that I was dying, and it had no effect on me whatsoever. But my parents cried. That was first time I’d ever seen my father cry. That sticks with me.

We went back to LOH and I was admitted as an inpatient. I cried myself to sleep that night, but I made a vow to myself. I would stop this now. I was going to get better and recover from this plague. I wanted my parents to be proud. I was different from most anorexics in that aspect. I wanted to live a normal life again. I was tired of the vicious cycle.

I was an inpatient for two weeks. It was anything but easy: tearful days, tearful nights, frustration, anger. They locked the bathrooms after all meals and snacks, for the obvious reasons, which was particularly hard if you were required to drink three bottles of Gatorade a day for electrolytes. After a few days, I became so tired of food. I felt like all I was doing was sitting around and eating, which is definitely not what I wanted to do.

Visiting hours were very difficult. It was so hard to see my family and know that I couldn’t leave with them. I remember one evening I talked to my mom on the phone before dinner. I had been having kind of an off day. Talking to her on the phone, I began to cry and begged her to come and get me. “I want to come home, I’m ready to come home,” I pleaded. Of course I couldn’t. At dinner I started crying even more; I couldn’t finish the food; I felt sick. I went back to the unit and went to bed early.

At times, I felt like I was in a prison. All the doors to everything were locked. We went everywhere in the group. Come to think of it, I felt like I was in a psychiatric hospital. Though, when you think about it, it kind of was. Each patient had to see a psychiatrist, as part of our treatment. I can recall one afternoon during free

time before dinner, we were allowed to go outside for a little bit. I hadn't been outside in about a week and a half. Feeling the sunlight was rewarding, yet depressing. There was a stone wall built around us, like they thought we were going to attempt to escape. But that little bit of light brought hope.

But I was getting the help I needed. No matter how much I hated the way things were, I was getting help. When I was given the okay to become an outpatient, I was beyond thrilled. Lots of girls had spent more than a month in inpatient. I felt lucky. Very lucky.

I was outpatient for a week; my mother came up to Naperville and we stayed in a hotel. I would attend LOH from breakfast until the last group in the late afternoon, and then I was free to leave with my mom. After that week, I returned home. That was when the real work began. Coming out of such a structured and sheltered environment into the real world again is like culture shock. I was constantly being bombarded with triggers, and didn't have people constantly concerned at all times. But I had the support that I needed: my mother, my counselor, my dietician and doctor--and my sister (Alicia), surprisingly. My mom told me that Alicia had really missed me and was very scared for me while I was away. That made me feel a respect for her I had never felt.

But the person who played the biggest part in the struggle was one of my best friends, "Laetitia." She seemed to understand more than anyone else, and she didn't try to change the way I was feeling. She just listened and let me talk to her. That's what helped the most, and I'm so grateful to her for that. I can't forget to mention how my other friends were supportive as well. "Veronique," "Naomi," "Lynn," "Florence," "Diego"--all of my friends cared about how I was doing. They showed genuine interest in learning about the disorder and how they could help.

Looking back, I am thankful that I went to LOH. I met some amazing people there, especially my roommate "Kaylie" and my first friend "Alexis." Without those two being there, supporting me, I don't know what I would have done. And the support team of dieticians, counselors and therapists there was amazing. Thinking of them floods my mind with many memories, both good and bad. But, in the end, it was all worth it.

I broke through my shell at LOH and found a part of who I am, a necessary step to finding the cause of the eating disorder.

Eating disorders are about control. I thought that if I could just control what I ate and how I looked, nothing else really mattered. It was a way to escape. Guilt, shame, feeling fat...these become your emotions. No happiness, no anger, no sadness. I can't really describe how someone can look in the mirror and hear a voice telling her she's fat, or he is worthless, or he or she is not worth anything. You can't tell someone to "just eat." It's not a quick fix. There's nothing like going through an eating disorder, and no one will understand. You can sympathize, but you can not relate.

It's been two years exactly since I began recovery, and I'm still in it. Sure, I have setbacks. And yea, I do still get feelings and urges to use behaviors, and I do give in sometimes. Everyday is hard-every single one. No one said it was going to be easy. Anorexia is something I'm going to have to live with for the rest of my life; it's never really going to go away. But the important thing is that I keep going, and that I'm trying. Because doing that reminds me why life is worth living.

HONORABLE MENTION:

Gain through a loss
by Stacy Dillard

"Ouch!"

As I hear him cry, the pressure in my breasts is a volcano about to erupt. I open his door, sit in the rocking chair in his room, and open my shirt. Oh, the sweet release is like steam bursting out of a kettle as the water boils. There is a slightly painful tug on my nipple that is completely unlike the gentle touch of a lover.

As I gaze down at him, I am engulfed by baby powder, lotion, and the musk of a new boy. The corners of his lips are involuntarily pulled toward his ears. His mouth, already full, has a little pearl sliding down his chin. His skin is coffee with too much cream. That burst of light in his eyes is like an eclipse as it rotates just past the dark, incredibly familiar.

He had that same light in those Irish eyes, eyes he got from his father, my grandpa. It was a beacon on the shore, warning of the trouble he was contemplating in his mind. I always felt a current of curiosity pass through my body when I caught that look in his eyes. The mischief he was contemplating was never mean-spirited; it was always light-hearted.

That eclipse, in his eyes, was not rotating the day we were told the news. The tinny smell of antiseptic wafted in the icy breeze of that never-ending hallway as we walked and talked, discussed really. It was a discussion no child wants to have, one my Mother's stunned psyche wouldn't handle. He wanted to be buried

with his parents. Would I please take care of my mother? “Of course!” was my immediate reply. I wanted to scream like a three-year-old and thrust my fingers in my ears as my heart was pummeled and ripped from my chest. Then my muscles hardened, my face was hot, and a block of ice replaced my mangled heart. How dare God make my Superman sick! And damn that tall, dark, and indestructible man for accepting his sickness. The fact that my Dad was even talking about death made me feel that he was giving up.

In the rocking chair my little burrito is wrapped up in my arms as we sway to and fro on a boat in gentle waves. He is calm and asleep, like an executive in a hammock after several years without a vacation. I want to melt into his skin, into that warm cup of coffee. I put my lips to his forehead like a humming bird on a flower. My eyes start to feel like lead.

I had to work very hard to keep my eyes open. The drive had seemed like a trip to Mars. I thought we would never get there. I had worked all night, walked in through my backdoor, changed my clothes, and sprinted out my front door. My yoke of devotion was awaiting me. It could be an incredible burden at times to do it all, but it was one of those times that you wouldn't trade for all the comforts in the world.

The hallway was always an icebox, but I was prepared. I was dressed in enough layers for ten Eskimos. My Dad's clothing depended on the type of chemotherapy he would have that day. Some of the chemo drugs made him burn up; he visibly turned red. Some of the drugs made him so cold you couldn't give him enough blankets. Dad pulled his I.V pole behind him like a disobedient dog on the days he had to have his chemotherapy.

I found the nearest couch to crash on as soon as I had given Dr. Bryan Link his update. He was bald and pale as a cue ball, and as slight as half his patients. He always had a look of a superior court judge, so serious, until he saw my humorous father. “Okay, Dan what do you have for me today?” Bryan would ask in obvious anticipation. Dad would get that light in his eyes, and proceed to tell him a joke that would turn Bryan as red as a sunset.

He is my small copy of my eldest son. He wiggles in my arms like a pig in a sack trying to escape. His icicle mitts with his tiny fingernails, as sharp as razor blades, scrape my belly--not entirely a pleasant feeling. My stomach is unfortunately used to not so comfortable touches.

The goop, like the suntan lotion at a tanning salon, spurted out onto my belly. Dad's blind eye feigned a look at the ultrasound monitor, but his eyes instead were turned toward the orange peel walls just to the left of the female technician. The fetus was detectable only to the trained eye of that woman, who explained it was a baby boy. My dad looked like my grandfather as he strained to get out the words. “A boy!” he exclaimed, as the dull marbles, that were his eyes, welled up. “Oh, I wish with all my heart I would be here to see him!”

The initial prickles of joy up my arm became tacks of sorrow down my spine. The excitement of finding out I was having another boy was beyond belief but that feeling was tempered. In a way demolished by the agony of knowing I was going to lose my dad before the baby was born. “He is going to somehow be named after you, Dad.”

My little monkey grabs the back of my arm. The smell of powder becomes

more and more musky, my husband after a game of basketball. The tiny toe finds a hold on my sore belly. My abdominal wall becomes his soccer ball.

I pulled my Dad forward forcefully, a sailor tugging the sail, yet gently as if touching the finest silk. "Of course I'll sit you up for a drink," I answered him. His bedroom was pungent with the scents of Old Spice, salty perspiration, and sickness. "Did you feel that? Dantre just kicked you, Dad!" I breathed into his ear as he leaned against my swollen belly. "You take such good care of me," he purred back once the desert thirst was abated.

I wouldn't have had it any other way. I felt like this was one of my biggest purposes in life. To be able to be there for my parents when they needed me most, just as they had always done for me.

My little "Noodle" squirms in my arms, and I cradle him closer, wishing I could devour him completely. I brush my face against his cheeks that are rose petals. My chest swells and a lump forms in my throat. He is like a favorite teddy bear that I want to cuddle so much until I squeeze all of his stuffing out.

I felt the sandpaper on my cheek. "Should I shave Dad before I go to work?" I asked my mother. Her blond hair was pulled back into a ponytail, my frail little pixie. We saw none of "the signs." There was no end to of the normal functions of life. There was no mottling; his legs were still the color of a deer's hide.

"Stacy, his breathing doesn't sound right!" my Mother's voice croaked. She placed the phone up to his mouth, and all I heard was a gurgled wind on the phone. I promised her I would get home as fast as I could.

As my patient stepped out of the shower and sat down, the chimes of despair rang out for all to hear.

"Stacy, he's gone."

The numbness set in.

He is nuzzling into my body. We melt together, warm fudge into soft serve ice cream. The sun in my chest radiates into all my limbs but is quickly chilled by the dropping of my stomach into my toes. I wish with every ounce of my being that Dad could be here to hold him. My mom steps in to ask if she can help. She becomes my daughter now, as she wears her naïveté like a dress. I whisper, "He'll be asleep soon, I'll meet you down stairs."

"I can feel your father watching us. You know he's looking down to see that baby now." She is beaming as I sit next to her on the couch and put my arm around her. The bluish green ocean in her eyes is staring back at me. "Thank you for always being there," she whispers in my ears.

As I hug my beautiful Pixie, who has the strength of Atlas and doesn't even know it, I realize that now I, my father's tomboy, have taken his place as the cornerstone of strength for the family.

"Mom I wouldn't have it any other way. I am just glad you let me be there for the two of you."



Untitled

by Michelle Mendoza

Spring 2010 Film Review Contest

**Sponsored by
the SVCC Humanities/Fine Arts department**

***The following essays are film reviews,
written in response to the prompt “The Most
Important Post-Millennium Film.” The winners were
chosen by a panel of published film critics, and at-
tended The Big Muddy Film Festival at
Southern Illinois University in February.***

28 Days Later
by Nathan Waters

Many films have been released in the first decade of the new millennium, but in my opinion, the film that remains the most important - both politically and culturally - is Danny Boyle's 2002 sleeper hit '28 Days Later'. The film is an excellent time capsule of a time in history when people were scared for their safety. It also conveys a compelling commentary on human relationships. Most notably, the film is important in terms of its innovative contributions to film as a medium.

When the film was released in 2002, the American lifestyle was changing. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, the media was filled with coverage of terrorist agendas and the nation's new need for security. In addition to this new-found paranoia, there came the advent of new diseases, such as the avian or swine flu, even SARS and Ebola. People were scared of infections - both politically and literally speaking. The film at hand is so prolific because it manages to capture this tension and incorporate it into the film's narrative structure. Screenwriter Alex Garland touched upon the political subtexts of his film: “The fear and paranoia is the same, I suppose. When we were developing the script and starting the whole thing, it was coming out of, in a way, other viruses – mad cow disease, foot and mouth – a whole sense that the government was 20 steps behind whatever the virus was doing. That was definitely a part of what was feeding into the film, part of the subtext in a way. The SARS thing is sort of bleak and coincidental.” (Zlotnick).

The film depicts a virus which spreads through society like a wildfire. Millions of people become infected with a disease which causes its victims to go mad. One drop of blood could infect a person in seconds. This descent into violence speaks to us on a very primal level, and touches a very sore nerve in

terms of its message.

The film also serves as an excellent character study. By casting unknown actors, director Danny Boyle was able to have characters that looked like everyday people, and he could observe how they interacted in troubled times. We first meet a young man as he walks curiously through a deserted London. He encounters survivors of this modern plague and he quickly learns that the life he knew before is gone. We see different character arcs weave through the film as bonds are formed. One of the central relationships involves a father and daughter looking for a surrogate family. Another is a beaten-down chemist who is devoid of any human compassion. These dynamic characters play against each other in a very truthful way, which speaks to the way people have learned to adapt in the first decade of the millennium. Hurricane Katrina, for instance, found people without homes or families. They adapted, and began to care for others as if they were family. It becomes clear that the relationships between Boyle's characters stay truthful to the way people would likely react in these situations.

The characters of '28 Days Later' are all played with intense realism, which makes watching the film very hard at points. In an interview, director Danny Boyle commented on how he wanted his characters to be portrayed: "...we also wanted it to be more emotional than horror films normally are. We wanted you to genuinely care about these people" (Hunter).

In terms of cinematic innovation, '28 Days Later' is important to note for several reasons. Firstly, the film is shot almost entirely on DV, which was relatively new technology at the time. Digital Video allowed the filmmakers to create a film which looked, felt, and sounded real. By using cameras which were commercially available, the team was able to craft a film which looked unlike any horror movie before it. Instead of using conventional film cameras, the filmmakers avoided a superficial looking movie in favor of a gritty, documentary-inspired picture. In an interview with Boyle, he touched upon the look of his film: We wanted it to feel different in texture from normal film. Because it's an apocalypse, you can use a different hue, because nobody knows what things will look like if everybody's killed or there are no cars. So we talked about having a different texture, which we got with the DV" (Hunter).

Secondly, the film has had a major impact on filmmakers around the world. '28 Days Later' felt like a catalyst to the independent film genre. The film proved that you could actually go out and make a film with commercially available equipment, which is incredibly inspiring for artists who may not have access to professional, Hollywood-grade technology.

In short, '28 Days Later' is an extreme film in every sense of the word. The film pushes several boundaries in terms of form, content and its effect on the industry. To miss this film would be to avoid what I feel is one of the most important film-going experiences of the decade. The film surpasses genres, as well as creating a film which manages to tuck a political and sociological message in with jumps and scares. In the spirit of earlier filmmakers such as George Romero, Danny Boyle created a film which meshes current technology with a strong script, making it more dark and complex film.

The Wrestler by Husni Ashiku

The film being reviewed here is Darren Aronofsky's 2008 film "The Wrestler". How does one justify a film to be "the best" of its decade? Whatever guidelines one puts into place would never be correct; someone no matter what, will disagree and wish for these principles to be changed. So how does one pick a film that he/she thinks is the most important of its decade? The point can be made here that, if justified... any film could be the best of its decade. One has to be honest with oneself and pick the film that is most dear to that individual.

It is human nature to question our future, to think of what might come. Two decades ago 3D film and HD media were just being tried out and were said to be the future of film; thus far this has held true. With films like "Avatar" being box office smashes because of its special effects, the era of digital media has officially arrived. It would only be expected of directors to use these magnificent tools to better portray a story of substance, as James Cameron has in his newest film. Also expected is for Darren Aronofsky, a historically experimental director, to take advantage of this sort of technology as he did in his three prior highly stylized films, "Pi", "Requiem for a Dream", and "The Fountain". It is refreshing when accomplished directors do go against the grain to make independent, lower budget films, as Aronofsky did in this case, and show off what they can really do creatively without the assistance of technology. In his film "The Wrestler", he features not only his creative brilliance but a story of true substance and quality.

In his film, Mickey Rourke stars as an aged wrestler decades past his prime desperately clutching to the quickly fading strings that still connect him to the world that he once ruled. The depiction of this character by Mickey Rourke is the most interesting aspect of the film, and where I'd like to begin my analysis because of the undeniable parallels in both the character, Randy The Ram Robinson, and Rourke's acting career. Rourke fits flawlessly into Randy's green faded tights; his muscled build from steroids, his broken body, and his greatly damaged face easily brings to life a man who has lived so hard that he is a shell of his former self. Rourke's hunched over posture and sluggish walk reflects the feelings of despair and loneliness buried deep inside him- the actor and his character. It was Josh of Cinema Blend magazine who said "Aronofsky's The Wrestler is a movie not about wrestling, though; I perceive it to be about a man whose life is completely empty. The "Ram" is a wrestler but he also could have been an investment banker or a restaurant owner; he's anyone who's spent his life so devoted to a single pursuit that he's self-destructed, demolishing everyone and everything else around him." In this way, the film's writer Robert D. Siegel and cinematographer Maryse Alberti encapsulate Rourke as a man. Rourke, who was at one time considered by his peers as the next great American actor and compared to great performers like Marlin Brando, has since lost his greatness. As portrayed in the beginning of the film, The Ram had achieved his greatness in the ring but because of a nearly fatal heart attack, he has to give up the sport he loves and literally beg for other work. Depicted in a non-linear scene of a violent match where graphic uses of staple guns and barbed wire is used, allowing the viewer to see just how 'fake' wrestling is,

The neo-realistic style and almost documentary like filming gives the

feeling almost like being with him through his troubles. A reflection on the work of Maryse Alberti a historically documentary cinematographer- with a quarter of the film being shot from behind Rourke, Each scene carefully constructs Aronofsky's portrait of a fallen star, with scenes such as waking up in a trailer park or a van, and the opening shot of Rourke in the corner hunched over on a folding chair in what looks to be a kindergarten classroom. It's these scenes that accentuate the aging, self loathing, and proud but beaten character. Rourke's performance truly displayed a wide range of emotions; one good example being the two deli scenes: the first of which shows the 'Ram' at the height of his happiness, telling jokes and giving old lady costumers' nicknames and the next of him at the pit of despair, slicing his own finger on purpose as the result of his misfortunes. Not to be forgotten either is the performance of Marisa Tomei, who plays a stripper that the Ram falls in love with. The realistic height that this film achieves is in the boardwalk scene where, with his daughter that he's neglected during his life as a wrestler, he admits for the first time his faults to her with a steady stream of tears running down his face.

To sum up, the movie is a character study of Randy: his joys and insecurities and how he tries to fight his loneliness and confront his fears. Though this story has been portrayed before in films like the last "Rocky" movie, this wrestler story is a lot more realistic, involved, and heart- wrenching. All filmmakers are able to take this less stylistic form of film and portray something of true substance on a financially conservative budget. Aronofsky not only does but does it masterfully. One can only hope that in the future of the industry some will take this route but it is unfortunate that few have the intestinal fortitude. Aronofsky did and that is why I pick this film as the most important of this last decade.

Tyler, Josh. "The Wrestler - Review." *Cinema Blend LLC*. 12 dec 2008. Cinema Blend LLC, Web. 1 Feb 2010.

<<http://www.cinemablend.com/dvds/The-Wrestler-3514.html>>.