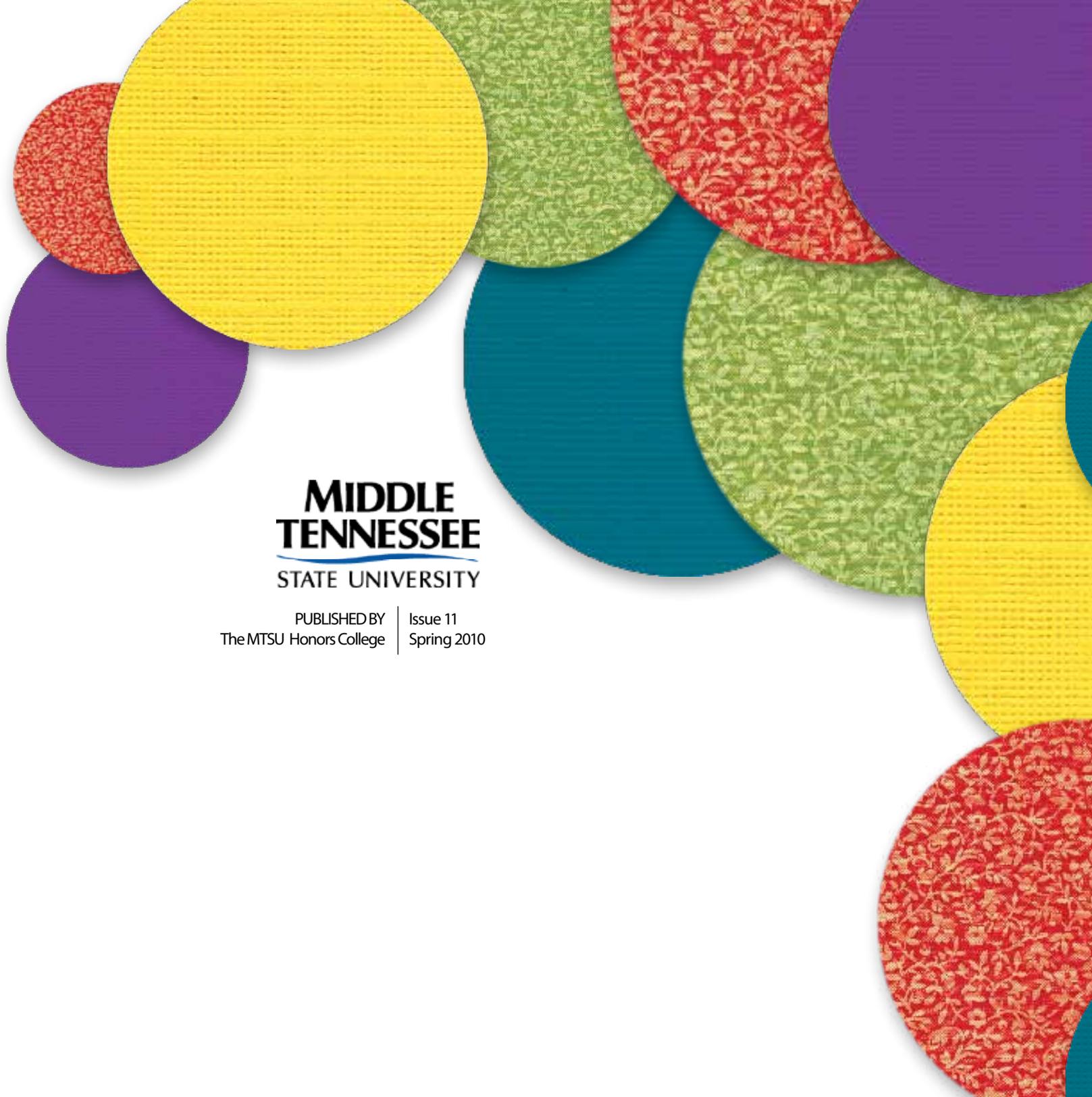




# COLLAGE

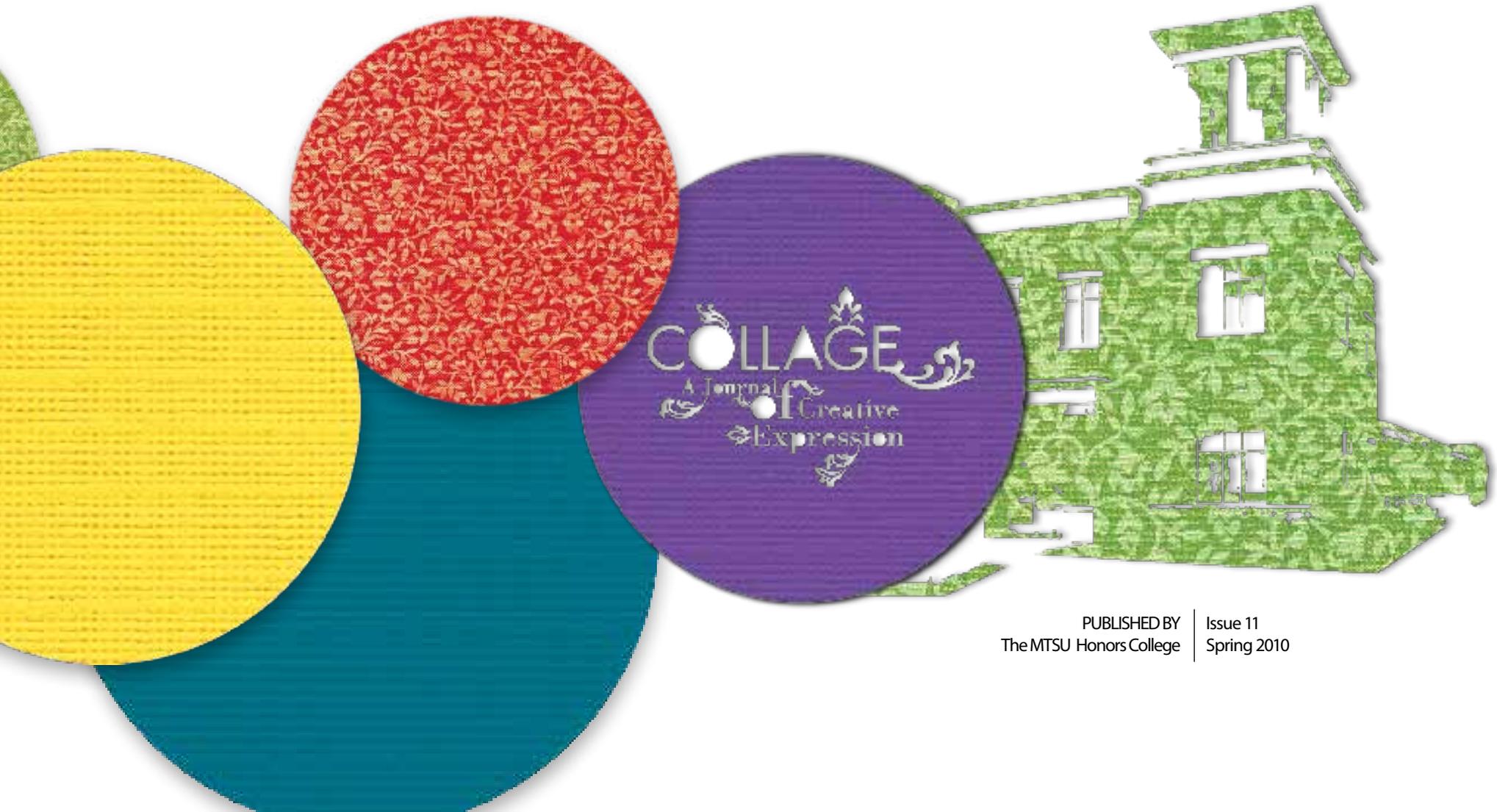
Journal of Creative Expression



**MIDDLE  
TENNESSEE**  
STATE UNIVERSITY

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A Journal of Creative  
Expression

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## Letter from the Editor

A whirlwind. If I only had one word to describe working on Collage this semester, “whirlwind” would be the perfect description. I can remember gearing up for this spring’s production cycle just a few months ago. I blinked, and now the publication’s eleventh issue is complete. Although everything has gone by fast, this issue is still the result of a lot of hard work by a lot of people.

The magazine would not be as exceptional as it is without the time and dedication of the staff members and advisors involved with its production. This semester’s team had to brave uncertain waters because of new technology and new online processes. But, they never complained. Through their patience and persistence, everything came together successfully. We were able to produce something of which we can all be very proud.

Current students and alumni continue to see Collage as one of the best outlets available for their creativity to shine. And shine it does. From poems and short stories to detailed photographs and mixed media, the best of MTSU’s creative talent truly is within these pages.

I have been blessed to be a part of the Collage staff for six semesters and be Editor-In-Chief for two. I started on the literature review staff and worked my way up, thoroughly enjoying the ride. I have learned how to trust myself and, at the same time, effectively delegate to others. I have learned the importance of choosing a great team and being able to rally that team toward a common goal. I am honored that my work has helped create valuable, thought-provoking additions to Collage’s growing legacy.

With gratitude and love, I present the Spring 2010 edition of Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression.

Jasmine “Jaz” Gray

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Abigail Stroupe

Whistling a dirge from his window,  
a fisherman had nested on the shore,  
keeping rhythm to the crashing waves  
of the sea he didn't adventure anymore.

The pain of his longing was etched on his face;  
his eyes were salty and sorrowed.

He pulled a pipe from his coat pocket  
inhaling the relief he'd borrowed.

He desired a steadfast companion  
to make livable his sandy hell.

He thought he would have found a fish  
but it was a bird that came with him to dwell.

She was perched outside his window,  
and her heart had welled with kindness  
despite not understanding his need for the sea  
she loved him in her blindness.

On days with the ocean withdrawn,  
the fisherman found that he loved the bird  
but when his heart found it's ache again  
he could love her only in word.

So her wings drooped from his weight,  
and she wished for him to discover  
the consistency she'd offered painfully  
out of love for another.

But his eyes were glazed with the past,  
and she could not shoulder the veil.  
Nor bear the weight of his shifting affections  
which left her once joyful body frail.

"Why did I dare inside?  
Not being a fish, but a bird?"

And as I've floundered on the floor  
of his watering heart,  
my love he has not heard.

I have committed a grievous injustice  
burying my feathers in hope of scales,  
for a fisherman discontent with me  
only made happy with salt under his nails.

Fisher, I want to stay with you  
but as a bird; you must love me like this.  
Because I cannot keep existing  
cursing myself for not being a fish."



Ocean View

Kaitlyn Robertson

Acrylic, pastel and stitching



**Stained**

Ashley Cochran

Acrylic, oil, fabric and thread on canvas



**Dormant**  
Kristin Johnson

Arms bare and twisted,  
Shivering, waiting, like you,  
For spring's redemption.

**Coffee Break**  
at the  
James E. Walker Library  
Damon Sierra

Lamppost sentinels  
Stand in silent parade

As an honor guard to  
Columned balustrades  
And yellow windows reaching  
Toward the sky

The future hinges on this collegiate masquerade

A studious elixir warms my hand  
Suckled from the Mermaid's Teat

And the vigorous bite of  
Winter assaults my chest in a  
Glorious  
Painful  
Exaltation of life and death

## God Made the Automobile, a Small-town Manifesto

Laura Frizzell

With my car easing over a small hill to be greeted by the distant, familiar, twinkling lights out on the horizon, it makes the

smallest town seem like a metropolis after miles and hours of the loneliest, blackest highway imaginable.

But up close, here especially, things become smaller and less romantic. Cruising these streets at night, in this dead town, at this hour with the exception of those loyal lights that never sleep when the moon is out, my life is brought back to me in the most sentimental of ways because I was born here. Among the dirty automobile repair shops and the greasy diners where everything is sticky and fluorescent, I was born here.

I steer my little car, all plastic and paint, through a series of intersecting streets, circle the ancient town square, and then head on to another endless highway. It will take me away from this small blot of civilization that I call my own. I had just gotten back, but it's always time to leave again. I drive aimlessly and forever, chasing a harvest moon hanging low and full in the sky. I listen to the radio quietly and think about the people living in the sleepy little houses I pass in the darkness with their gardens and geraniums and tabby cats all left outside, hidden by night.

These are the nights when my mind is on fire the most, and I am more than thankful to have a means of escape: my trusty car, all plastic and paint. As long as there's gasoline to burn, I'll ride forever, thinking about who I am and who I've been.

I was born in a tiny town in the flattest, most forgettable part of the state, where all is farmland except for the small, well-lit grid that is the town itself. I am an only child, raised by two parents who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb and intended the same for me.

In the first grade, I had a best friend with whom I wanted to grow old, but of course, we haven't seen each other in a long time. When I was a child, I asked for a typewriter for my seventh birthday (and was given one) because I wanted a more official way to compose the little stories I wrote so easily then. I wanted to be everything then: a storyteller, a school teacher, and a famous actress. In my bedroom full of pink gingham and stuffed animals, I pretended to be a teacher, an eight year old faux schoolmarm talking to invisible students about their multiplication tables and how the center of the earth is called the mantle. In our dining room, which we didn't fill with furniture until I was a teenager, I would act out scenes from my favorite movies, a tiny little starlet in an empty room that seemed as large as a stage.

When I was ten, it occurred to me what it meant to die, and I realized with fitful despair that everyone would experience death. I crept into bed with my mother and watched her sleep for the longest time with her back moving slowly beneath her burgundy robe, and I cried because I understood that I would lose her someday. The older I got the more apparent it became that I would never get to date a guy with a name like Ryan or Brandon, but I still managed to have my first kiss at the age of fifteen in a church, which was a sweet, electric moment like no other.

In high school, I made good friends and good grades, but I didn't go to the senior awards night to collect my cheap, but important, prizes or to my senior graduation to collect my cheap, but important, diploma. I don't remember why I chose not to, but now I regret those decisions with a sickly sadness I sometimes find unbearable.

Then I went away to college and discovered the beauty of living on my own and reveled in that freedom for as long as I could before returning to

my hometown with the farm animals, parents, churches, and memories, both good and bad. If there is a large notebook in the sky full of my information, it will say that I've made a few snowmen in my life, gone to a few concerts, flown a kite, believed in God and not believed in God, but believed in ghosts forever and always, been afraid of the dark, swam in the ocean, picked grapes straight from the vine, kissed boys I loved and kissed boys I didn't love, told many a stupid lie, won a Journey CD in a radio station trivia challenge, earned a degree from a semi-prestigious university, and driven over every country road in my hometown county.

The night is growing later now, but in the words of Frost, I have miles to go before I sleep, and this countryside spreads outward forever. My hands are steady on the wheel, and my eyes just as steadily regard the road before me. But my mind is darting back and forth a million light years between past and present and occasionally future. I always realize in those moments of lonely travel that my car, all plastic and paint, is just as much for self-discovery as it is for transportation. And so I'll always be driving, smoothing out the pavement with my tires, traversing the same roads and the same memories. •



## To My Dear Wife After Reading Shakespeare

Taras Mikhaliuk

Thy beauty far outshineth my dark ink  
So let my verse thy beauty's shadow be,  
And so fall short, yet reach the lovely brink,  
A perfect line of thy geometry.  
To contemplate thy loveliness divine  
I moisten and import my sharpened quill,  
In rapture I forget myself and mine,  
But draw, and pant, and rave, and keep thee still.  
When Age and Time arise and dim thy sight  
Thee to destroy, my verse thy knight shall be,  
My ink shall flow and outrun in the fight,  
Darkness devour, thus underlining thee.  
My streaming ink thy beauty shan't contain,  
Thou keepeth me instead in thy domain.



Buttercup  
Heather Moulder  
Intaglio and spray paint stencil



**Image 8**  
Cecilia Dockins

The air was cool as Stacy opened her car door. It protested with age, but finally relented. She would have traded it in years ago, but the old Beemer still had a lot of get up and go. Stacy identified with that. She was not an old bird, but her chickadee days were over. Chuckling, she knew her ex-husband Tom would have felt differently. He had left her less than six months ago for a twenty-year old girl named Marla. It still hurt, but sometimes things in life that hurt were just plain funny. Stacy always found the humor in life. Her loving husband had become a fifty-year old man sporting leather pants and a comb over. He had said that he needed a new lease on life. Stacy took a deep breath in and closed her eyes. She felt the coolness of the wind on her face. The fall weather in Tennessee was the only relief from the harsh, choking summers. The season also brought with it the mile long yard sale—the once a year junk-o-rama that everyone clamored out of their houses for before the rays of the sun met the tips of the grass.

Earlier, Stacy had been excited about the prospect of a good find. Frustrated, she realized that it was already halfway through the day and she had only claimed an antique lamp that needed intense rehab. An old farmhouse was her last stop before calling it a day. The house was further out than the others. Several wind chimes clanked and twirled on the front porch. Blankets covered the ground, and junk was piled in boxes everywhere. Climbing the steps to the old farmhouse, Stacy noticed the whispering of the trees had stopped. Looking up, she noticed that the old oak branches were still. Not one leaf moved. She noticed a train racing

across the old rusted track just a mile down the road, yet the sound failed to reach her ears. Shaking her head, she wondered if she was going crazy.

“No wind will do strange things to sound,” grumbled a voice deep inside the house. It sounded like it was an echo inside a deep cave. It seemed like someone had been swallowed whole by the house. Stacy nervously giggled. Her imagination had officially checked in.

“Well I will just look around if that is okay with you,” Stacy almost whispered. Her intention was to leave, to get in her car and go. As she turned, hot breath rushed against her ear. A cold hand clamped down on her shoulder. “No, no take your time. Would you like something to drink?” the man asked. Stacy bit down, suffocating the scream that was caught in her throat. Her hands fluttered up to her mouth to stifle the sound. Turning slowly around, she was finally going to meet the voice.

He was a small man and, to Stacy’s surprise, blind. The smoky dark glasses hid his eyes. He held a walking cane pressed to his side. Like the leather in an old car, he had been weathered by age. Stacy was internally in cahoots. She almost couldn’t smother the laughter. What had she been thinking? This man could be her grandfather.

“I have something real special inside.” Stacy followed him into the house. He had several beautiful bird cages filled with canaries and finches. Hand beaten, wrought iron pillars, and scrolls danced romantically over the cages. They reminded Stacy of something. It was faint, like when you open the freezer and a puff of cold air blows in your face. Something a professor

once said about Marilyn Frye and birdcages. This was all before she dropped out of college and married Tom. The old man made his way over to a bookcase. The subtle tap, tap, tap came from his cane. His wrinkled hand reached to the top shelf, and he felt his way across several books’ bindings. He stopped at a large leather one. He pulled it down for Stacy to see.

“I am somewhat of a collector,” his voice warbled with excitement. He cradled the book gently in his hands. Stacy thought the old leather book was beautiful. Symbols, etched by heat, danced across the cover. She instantly wanted to caress the worn hardback. Dizziness moved through her head. Heat crawled up her face. Crooked fingers that ached with age opened the leather book. It was a photograph album. As he flipped to the second page, Stacy’s heart began to pump hard. Grabbing her chest, she couldn’t breathe. There was a picture of a woman Stacy’s age. Her face was contorted in a tortured smile. Stacy couldn’t believe it. The woman blinked. She was alive, stuck in this album for eternity. Under the picture was a caption, “Image One.” He flipped to the last page.

“This is where I am going to keep you,” he said.

Realizing she was seeing him from inside the album now, he carefully removed the smoky glasses and tucked them neatly into his front pocket. “I can see you now.” He smiled. His eyes burned her. He could see her. Dear God! He could see her. She could only try to blink away the pain. Her eyes would not stay closed.

“Say tweet, tweet.”•



Good Luck Ola  
Heather Moulder & Alexis Thompson

  
**The Earth  
and the  
Evening**  
Taras Mikhailiuk  
Creative Expression Award

She has put on her finest garments:  
Amber tunic  
Inlaid with liquid pearls;  
She anointed herself with mists of late  
harvest,  
And moistened  
Her flame-braided curls.

Young evening descends boldly,  
Hard-breathing lover,  
Unveiling her rising breasts;  
He unmaiden her solitude, holds her,  
Sighs,  
And fades, and motionless rests.



Pooh  
Jamie Donahue

Disintegration  
Joseph C. Lampley

The various components of my body – Conscious  
Each cell arose and achieved sentience simultaneously  
A trillion conflicting thoughts – Each  
Straining against anatomical cohesion  
Some swearing and violently shaking –  
Uneasy at their genetically assigned loci  
Their voices – Disembodied, embodiments of discontent  
As they flagellate each other in vain attempts –  
To secede from the mass – To gain motile independence  
One last impulse fires across a rapidly fragmenting  
Neural network – The electrical discharge reaches the final axon –  
Disintegration!  
A trillion cells go their separate ways...



Fifteen miles south of San Diego  
a nation is born  
somewhere  
between my  
legs  
and my  
homeland.

**Between** My Aztec paradise,  
Margaret Hoffman my borderland baby,  
body severed  
in a Tejana-Tijuana tirade,  
as an international botched abortion  
proceeds  
to slice open the blood vessels of a nation,  
hemorrhaging in a barbed wire  
Conquistadorian conquest.

And,  
where the grit hits the flesh,  
I wait,  
heart slumping like the breasts of a woman  
scraped to the wall,  
and mourning my place to call home.

So can you tell me, gringo,  
where is my homechild?



**Teal Tribute to the Sea**  
Lauren Athalia  
Creative Expression Award

## Therapy with Dead People

Traci Cruey

It was during one of the longest droughts in Apples, Alabama history when my little brother became a grim reaper. It happened to be during his funeral that I found out about his new occupation.

Since Apples was a rather small town, news of the untimely death

became quite the gossip. My parents received condolences from so many people that they decided to post an open invitation to the funeral in the local paper.

People that my brother had never known existed showed up with weeping eyes spouting "how tragic," and I felt my jaw clench with the effort not to scream.

The grass crunched under everyone's feet as we gathered for the lowering of the casket. I passed extra tissues to Mom and watched as she and Dad took their seats at the front. The seat reserved for me stayed empty. As it hadn't rained in over a year there was obviously no need for a tent. It also meant there was no protection from the ever-present sun either. Sweat trickled down my back, and I wished I was smart enough to wear a big enough hat to hide from the hot sun . . . and the stares.

I had hoped to avoid them by standing in the back—thought that dealing with the pain of my heels would be easier than the heat of their gazes. As I shifted my weight from one leg to the other, I could admit I was severely mistaken.

It's not like it was super obvious or anything. Maybe it would have been easier to face if it were. Instead they played it subtle, giving me these sidelong glances that kept shifting from my face to my cast.

And here was the crux of it: my cheeks burned and the skin under the cast on my arm itched. I knew it wasn't just because of a young boy's untimely death that these vultures were here.

It was because I was his murderer.

It was a cliché story really—a teenager with a brand new license got into an accident on the road. I breathed in the dry air and my arm tingled as I remembered how we all arrived at this point.

The drought had gotten so bad that the city advised against using sprinklers for their lawns. Water conservation was key during this time, they said. This led to brown yards and unemployed teenagers who had hoped to make a buck mowing. The ground was so dry that the Fourth of July celebration was already canceled, even though it was two months away.

The whole water limitation thing was driving Mom mad. She hated that her rose bushes had to suffer because of some stupid drought. Thanks to our high wooden fence, Mom was able to water her roses without judgmental neighbors seeing.

She still tried to be sneaky about it though, refusing to use a hose as someone might hear the sound of water. Instead, she filled up numerous watering cans in our kitchen and tediously traveled back and forth till her roses were quenched of thirst. It was during this ritual that Mom asked if I could take my little brother, Bobby, to band practice as she was obviously busy.

Wiping my brow, I handed her another watering can and huffed, "But what's the point? It's not like he's any good. In fact, none of them are any good. Why is there a band in middle school again?"

She crinkled her brown eyes in amusement and replied, "Now Alison, Bobby's skill level isn't the issue. You're just too lazy to get out."

I scoffed but heard the truth in her statement. The rising temperatures had certainly made me lethargic. Once I got home from school I didn't leave the air-conditioned house. Sounded boring, but there wasn't anything better to do in this weather – not enough water to fill the pools and it was too hot and dusty to do anything else outside.

My eyes drifted to our house where my brother sat with his saxophone case beside him on the couch. His sandy blonde head was tilted on the back of the cushion while he flipped through the television channels in obvious boredom. I sighed, stretched my arm, and felt hot keys settle into my palm. Satisfied, Mom returned to her roses with a departing, "Drive safely now."

Bobby didn't react when I slammed the back door open and trudged in, didn't react when I grabbed the remote from his hand and shut off the TV, nor did he react when I crossed my arms and lightly kicked his dangling foot. Bobby just sat there. How annoying. I plopped down next to him, close enough that our sides touched. "You're going to be late you know."

He grumbled, "What does it matter? I'm not good anyway." I snickered and elbowed him in the side. "That's never stopped you before. Besides, practice makes perfect and all that."

He fingered his instrument case and whined, "It's too hot." Rolling my eyes, I jumped to my feet and stood in front of my brother. "Stop copying my complaints against the world and get your butt in the car," I said extending my hand, "You coming or what?"

For a second he just stared at me with hazel eyes that people said were just like my own, but then his hand gripped mine



### Solar Power

Alison Ford

Acrylic and spray paint on canvas

and I pulled until he was right beside me. Guiding him out the door I chastised, "Just so you know, because of you I'm gonna have to speed in order to get you there on time?"

"Whatever. Just don't make me late."

We continued in this way – lightly trading barbs. Laughter filled the car as we kept picking at each other. I wasn't paying attention, too occupied pushing buttons on the radio just to pester my brother.

Then I hit a pothole.

It was the front-left tire that made the impact. Full on actually. The tire blew out, and the loose hold I had on the wheel swung to the left. The car turned into the other lane, a side collision occurred, and well . . . we're at a funeral now. I'm sure you can guess what happened next. It was certainly not a time I liked to recollect on. The sounds of metal crushing bones and Bobby's screams invaded my dreams, so I tried not to think about it while I was awake, but in this kind of weather there wasn't much else to do but think.

I heard my mother's cries over the sound of the preacher, and I knew I had to get out of there. The dry grass was loud under my steps, and people stared as I made my way to the cars. Mom and Dad would talk to me about it later, how rude it was to up and leave your brother's funeral. Well, the town had already labeled me a murderer, might as well add cold-hearted bitch to the list.

I leaned against the hot hearse and slid until the gravel poked my butt. I wrapped my left arm tight around my legs and dropped my head to my knees. My fingertips pressed into flesh. I didn't realize I was even crying until I felt the moisture slide down my leg.

"Here. Have a tissue."

As voices go, I could honestly say this one shocked me the most. My head shot up so fast that it hit the car.

I winced, but didn't take my eyes off the person in front of me. Sandy blonde hair, eyes just like mine with smug smirk in place – what the hell? "I've officially gone crazy haven't I?"

He chuckled and replied, "I thought you were always crazy." "You're dead."

His smile dropped and he plopped down beside me, close enough that our sides touched, and sighed, "Can't argue that."

My brows creased in confusion. "Then how . . . ?"

He hesitated, tapping his fingers on his knees as he tried to think of an answer. "I probably shouldn't say. I definitely shouldn't be here, but who can resist their own funeral right?" He paused, eyes gliding to the cast on my right arm, and swallowed. "Guess I've already come this far."

He said no more, and his silence began to grate on my nerves. This had to be Bobby. No one could irritate me like him.

My eyes rolled.

"Just spit it out already."

"Fine," he grumbled, "I'm a grim reaper."

I blinked and heard funny noises escape my throat. "Uh... so you actually take the souls of dead people?"

He shook his head. "I don't. Each of us has our own specializations. I reap the souls of dead pets."

I laughed. "You're kidding me? You're the one that makes all dogs go to heaven?"

"I don't know about that. I just reap the soul. I don't know where it goes." His attention shifted to the funeral still going on behind us. "Is it ironic that they're burying my dead body in the dead ground?"

My hands clenched. "Don't say that," I whispered, "and it's more unfortunate than ironic. You probably would have learned that if you had made it to high school."

He flinched, and my arm felt like it was breaking all over again. I watched as he started picking at the gravel. I asked, "Do you remember what Grandma used to say? 'Happy are the dead that it rains.' Do you think that's true?"

He gave a small chuckle and slid his eyes to mine. "Is that your round-a-bout way of asking if I'm ok?"

My chin quivered and something behind my eyes burst. I sobbed, "Bobby, I'm so sorry." My face quickly became a mess and I knew my mascara was running all over the place.

A tissue was shoved into my left hand. I sniffed and heard the gravel shift. The warmth beside me left, and I listened as he sighed above me. "I was really angry. I died and you just got a broken arm. Didn't seem fair. Then I come here, and I see how the others are treating you. That certainly didn't seem fair either."

I wiped my face with the back of my hand and crinkled the tissue. "So life isn't fair. Obvious observation is obvious."

"Don't let them get to you Alison. You're not a murderer. If you want me to say I forgive you then I do, but you never needed it. Besides, now I have all sorts of time to practice the saxophone." He stretched out his arm. "So you coming or what?" I studied my brother's form in front of me. His words had made me feel lighter than I had for a while. Placing my hand in his, I felt him pull until I was standing. He looked past me into the crowd. "Looks like things are starting to wrap up. Time for me to go I'm afraid."

I grabbed his shoulder and pulled him into a tight hug. Burying my face into the crook of his neck I wondered if he would ever get taller. "Will I ever see you again?"

His snigger tickled my neck. "Maybe. You could always buy a pet."

I laughed and lightly pushed him away. Giving one last glance, we both turned our separate ways. Although I was met with accusing stares, I just didn't care anymore. That night, when it rained for the first time in over a year, I smiled. •

## Sitting Nude

Mac Bydalek

Intaglio







Chad  
Mac Bydalek  
Intaglio

## Sorry, Jack

Christopher Watkins  
(Song Lyrics)

Oh lord, I met a girl  
She looked like Dixieland  
With sawdust eyes and long white boots  
She woke me up my head, good lord; she woke me up my head

She took me for a man, good lord  
Took me for a dance  
She told me I could change my life  
I didn't understand a word, I didn't understand

I can't believe I never knew before  
Why I was angry all the time

Or how Big Jim had us saving our money up just until the next Friday night  
Two years of living, good lord  
I was a different man  
One year to empty my whole life  
One to fill it up again; so good to fill it up again

Oh lord she told me once  
When it was time to let her go  
Would you guess that's when I tried to hold on more than ever before?

I tried to do as she said  
Good fishermen are kind  
But when she up and disappeared  
I held a broken line, good lord; I held a broken line

I know I ought to not have  
Drove my car onto the dancehall floor  
That dumb look in their eyes, when I asked 'em what they were living for  
Two years of living, good lord  
I never could have guessed  
But two days without a trace of her  
I was a mess at best, I know; I was a mess at best

Oh lord she told me once  
When it was time to let her go  
Would you guess that's when I tried to hold on more than ever before?

I tried to change my life, good lord  
I tried to change their minds  
Driving my fists into their skulls  
Now I'm on the gallows line, oh god; I'm on the gallows line

I am sitting in a wooden chair, and I am staring at a small reading primer. My hair is dangling in my eyes. I feel a small trickle of sweat run down my nose, but I dare not brush it away. I am terrified. I am clutching a book with white knuckled intensity. I have a strange metallic taste in my mouth, and I am afraid the teacher is going to call on me. I peer out from my damp dark locks of hair and look out the classroom window. The white glare of the spring sun sends a stray ray of light through the classroom window onto the pea green carpet near my sneaker clad feet, illuminating motes of dust. The dust motes seemed to hang in the sunbeam as though they are suspended in time, like a fly suddenly trapped in amber. I can hear the laughter of children trickling in from the playground nearby. I look back down and stare at the ugly green carpet. I am sitting in the corner with a small group of boys. We are sitting in a circle because we have problems, we are special, and we are behind in school. I am frightened that the teacher, Mrs. Ford, is going to call on me. I am ten years old, and I cannot read or write.

Memory is a slippery thing. Time and events can fade or deteriorate, and I certainly have had issues with that as I age. Nevertheless, some memories are so sharp they are as clear as the day they happened. I certainly remember that hideous carpet in that classroom so many years ago. I remember the fear of being called upon, the nervousness that never went away, leaving me with stomachaches and late nights crying into my pillow. But most important of all, I remember the moment, the exact second, that I learned to read. I am not sure when it became apparent, when exactly I knew I was not learning like I should. I do remember spending a lot of time playing by myself in the woods around my house, and my imagination was my escape from my erratic and emotional mother and the ache of an absent father. He had left to work overseas and things around the house had started to slip into disorder. My mother had strange men coming to the house late at night; she lost her temper and hit us telling us we were stupid, and how she wished she had not had us. When she ignored us it was a relief. But as to the cause of my learning disabilities, they

# “Stupid, she called me stupid, the same thing my mother was through my mind, my heart

simply were. I had always been that way in my memory.

I escaped from my home life by immersing myself in movies. I often stayed up late at night, watching old science fiction and horror films. I stared at the pictures in the books in the library and comic books at the store, wondering what the marks meant. I had incredible images in my mind, and in my frustration and attempts to get them out, I spent hours drawing them with pencils. The school kept taking my father's money, passing me to each grade, and I was illiterate and getting more and more upset and withdrawn. Although my drawing skills in retrospect were amazing, I hid the pictures from all but my closest friends and hid my inability to read like a shameful secret.

When Mrs. Ford came to teach, replacing the elderly matron who had consistently passed me regardless of my deficiencies, I was ecstatic. I thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world. She was young and energetic with blue eyes and brunette hair styled into a bob. I think she had a master's degree, and this was her first full teaching position. I mooned over her every day in class. I picked flowers around the playground and gave them to her, even though the other boys teased me for being a teacher's pet. She paid a lot of attention to me at first, buying me pens and pencils to draw with. I even fantasized that she was my real mother, thinking she would take me away from my depressing home life.

One day, she finally became very concerned when she realized after some testing that several of the boys were behind in reading and writing, and that I was unable to

do any of the work at all. She formed a reading group and started tutoring us. Initially she seemed very optimistic, working hard with us. She made some progress with the boys, but I was still unable to understand the concepts she was trying to drill into my head.

The day I was sitting, sweating in the little chair, staring at the pea green carpet designs, and feverishly praying that she would not call on me, is still very clear. She did call on me a few minutes after I stared into the sunbeam at the motes of dust. I recall these next few moments with incredible clarity.

“Joseph,” she said tiredly, we had been at this an hour, “Now, just like I showed you, where is the beginning of the paragraph?”

I said nothing, staring intently at the marks, they might have well as been Sanskrit. “Joseph, where is the beginning of the paragraph? Remember? It is where the first sentence is, the indentation.”

My heart was racing; the boys in the reading group were snickering at me, and my face was getting hot. I looked up through my bangs and noticed that Mrs. Ford's face was turning red too; her eyes were staring straight ahead.

“Joseph, where is the paragraph's beginning?” she said through gritted teeth.

I mumbled something incoherent in my fear and, with a trembling hand, pointed at the middle of the page. She stood up, walked over, and with her finger she jabbed at the edge of the page.

“It's right here! Right here!” Her hand was shaking. Suddenly, she snatched the book from my hands and threw it on the floor.

s always saying. **Stupid, stupid, stupid, the words tore**  
**me, forcing a sob out of me."**

She screamed at me, shouting, "WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU!!!! WHY CAN'T YOU DO THIS!!! YOU HAVE TO BE STUPIDEST CHILD I HAVE EVER SEEN!!!"

Stupid, she called me stupid, the same thing my mother was always saying. Stupid, stupid, stupid, the words tore through my mind, my heart, forcing a sob out of me. My vision blurred with hot tears as I stared at the book on the floor. She berated me and the other boys until she collapsed in her chair crying and apologizing. The damage was done; my heart broke that day. After that, she was just another adult making fun of me.

About a month later, back in the circle of reading, she leaned forward and pointed at the words on the page. "Now Joseph, see these marks, remember, they go together. The letter "I" and the letter "T" work together, they are friends. When they get together, they make noise, what is the noise the I makes Joseph?"

"Eyyyyyeee," I said.

"And the T?"

"Tee"

"And what is the sound they make together?"

"Hiiittt" I said.

I stared at the page and blinked. I blinked again. I felt as though someone had poured a cup of ice water down my back. I honestly could not move. The marks on the page had a sound, the sound was the word, and the word made sense. The first word was "It." The first word I ever learned to read was the word "It." I could not speak for a moment. In a few seconds my life had change irrevocably and an incredible

world had suddenly opened up to me. The word "It" became a golden key, the key unlocked a new road, and I ran down that road as fast as I could.

My mother still called me stupid, my teachers thought I was an idiot, but I read all the time. I read the back of cereal boxes, the dictionary, newspapers, anything I could get my hands on. I hated school, my teachers and my rapidly ailing mother, but I loved books. In my mind, I flew spaceships, fought with barbarians, jumped building to building with Spiderman, and by the time I was thirteen, journeyed into the circles of Hell in Dante's Inferno.

Many years later, as senior in high school, a teacher finally noticed me. She told me I was not stupid, that I mattered and was not trash. She told me I could do anything I wanted, that I had to apply myself. She told me, even though I did have a learning disorder, she was amazed at what I could do. Her name was Karen, and she was the first person to make me feel like a human being with potential. Despite her help, I almost did not graduate from school. I had to work in a factory third shift, and I could barely see when I got to my morning classes because my eyes were always dark and puffy from exhaustion. I barely graduated with a 2.0 average. Finally, many years later, I tested into college on the knowledge I had acquired through my years of reading and somewhat eclectic research.

I still look about me in amazement, the stupid boy, the stupid boy who is a writer, an academic, and looking at having an honors degree soon, and almost cannot believe I have come this far. I now share my love of reading sci-fi and fantasy books with my son. He buries himself in his



fantasy books, and his thoughts run rampant with creativity. We often sit and talk about ideas for stories and interesting books we both like. One day, I also hope to share those literary joys that saved my mind as a troubled teen with my grandchildren, and perhaps they will with their children too. •



A Eclairer La Veille  
Brian Harstine

I  
woke up  
Early

Margaret Hoffman

I woke up early the day I died  
and I wanted all my first chances  
to flood through paper walls

so I set out to get the Times  
while the musk of morning tobacco  
and carbonized lead  
burnt gently  
into my left and right ventricles.

And I took my time  
dragging my past on the pavement,  
shoes all a-scuff from my khaki-coated habit,  
while my coffee ran bitter,  
dripping to the drag of my extended stay.

Yellow with age,  
the shriveled pages of my fingers  
slid down the doorbells  
of yesterday's history  
as I slathered my ambitions  
on burnt Roman Meal  
and felt the slow fade of Familiarity  
cradle me  
in American lullabies.

And,  
in the hollows  
of my comfortable rhythm,  
I swallowed my politics  
and went back to bed.



Solemn Sail  
Ryan Brosche

## King of the Broken

Lauren Gooch

I've met the King of the Broken and the Broken Hearted.  
A boy king without regal airs or any particular wisdom  
Scars for royal jewels  
He rules without a throne room,  
But his court is large.

I watch them bow and sway  
Hanging from his every motion as the microphone twirls in his  
spasmodic fingers  
And I wonder why they bend with perilous need  
At the mercy of a lacerated, fragmentary soul  
Whose charisma is his royal pedigree  
And the bass strings wail with angst for a crowd of the damned  
And he revels in his glory,  
Crowned sovereign of these wretched lost.

I wonder if they see the cracks in his crystalline heart.  
His rebellion stirs their hope when he can't even see his own  
And my heart breaks for this glorious revolutionary disconsolate  
Egotistic egregious man  
Whom I will love until the day I die  
And perhaps become one of the lost  
Positioning my heavenly body around our own glorified sun.

I'll lose myself in the chaotic waves rolling off his body  
Like magma from the steaming mouth of Vesuvius  
A perpetual scream of rage and confusion  
At being forced inside such a diminutive wasted physical form  
That will forever plague his wild longing

To be free and become electric  
Like the static from the amp of his guitar  
And burst forth with all the planned destruction of a nuclear hurricane.

And there in the ashen aftermath  
We live and work and bide our time  
And sway and bow  
And pay homage to the King of the Broken and the Broken Hearted  
And lose our souls in his own loss  
As we smell the grimy burning vanilla of a fresh cigarette  
Pressed to his unshaven face  
And hang on his every movement  
In a mass cry to Heaven  
Oh, Lord, tell us why.



### Wings

Megan E. Hall  
Acrylic and Collage on Canvas



### Untitled

Patrick Casey

### The Other Side of Nowhere

Anna Houser

I met you on a rainy day in June,  
while you were still getting over that semi-awkward wound you received  
while fighting in the war between the righteous and the superstitious.  
You told me all about yourself while holding  
a ham sandwich in your hands, like the thin slices of bread would keep  
you locked to the earth despite the pull of your buoyant thoughts.  
I could feel the pressure growing behind your skin  
like a ship about to sail, wind carrying it over  
the edges of our flat earth, disappearing into the cosmos  
along with the umbrella you borrowed from me last Tuesday.  
Trying to define your mistakes  
is something I do,  
and do,  
and keep on doing,  
though it's your mistakes

that have made you who you are, or were, at least.  
I'd like to see you, and that ham sandwich, when we are ninety-five.  
I have a feeling you'll be same, and we'll gently sway on that swing  
you'll still have in the backyard, hashing over  
the yet unanswered questions we've spent our lives on.

I don't consider it a waste. I'd like to know who you'll be  
when your future becomes your past.

Until then,  
I just wanted to say that Existentialism isn't real.

I'd like a sandwich.

## A Modest Proposal for a New Education System

Elizabeth Henegar Due to the federal push to have increasingly better results in our nation's schools and the failure of these schools to live up to expectations, I have come to the conclusion that the fault must lie with the students in said schools. Seeing as test scores are the hardest requirement for schools to meet, students who fail should be the first punished. If schools fail to administer these punishments once they are accepted, then action must be taken upon the school in order to ensure the same quality of life for all graduates.

First and foremost, each time a student fails a class, the punishment should get increasingly worse. This will encourage the student to try harder at the subject in the next six weeks.

The first time a student fails a class, meaning a six weeks grade below a 70, the student shall be subjected to the amputation of a foot. This amputation will use all modern technology available; however, for the duration of the student's school career, he will not be allowed to use a prosthetic.

Upon failing a second class, the student will have a limb, preferably the leg, amputated. This will be without the luxury of anesthesia. If the student then continues to fail his/her class, the student will now lose an arm, using current medical technology from the 1800s. Failing a fourth class will result in the student receiving a non-fatal gunshot without any medical assistance. The last and final failing the student will achieve will be that of his/her fifth class, which will result in death by firing squad.

With the hope of being fair, all students will be warned at progress reports of their failure of a class. A taser-gun will be used at increasing voltages to encourage the students' grade improvement. Being a mostly just society, the measures will not take affect until middle school, that being seventh grade.

The second major concern facing high schools based upon the new federal standards is graduation and dropout rates. The death of failing students will limit the number of students who reach the age to drop out, leaving only those who are able to succeed. This will lower the drop out rate exponentially. It will also guarantee that students will be able to graduate in four years. Attendance will also greatly improve, as abundant absences have the possibility of resulting in loss of limb. •





Bio-thalassic Exaggeration

Johanna Torres  
Porcelain

Creative Expression Award

## The Miracle of Sleep

Matthew E. Forman

You slept in my arms last night,  
And I kissed the top of your head;  
I felt on my chest your small sleep smile,  
Did you feel me lying beside you in bed?

As I drifted in your soft fresh scent  
Your gentle breathing tickled my chest;  
But our hearts beating in compliment to  
each other--  
That is what I think felt the best.

Your hands lay there on my stomach,  
And the warmth contrasted with the cool  
sheet;  
I had to smile to myself as I remembered  
How earlier I rubbed so much to warm your  
feet.

The weight of your leg felt so natural  
As it pressed heavily down on my thigh:  
Finally, I felt again contentment and  
peace,  
And you moved slightly as I let out a sigh.

But this morning the miracle evaporated  
from my life,  
When I woke and your face I expected to  
see;  
And I knew you watched over me from so  
far, far away;  
I would swear last night was real, yet how  
could that be?



Some Day, Baby  
Courtney Lineberger

Be  
Michael Hecker

And so it had become that the world had turned back upon itself, inevitably repeating itself into infinity. The patterns of life had been found and lost too many times, and they turned and turned into oblivion so much so that to calculate these patterns' approach would be unfathomable for the human brain to ever fully comprehend, though many have tried and continue to do so.

But, this story in particular is about a boy whose flesh and bone are that similar to your own, a boy who could be mistaken for any other. His physical characteristics are not of importance to this story; more so are his motivation, words, and actions. This is what we are all made of. The rest of the things that comprise us are as deceiving as parlor tricks such as smoke and mirrors.

This boy's name just so happened to be Oliver (though he could be called anything or have any gender for that is the nature of this story, but we will call him Oliver). Oliver was a unique child of his time for he was born smarter than his parents.

This trend had been taking place well into the 21st century. It was quite inevitable that it happen, children being more educated than their parents, and Oliver was that of a genius, in the standards of the 21st century, by the end of his stay within his mother's belly. Though this be extraordinary, it was by no means impossible for this has happened before and will continue to happen well into the future. For everything that has happened will happen again and again. These cycles occur without our knowing because we always forget the important things.

For this is the nature of all things and it was this that young Oliver would soon come to understand and make

the rest of civilization aware of. Since he did not need diapers nor motor skill training nor color coordinated toys, he spent his first few years of his long life reading, science, politics, religion, and all that comprises history for however long people had begun to write it down.

Needless to say, his birth was unprecedented for the people that inhabited the earth at the time, and his story spread throughout the world in newspapers with catchy headlines like "Babbling Baby Boasts About Bastiat " and "From Neanderthal to Nietzsche: Is Genius Baby Son of God?"

Oliver's popularity grew so much so that, by the age of three, he had begun appearing on all the television and radio talk shows to discuss political, theoretical, and philosophical topics of the time. His parents loved the attention and the hefty profit they obtained from all of his star appearances. While he was on a scientific talk show alongside men with beards the color of Oliver's first tooth, discussing Quantum and Unified Field Theory and its interconnectivity to all living and inanimate objects in the universe, it happened for the first time.

A woman burst through the audience with what looked like a package in her arms screaming and wailing and running straight towards Oliver. The audience erupted in hysteria until they realized that the package in which she was toting was wailing as well. Swaddled in the lady's arms lay a small child about the same size as Oliver. The woman cried and begged for Oliver, whom she exclaimed was the son of God, to save her child from a fatal disease with which he was born.

Oliver spoke very calmly and quietly, almost as if it were a lullaby for the youngster, "Good woman, I am not the son of God. I am but a child just as this one is. There

is no difference between any of us. Everything in the cosmos is but matter compiled upon matter. We originate and dissolve into the same energy force. If this is God then I and everything in existence is of this being." The lady's child began to be silent and the woman, looking discouraged, walked solemnly back through the audience.

Though it was the first time Oliver had been accused of being heaven sent, it would not be the last. Oliver's title as the son of God continued to spread throughout the world and soon droves of people accumulated around the two bedroom house Oliver and his parents called home.

Day after day Oliver and his parents would be harassed by hundreds of individuals seeking council with the "son of God." They started living outside the home and became hysterical every time Oliver was seen in public anywhere.

Oliver knew that this could not last, so one day, just after his 4th birthday, he informed the local television station that he would be making a public address about the meaning of life.

Of course, this put the people of the world in an uncontrollable frenzy and mass hysteria broke out due to the announcement. People were clamoring over television sets and trampling upon each other in the streets to try and hear or see Oliver speak.

When Oliver came over the radio waves, television screens, and computer monitors, one could practically hear atoms splitting (just an exaggeration, but seriously, it was very quiet). He was standing in the middle of a local newsroom with a single light on him. From his chest pocket he pulled a small note card. This note card was practically all white like it had never been touched before. The only part that was not white was one word written

very neatly with perfect spacing on all sides as if its placement was completely deliberate and precise.

With the same calm voice Oliver used to lull the baby from crying, he began to speak. "People of the earth. Hear my words for I have discovered the meaning to life, but before I divulge this, let me please explain myself and what I believe the nature of our civilization is and what we should strive towards.

Somewhere in our evolution from beast to man, we set ourselves on a path of hierarchical decent of which has perpetuated itself into the exploitation of, not only one another, but of that which sustains us for such outcomes as selfish as personal superiority. Our dominance over our surroundings and each other has caused us to set ourselves apart from the natural harmony, which brings balance to the cosmos. This imbalance and lack of compassion for one another has caused numerous natural disasters and countless tragedies, which have compensated for our imbalance that humankind has created.

Traveling this path has brought us all to this moment. We have forgotten that we are self-sustaining creatures who must abide by this natural cycle of life, for if we stay the path that has been laid down before us, we will bring an end to that which is existence.

And with that I will now leave you all with the meaning of life." He turned his back to the camera, approached the desk, and leaned his small note card against the desk. The camera zoomed in to reveal one word: BE.●



Origins of Symmetry  
Jillian Dixon



How Did I End Up Like This  
Christopher Donahue



Invasion of Space  
Becky Dickovitch

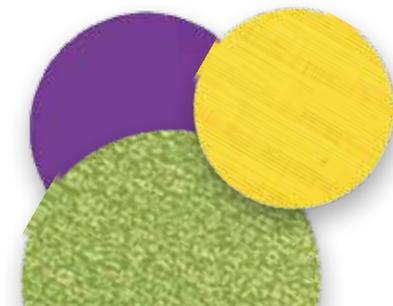
School  
Dream  
Taffeta Chime

I'm sick,  
barely able to make it  
through Drama  
and walking across campus  
in wet socks.  
The thought of skipping your class  
sounds blissful.  
I'll draft an email—later.  
Surprise!  
In my apartment  
I find my tortured classmates  
crammed inside.  
"A change of venue,"  
you chirp.  
"Peck can be so dull  
and this is just  
so lively!"  
I moan  
shuffle to my bed  
and face plant my pillow  
still in wet socks.  
Hours later, conscious again,  
I moan  
shuffle from my bed—  
But you  
still coursing and discouraging  
pause to ponder why  
I look like a zombie?  
I'm sick.  
Suddenly,  
everyone else feels remorse for  
invading my sanctuary.  
But you  
you query,  
"Have you any herbal tea?"

Some dread dreams  
of falling or  
nakedness or  
death  
Not me!  
Dr. Lavery, wet socks, and herbal tea.



The Sad Recruit  
Morgan Beaty



## The Beauty of Truth in a Dusty Heart

Abigail Stroupe

Is there beauty inside a broken dusty heart  
that finds itself hitchhiking into the past?  
Would any have the courage to take it home?  
Rather, it takes housing underneath graffiti marked highways,  
warming hands in the oil drum fires of solitude.  
Sitting in the dust. Sitting and alone.

Is there truth in my grandmother's wet kisses?  
Her mouth was stained with tears,  
she thought the world forgot her name,  
the way she forgets our faces.  
Her heart shares the homelessness of my own,  
together we sit by the fire, together and still alone.

Is there redemption to be found amidst  
the vulnerability and shame felt crying in a bleak white lobby,  
surrounded by inattentive chairs and empty walls.  
Does the beauty manage to survive  
in a heart that has traded its color for a loaf of bread?  
Or lost its innocence for the promise of a home?

Is there beauty to be found here?  
Is it in my shaking hands?  
Is it to be found in a pretty face?  
Or in grand sweeping promises?  
No--it's in a broken dusty heart's wheezing cry of "I love you still."

## Arctic Leap

Jenna Winstead





Stade De Symetrie  
Brian Hartstine



Green and Red Buttoned Mugs  
Sara Bielaczyc

## A Careless Summer

Ryan Brosche

For a moment, there was a careless summer.

The jogger passed right by me!  
The children yelled and played  
in the back yard.

I heard even my own footsteps  
petting the pavement.

The sun was strong.

Then the cars came, their drivers  
crouched, hidden behind tinted  
windshields, rushing to get home.

Traffic sounds like the ocean  
at a distance, but no one  
likes to be caught drowning  
in a wave.



Meet and I glanced at the instructions:

**Three** If you're here to meet someone new, fill out an interest card. Based on this casual information, Taffeta Chime we'll pair you with someone to meet.

Choose three courses for your meal, and chat with your new friend!

Singles composed most of Meet and Three's customers, but the restaurant was open to anyone. There was always an eclectic mix.

"Carrie?" Jennie's voice rose above the bluesy country music. "I've got a place ready for you." My waitress led me through the obstacle course of booths and tables. "Here ya go! I'll be back with your unsweet tea," she said with a pat on the table before she dashed away. She knew me all too well; I came here often.

As I folded my skirt to slide into the booth, I saw a really good-looking guy walking my way. He quickly glanced at me and flashed a smile with a little nod. I smiled awkwardly, and then nonchalantly curled my red hair behind an ear, trying to appear as though I was quite accustomed to good-looking guys smiling in my direction. When he turned to sit at a table across the room, I let out a sigh and mashed the lemons into my tea with my lipstick-stained straw.

I looked around at people diligently engaging in the awkward what-do-I-ask-next-to-keep-us-talking conversations that I fancied to master graciously someday. Here I was at Meet and Three—my desperate, last resort—for the umpteenth time.

"Here's your seat, sir."

Jennie's voice caught me by surprise, and I was scared to look. Still, my eyes rose expectantly, and I saw a sharp suit, a slim figure ... big glasses, and an almost bald head. You've got to be kidding me! The flustered man looked to be eighty! He had that grandpa smell that reminded me of flannel. I wondered if he had any teeth behind those dry lips. The leathery skin on his hands pushed taut as he shoved himself into the booth with a settling groan and a frothy cough.

I tried to catch Jennie's glance, but she cleared her throat and started her spiel, "Sir, allow me to introduce you to Miss Carrie Merritt. There are conversation cards provided for your convenience in case you run out of things to talk about, and I'll be back with your food shortly" She batted her Barbie lashes and sped away. I cast a subtle glare at Jennie's retreat.

"Mark Shrum," he extended his hand across the table, and I

took hold of it with a resigned smile.

The hunk at the still-empty table across the way was stifling a laugh.

Mr. Shrum seemed small for his

suit; it hovered with the shoulder pads

suspended just below his ears. Folds of withered skin fell around his bowtie. After a silence, he coughed and said, "You come here often?" I heard a whistling squeal as he tuned his hearing aid. "Sorry—I hear too much of the band." I didn't really think the band's down-home rendition of "Georgia on my Mind" was terribly loud ... but then again, I also didn't watch Wheel of Fortune every night. It was going to be a long evening. "This is my first time here." I spotted that he was missing quite a few teeth. "Not at all what I was expecting!" Laughter bubbled in his throat and wheezed out. "Is the food good?"

"If you're into the mom-and-pop thing, yeah."

"Is there any other kind?" and the cauldron bubbled up another laugh. Quickly though, it turned into an unsettling clearing of the throat. "So, uh ... did you have any damage from the storms the other night?"

You knew you were stuck in small-talk purgatory when the conversation turned to weather. "No."

"You're a student?" he asked as he loosened his bowtie. I nodded.

"What are you studying?"

"English," I said, waiting for the that's-a-useless-major glance. "I'm a grad student. Hoping to be a professor."

"Good for you! I used to be a professor."

"Really?" I asked, though not really paying attention.

Instead, his horrifying statement made my entire toothless future flash before my eyes. At least we were out of the weather, though.

"Music and Composition."

"You're a musician?" I found this surprising.

He chuckled, and it sounded like the pot was boiling over. "Was. Arthritis makes life on us old folks difficult," he said, massaging his bulging knuckles. "I still compose. That's my favorite activity, and I can thankfully still do that."

"Piano?"

"Orchestra. But, yes, it usually starts with an idea and a piano."

Wow. I would not have guessed. Jennie brought our food and asked me with her eyes how I was doing. I cautiously shook my head at her and slightly shrugged. She just smiled, refilled my tea, and strode away.

"What do you do in the meantime while you're getting your degree? Do you work?" he asked as he cut his chicken-fried steak into morsels he could chew.

"I babysit." Translation: I take care of all my many married friends' kids since I probably will never have any of my own.

"Oh, you like children!" Suddenly, he produced a picture of a little crumb-cruncher. "I've got a great-grandson, newest addition to the Shrum brood, my wife can't get enough of him." He tucked the photo back into his coat pocket and

### Untitled

Brandon Woods  
Ink and Acrylic paint

returned to his meal. I watched him dip a bite of steak into his soup, slip the fork into his mouth, and mash the food around with rigorous movement of his floppy jaw.

"You two would get along well, I suppose. I wonder who she's eating with," he mentioned as he quietly surveyed the restaurant before placing another soup-softened bite of steak into his mouth.

"What do you mean?" I asked, a little confused. Was she out and about too, meeting someone like the handsome guy across the way?

"Today is our wedding anniversary. I wanted to bring her out to a nice restaurant for dinner. We came here, but we had no idea what was in store! When we found out that everyone here has the option to eat with a stranger, I suggested to my bride that we just eat together. It was her idea to take the adventure; she thought it sounded fun. So here I am! I just hope some youngster doesn't take a shine to my gal and make this our last anniversary!"

A shade of humility "becomed" me. This poor little man came to be with his wife and got stuck with some whiny, self-absorbed kid!

"I'm just joking. She wouldn't do that," he mumbled. "I'm too handsome!" He grinned and showed his few teeth.

"So she should really be more worried about you, huh?" I teased and took a big bite of my baguette.

"Nah, I'd never leave my girl." He dabbed his mouth with his napkin and smiled. "I'm a lucky man. Have been for over half a century! I saw her pretty face, but I fell in love with her ponytail; she curled it so it looked . . ." he made a swirling motion with his thick, crooked finger, "like a tornado or something like that, and hoo! it was the cutest ponytail I'd ever seen. I told myself, 'I'm gonna marry that girl.' His smoky laugh bubbled up again.

"That's precious," I responded.

As he spoke, I watched his dancing eyes and noticed that even thick glasses couldn't hide his boyish charm. While he was sharing about this woman he loved so much, I saw back to the young man he was. His eyes gleamed with playfulness, his skin tightened and tanned. Dark hair covered his spotted scalp, square shoulders pushed his posture to pride, and his teeth stood in white rows. He was quite handsome, basking in the glow of the joy he had found in her presence. The bowtie, the suit, the gold wedding band were all reflections of how much she meant to him; but none of those reflected so brightly as the twinkle in the young expression that just happened to be disguised in wrinkles, baldness, age spots, and glasses.

"So what's a pretty, young thing doing hanging out with an old man on a night like this?"

Smoochin'  
Emily Ryan  
Adobe Illustrator



Embarrassed that I had asked myself the same thing, I still wasn't sure how to answer.

"Looking for someone special?" he asked as he pushed away his plate with the remnants of chicken-fried steak and pulled in his bowl of Mississippi mud pie.

I sighed and jabbed at my French onion soup that was getting cold. "Well," he said around his mouthful of chocolate dessert, "no hurry. You're smart, beautiful . . . and you're enjoying a hot date with a funny old man on a lively night." He shook his chocolate-covered fork at me and said, "You're a rare one. Don't you dare settle for just anybody."

Mr. Shrum's words hung in the air and meshed with the applause after the band's playing of "Lonesome Road Blues." As Mr. Shrum and I added our applause to the trailing last note, the band leader leaned in to the microphone and said, "We have a very special song request. Is there a Mrs. Teresa Shrum out there?" I saw a hand go up across the room, and Mr. Shrum smiled even wider and straightened his bowtie. "Mrs. Shrum, there's a young man up here who's very anxious to dance with you." Everyone in the restaurant seemed to coo in unison as Mr. Shrum walked toward his wife and extended his hand to her. "Mr. and Mrs. Shrum may look like newlyweds, but they

are celebrating their sixty-fourth wedding anniversary tonight!" The restaurant filled with applause, and I felt a strange sense of pride for the two of them.

Mrs. Shrum's pearl earrings and necklace shimmered beneath the enchanting lights. She placed her hand on her chest and couldn't seem to stop her embarrassed smiling. "I Got the Sun in the Morning" began to play. Mr. Shrum took her hand and kissed her forehead. They danced gently, and other couples gathered around them. It was quite possibly the sweetest thing I had ever seen. The music became foggy in my ears, and all the lights seemed to focus on them. As my eyes lingered on them, the years melted away. They were young again, dancing in each other's arms for the first time and just realizing the meaning behind the words in that song. Teresa's curly ponytail bounced as she stepped and followed Mark's lead, and their nimble limbs kept beat easily.

My face felt warm, and I noticed tears on my cheeks. I sniffed, wiped my face, and quickly jotted down "Thank you" on the back of a conversation card and placed it in front of Mr. Shrum's seat. I left the money for Jennie on the table and started toward the exit. "Carrie?" Jennie's voice called behind me.

I turned and tried to smile to her. "You were right. Mr. Shrum is exactly what I was looking for." She slowly nodded, not sure what to say. I reached for the door, looking forward to the composure of the cool evening air.

"Excuse me," someone said. I turned and saw that it was the handsome guy from the table across the room. "I hope my grandpa didn't bother you too much."

I almost swallowed my tongue. "You're Mr. Shrum's grandson?"

He smiled and extended a hand. "Their youngest, Paul."

"I'm Carrie," I squeaked. "But no, your grandfather's great."

He laughed. I laughed too, mostly because I couldn't believe this was happening. "Could you stay for a cup of coffee? I'd kind of like to hear what the two of you talked about. I noticed that he acquainted you with my nephew."

Quickly, I pulled my hair into a ponytail and floated back into the Meet and Three. ●



Launch  
Quinton Williams



Selina  
Jenna Winstead

## ABOUT COLLAGE

Collage is a biannual publication of the Middle Tennessee State University Honors College. All submissions were reviewed anonymously and selected by a student editorial staff. The materials published by Collage do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Collage staff, Honors College, MTSU student body, staff, or administrators. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form without written permission from the editor or adviser of Collage. Inquiries should be addressed to Middle Tennessee State University, 1301 East Main Street, Box 267, Murfreesboro, TN 37132.

## Policy Statement

Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression is an arts and literary magazine featuring top-scoring work chosen by the volunteer student staff in a blind grading process. The staff attempts to choose the best work without regard for theme or authorship.

Although Collage is a publication of the University Honors College, staff members and submitters are not required to be Honors students. Staff members are selected each semester from a pool of applicants and must have at least a 3.0 GPA and two letters of recommendation.

## To Submit to Collage

Collage accepts submissions year-round. A completed submission form, available at [www.mtsu.edu/~collage](http://www.mtsu.edu/~collage), must accompany each submission. Deadlines for each issue and submission guidelines are also found on the website. Submissions of art, photography, poetry, and prose may be turned in at the Collage office, Paul W. Martin Sr. Honors Building, Room 224 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Submissions are also accepted via mail and e-mail from MTSU students and alumni.



## Creative Expression Awards

Each semester the Collage Faculty Advisory Board selects five top-ranked submissions to receive Creative Expression Awards, one from each major category: art, photography, poetry, prose, and alumni. Literature winners receive the Martha Hixon Creative Expression Award, and visual winners are awarded the Lon Nuell Creative Expression Award. Award recipients receive gift cards.



## COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION AWARDS

Gold Medalist Certificate – 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009  
Silver Crown Award – 2007 & 2008

## Production Notes

TECHNOLOGY  
Adobe InDesign  
Adobe Illustrator  
Adobe Photoshop  
Apple Macintosh Platform

TYPOGRAPHY  
Minion  
Futura

PAPER  
100 lb. Dull white Cover  
80 lb. Dull White Text

BINDING  
Saddle Stitch

PRINTING  
Franklin Graphics of Nashville, Tennessee  
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