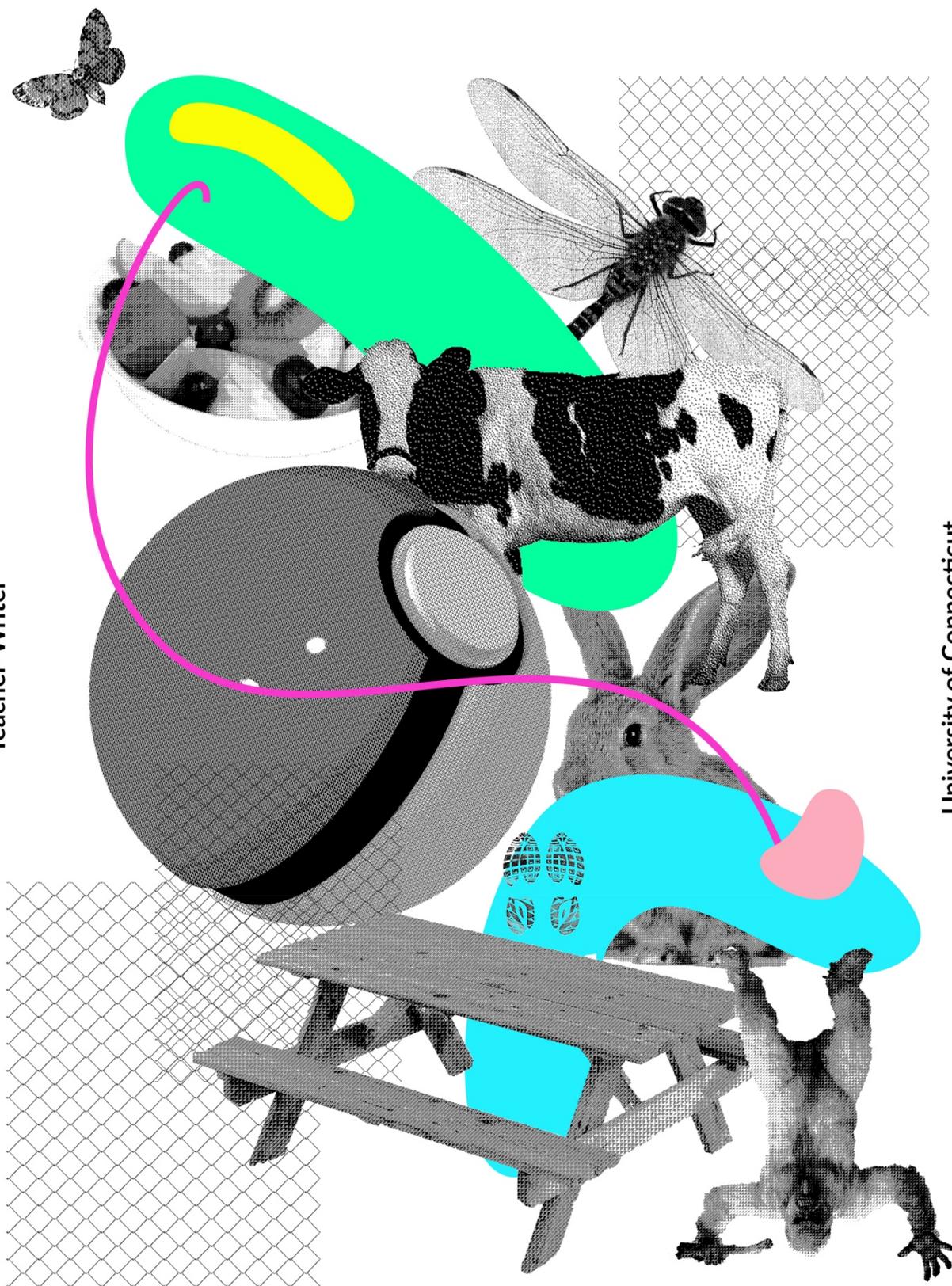


Baker's Dozen: May Contain Nuts

2016 Summer Institute Fellows
Teacher-Writer



University of Connecticut
Storrs, Connecticut

Connecticut Writing Project
Volume VIII

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Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest Winners

Poetry Winner

Mary Bennet in the Underworld

Amanda Greenwell (SI 16)

When they ferried me across the river, I slowly forgot.
Forgot that she had written me with no mind of my own,
all scripture, all sermon, all etiquette books with uncracked spines.
Forgot that she made me a puppet of the preachers and the patriarchy,
their wants and wills forced on my tongue,
their perverted wisdoms thrust from my mouth.

Forgot that she didn't think of me
when the new tenants moved into the hall down the lane
and mama was scheming about daughters to sell
while papa locked his study door
to read what I could not,
to forget what he should not.
I abhor the forgetting.

So when any wayfarer seeks congress with a shade, I drink
the warm, slick blood spilt by his knife, jostling
for space next to Lady Capulet and Daisy Buchanan,
shaking off that insipid Cordelia
who clings to my petticoats
in mute terror. In waves
we come, we drink, we remember, we rage.

It is only for Cassandra that we step aside. Thirst insatiable,
she lunges forward, ragged fingernails extended like claws.
One deep draught and she flings her head back,
pupils dilated with the mastery of a memory and a voice
all her own. She moves down the dank tunnel,
cackling her song, lifting her shredded robes to step
over Echo, slumped limp in a corner,
her two-dimensional self folded over like creased paper.

When I turn from the trough, I confront my reflection
in a glassy rock-face, dark hair coiling over
a bodice outgrown and ripped. I drag
the back of my hand across my mouth, smearing
blood up to my cheekbone. I think
of Lizzie and Lydia smirking, of Jane and Kitty
turning from me in superior silence.

Touching a finger to the polished stone,
I trace the lines of my closed lips, part them
into an angry gash. The surface gives way,
deepening at the pressure, welcoming
the portrait I begin to paint: a portrait of me as I see
myself, a blood offering to whomever will listen.

Prose Fiction Winner

Rodeo Boy

Susan Laurençot (SI 15)

He pushed the child to the ground, not hard enough to hurt him, but hard enough to knock him down. The little boy, Joey, started to cry.

"Whadd're you, a wuss? Get up, boy!" Joey stared into the dirt, trying to carve out a hole in the earth; wasn't even concerned that it might take him straight to Hell. Looking up through his too-long, too-thick little boy bangs, he could see the mountains, green and lush, imposing from his position in the brown dirt complete with specks of horse, bull and sheep shit too fine to shovel, but not too fine to make his knees and hands stink from landing in it. The sky, though he didn't dare to look up at it, was blue and clear. This landscape framed the child, head down and on his hands and knees, as if he was the subject in a Bierstadt landscape with the light cynically pushing its way past the dark, looming mountains. His grandfather stood in front of him.

"Come on, get up!"

Joey just barely teetered to his feet. His grandfather pushed him down again.

"Hah! Can't stand up, huh? What? Now you're going to cry? Why're you crying? Did I hurt you? Your feelin's hurt? What're ya cryin' about? Come on, try again. Get up!" the old man taunted.

"My wrist hurts," Joey whimpered, half out of genuine fear, and half from the realization that from where he was sitting, his grandfather blocked the mountains. *Is he really that big?* thought Joey. *He's bigger than the mountains.* His grandfather blocked the sun.

"No it don't. Your wrist don't hurt. Suck it up, boy! Stop cryin'!"

"Stop it, Dad, you're being too hard on him. Come on, Joey. Get up." His mother half-heartedly came to his rescue. She didn't rush over to him. Didn't want to baby him. Her name was Sunny, and Joey loved her as much for her name as he did for the fact that she was his mother. "Go on. Do as he says. Get up." She went back to brushing the horse, the same one she'd gotten when she was pregnant with Joey. It was a consolation prize from her husband when she gave up bull riding. The black Arabian was everything she said she wanted at the time. That, she assured everyone, and her husband and a healthy baby. That would be all she would ever need again.

"And stop crying, for Chrissake. Do you want to leave? Do you want to go play hopscotch?" His grandfather was on a roll. There'd be no stopping him until Joey broke.

"No," Joey whispered. He used his bangs as a shield.

"What's that?" His grandfather roughly pulled Joey's hair back, forcing the boy to look him in the eyes, or if not in the eyes, at least forcing him to show his face.

"What'dya say?"

"No!" Joey yelled.

"No? What then? What do you want to do?"

"I want to ride sheep."

"What? What're you mumblin'?"

"I want to ride sheep!"

"Sheep! You're not a baby anymore! Sheep! Dammit, kid. You say that like you've mastered something powerful. Crap. Them big, fluffy mamas *like* you ridin' em. It ain't nothin' when you win that. It's like ridin' a friggin merry-go-round or beddy-bye lovey for cryin' out loud. You like ridin', right? You like it? We're gettin'

you on a bull soon. Real soon, so get used to falling, kid. Get used to landing in the dirt. Get used to the taste of shit in your mouth like it's salt on a tomato."

Joey walked away, throwing a handful of dust in his grandfather's direction.

"Thatta boy. Good job." It made him proud to see Joey stick up for himself. "You baby that kid too much," he turned his criticism toward Sunny.

"And you're too tough on him." She refused to look in his direction, focusing instead at the animal she was still grooming.

"Look, the kid's talented. He can ride like no one I've ever seen."

"Yep, he can. But he's still eight years old."

"Won't be forever, though."

"That's for sure."

"Wait'll he starts riding bulls."

Sunny started to walk away. "We'll see, Dad. Let's see how it goes."

"Yep. Just remember, you got him into this. You remember that, ok?" He was yelling at her back, a view he'd gotten used to since her teens. Always turning her back on him, that one. She was quite the rider herself, before she got pregnant with Joey. She was good, not great, but gutsy. That girl hung on, and when she fell, she exploded with anger. Broke her hand once, not from a fall, but from punching the gate afterwards. That's the kind of competitor she was. Gutsy and mad. The worst combination of woman. She set out to beat everyone, though it was nearly impossible, and it almost never happened. Still, she loved everything about the rodeo—including the smell of the animals. Especially the smell of the animals. She loved how loud it was. She loved being covered in a fine layer of dirt from the time they got there until she stood in the hot shower in some motel room, watching the muddy water whirl around her feet and into the drain. She loved the trophies she won sometimes. The wins were frequent at first, but came less and less as she grew older and the boys got stronger. She still had all her helmets on a shelf in her closet. Joey loved to put them on, too. They were pink when she was younger, but by the time she was fourteen, she traded in the bubblegum sweetie-pie look for a shiny black version. At eighteen, she spent her own winnings on a helmet that made her look like a knight. It was still black, but someone had airbrushed orange and red flames that spread toward the cage around her face. That helmet was her pride and joy. By the time she got to competitions where the boys were as big as men, she stopped bringing home trophies all together. They couldn't convince her to compete against other girls. So the men lined up, smiling at each other, wincing in the glaring sunshine, sure of their conquest. Except for Joe. Joe beat her in the arena every time, but it was never an easy win. The bull-riding against her was easy, sure. Watching her lose, now that hurt him. Didn't stop him, though. So he worked to make her love him. She desired his talent; he, her body. They both got what they wanted.

"Hey!" her father called to her. "When's that husband of yours coming back?"

"After the tour," she yelled back at him.

"That kid needs his father to show him the ropes."

"He's fine, Dad." She stopped and turned to look at him. "He's fine. Leave him be."

"Yeah. Leave him be. He'll amount to nothin' if I leave him be. Up to you, he'd still be in diapers."

Sunny ignored him, pretending that she didn't hear a word he said. She was tough enough on the kid. He was eight. He didn't need to be any tougher than he

already was. It was she who needed to toughen up. She'd lost her edge when she got pregnant with him. Quit bull riding as soon as she found out. Protecting him from the get-go.

"Mom?"

"Hey, Jo-Jo. What's up, kiddo?" She also pulled his bangs out of his eyes, those eyes that were identical to his dad's, though everyone else thought they saw her in them.

"My wrist really does hurt."

"No it doesn't, Buddy. It's mind over matter. Go put some ice on it, and do something else. It'll go away. I promise." Her smile went right through him. His mom's smile. He thought, *That's why they named her Sunny. And her hair. They knew her hair would be shiny as the sun.* "Go on, now. Get outta here." She'd look at his wrist tonight, just to make sure nothing was really broken. She checked her irritation at him. After all, maybe it really did hurt him. "Hey, Joey. Love you, Bud." He ran up and smashed into her, hugging her so hard she nearly fell over. "Come on, now. Not so hard! Your mom is a weakling." Her hand shaded her eyes from the afternoon sun. At about 1:00, the Colorado ranch became as dry as the desert. It was always at about this time that she would imagine the Wild West. As a kid, she'd had those stiff, plastic dolls and horses, The Wests, from the Old West. The joints allowed the arms and legs to bend in unnatural positions, but Johnny and Jane West were her best companions. Johnny was dressed all in brown from his hat to his boots, and Jane in fashionable robin's egg blue, the plastic shade. She'd hoped Joey would want them, but he just left them outside. She found Jane in a hay bale once, and hid her after that. She'd save her and Johnny, too. Their horses, Joey treasured—both Thunderbolt and Flame. The couple's Indian guide and friend, Chief Cherokee, had long been lost, left behind at some rodeo in Texas as Sunny remembered it.

"No you're not. You're strong as a bull!" His voice startled her back to adulthood.

She snorted at him, huffed some loud, mean breaths, scraped the ground with her boots, then roared at him, tickling him at the same time. "Go! Go away!" She laughed and patted his bottom, pretending to spank him.

"I'm going, Mom! I'm going! I'll make you some iced-tea. You want some?"

"Sure," she hollered back. "Make sure you clean up all the powder mess you make, though!" She felt a little like she was babysitting; like she was having this conversation with a neighbor's child. Even after eight years, she sometimes had to remind herself that she was the mom and the wife. She was the little lady in charge.

"Two scoops?"

"One for each glass!"

"Got it!" He did seem to be favoring his right arm.

"You need to use that wrist! Don't baby it!" she yelled to him. She watched him wince as he shook it out. Maybe her father was right. He was kind of delicate. Not like her at all. Or his dad. "Where'd you come from?" she yelled to him.

"What?"

"Nothing, Baby. We're going to get you up on a bull soon! A calf! They're MEAN! The meanest calf we can find!" He waved at her with his right arm, as if to let her know that he was as brave as she was. She threw him another smile and he ran off. She checked herself again. Sunny was annoyed lately more and more at her boy. She loved him. No question about that. And her father was right; he rode better than any kid she'd ever seen ride. *He'll be better than Joe, Sr.,* she thought. Last she'd heard from

Joe, he had won big in Houston and was heading to Oklahoma. He was a shoe-in there, too. The money wasn't bad. Especially with them living with her father. He'd be in Colorado by mid-month, and they'd get to be a family then. She was considering following him to Wyoming and maybe even Reno. She'd have to have a meeting with the school again if she did. Or leave Joey behind with her father. Next year, forget it. The school was less and less accommodating of Joey's absences each year. They talked about homeschooling him so he could ride the winter circuit. If he was really going to do this, it was an inevitability. But the absences made Joey anxious. Sunny couldn't understand this at all. When she was riding, she loved missing school. Didn't care one bit if she was behind in math or map coloring. She knew she'd never need any of it anyway.

She could see Joey through the kitchen window standing on a chair, scooping out instant tea into two tall, plastic cups. *He's gonna make a mess*, she thought. *And my father is going to have a fit*. She took a deep breath and shook her head. She kicked the dirt to stir it up, put her hands into her pockets, looked up at the sky for just a second. She exhaled long enough to feel oxygen deprived and crave a breath in. *Better go save him*, she thought to herself. *That boy needs saving*.

"Hey, Joe. Let's clean this mess up, ok? Granddad isn't going to like this." Poor kid was smiling ear to ear until she walked in.

"How come he gets so mad at me, Ma?"

"I don't know. He's like a mean old hornet sometimes. That's all. It's him, Dude. Not you."

"Uh uh. It's me. He gets really, really mad at me. Do you get mad at me like that?"

"You know sometimes I get mad, Joey. What kind of a question is that?"

"I mean, do you get hateful mad at me?"

"No, Joey. I never hate you. Neither does Granddad."

"Neither does Granddad what?" Her father came into the kitchen. "Hope you're cleaning this mess up," he said.

"That's just what we're doing, right, Joe-Joe?"

"I asked my mom if she ever hates me like you do," his honesty cut right through Sunny.

Her father didn't respond. He just looked at the two of them and left the kitchen.

"See? He does hate me."

Sunny heard the TV go on in the living room.

"No he doesn't. He just doesn't know any other way."

"Was he like this to you, when you were a little girl?"

"Nope. He's gotten all sour, Joey. I don't know why." But she did know why. It just hadn't occurred to her until now. It was the moment she and Joe announced they had gotten married. Her parents just sat at the kitchen table. Her father had simply gotten up and left the room. Her mother, Diana, had cried.

"I would have liked to have been there," she'd said. Sunny could practically see her broken heart, oozing tears and droplets of blood into her lungs, making it difficult for her mother to breathe. "I've always thought I'd see you get married."

"I'm pregnant, Mom." She still doesn't know why she thought this would make anything better, but it did.

"A baby!" Her mother clapped her hands and cried even harder. "A baby! Frank! Frank! You're gonna be a grandpa!" she yelled.

They all clearly heard the front door slam.

"Don't worry, kids. Dad will come around!" She was hugging them both. "Where will you live?" Joe and Sunny shot each other quick looks. Diana caught on immediately. "Here?! Oh, of course, here! Where else would you go! You can have the guest house in the back. It will be cozy, but with Joe gone most of the time, you'll be just fine alone there, Sunny." They laughed.

"Thanks, Mom. That's one way of looking at it."

"Oh, you'll be fine, both of you. You'll be off the circuit now, right?" She directed her question to her daughter.

"Yes, Mom. I'm done with riding." She saw her father out in the ring with the horses. He'd be disappointed in her decision not to ride anymore, but he must have seen the writing on the wall. She wasn't that good. Not good enough. Even he must have already seen that.

"So when did he get so mean?" Joey once again intruded on her thoughts.

"I don't know, maybe after Grandma died. He took it hard." This was a much cleaner explanation. Sunny's mother must have known she was sick, but never let on. Just before Joey's first birthday, she finally let her family know. She died before he turned two. It would be reasonable that this is what turned her father into such an angry man. But Sunny knew better. She knew it in her heart. She felt it, maybe as strongly as he did.

"Whatta think about ridin' a calf soon?" she thought it was time to change the subject.

Joey stirred the drink a little harder, spilling some in the process.

"No opinion?" she teased him, nudging him, perhaps a little too hard, nearly knocking him off the chair he was standing on in order to work at the sink counter. He handed her the iced tea.

"Seriously, Joe. What do you think?" She tried to hide her irritation at him, but her voice was strained.

"I dunno," was all he could say.

"You don't know? Honestly, Joey? You don't know whether or not you want to ride anymore?"

"No, Mom! I don't know! I don't think so, I don't know!" Joey rarely yelled at Sunny. He wasn't like other kids in that way. He did what he was told, when he was told, and always seemed happy to do it. He took her completely off guard.

"What? Are you kidding me? No? You said no," Sunny stepped back a little bit. "You said no. So that's it. You're done riding." She said it like it was his punishment, like he should be ashamed of himself, like he could find no redemption, ever, from this decision, this decision made at eight years old.

"No I didn't, Ma. I didn't mean no. I just meant I don't know." He was quieter, but desperate to win back her approval.

Sunny put her hands over her face. "You tell him," she said quietly.

"Grandpa?"

"Yes. It's your decision, so you tell him."

Joey jumped off the chair and ran outside. *Good*, Sunny thought. *God damn it! Let him go!* But then she felt a sickly guilt. She knew she'd regret this. She knew she'd wish later that she'd run after him and kissed him to make it all better. She knew this, but still, she just stood in the kitchen, cleaning up the mess, putting the chair back, feeling the shame of so many failures creep up from the kitchen tiles, through her boots, up her legs and settle, for a lifetime, in her heart.

Prose Nonfiction Winner

Learning by Example
Joanne Peluso (SI 07)

A black man, living alone in a stable, endures the insults of his white co-workers despite his superior background and intelligence. A young boy's fragile body is ripped apart savagely at the hands of those he called friends. A wealthy teenager wanders through New York City, drunk and lonely, after being expelled from yet another fancy prep school. A young man returns from the Air Force, marries his high school sweetheart, and settles down to raise two daughters with her, only to lose her to breast cancer five years later. The stories that consume us are notorious for their blatant injustice, unfathomable violence, and depressing epiphanies. Life, thankfully, won't always be miserable; sometimes it will be downright wonderful—almost perfect, even. The bad times are trickier. The world is full of logical, nerdy kids, sounding out dire warnings that nobody wants to hear; street-smart travelers whose dreams of settling down will never come true; and those who have suffered incredible loss and find themselves, like that disenchanting teenage boy, whispering the name of their loved ones, praying that they won't disappear before they cross the road to whatever awaits on the other side.

Each person has a private journey, and it's *a little bit* but *not really* like the path traveled by one of the characters in a sophomore novel, but the desired destination is always the same: to get through this life relatively unscathed and have something to show for it at the end.

On the other side of the highway—or maybe, at the bottom of a cliff, or on a pastoral ranch, or nestled under a fruit tree on an uninhabited island—is a life well-lived. What we take with us, if we're paying attention, are instructions on how to navigate this life successfully. We learn from the stories of those who came before us. William Golding and J.D. Salinger came home from the same war and wrote very different novels with a common theme: *life is tough and people are corrupt*; two decades earlier, John Steinbeck took up the plight of the migrant workers during the Great Depression to show his readers that *life is tough, people are corrupt, and nobody cares*; and every day, sitting at the kitchen table or driving through city streets, watching a Yankee-Red Sox game from the bleachers or breathing in the antiseptic silence of an Intensive Care room, my father taught me, through his stories and his actions, that *life is tough, people can be corrupt, and maybe most people don't care, but coming from a place of generosity is the key to getting along in the world*. A quote which has been incorrectly attributed to the Greek philosopher Plato reminds us to “be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.” When we begin to see life as a battleground in which all of humanity is really fighting on the *same side*, against apathy or sadness or injustice or hatred, we cannot help but treat each other with kindness.

Simon, the generous-spirited middle-school boy in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, and James Castle, who commits suicide after being bullied in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, can both be seen as “Christ figures” in their respective novels. While we never learn much about James Castle except that Holden admires him, we can surmise based on Salinger's central idea that James Castle (note the initials) lost his desire to live after experiencing what Golding called “the darkness of man's heart” (Golding 202); Simon, however, is one of the main characters in *LotF* and by far the kindest, as illustrated by Golding when Simon “walked with an accustomed tread

through the fruit trees ... [and] found for [the littlest castaways] the fruit they could not reach, pulled off the choicest from up in the foliage, passed them back down to the endless, outstretched hands" (56). Simon's need for solitude, his familiarity with nature, and his generosity to the younger children, whom the older boys see as pests, indicate that he is much more self-actualized than the others (Maslow). After he learns the harsh reality of the world—that the monster the islanders had feared is actually a dead military man, caught in a web created by his parachute—Simon untangles the ropes, allowing the corpse to eventually drift off to sea (Golding 147). It is by doing so that Simon intends to bring redemption to the others, freeing them of their fear of an imaginary beast; of course, in their frenzy, the boys kill him before he can make them understand (Golding 153), showing in a dramatic way how human nature favors violence over reason and resists Simon's perception of the truth: that "maybe [the beast is] only us" (Golding 89). Certainly, for *Catcher's* James Castle, the "beast" came in the form of prep school boys who torment him in ways that the normally outspoken Holden cannot even repeat (Salinger 170).

Simon's martyrdom, and the metaphorical rejection of his gift of knowledge, serve to enforce Golding's assertion that mankind is evil; after Simon's body is carried out to the ocean in a passage which uses light, color, texture, and celestial imagery to emphasize his connection to a higher plane (Golding 153-4), even Ralph and Piggy deny their involvement with his death. Yet Simon's death is not in vain, for he has effectively illuminated for Golding's readers the extent to which we avoid facing our own propensity for evil. Most of the boys on the island will "get back all right" (Golding 111), but not before they commit another murder and lose whatever humanity they have left. Rather than view themselves as connected to nature, inseparable from their environment and from each other, the boys succumb to that darkness Golding writes about, working against their surroundings and their peers, selfishly, savagely, and chaotically. Once a society has lost its focus on the greater good and cares only about individual survival, those who are attempting to do good work, like Simon, risk losing themselves to those who are louder and more powerful.

Power doesn't always have to do with physical strength, and generosity rarely has to do with wealth—in fact, several studies over the past few years show that lower- and middle-class people give a higher percentage of their incomes to charity and show a stronger ability to empathize with others (Stern). John Steinbeck, the quintessential American author, is best known for his books about the poor and disenfranchised migrant workers of California. The gigantic but intellectually disabled Lennie and the smart but beleaguered George in *Of Mice and Men* are typical Steinbeck characters, victims of their lowly circumstances, trying but never succeeding in their attempts to rise up. Like the greedy CEOs of today who rake in more money than they could ever spend in a lifetime while exploiting their minimum-wage employees, Steinbeck's ranch owners offer little in the way of compensation to their farmers and stable workers, ensuring that these underprivileged men will never be able to own property or work for themselves. Still, George Milton (again, the name is significant: John Milton, a poet of the 1600s, wrote *Paradise Lost*) is a person of generosity, taking care of Lennie and bearing equal punishment when Lennie inevitably gets into trouble. Because the need for companionship is so innate, one might argue that George's kindness toward Lennie is self-serving, but as George explains to Slim, "I ain't got no people. I seen the guys that go around on the ranches alone. That ain't no good ... After a long time they get mean. They get wantin' to fight all the time ... Lennie's a God damn nuisance most of the time. But you get used to goin' around with a guy an' you can't get rid of him" (Steinbeck 41).

Even when George does “get rid of” Lennie, he does so out of kindness, in a mercy killing of sorts, saving him from being tortured by the other men. In his final act of generosity, he assures Lennie that “I ain’t mad. I ain’t never been mad, an’ I ain’t now. That’s a thing I want ya to know” (Steinbeck 106). Even though Slim, the most respected of the ranch hands, tells George that he did the right thing, George’s life has changed drastically. Without Lennie, George is just another solitary migrant worker.

One of the saddest characters in *OMaM* is the stable-hand, Crooks, so named because of a deformity he suffered after being kicked by a horse. Isolated because he is an African-American in a time of segregation, Crooks sleeps in the harness room next to the barn, and joins the other workers only when they allow him into their circle. Rather than face repeated rejections, Crooks holds himself with dignity, “[keeping] his distance and demand[ing] that other people keep theirs” (Steinbeck 67). His room is neat and contains books, a sign that he is literate at a time when many black people were not allowed an equal education. In fact, Crooks is proud to tell Lennie, “I ain’t a southern negro ... I was born right here in California. My old man had a chicken ranch, ‘bout ten acres” (Steinbeck 70); Crooks has actually experienced more prosperity—and possibly more schooling—than many of the other men on the ranch, but he is viewed as inferior simply because of his color. Accustomed to isolation as the only black child in his community, he now faces similar segregation and loneliness on the ranch, but maintains his “proud, aloof” exterior (Steinbeck 67). It is only when he engages in a conversation with Lennie and Candy, the other men who are left behind when the physically and intellectually fit workers go off drinking and carousing, that Crooks displays anything other than silence, mistrust or meanness. Like Lennie and Candy, Crooks becomes enchanted by the idea of working for himself, away from the pugnacious Curley and his wealthy father. In an every-man-for-himself environment, kindness is seen as a sign of weakness, so the men are constantly on the defensive, viewing each other as adversaries rather than as potential friends. Even those who are intrinsically kind can resort to cruelty if they are rejected by their peers, which is why social outcasts often respond to overtures of kindness with anger or skepticism, much as Crooks did when he first encountered Lennie in the stable. Yet I don’t think that people should be reluctant to show kindness for fear of being rejected. Aesop’s Fables teach us that “no act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.” Generosity *does* make a difference; even if the recipient doesn’t show immediate gratitude, kindness is not forgotten and can often change a person’s outlook on life and humanity.

Holden Caulfield receives very few overtures of kindness in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Most students see him as a hypocrite who calls others “phony” while he misrepresents himself to everyone he encounters. Readers who view him unsympathetically may be interpreting him too literally; Holden is one of the kindest characters in literature, and because of that, he will grow up (if he ever grows up) to be a person of integrity and compassion. The careful reader will note that Holden, despite his seeming animosity toward Ackley, empathizes with him enough to invite him to the movies on a lonely Saturday night (Salinger 36). Also, Holden’s compassion for Sunny comes to light when he hangs up her green dress and imagines how “the salesman probably just thought she was a regular girl when she bought it” (Salinger 96); rather than take advantage of her, he wants to simply have a conversation.

Holden also judges others by his personal standards of kindness: old Haas, who snubbed the parents who were “sort of fat or corny-looking or something” (Salinger 14); the lady at the movies who cries “all through the goddam picture” but refuses to take her child to the bathroom (Salinger 139-40); Mr. Antolini, who may or may not be a

pervert but who was “the only guy that’d even gone *near* ... James Castle ... when he was dead” (Salinger 195). We must differentiate between the observations that Holden makes to his therapist (the reader) and the way he actually behaves toward the people he meets on his journey. His dream of being a catcher in the rye is in itself an act of kindness—saving children before they fall into the cruel world that William Golding writes about. Recognizing the impossibility of this dream allows him to make his first step toward healing.

In the early 1950s, right around the same time the fictional Holden Caulfield was making his way through Manhattan’s “phony” clubs and theaters, a young man in Hartford was forging his birth certificate so that he could enter the Air Force before his eighteenth birthday, leaving behind an abusive, alcoholic father, a devoted mother who barely spoke English, a half dozen siblings, and a beautiful fiancée. Upon his return from the military, the young man married the girl—his high school love—and, in keeping with the Italian tradition, they became parents of a baby girl ten months later, and another daughter the next year. It’s quite possible they would have continued having babies until they reached an even dozen, or at least until they finally had a boy, but his beloved wife developed cancer and was gone within months, leaving the young man, not even thirty, with two daughters, aged four and three. I was the four-year-old. This was in the 1960s, when single parents were rare and single *fathers* existed only in fairy tales and sitcoms. Relatives offered to take my sister and me so that he could resume his life, but he insisted that we would not be separated from him or from each other. He became the kind of parent who worked the night shift so that he could be home for his children during the day; he never missed a parent conference or a chance to spend a summer day at the beach. He filled our working-class home with books, music, dancing, and laughter; he taught us to love baseball, the ocean, fishing, and dogs. He was far from perfect (grape soda was the closest we got to fruit, some days; the Dodge reeked of cigarettes; his temper flared at the slightest of my transgressions), but at the end of his life, he was able to say, “I did the best I could,” and my sister and I could answer truthfully, “You did really, really good.” Like the parent in Langston Hughes’ poem “Mother to Son,” life for my father was not a “crystal stair” (line 2). He told us stories of his impoverished childhood and his strained relationship with his own father. There were stories he did not tell, stories about what it must have been like to lose his wife while still in his 20s, but he instilled in us enough empathy so that as we got older, my sister and I could look beyond our own grief and imagine what that loss must’ve been like for him. Yet, like Hughes’ tenacious mother, my father did not let the darkness keep him from climbing, and he expected the same from us.

What I remember most was his limitless generosity: the bags of vegetables freshly picked from his garden and distributed to neighbors and family; the extra miles logged on his car from chauffeuring people all over the state and beyond; the twenty-dollar bill tucked into my hand as I boarded the train for college. The video “Inspiring Power of Giving (and Veggie Soup)” shows how a Thai man’s lifetime of generosity is repaid by a young doctor who was once the recipient of his kindness. The film illustrates how one person’s simple act of giving can change someone’s life, in this case showing a poor boy with a sick mother that there are caring people in the world. Sometimes all we need is one person to say hello or look happy to see us; the smallest gesture can change a life.

In Steinbeck’s naturalistic world, George’s single shot to the back of Lennie’s head is an act of kindness which saves the childlike giant from a much crueler death. Although readers recognize the injustices rampant in *Of Mice and Men*, they understand

that George acted out of love for his friend. Salinger's prototypical teenager, Holden, abhorred insincerity and feared becoming that which he hated; however, he has what Steinbeck's characters lacked, the education, resources and intellectual capacity to overcome his "teen angst" and view others with empathy rather than impatience. By the end of the book, he is oddly "missing everybody," and the reader believes that Holden will be a better person because he has learned to accept his reliance on other people. This is something that all teenagers need to do in order to be successful: not only behave kindly, but also allow others to *show* kindness and concern. We grow up when we realize we are not as autonomous as we think we are; we need each other.

So where does that leave the little savages on Golding's imaginary island? The final image in *Lord of the Flies* is of a battleship in the distance, Golding's way of saying that adult wars are what brought the boys to the island, and nothing has changed now that a warship has come to their rescue. Jack's hesitation when the naval officer asks who is in charge shows that the "chief savage" may recognize his own evil nature and attempt to stifle it as he returns to the "real" (but just as evil) world. If, as Golding believes, we are savages at heart, how are we supposed to create a world that is worth living in? Rather than accept Golding's negative view of the world, I choose to concentrate on the beautiful things I have witnessed and experienced. I choose to align myself with inspirational people such as Anne Frank, who saw the absolute worst that humanity had to offer yet said, "Despite everything, I believe that people are really good at heart" (Frank). Most of all, I choose to follow the example set by my father. Going through his papers after his death, my sister and I found a copy of his military records, which listed his blood type, something we'd never known before: he was type O negative, which was once considered "the universal donor." As an English teacher, I think in metaphor, and that is how I will always remember my father—he gave to everyone, and I prefer to approach life his way, so that at the end of my own life, I can also look back and say that I did the best I could.

**Teacher-Consultant
Writing Contest
Honorable Mentions**

Poetry Honorable Mentions

Bridge

Gilbert Moon (SI 90)

My eyes follow the current upstream to a woman
at sunset on her porch who hears the lull when day shift
workers quit machines, comb their hair, grab an empty
lunch box and wait in line at the time clock. The woman
sits with pots inside bubbling on the stove, a loaf of bread
set on the table by two plates. She hears him coming up the stairs,
his step a tired scrape of shoe soles on wood. The children once
ran to him but now it's only two, the man and woman who keep
rituals. He walks by her to open the screen door. She listens to
the spring stretch, the slam of its closing, and metallic slide of
lunchbox set on counter. He sits heavy in his place at the table.
She goes in and fills his plate, then her own. They eat, and do not
speak round the bread in their mouths. Language is not needed
at the table or in the backyard sun where he goes to read the paper.
She'll do the dishes, knows he will take his hat and later walk up
Center Street, past alleyways and stores closing for the night
to the grass and benches of the Green where he will pass time
with other men who ask no why of things. She remembers nights
when they held each other under darkness while the kids slept,
one instant of their bodies absorbed in life beyond work,
and factories, and the river running black. I know the woman
and the man, their memory preserved on beams of steel above
what flows into the deep stream of lifetimes. How many like them
could not find joy, watched breeze swat cigar smoke away and
breathed relief as if it was them escaping the press of walls, black
sand molds, and foundry fire? Pipe drains spill poison
in the river, and chimney fumes plume high on wind ignoring ruins
of old sentiments that asked for the better life pictured in barbershop
magazines. Survivors look at me with blank stares, will not
acknowledge time or where it's brought us, speak in bleak
conspiracies that seek fast and willing answers, what suffices
in a pinch, the quick fix staring into graves that make the whole
of our experience meaningless. I don't trust the word of who
does not see dead fish floating in a river; stay aloof from it
on a steel bridge lamenting the passage of each second sacrificed
to dumb with wonder gazing at what might have been. Rather
I would learn from ripples dappled by a rush of the dead,
their shrouds hooked on rocks like green weed
adrift with human laughter that glitters below
the sullen stream's surface.

Spoils

Kimberly Perschmann (SI 99)

She left the stars in disarray
and sliced the moon into clean quarters.
She took only the part that sleeps
with its back to the sun
and began the long journey home.
Satisfied with her twilight raid,
she wrapped her spoils in silken
threads and carried them to bed.
And while the night air draped its
gentle frost on the toes of the
sweet gum tree in the front yard,
she kissed the moon a warm goodnight
and curled around its crescent splendor,
wondering why she hadn't plundered
The sky sooner.

The Werewolf

Kimberly Perschmann (SI 99)

When twilight came the dusky moon
cut through shaded windows, a sweaty drink
bleaching milky circles into the dark
wood table beside the beastly form. The transformation
has disquieted the girl, who avoids the creature
in her bedroom, playing records to mask the wounds.

Half-human, half-animal, she becomes unwound
by cocktail hour and approaching moonlight,
shedding her nurturing skin and donning the creature's
wolfish anger and wild regret with sloppy drink,
the curse of Lycaon gradually transforming
her from woman to wolf, until morning bests the dark.

The girl knows what to expect when darkness
reaches into day to take away her mother. Wounding,
predictable and impossible to restrain, the transformation
is triggered by ice cubes and moonshine,
(or whatever else might be the drink
of the moment) stirring the bitter creature.

And so the girl controls what she can, becoming a creature
of habitual thinking: never let imperfection darken
your doorstep, don't break the rules, drink
in the peaceful days and bask in avoidance, hide your wounds,
feel worthy only when someone is mooning
over you, and if you're good, things will magically transform.

When the girl is old enough she constructs her own transformation,
(the first of many) moving far, far away from the creature.
And even though she makes her home under the same moon,
there is comfort in the distance. She calls only when darkness
is masked by daylight, avoidance her deepest wound.
She longs to fight instead of fly, and still aches to stop the drinking.

Now twice divorced (wolf-wounds abound!) the girl doesn't drink,
somehow dodging that hereditary bite. And yet she is easily transformed
by her older son's smile, her daughter's charm (despite wounds
of her own) or her youngest son's obsession with particular creature
comforts, likely caused by the Down Syndrome, another dark
chapter she swiftly barter for delight, smirking at the moon.

Evenings she drinks coffee and writes poems, a creature
of unending transformation. And if darkness
ruptures old wounds, she dresses them with the softening and merciful moon.

For My Father

Joanne Peluso (SI 07)

In hospice
cardboard butterflies
hang from the doors of the dying.

Transition, the nurse explains,
although I, who interpret symbols for a living,
should have known this all along.

When you come visit me—
and you will—
don't come as a butterfly,
bruise-colored,
mottled purple powder,
fickle insect.
(I will never be ready for butterflies again.)

Come instead as you always did:
a hot cup of tea at the kitchen table
during a power outage;
a patch of sunlight
melting the snow from my windshield
on the morning of my birthday;
the green of gardens and baseball fields;
the hush of the surf in Maine, in August.

Come as a wrinkle on my forehead,
a worry line, a battle scar
left over from those nights in March
when I'd drive home down too-dark roads,
expecting accidents.
Come as a streetlight
that shines outside my window
bright as lightning
so that even at midnight
I can read the future
in the palm of my hand.

Prose Fiction Honorable Mentions

Fourth Moon

Susan Laurençot (SI 15)

The shell of the life-sustaining pod was beginning to get a cloudy-haze. Celeste didn't particularly mind the cloudiness; there wasn't much to see outside. It was almost always dark, except for those few moments when the planet rotated near enough to the sun to receive light, and it was barren and flat. In some places, the pod bore scratches, evidence that children had played here. There was a small paint splatter at one end where someone had once attempted art. Everywhere Celeste looked, there were traces of her life, and the lives of people she knew; some of these people she loved, some of them simply passed through her life like dust. She looked at the calendar on the pod data screen. Soon, she would pass into her fourth moon, her final moon. Although some of her comrades had seen five moons, she thought that this was probably her last one.

Celeste began planning for her final moon phase. She remembered an old movie she saw in her early twenties, while still on Earth. It was a Japanese film. The elderly were expected to go to a mountain in the winter, settle in, and fall asleep to their deaths. They were supposed to know when it was time for this to happen. Celeste thought that probably there were some who refused to do it, becoming a burden to their families, waiting for someone else to take them there, passively daring them to leave them alone to freeze. She thought she remembered a scene where family members argued over their mother, recently gone blind. They wondered why she wasn't leaving, then argued over who was to take her. Celeste did not remember the details, but she did remember a man carrying this old woman up the mountainside, through the snow, setting her down, arranging her scarf over her head, and leaving. Well, there were no mountains nor was there snow for Celeste to bank on. There was, however, the "tea" that could be arranged. She would look into that tomorrow.

"Rah-Rah!" The hatch opened and in bounded her granddaughter, Seria, not even half-way through her first moon.

"Come here! Hug me," Celeste coaxed. "I've missed you terribly! How was your trip? How was Earth?"

"It was beautiful, Rah-Rah! Did you really grow up there?"

"I did. I was a very lucky girl. Were you able to go outside?"

"No. Daddy said the sun would burn us, so we stayed inside. He said, next time he'll arrange some ultraviolet sessions before we go."

Celeste giggled. "I think you mean ultraviolet. I'm glad he's thinking of another trip. But it's too bad you stayed inside the whole time. Outside is a wonderful place."

"Oh, it was wonderful anyway! There are underground tunnels with trains and stores!"

Celeste laughed. "I remember," she said. "I hated them! So closed in."

"No, Rah-Rah! They're awesome! And they broadcast the most beautiful scenes of outside! Do you know there are clouds on Earth?"

"Clouds! Yes, were they big and fluffy?"

"Yep! And they moved—they floated!"

"Maybe next time you go, you'll be able to see the real things."

"Maybe you can come with us the next time."

"Maybe." Celeste knew that would mean she would have to placate her son-in-law's hurt feelings. They didn't get along very well, Celeste and Marcus. He was

conservative; she not. She despised his political views. Her daughter, Lilith, begged her to be more patient with him. Celeste was disappointed in Lilith for choosing him to be her partner. She tried not to let this show, but Celeste wore her heart on her sleeve. In fact, she had gotten more set in her ways, and less able to hide her feelings as she aged. Her husband, Alistair, had kept her in check, reminding her that her relationship with Lilith, and then with Seria, was far more important than her relationship with Marcus. When he died in the transport crash a quarter moon ago, Celeste turned her anguish towards Marcus. He was an easy target because, in her opinion, he was so ignorant. At first, Marcus had tried to fill Alistair's shoes. Celeste resented this. And, she came to realize, she resented living on this planet. She had come with Alistair for his work. He had promised it would only be for a short time. They had honeymooned here. It was exciting at the time. They were considered early-adapters. Hardly anyone was making the move back then. That was when they counted time in years, and not in moons. And now, here she was, facing her fourth moon alone and on this god-forsaken planet.

"Where's your mom?" she finally thought to ask.

"She's in the car with Daddy. They said to come in and say hi,"

"And then you were to come right back, young lady." Lilith stood in the hatch. She was stern. Celeste thought she was unjustly stern too often, but had learned to keep her mouth shut about it. "Hi, Mom. How have you been?"

"Hi, Sweetie!" Celeste was genuinely happy to see Lilith. She got up to hug her. She could feel Lilith bracing for this even before she touched her. She knew she had a lot of work ahead of her in this last moon. She tried a treaty. "Ask Marcus to come in. I can cook for us. You must be tired and hungry."

"Yay! Please, Mom?" Seria hugged Celeste around the waist; Lilith looked suspicious.

"Are you sure, Mom?" Lilith asked. "It won't be too much?"

"Too much? You mean, for an old bat like myself?" Celeste and Seria laughed. Seria was now standing between the two women, holding both of her grandmother's hands. She looked over her shoulder at Lilith.

"You know what I mean." Lilith smiled a little. The truth was, Lilith admired her mother. She liked that this woman refused to change much during her time on this planet, the only home Lilith ever knew. "You look thin, Mom. Are you eating?" She was softening. Celeste knew she'd get Marcus to come in.

"I'm heading into my fourth moon, Lilith. Things start happening."

"Where are the rings on your toes?" Seria was concerned, too, squatting now at her grandmother's bare feet.

"I think they must have fallen off," Celeste said as casually as she could.

"Did you lose them, Mom? You loved those rings. I've never seen you without them."

"They must be here someplace, right? I thought they might have fallen off in bed, but I just can't seem to find them. Don't worry, Seria, Rah-Rah will get new ones. I promise." Celeste had noticed over the last few moon phases that her body was changing—she was becoming gaunt, almost skeletal. She had seen other people go through this. It wasn't like aging on Earth; it was like watching herself decompose little by little. She was still, especially to Seria, a beautiful woman. She had learned to adjust to this planet, but now she just wanted to go home, back to the sea on the Earth. She longed to feel the sand between her toes. She had dreamt that she had lost her rings there, on the beach. While she searched for them, she found beautiful pieces of sea

glass. She strung them on seaweed, and wore them like a crown. Then, of course, she woke up to the scratched pod and the dark sky. Always dark. She tried to figure out when the light would next come. She hoped to still be alive for it. It would be a shame to die here in this darkness.

Celeste noticed other signs of her physical deterioration, signs that she had never noticed her own grandmother going through. She remembered that on Earth, the elderly sometimes experienced dementia. Her mind, on the other hand, seemed to be becoming sharper, more clear. Colors seemed more vivid. Sounds, more precise. The world was slowly becoming a beautiful poem, and she was only a reader—a spectator of its beauty. It was only recently, in fact, that she began to notice that the occasional dust storm, provoked by orbiting nearer or farther from the sun, stirred up a lavender fog that would settle over pods, communication towers and equipment left to become future ancient archeology. To Celeste these looked more and more like the pictures she remembered from grade school back on earth of elephant graveyards. Piles and piles of undisturbed bones in various stages of decay, becoming glistening sculpture before her eyes. Maybe only to her eyes. She looked down at Seria.

"Really, sweetie, it's all right." She smiled at Lilith, looking in her eyes, seeing a bit of herself there.

"I'll get Marcus. We'd love to eat dinner." This brought a round of cheers from Seria and from Celeste. Lilith flashed them both a smile, and raised her eyebrows in an I'll give it my best shot kind of way.

"Come on, Seri, let's go into the kitchen and see what we can find."

"Can I stay tonight, Rah-Rah? I'll help you find your rings. I can scavenge for them, just like I used to to find your transport chip." She gave Celeste a mischievous giggle. "Remember?"

"Oh, I do! Now I keep it right there, right in that orange bowl by the hatch!"

"Good thinking!"

Marcus and Lilith came through almost on cue. "Hello, Celeste. I hope you've been well." Curt and businesslike as usual. Celeste was relieved to see he was wearing shorts, and not a suit.

"You look rested, Marcus! Nice to see you." Celeste did her best to sound warm.

"Rah-Rah lost her rings," Seria piped in. "I'm going to spend the night and scavenge for them." Marcus and Lilith looked at Celeste.

"It's fine with me! I'd love the company," she chimed in. She felt an awkwardness between them. "I'm fine, you know. The fourth moon isn't for a little while yet." She tried to laugh to lighten the mood.

"Don't joke about it, Mom."

"Why?" Celeste took Lilith's face in her hands and kissed her nose, just like she used to when Lilith was Seria's age. Seria hugged them both. "It's ok."

"You don't know that this is going to be your last moon phase." The two women looked at Seria.

"Yes it is," Seria said. "Remember, Mom? I told you that Rah-Rah will live until the fourth moon."

"You just were repeating a dream you had, Seri," Marcus scolded, looking guiltily at Celeste, who thought she might have seen a glimmer of humanity in him after all. "We can't know what someone's final moon will be. Not yet anyway. Not with any accuracy." He scowled at Seria. She understood that she was to change her story. She went to Celeste and threw her arms tightly around her, burying her head in her grandmother's ribs.

"You won't die, Rah-Rah. Not yet."

"Seria!" Lilith seemed outraged. Celeste kissed the top of Seria's head and motioned for her daughter and son-in-law to be quiet.

"Enough talk of Rah-Rah dying," she said as cheerfully as she could. "Let's just go find something to eat!"

"And maybe we'll find your rings, too!" Seria seemed cheered.

Later that night, after Lilith and Marcus had left and Seria and Celeste were settled in, they put the data screen on entertainment mode to watch a young pop-singer's performance on a far away planet, and chatted about the rising of the fourth moon. The singer wore a trendy retro-skirt of cotton gauze, but her bustier was made in the more contemporary polymers that, when painted onto the body, dried and made a cast-like garment. The bustier glowed and changed colors according to the singer's body temperature. It reminded Celeste of the weird doll clothes of the 1990s that she'd seen in her mother's old photographs, and of the mood rings she bought at vintage shops and flea markets when she was young. Like the clothing, these rings were supposed to change color too, revealing the wearer's true emotions. Celeste always was cold, so her ring was almost always black. She guessed her clothing would be as well if she ever donned any of the poly-wear. She, herself, never gave in to the polymer fad, and continued to shop inter-galactically, having most of her clothes flown by aerospace-drones from Earth, although the newest printers touted the ability to print cloth-like apparel, and she toyed with the idea of ordering a dress to try.

"Does it frighten you to talk about my fourth moon, Seri?"

"No, Rah-Rah. It does Mommy, though."

"Oh, don't I know it."

"Does it frighten you, Rah-Rah? Was I bad to tell you?"

"No, Seria! No! You are not bad! Tell me more about it. How will I know?"

"When you will die?"

"Yes. How will I know? I want to make the special tea."

"I don't know, exactly."

"How do you know that the fourth moon is my moon?"

"I don't know that either, exactly."

"Why did you say so?"

"I don't know, Rah-Rah. The words just came out of my mouth." Seria looked ashamed, which was not what Celeste had intended.

"It's ok, Honey. You didn't do anything wrong. I was just curious. Do you know, just know but not know why you know, what it will be like?"

"It's like living on another planet, except I'll still get to talk to you. If you want to."

"If I want to? Of course I want to!" They hugged. Feeling the warmth of this tiny girl, this child that seemed to spring from her own soul, made her grieve. Perhaps Marcus was right. Perhaps no one, not even Seria, not even Alistair, could possibly predict the end of a human life cycle. Humans were not, after all, like houseflies whose lifespans were predictably 28 days. Or a dog or cat even. Humans were still too variable to accurately predict. Seria yawned.

"Sleepy?"

"Nope. Not yet. Let's look for your rings, Rah-Rah."

"Now?"

"Yes. I'll sleep better." The little girl yawned again, and Celeste caught it. She yawned as well.

"Well, I think we both might fall asleep on our hunt, but let's do it." Giggling, the two of them rolled out of the sleeping sling. Celeste had begged Alistair to construct this for her. It was a lovely white linen-look hammock, hung from the sleeping area ceiling. Speakers, stimulated by any weight in the hammock, softly played water sounds as they slept. *When it's time*, Celeste thought, *I will come here with my tea and a book. When it's time, this will be my mountain.* This idea, of dying on this planet, was almost too much for Celeste to bear.

"Rah-Rah?" Celeste felt two tiny hands on her face.

"Sorry, Sweetie. I was just daydreaming."

"More planning?"

"Nope. No more planning. Let's find those rings!"

Celeste and Seria crawled from room to room, exaggerating their hunt for the rings, looking under the furniture, lifting the edges of the antique rugs Celeste and Alistair inherited from their families back on Earth.

"Here's one!" Seria yelled. "It was right here on top of the rug!"

"Hooray for you! Here, let's see how it slipped off." Celeste stretched her legs out toward the child. "Slide one on one of those piggies, please." Seria pushed the ring over one of the knuckles of her toe. It slid too easily. "Try a fatter toe. One of them will work." Seria kept sliding the ring on different toes. "I know what we'll do. There must be some poly-tape here someplace. When I was a girl and your Grandpa Alistair asked me to be his girlfriend, he gave me his college ring. It was too big, so I wrapped tape around the band until I could have it made smaller. It worked perfectly." Seria clapped her hands and jumped up; she extended a hand to her grandmother to help her. The gesture nearly made Celeste cry.

"Thank you, my sweetie," she said, groaning while getting up. "Whew! That's getting harder and harder!" she joked. But it was true and inevitable. She imagined it wouldn't be too much longer until she would not be able to be on the floor playing with Seria any longer. "Pretty soon, we'll have to stick with the digi-puzzles!"

"You hate those, Rah-Rah." Seria kissed Celeste's hand and ran ahead to the pod tool drawer. "Is the tape here?"

"Yes, should be."

"Rah-Rah, here's another ring!"

"Really? Where?"

"Here, in the kitchen. Oh, and another one too, right here under the food storage!"

"Come on! Who put them there?"

"Oh, Rah-Rah, they must just be slipping off. Let's fix them. You aren't you without them." Seria was truly despaired.

"And then to bed."

"And then to bed," Seria repeated with adult authority.

In Celeste's dream that night she was back again at the shore, wearing the crown of blue and green sea glass. When she looked down at her feet, they looked like the talons of a seagull. On the claws were her rings—vivid rubies and sapphires—tied on with bits of grass. The skin on her legs was transparent in spots, revealing sinews and tendons, and capillary riverlets, glowing with lavender hued blood. The other parts of her were the color of pink quartz. Her hands remained human, and for that, she was grateful. She unclenched her fingers and blew into her palms. From her mouth came sand, dotted with mica and miniscule shells. She felt compelled to re-consume what

she had just expelled. She awoke while licking the last grains of sand from her open palms. Seria was still sound asleep.

Celeste slowly rolled out of the hammock. She felt a longing for a sunrise that she hadn't felt in a long time—maybe since her honeymoon with Alistair. She crept over the rugs, so strange here on this planet with their geometry based on a woven grid, materials raw, scratchy, and so—what? Celeste couldn't quite name it at first, but *human* was what finally came to her. Somehow they had they been able to hang onto their humanity, these people like herself who had coupled and borne children here, in this darkness. Her feet were achy, but other than that, she felt fine. The same as always. Not nearly like she was approaching her final moon. She made sure that she had human feet. She did. She checked her legs and arms. They seemed fine. She put her hand to her heart. It felt strong. She looked at the data screen. It was still early. She pressed *voice*. "Here to home." She corrected herself. "Home to Earth. Distance. Time. Price. First available date. Four tickets."

Open Mic

Amanda Greenwell (SI 16)

So it's open mic night at this bar and I'm hanging with a friend who has a few new tunes she wants to try out on a crowd. The inside of the place is a dive. There's next to no one there and the tables are all cock-eyed and the chairs look like outtakes from an estate sale and only if I squint through what must be leftover smog from indoor smoking days do I spy a bartender slumped in the corner where he is polishing—get this—various pieces of ornate silverware. He's got a few delicate butter knives and this old ladle that looks like it came from some baroque soup tureen and I think, well, at least the joint has character.

Tanya leaves me at one of the topsy-turvy tables with her guitar and she heads over to the guy with the notebook to sign up for her slot. He shakes her hand and gives her a pat on the shoulder and when she comes back she says there's already about twelve people on the list before her. I don't know where they're hiding, but it can't be in the bathroom because I just watched a waitress go in there and it's a one-sie, black-and-white checkered floor with a drain right in the middle in case someone decides to take a shower in the sink.

Tanya's nervous and quiet and that's the usual for her, so I sit back and take in the early acts. There's a Goth girl with a decent voice and solid guitar skills whose songs are pretty political, and then there's an all male ensemble complete with bongos and a harmonica that rocks out some pretty cool folk fusion. The most amusing act is this fuzzy-headed, thick-shouldered Irish-looking guy who gets up there with his flamenco guitar, asks for a bass player, and proceeds to yell his chord progression at the top of his lungs so the bassist can follow. He's in the middle of some arrangement of which he is far too proud, and he keeps winking and smiling at everyone. He plays two numbers and then tries for a third, but the open mic dude swoops in—to appreciative applause—and gets another act on stage.

The night goes on and while Tanya plays the crowd falls into non-attention and appreciation in turn (her guitar skills are weak, but the pipes get them every time). When she comes back she's happy and spent and we order another beer.

Then he gets on stage.

He barely registers as bar furniture—a too-skinny, white t-shirted boy who doesn't even carry an instrument. When he settles onto his stool he introduces himself as Jamie or Jacob or some name with a J that fits his frame in the same awkward way his jeans hang from his hips. Tanya and I share a quick glance, and I decide he looks like a cross between Eminem and my ninth grade geometry teacher, eyebrows thick and hair thin. I look at Jeremy—or Jordan?—with interest, watching a lanky arm catch the microphone as it threatens to topple, appreciating the precise looseness of the high-tops that prop up the cuffs of what his grandmother (I imagine) calls his dungarees. He has a family now, this kid, a past, and he's managed to leap out of a Bazooka Joe comic to tune his guitar, because yes, he does have one, hidden behind the amp. Tanya leans forward. I sit back and cross my arms.

He sings. The first song is lush and full, an unexpected surprise. I sort of squeal in delight on the inside, but I'm not that type of girl so I play it cool on the exterior. The crowd grooves on it—his friends are here, so that helps—and I manage to flash a smile at one of them because, hey, I'm getting into the mood of all this, too, even though I don't remember what the song is about once it ends.

His second tune is about him, at nineteen, breaking up with his girlfriend. He laughs as he introduces it, mentions there are so many girls out there and he can't believe he was so torn up about this one. The crowd smiles to share the joke, but I look around and see that they all know that nineteen is a terrible age, that the heart has developed neither its full capacity nor its complete armor, and they understand that his prologue is an excuse to save face. As he sings the story, his eyes turn sad, like the deepened sockets of an El Greco figure, and I notice he has the cheekbones to match. I feel a tug somewhere in my chest and decide this kid is good, real good. He's singing about a bedroom wall and a crack or a slant of light, which might sound completely clichéd in some other context, but he's making it work. He looks around and I can tell that he knows the crowd is with him because he smiles to himself and leans closer to the mic and his dimples deepen with the next verse, and all of a sudden I'm picturing, and not on purpose, this boy I met at my summer job when I was sixteen. He had these spectacular eyes—nothing interesting about their color, but man did he know how to use them. And I'm thinking about the first time that he kissed me (which I always count as my *real* first kiss because the ones before it disappeared the moment he leaned in), and that tugging feeling in my chest gives way and I look down and—this is when the story gets weird—I see my heart start to slip out, right through my shirt, from between my third and fourth rib. I look closer and I see that it's not slipping; it's *struggling* to get out of my body, to pull some inflated chamber from the bars of my ribcage. It finally comes free and flops down onto the floor, this purple blob that looks more like an oddly-shaped pickled beat than the hearts I've seen in textbooks, and I'm immediately embarrassed. I glance around, trying to gauge the reaction of the witnesses, but no one seems to have noticed. I look back at the heart, and it's lying there, collecting dust and hair from the dirty floor, and I think, "gross," especially because—yes, it is starting to move. The heart—my heart—is moving. It has these arms that are not really arms but more like knobs that form when a person puts his hand into a sock puppet, and it's using those arms to drag itself across the floor. My heart is bear-crawling towards the stage.

I'm watching it and I suppose to myself that I should be concerned or scared (I've not had a tetanus shot in years), but I'm not, even though my heart has never done this before. Well, I mean, I guess it's *done* this before, but never so suddenly, and never *visibly*. I am shocked, and a little bit intrigued, but mostly breaking out in a humiliated sweat. I try to pull it back, contract my stomach muscles and suck in my breath, but it's determined, and even though it looks jiggly and slimy on the floor, it must have some sort of traction control grip on the wood, because it just keeps dragging itself onward. Jacob, or Jamie, or whoever he is, doesn't seem to have noticed it yet, but it's just a matter of time, because it's headed right for him. That's when I see the long, tentacle-like vein (I think "ventricle," but I know that's not right, even though I can see the word scrawled in my 10th grade bio notebook) that still connects it to my body, and I pause for a second before I grip it because, well, it has some sort of plasma-like stuff clinging to it the way seaweed clings to an anchor line, and I'm not so sure I want to touch it. But I do, and it is wet and strangely cold. I give it a tug. The heart responds like a dog on a leash, letting up for a moment but then forging ahead, and just then a waiter starts to cross between me and the stage, and he's headed right for the vein-rope. I figure, well, it's all over now, and people will begin screaming and freaking out and I'll either die of tetanus because I'm in a dirty bar or an ambulance will whisk me away and I'll become front page news, but all of a sudden he seems to have forgotten something and he doubles back to the tables and ends up taking an alternate route to the kitchen that does

not involve clothes-lining himself on my aorta. I say a small thank-you prayer for that miracle but forget to mention the larger problem, because even though all of this is going on, I catch a line from the chorus of the song and I flash to my ex-boyfriend from college, standing there with his glasses and his eyebrow ring, all intellect in person and romantic love letters from a distance. I actually see him shake hands with the summer job boy, both of them grinning, and my heart jolts ahead, and this time I am pissed so I grab the vein-rope and heave it back, hard, towards me. It staggers wildly, and then I feel the muscles in my stomach release, and the line goes slack.

For a moment I cannot breathe. My heart is right in front of the stage, enjoying its new freedom by waving its sock puppet arms in the air in a Jim-Henson-creation-gone-horribly-hairless-and-wrong burlesque, and I am just waiting for it to produce a lighter from its amorphousness and sway to the rhythm. His buddy yells out “yeah, J!” and I turn and see that he is looking at the kid on stage with this supreme awe and uncensored love in his eyes, and I think to myself, man, that is nice to see, because most dudes don’t look at each other that way. Hell, most *people* don’t, at least not where I’m from. And I notice this thin little wisp of a thread coming from the third button on his shirt, and I follow it and follow it until I see that *this* guy’s heart is *also* on a field trip, except his has made it all the way to Jamie’s shoe, and it’s slowly crawling up his leg. I can’t really tell if either one of them notices, but if they do they are treating the whole situation like it is totally normal. Meanwhile I realize that now that my heart is gone, my lungs have way more room to do their thing, and my body is sucking in these huge gulps of air—which is unsettling in a really interesting kind of way—and I can feel the oxygen filling my limbs and rushing to my brain and the sensation is intoxicating. Jamie is finishing his song with this sweet and sour final chord and his voice is in some minor key, and I’m dizzy with my lung capacity, so when my heart leaps from its number-one-fan station at the base of the stage and lands in the pocket of J-dog’s sweatshirt vest, I just say “fuck it,” and feel my face spread into a grin as I join the shouts and applause.

He starts his third piece and I gather up the vein-rope (really, *nobody* notices?), wind it around my fist and try my best to stick it back into my chest cavity, and by the end of the song (this one is about his musical career—funny in a charming kind of way, but no depth) I’ve managed to erase any evidence of my rogue heart from my torso.

His set is over. Tanya leans over to me: “Wow. He’s good.”

I nod. I can see the shape of my heart as it nestles into his vest pocket. I can’t think of a way to get it back, but I’m not trying too hard either, and I’m not exactly sure why but it may have something to do with the fact that I’ve never breathed so easy in my life. I tell myself the kid probably lives in his mother’s basement and she’ll end up washing the vest in a week or so and the detergent will put an end to it. I smirk at the thought and settle back down into my chair, ignoring the itch developing in my chest.

The kid’s friend gets up there and dedicates a song to Jordan (I guess that’s his real name). Jordan nods in appreciation but his heart stays put, and in the warm brown crescents of his friend’s eyes I see something like a longing that revels in its own perpetuity.

When I get home later I lie in bed and stare at where the ceiling would be if I could see it in the darkness. I try to run through the night but the filmstrip of my memory is cloudy, and that itch has become an ache. Turning on my side, I pull my knees up to my chin and hold on like I’m trying to keep my body from disintegrating. I can feel the promethean organ regenerating in my chest, the sensation building to a pressure that is equal parts love and regret.

Prose Nonfiction Honorable Mentions

On The Edge

Lisa Allocca (SI 02)

I stood at the edge of the cliff looking down. The cliff abruptly ended just inches from my Keds. Tiny, inconsequential pebbles rolled over the drop off as I scuffled away from the mountain's rock ledge. No trees or scrub brush lived here ... at the top of the cliff.

What am I doing here?! Please, God, let me make it through this safely!!! I don't want to die!

I cautiously lifted my head to take a peek down. Large boulders stood guard at the bottom. *We could die here, and no one would know*, I thought to myself. From this great height, our houses on Flanders Road looked like toys dotting a play landscape.

A small breeze whipped my hair away from my face, causing goose bumps on my arms beneath my jacket. I took a small gulp of air, making no sound. I did not want Tanya, my best friend, to see my fear. She was never afraid of anything. In fact, she was the reason why I stood there ... at the edge of Doom.

It was earlier in the day, and she became bored playing records on her record player. We had already performed all of the songs in *Grease*, and we were in the middle of *Abba* when she lifted the needle of her player to stop my solo. Her floor was a garbage heap of costumes and dolls. She swept her blond waves from her face, looked toward her closed door, raised an eyebrow, and whispered. "Let's do something *different!*"

I should have known.

But, Tanya always won her battles, and to be honest, I never really argued with her. She had some sort of weird peer power over me. She always had. Even as my gut screamed *No*, my feet followed her. She always led me to TROUBLE.

We crossed the street and entered the woods behind her neighbor's house. The next thing I knew we were climbing a steep embankment at the base of the mountain that bordered our town.

So there I stood—on the edge of death—without my parents' knowledge or consent.

"I want to get closer," she decided.

What could she mean by that?! I wondered.

She crept to the ledge and sat down on an old stump, a dead root really, that grew out of and back into the cliff, creating a sort of seat out over open air. Her perfectly sculpted legs dangled freely defying Life itself.

"Sit down with me," she smiled, her perfect pearly teeth sparkling in the bright sun. Her little tan legs still dangled precariously over the edge of the cliff. She didn't care to notice that a bird flew beneath her feet into a tree top twenty feet below.

"Ummm, no thanks. I don't want to," I mumbled, studying my sneakers. I hesitantly stepped one step further back toward the trail.

"C'mon!" she said. "Nobody will know. Nobody's here!" She flipped her hair over her shoulder in a way that meant, *I mean business.*

"Tanya, we shouldn't be here ..." My voice quavered with worry as a knot formed in my throat. "I need to go home." Just then a breeze kicked up and a few leaves danced to across the trail and floated out into a sea of nothingness.

Tanya sighed a deep, heavy breath in a condescending manner. She was feigning patience with my attitude.

Her smile turned sour and she grabbed her hair into a thick ponytail and snapped it tight with a band she always wore on her right wrist. She glared at me in her *I-Expect-You-To-Listen-To-Me* way.

“Sit!” she simply said.

And really? Why wouldn't she expect me to listen to her? I thought to myself. I usually always did. *But eating chocolate covered bugs or staying up late to paint our nails or do each other's makeup was different than this!*

I could make this easy and do what she wanted. Or, I could finally take a stand. I had been listening to her and doing what SHE wanted since we were five years old. But, this was wrong! I felt it in my bones. Here, we were alone. There was no adult in sight. No adult even knew where we were!

What should I do?

I took another small step backwards. I listened to the woods ... the breeze in the trees, the rustle of leaves, the sticks creaking, the hum of the crickets and frogs ... waiting for an answer. The sun was beginning to set on the face of the cliff. Soon the path would be dim and dangerous.

It hit me then. *I need to get out of here!* I screamed in my head. *This is nuts!*

I took a huge step onto the small trail we had followed up. “NO!” I stated clearly, jutting my chin out in defiance. “I need to go home,” I asserted as my confidence grew with each word. I started walking away.

A moment later, she followed me in silence, then passed me on the trail with a brush of her shoulder. She always had to be first.

In silence, we climbed up and over rock ledges, ducking tree limbs and brush, as we headed down the mountain.

In silence, we parted ways when we got to our street.

In silence, she ran up her driveway.

And I walked down the road, heading to safety. I glanced back up at the cliff from where we had just traveled and marveled at the sight of the rocks turning red in the dying sun. I looked for the limb on which Tanya sat. But I couldn't see it from the street.

Something that day changed in our relationship. I didn't follow her anymore. For a while, she punished me by asking other girls to sleep over her house in front of me or by asking other girls to sit with her at lunch. But she came around.

Within weeks I was back next to her at lunch, laughing at a joke or looking at *Teen Magazine*. She asked *me* what I wanted to do a little more.

From then on if I did anything she suggested, *it was because I wanted to.*

My Mother's Pie Crust

Barbara Merkelson (SI 89)

My mother, Wanda, knew that her pie crust was the best. Her crust was the flakiest, the lightest, the meltiest in your mouth best. In fact, I never asked for a birthday cake. "Give me a birthday pie," I'd tell my mother.

As soon as my request for a pie left my lips, my mother began her ritual. First, she washed and dried her hands. She moved the cloth between each long thin finger to make sure all her fingers were really dry. Then she readied her utensils: the same crust-making bowl, the same one handled-wooden rolling pin, the metal pie plate, the five-pound bag of flour, dinner fork, tablespoon, measuring cup, shortening, sugar, salt and very cold water were placed on the kitchen counter work space. The oven temperature was set at 425 degrees. All now was ready for the crust making to begin.

I sat across from her and watched the ordinary dinner fork transform the flour, sugar, salt and shortening into little clumps.

"Don't spend too much time making the flour and shortening crumble. You don't want a tough crust," she would say each time as she added the very cold water a bit at a time.

Then she would use both hands to make an irregular-shaped dough ball, pour just enough flour on the counter to create a white circle mound and wipe flour on the rolling pin. The time to make the crust was now at hand. And so the dough ball was removed from the bowl, patted down on the flour, and then turned over to get a dusting of flour on both sides. My mother's rolling pin, one of two once used by my grandmother, pressed the dough into a circle.

"The secret is to roll both sides of the dough," my mother warned. "Anyone can make a pie crust. I don't know why women say they can't do it," she said after completing the rolling out of the other side.

She easily lifted the scalloped-edged circle (her crust never stuck to the counter), placed it in the pie plate and etched fork footprints in the bottom crust.

"The pie has to breathe, you know," she whispered to me.

Fresh fruit or a canned pie filling covered the bottom crust and filled the pie plate. A second and final layer of pie crust was again transformed from dough by my mother's magic. The extra crust hanging below the top of the pie plate was cut away. Then my mother's powdery thumb and first two fingers were used to crimp the end edges into a wave. The dinner fork jabbed here and there on the top crust, or sometimes a knife sliced the openings from which hot juices could bubble. My mother's eyes twinkled as she lifted and placed her latest masterpiece in the oven.

"I do hope the pie is good," she would say as if addressing the oven. I reassured her that the pie would be delicious, and of course it always was.

The left over edges were not thrown away but became crust for an apple dumpling or a mini pie. Usually, my mother placed the rolling pin on my side of the counter and asked, "Barbie, would you like to make the crust?" The mini dessert was my chance to practice. With time I learned more and more about the magic.

My mother's hands are older now and her right hand tends to swell. She doesn't bake as many pies. But when she does, her crust is still the flakiest, the lightest, the meltiest in your mouth best.

2016 Summer Institute Fellows

Night Driving in Ellington, CT
Caitlin Donahue

There's nothing to see in a town without streetlights—
perhaps a huddle of cows lowing in the darkness
or a cornfield imperceptibly growing gold.
A machine with two bright pinpricks for eyes trundles us through
this black country. Manure reeks through the vents
on the sides of a broken car radio in static silence.
Words begin to cling to my lips & bead away as your head turns
toward your own reflection in the passenger window.
You begin to nod off, face pressed to your sphere of breath
fogging the windshield. Hands clenched
on the steering wheel, I pass home
and keep going, driving north—*do you want to keep going?*
I'd reach Vermont or another place with other cows & corn.
Out of the dark looms a headless mailbox,
a possum's milk-blue stare & scuttle, a newspaper smeared
across a puddle. 83 is a lonely road to somewhere lonelier.
Soon I'll have to turn back as the sky stains ink-purple
to curl up, dreaming of Vermont, turning away
from the question you never answered.

Fighting Myself

Alexandria Bottelsen

Everyone else was laughing. My mouth hung open in half-smiling awe because I didn't think what I had said was all that amusing. I smile, small, toothless, and genuine, but on the inside the wheels spin quickly, driving my mind off the cliff of endless torment. *Of course it wasn't funny, you idiot. They're laughing to be polite. They don't really like you that much anyway. You're lucky that they happen to be on the same soccer team as you.*

No, that's not it. I continue to nod and pretend to follow along with the conversation that has continued post-laughter, but I feel myself start to play with my long, mouse brown hair, breaking my otherwise well-rehearsed poker face. Luckily no one notices. They are far too busy chattering away and enjoying the break from practice, giving me time to attempt to compose myself. These girls are my friends, I try to reassure myself, and I know all that polite nonsense is untrue. I try desperately to push against the anxious version of myself gaining traction in my head. And yet ...

You're right, they weren't being polite. Why would they feel the need to be polite to you? They were all actually laughing AT you, mocking you. Instead of cracking the joke, you're the butt of it, left out and friendless because you aren't worth it.

Back in reality, I absently nod in agreement because everyone else is, and I feel my face flush despite myself. Sam says something smart, typical her, and the girls smirk and nod. All of a sudden, the smiles shared between close friends feel sharp, pointed at me and me alone. Tiny movements and gestures, which usually allow me to read people and tend to them accordingly, are now being turned against me. If only I could hear what they were thinking instead of being buried under my own thoughts.

On second thought, no. I don't think I want to know. I might not be able to take it. I excuse myself briefly to get some water, flashing my empty bottle and knowing I'm going to need to refill if I can't manage to stop the flood building behind my eyes. The problem with the voices in my head is that they are So. Damn. Convincing.

You Will Need Other People

Laura Bittner

“You will need other people. And you will need to be that other person to someone else, a living, breathing, screaming invitation to believe better things.”

When you’re in an abusive relationship, you’d be surprised how many people speak up and share their stories of abuse. You’re not sure what signs they see when he’s with you, but they notice. You learn that Megan in the front end, Barb and Molly from the deli, Danielle in bakery, Cory in the meat department, and your own mother have all been in at least one abusive relationship. They share their stories with you, connecting with you, and try to convince you to get the fuck out of yours.

“Speak the truth, even if your voice shakes.”

Leaving an abusive relationship takes a lot of debate. Lots of pro and con lists. Lots of, Is he going to kill me? Is he going to kill himself? Where do I go from here? Questions that you want answers to, but you won’t know until you give it a try. The least you can do for yourself is save yourself from a narcissistic personality. No one has time for that.

“Take the first step in faith. You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just the first step.”

If his brother tells you that you need to leave him, consider where he is coming from. He will share with you his own story of escaping a different kind of abuse. His ex-wife. He will tell you about the childhood his brother and he made it through with their abusive father. He will say, “The way he held your face is the same way our dad held my face before a swing came.”

“What makes you vulnerable makes you beautiful.”

Your mother will share her story with you. Her boyfriend that traveled with her to the west coast. It will surprise you that she was ever in a similar position. You see your mother as strong.

“I am living a story. I will not give up.”

With the help of all of these survivors, you yourself will become one. They will help you escape. You will realize it is not just your story that you need to represent, but all of these women and men that understand. And even though it will be tough, remember these stories, hold onto their strength, and keep yourself away. Don’t let his manipulation trick you. When he tells you he’s changed and presents you with a diamond ring, respond with a “no.” The beautiful blue topaz and diamond necklace he bought you will get thrown out the window of his second story bedroom. You will walk out of there with your pride in place and remember that your story is not over and he is not the end.

“Tell them to look up. Tell them to remember the stars. The stars are always there but we miss them in the dirt and clouds. We miss them in the storms. Tell them to remember hope. We have hope.”

Pitch Stark

Amanda Greenwell

Click trap fear snap
Eye quake sweat slake

Sharp gloom mind wound
Tongue stale hair wail

Moan hall pull thrall
Jump wait beat late

Flush feet stick heat
Creak smack breath wrack

Far stair ice lair
Roar edge thought wedge

Blood flight air bite
Stone drip gulp pit

Whiff snarl joint gnarl
Trip reach heart breach

Skin curl neck whirl
Burst core whip door

Hand-Over-Hand

Erika Karwowski

Stage One: Shock

The alarm goes off. It's 2:30 in the morning. *Didn't I just go to sleep?* Well, yes actually. Just a few hours ago we were sitting around the campfire, sipping beers, and staring into the enflamed logs, glowing blue and green from a "Mystical Fire" pack we bought around the corner for \$1.99.

I hear the rest of the camp stirring. Can I get away with sleeping an extra ten minutes? Five minutes? One minute? Paul taps me and mumbles, "Time to get up." Knowing there's no getting out of this, I pull myself up, grab my pile of clothes, and head over to the camp bathrooms. Strapping the headlamp on, I try to walk as quietly as possible, not to wake the other campers still asleep in their nylon tents. *I wish I was them*, I think to myself as I approach the lit-up building.

Pulling on my leggings, lacing my Merrells, tying up my hair, I look over at the other members of my morning hike crew doing the same. Two of them have a look of glee on their faces, so I force a smile. Another walks in, and we share a similar sentiment, with her face looking tired and her lips folded downward. In the mirror, my eyes scream at me while I put in my contacts. I force them anyway, and blink. Following the pebbled path back to our camp, Paul is waiting by the car with the rest of our party. I fill my pack with Cliff bars and bananas; by the time we reach the summit, it will be breakfast.

We walk to the car, slide ourselves in, and make our way to the trailhead.

Stage Two: Guilt

The lot we intended to park in was closed. Too early I suppose. We park in a lot a bit farther up the road, and walk back down to get to our starting point.

It is now 3:30, and the sky remains dark, but we all wear our lamps to guide our way. The trail's length in theory is short, about two miles to the top. Unfortunately, in hiking terms, the shorter the distance, the tougher the climb. It starts off relatively gradual, with an incline that I can manage. I quickly fall toward the back of the group, knowing that my pace is slow, and that I am horrendously out of shape. Paul starts off in the front, but slows down to keep with me. "We're accountability-buddies," he states gleefully. I smile, knowing that he could easily lead the group, but chooses to stick with me instead.

Soon, the theory proves true, an open rock face appears, and the next mile is strictly hand-over-hand. Sighing to myself, I slowly but surely begin my ascent.

Stage Three: Bargaining

The first few rocks are always fun. A rush of childhood nostalgia runs through my veins, picturing myself as a little girl, climbing over rocks barefoot along the beach. It was such an adventure, seeing how far out I could go, and how close to the water I could get. Imagining the rock jetty on my favorite Rhode Island beach, my mood lightens, and my mind begins to wander.

That memory distracts me for a bit, until my heavy breathing brings me back. I realize that I am nowhere near that beach, but on a mountain, with no option of stopping. After a few slips while hiking over these boulders, I decide my thinking needs to simplify. Where is the next place I can put my foot? Don't fall. That rock looks wet, let's avoid it.

My breathing becomes heavier, and the group in front of us is advancing at a quicker pace. I'm not alone, I'm with three other novice hikers, and Paul. I start to take more breaks, and although it's a chilly morning, I take off my zip-up for some relief. Looking toward the top of this climb, I make a deal with myself. Just make it until that rock, then you can take break. I make it, take a break, and the bargaining continues.

Only a hundred feet left, surely at the top there will be some walking with no incline? Pulling myself up the next rock face reveals another steep climb. *Shit*, I say aloud. Paul smirks, but the others feel my angst and let out a similar moan.

Stage Four: Loneliness

The muscles in my legs are continuously throbbing, and my heart rate must be exceeding 180 beats per minute. I wonder if anyone can hear how loudly I'm breathing? Instinct tells me to end this misery, but practicality tells me to keep going. If I stop for too long, my momentum is lost. If I sit down, there's no getting up. *If only I went to the gym more.*

None of these thoughts are helpful; in turn they act as a diversion. One would think distraction in this case would be good, but I become careless with my movements and almost lose control a few times. I go back to my simplified thinking: step, climb, breath, pull, pause, drink, continue. Although I'm with a group of five, no one really speaks. It comes to mind how individual this hike is. Every once in a while you'll hear a curse word when another set of rocks comes along, most often coming from myself, but everyone is focused on their body and making it move up the mountain.

The climbing pattern becomes involuntary; I have an automatic sense of where I need to move. I wonder how far the other group is? They are completely out of sight by now. Looking around, I see the glow of the sun beginning to emerge from behind an adjacent hill. A few feet up, Paul is standing. "Come look," he says. "A vista awaits."

Stage Five: The Upward Turn

My coworker, who is an avid hiker, once told me to always appreciate the vistas along the way to the summit. Many hikers, including Paul, are focused on the end goal, and don't take the time to appreciate the scenery along the way. I'd like to think that I've helped Paul see the value in stopping for vistas. Additionally, it's an excuse to take a break without feeling like you are slowing the group down. *Judgment-free resting*, I think to myself.

Looking out, I can see the rocky coast of Maine to the left. Morning fog creeps out from the ocean onto the neighboring land. As my eyes sweep across, countless ponds are scattered through the park, with miles of evergreens surrounding them. I am suddenly reenergized, and yearn to see more. *This, I think, is why I'm hiking.*

Stage Six: Working Through

After ten more minutes of an upward climb, we reach the end of the boulder. "An alpine meadow," Paul says. The terrain is mostly flat at first. Walking around the corners, we can see the summit in sight. This does not necessarily mean it is close in distance; we still have a half mile to go. The rocks are flat and long, and my shoes do their best to grip. The mood has lightened among the group; no more hand-over-hand.

The surrounding environment is barren, like most mountaintops. Some shrubs pop up here and there, but we are exposed, and winds pick up. I slide back into my zip up to try and protect from these strong gusts. We walk in a line, moving one foot in front of the other, knowing we will soon will summit.

A road appears, and a car drives by. *How nice, I think, for those people, to have simply driven to the top while we had been hiking for the past two hours.* Erika at 2:30 this morning would have been jealous, but I knew future me would find a sense of accomplishment in completion. We follow the road to the top and make our way toward the summit marker.

Stage Seven: Acceptance

No word can truly capture the image you get when looking out at Acadia National Park from the top of Cadillac Mountain. On one end you have the Atlantic Ocean in all its glory, with its never-ending miles of blue water stretching far beyond sight. Several small islands dot the coast, begging to be explored. Along the other side you see crystal lakes, endless trees, and neighboring mountains, which are smaller in size, and lack the majesty Cadillac exudes. Fresh air fills your lungs, and although it's windy and becoming increasingly colder, the sense of achievement takes over and I feel none of it.

Looking across, we notice the other members of our group; they've been there for about twenty-five minutes, and were trying to hide from the wind. We all take our obligatory pictures, and take in as much as we can before we too, desire a shield from the elements. Walking down toward the rocks, we sit, and drink in the view, along with some water. "What time is it?" someone asks.

"6:00 A.M." another person replies.

sin-ə-mən
Meg Bakken

Shaved inner bark, dried
curls into quills
sweet smell, crumbling
roughly pounded, macerated
in seawater, golden yellow color
darkens, hot taste
ginger jar, brown sugar &
rum soaked raisins
oven door opens
memories waft, of
tradition, grandparents, family
delicate warm scent
home

Hands Free

Jacqueline Kremer

The light turns yellow
and I hit the brakes.

Across the street, to my left
a young man in shorts and ragged T-shirt
rides
—no hands—
on an old BMX bike with wheels too small.
Talking on a cell phone,
he coasts confidently through the intersection.
Then, lowering the phone,
he lifts his other hand from his lap,
takes a long drag from a cigarette,
and continues down the road.

I sit in my minivan
side airbags at the ready,
seat belt buckled,
thinking about the
high-fiber breakfast
and multivitamin I had this morning.
How I methodically
applied sunscreen,
checked the weather,
locked the house,
put on my polarized sunglasses,
and drove well within the speed limit.

The light turns green.
I pull ahead,
passing the young man,
and feel just a tad bit envious.

Advice Column
Marc Zimmerman

Dear Adam,

I'm having trouble with my girlfriend. She doesn't know what the hell she wants and is constantly confusing me with trick questions. Last night I offered to take her out to dinner anywhere she wanted. She told me anything was fine and then rejected the five places I mentioned so she could think about it. After an hour, I made myself a sandwich and then she got mad at me and I had to sleep on the couch. What the hell is wrong with her? How do I keep from getting in trouble? Is there any hope for our relationship?

Sincerely,
PB&J is Better Than Nothing

Hey PB,

Yeah, you've got a serious problem but it is not what you think. Trust me, after 21 years of marriage, I have learned EVERYTHING about women. Here's the not-so-big secret: they are not logical and never do or say what makes sense. I have some clear advice that will help you deal with her insanity on a daily basis:

1. Don't just agree or say "uh-huh" or "whatever" or "fine." This is a clear path to an argument that you will never win. Trust me, you need to put down the remote and look at her. Just push pause on the DVR first.
2. Take the wrong stand. Try to figure out what she MIGHT want (although this is a challenge) and then disagree with her. She will be thrilled that you are listening. Pick shades instead of blinds or linoleum over tile.
3. Argue with her on a daily basis about little things like doilies and toilet paper. Who cares if it rolls over or under as long as some is left on the roll? This makes her feel like she needs to "fix" you. Women love to take on projects. It makes them feel needed. If things are going too well, she will suspect you are cheating on her.
4. Are you paying attention? After putting up a believable fight, reluctantly give in and admit that she is right. You may not really care but she does. You definitely do not want to win arguments EVER. This makes her even happier and, honestly, do you really care what restaurant you go to or what color her dress is as long as there is beer?

The proof of this is in my 21 years of marriage. And the start was not easy. She wanted ivory and teal for wedding colors. What color is teal anyway? I think it is a greenish color but I'm still not sure. I held out for gray and blue, which are simple colors on the palette that I know, but I really didn't care. I let her win and you should have seen how happy she was. The same thing went for the Jordan almonds as favors and the wedding meal. I still don't remember what we ate but I remember the open bar, my one victory. Actually, she wanted it for her family so I maneuvered her to "win" that one too! I almost got to hang out and watch NASCAR with them.

Good luck and remember to give up!

Adam

P.S. I am now recovering from a concussion after being hit with a frying pan that "slipped" out of her hands, but I agreed that she was right and that I'm an idiot. Keep giving up!

The Body

Jennifer Norman

The Body

The bone beneath the flesh
Corporeal and fresh
rugged hard
stark and bleached alabaster
singing the song of childhood with the voice of a surgical bard.

The flesh above the bone
melting memories that weigh like stone
each piece of peace purchased with a pound of flesh
whispering across the face a shadow, a breath

Angular sharp, and deep
cavernous and steep
elbows and collarbones and sternum
food no longer the opium

Cold, raked over, thirsting
Conglomeration of rock and biting
Until I am a skeleton chalky
standing here finally not talking.

The Brain

I am the center of someone else's novel.
A central growing force of a protagonist
waiting for the plot to thicken.

Passively resisting the entropy of the fictional elements
as they carry me forward toward the climax of destiny.

I am the black hole character of a life
steered by the antagonistic forces
shoving and bullying their way
signal turns and headlights
driving themselves each and every way.

I am the starring role of a play
I did not author
nor audition for.

The Spirit

I worship at your altar of ash
blank and empty words that take up space

but have no substance

An abuse of the righteous kind
that I kneel, bow, kowtow and obey
out of my own selfish need for affirmation.

I worship at your altar of denial
deep, profound, and less any sense of self
I worship at the altar of ash
decomposed promises and the spillage of words.

Undertow

Courtney Payzant

Eighteen years ago, while the children were growing up, we bought a summer house on the eastern shore. Not that we could afford it then—not really, but the land called to me. The house was only a shell, and it was a mess. The man who had begun building it was an alcoholic, and his liver failed before he was able to finish.

More importantly, though, the site was exactly on the spot where my father took Tom, Barb, and me camping when we were young, when that land had been a campground. He took us there, leaving my mother Janey and my siblings and me at the site at night while he went into town to drink. It was best when he stayed out till morning, with some local woman, so that he'd come home weak and bleary-eyed. Otherwise, at least one of us would wake up with blackened, tear-stained, or sleep-deprived eyes. Not that that was any different from the way it was at home.

I like to think about the difference at that site now. I built our house there; I stay home with my family every night; and my wife and children wake up rested.

And I think *he* was proud of my house on the bay, too.

Every year, even when the COPD was so bad that he couldn't walk for more than ten seconds at a time, he drove the twelve hours north with my mother, who shared a car with him out of necessity. Her eyes were too bad to sustain the whole trip. At least he let her sing her church songs on the ride up—I can't bear that. But he had something to make up for, and I don't.

He never talked much, even when we were younger. He listened a lot. I think the illness made it even more difficult for him to speak. He spent the last years of his life nearly mute, aside from complaints.

He lived five minutes from us at home, during the fall, winter, and spring. My brother Tom visited him rarely, our sister Barbara even less. Our mother Janey, who lived in the same complex as he did, saw him less often than we did, though I don't think anyone could blame her for that.

Sally insisted that if we invited my mother to dinner, *he* would have to come, too. It was Sally who took my father to doctor appointments, picked up his prescriptions, rushed him to the hospital if he got really bad. Barbara could say that she lived too far. Tom could say that he was a single parent. I could say that I had to work to provide for my family. But really, none of us wanted to be with him. And what did we owe him, anyway? If we treated him the way he had treated us ... well, I would never tell my children about that.

One time he had to have an emergency surgery. None of us went except Sally. She stayed with him all night. He cried when he woke up and saw her face, so overjoyed that Sally, at least, was there.

And still, the walls of his apartment were filled with pictures of us, of Steph, Sam, and Sarah, of Bianca, Tom's daughter, of Barb's daughters and their families, of his great-grandchildren, and of Janey, my mother—mostly of her. There were pictures of everyone together, at many different ages, and shots of Janey in miniature, in four-by-sixes with her children, with her brothers, and of just her face, neck up, in full eleven-by-fourteen frames, as if she were really there.

And *still*, he came to my house on the shore every summer for two weeks at a time. Sally would say, "If Janey's going to come, Ronnie'll have to drive her." I tried suggesting that Janey needn't come, either, but Sally always acted like that was a joke.

He would sit in the middle of the green couch in the living room on the second floor, staring at the blue bay through the picture windows that took up the entire wall, saying nothing. When we bought the property, the only beauty that the ugly square, squat, shell of a house held was in those windows. In the later years when he could still make the drive, he even slept on that couch in front of the windows, in his spot.

When he lay dying, it was almost involuntarily that I went to him. If I had stopped to think, I may not have gone at all, but we all went in the end. Sally would have insisted, anyway. Sarah was at school and Steph had moved away, with Dan, but they rushed home. Barbara made the drive with her new husband, and Tom left work early. Ronnie was silent to the last. Janey consented to sit by his side, but she didn't reach out to him, not even at the end. He watched her face, and she stared at his quilt, his body barely a small hill on the otherwise perfectly flat landscape of his bed.

Most of the money he left went to Janey. The rest of his money he set aside for a celebration. He wanted no funeral, no wake, no fuss—just to have a party at my house on the shore. He had intended to set enough aside to transport and lodge his extended family near the bay.

Tom and Barb bickered over nearly worthless furniture and pictures, his one decent recliner and his flat screen TV. But none of us wanted to *celebrate* his life. If it weren't for Sally, I'd have put my foot down. To her credit, she usually does what I decide is best for us, but in this, she won. I consented to having the party at our house, but neither my time nor my money would fuel it. He had had enough of both when he was alive, and he had spent them carelessly.

Still, it was magical to see Sally and my girls work to prepare. They ordered tents, tables and chairs, trays of chicken Marsala and sautéed green beans and mashed potatoes, kegs of beer and bottles of wine. Even Barb was attracted to the planning; she had inherited my mother's taste for making things more beautiful than they are. She bought streamers and helped Sarah fill clear glass vases with violet and white lupines from the field across the street and from the banks on the sides of the tiny, red dirt road. Sally and Steph baked strawberry-rhubarb pie, Dutch apple tarts, and blueberry-sour cream coffee cake.

On the day of the party, I watched as Sally and Barb brought out their purchases and Steph distributed the decorations around the tent and tables with Sarah's help. I took out my good whiskey, the bottle I kept in the cabinet above the fridge, thinking that that at least could help to brighten this day. Sam, Dan, and Tom joined me, and we sipped from our glasses and sat on the green couch and looked out the windows at the bay.

My children *did* look beautiful together, dressed neatly in whites and blues. Sally had always loved to dress them similarly as children, and they unconsciously kept up the habit. I saw my girls getting ready in our bathroom mirror, golden and brown tresses mingling, rummaging through Sally's makeup and jewelry cases.

Later, our relatives came in droves: Janey's six brothers and their wives, my father's last sister, my cousins and second cousins. Tom and Bianca had stayed in our house, of course. Barb and her daughters stayed across the bay, still near. Once everyone was there, we talked for hours, circulating the crowd on that bright, warm day in July—a day that can be rare in the north. I introduced my children to relatives they had seen only once, when they were small, and even Sally met some cousins that she hadn't before.

Without meaning to, I began to enjoy myself. Even Tom looked at pictures and caught up on family gossip, which spread about more and more as plates were piled

and glasses were filled again. I could see my father sitting in a chair in the corner, saying nothing except to complain about irritating perfumes and lumpy mashed potatoes, as he would if he were still alive.

After everyone had been met and fed, Sally approached me with a small plastic container, the kind that I might have carried my lunch in. But this one held my father. She told me what to do, but I was reluctant. I looked at my children. Sam nodded to me, and I followed him to the edge of the water, carrying my father's remains. Before stepping into the bay, I turned to look at the crowd beneath the tent. Barb was smiling, approving. Janey only watched me, absently, and Tom met my gaze. I saw him hesitate, but then he nodded, too, and walked over to join us. We waded far into the shallow bay—we, the three remaining Gallant men—and we poured my father into the wind above the blue sea.

Parent Teacher Conference

Bridget O'Connor

I had been warned about you from Day 1. The woman, the myth, the legend. The Unpleasable Parent. One of those fabled helicopter moms who never says anything heinous enough to be asked to leave a meeting but always makes sure to say something scathing enough to make you question your decision to enter the field of education. "I'm sorry to say that you'll have to deal with a very difficult parent this year," my principal told me two months before school started. But nothing could really prepare me for meeting you for the first time, during my first ever parent teacher conference.

You come in "like a wrecking ball," and I unconsciously brace myself against the child-sized, blue plastic chair. I have never seen you before in person, but your hulking aggression matches the tone of many an email I've received from you in past weeks, so I recognize you right away. My entire team is there, but you glance past them, looking for the youngest one, the novice, the newbie, the neophyte.

Me.

Your eyes narrow like they can shoot out lasers capable of cutting someone in half, and I try not to flinch. You march your red, furious face over to the table and throw yourself down in the seat directly across from me. My team leader stretches his hand over the table to you, as a peace offering.

"Hi, Mrs. Hanes it's nice to—" he begins.

But, before he can finish, you stare straight into my soul with your laser eyes, barking, "Are you the Language Arts teacher?" in the same way in which an unsatisfied customer might say, "Let me speak to your manager THIS INSTANT."

I force a smile on my face and answer. Taking a page from my team leader, I offer you my sweaty hand to shake, and my actual name, which is, oddly enough, not "Language Arts Teacher."

You stare at my hand with a grimace and take it reluctantly, as if I just offered you a platter of expired lunch meat.

I open my mouth to speak, but you've already started.

"So. My son has a 79 in your class. Why didn't you tell me he was failing?" Your voice rises on the word "failing" and echoes across the cold tiles.

Failing? I think. How is the higher end of average considered failing? If something isn't above average, is it automatically "failing?" If someone asks, "How are you doing?" should you answer, "I'M FAILING," instead of, "I'm fine?" Should—

My team leader coughs and interrupts me from my reverie. I'm not sure how to answer this delicately, so I go with the truth.

"In the future, I can certainly stay in contact with you more frequently about Jamie's grades. But actually, a C+ is in the average range."

Wrong answer.

Your face grows from fever red to a startling shade of burgundy. Your lips become so thin that I wonder if it's biologically possible for lips to somehow glue themselves together.

After ten seconds of unnerving silence, you speak. "Are you ... saying ... that my child ... is average?"

What's the right answer here? Yes? No? Is this a rhetorical question? Is this an *actual* question? I'm waiting for Ashton Kutcher to burst out of the supply closet and yell, "You've been Punk'd!" Then I remember that the show *Punk'd* hasn't been on the air for five years. Well, shit.

I start, "No, Jamie is a wonderful student, and he's a pleasure to have in class. I would be happy to work out a—"

"It's no WONDER my CHILD is FAILING," you interrupt at an increased volume, "When you are teaching a book that is such a bad influence on children."

Frozen in fear, I have to thaw my brain out for a few seconds to realize what book you're talking about. We just started *The Outsiders*, a critically acclaimed coming-of-age novel that I'm pretty sure my parents had read in school. Is this really the bad influence you're referring to?

"*The Outsiders*, ma'am?"

"Oh, I've done my homework on this book." You pull out a stack of papers secured with a binder clip and slam it down on the table. "It has been banned in school districts for 'Ungodly themes, violence, and its depiction of children with no parental role models!'" You put air-quotes around these claims, which I'm sure came from the most reliable sources. "How could you let my child read such garbage?"

My team leader is about to speak, maybe to end the meeting, but I hold up my hand to stop him.

Little do you know that I, also, have "done my homework." On you. I was anticipating a struggle. I pull out two stacks of binder-clipped papers and try not to mimic how you slammed your packet on the table.

"Well, if you would like to learn more about my curriculum, I have a copy of it right here. I would be happy to answer any questions you have." I slide the first packet over to you and gesture to the second, larger packet. "If you would like your child to opt out of reading *The Outsiders*, you can complete this paperwork and go through the process." I emphasize the words "paperwork" and "process" to subtly suggest what a pain in the ass it would actually be for you to try to ban this book.

You focus your laser eyes on the large packet, and, instead, pick up my curriculum, flipping through its pages quickly, the way I've seen many of my students do when they're pretend-reading. "Well, it looks like there's a lot of reading and writing. We'll see how he fares with the other books. Expect to hear from me soon." You stand up abruptly and shove the chair crookedly into the table.

"Okay! You can email me if you have any other questions," I call after you as you march to the door. "It was nice meeting you!"

You pause and guffaw, "No, it wasn't," before slamming the door behind you. My team and I sit in stunned silence for a few seconds.

"Well, that went better than expected," my team leader says.

The Nestling

Rebecca Snay

A wreath hung on my front door,
Scarlet and ivory roses,
Woven in a boundless ring.

At the bottom, a rounded nest,
A bassinet cradling four eggs,
Smooth and speckled.

I watched the mother bird,
A cushion against the rain and darkness,
Brooding for weeks.

Under the gentle sun, the eggs hatched.
Shielded by the wreath,
The baby birds emerged.

The mother doted on her chicks,
Flying out, returning, flying out, returning,
The featherless bodies awaiting her.

Without notice, the nest fell to the ground.
Bits of dried leaves and grass scattered.
The bowl, collapsed into a mass of debris,
Crumbled into,
A memory.

Already far from the nest,
The fledglings were gone,
Finding refuge in the forest.

Except one,
A nestling, a fallen baby, forced out,
By the eagerness of the others.

It shivered on the black mulch,
Taking in desperate, lonely breaths,
Lifting its head, landing on its back.

I thought: Hope perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words.
The next day, under the gentle sun,

The nestling too was gone.

Spirits
Amanda Ligas

Spirits

Those who are gone,
Never really abandon
Us. They show they remain,
in the autumn
breezes,
Swirling leaves around your feet.
As you seek
Solace, in the evening air.
They speak
in the hollow
crackle,
of the leaves brushing pavement,
and each other.
Becoming part of your conversation,
listening accepting
praising forgiving
understanding, your void,
the missing spaces.
Caressing your soul,
Reminding you,
You're never
truly
Alone.

Teacher-As-Writer & Writers Retreat Contributions

My Walk and the Bull

Julia Kneeland

Awakening early one hot August morning I decided to take a walk. Being a teacher made my summer walks seem like sips of freedom. I put on my worn comfortable sneakers and took off. My road is quiet and wooded with little traffic and few homes. The day was bright and sunny with just enough breeze to take the edge off the humidity to make the walk doable.

After turning left at the intersection I noticed something unusual standing in front of my neighbor's split railed fence. It was a large, dark animal. Seeing various types of animals was nothing new. On previous walks I'd seen deer, horses, cows, foxes, wild turkeys, and geese. This one, however, seemed distinct.

Being slightly near-sighted, I walked closer, trying to focus in on what this creature was. Using the process of elimination, I tried to identify my new friend. Not a horse, too short and thick; not a dog, too big; and not quite a cow. Finally, a match! It was a large black bull with black eyes and no horns. He didn't appear annoyed, just lost and definitely out of place. He gave me a sideways glance as he continued chewing some grass. Choosing not to disturb his breakfast, I quickly turned and crossed back over the intersection, walking in the opposite direction.

Stubbornly feeling I wasn't about to let some wandering bull put me off my walk, I continued on. As I passed under the comfortable shade of the lush canopy of green foliage and by the peaceful paddock of horses, I wondered how that bull happened to be in my neighbor's yard. Probably it had just wandered away from one of the nearby farms. After a while I decided it was time to turn and head for home. Even the shade from the trees couldn't keep away the thick heaviness in the air.

Starting back down the road, I noticed my new friend was heading right towards me, just as if this were a typical stroll for both of us. I was shocked and amused at the same time. I just couldn't believe he had crossed over the intersection and followed me. Sometimes the cars zoomed right along our back roads and he could have gotten hit. Then reality struck! What should I do? There were basically two options. I could turn around and take the long way home. That would mean walking an additional three to four miles in the heat. Or I could take my chances and cautiously walk by the bull. Certainly we could share the road, right? Yes, it was a narrow road but I could stay way over on "my" side and hope that the bull would stay on "his" side.

I had a plan. If the bull came too far over on my side of the road I would simply climb up a tree. I was pretty certain bulls couldn't climb trees. As I walked towards him he watched me and I watched for a suitable tree. It seemed like an eternity until I got past that bull and there was a comfortable distance between us. I occasionally peeked around to see if he was going to turn and follow me. At the same time he was curiously turning and looking at me, too! I finally made it home safe, no bull. I just had to laugh to myself thinking, How would I have ever explained to my family about a bull following me home?

Biographies

Lisa Allocca

Lisa Allocca has been a sixth grade English teacher at William J. Johnston Middle School in Colchester for the past 20 years. She really hopes to become the next JK Rowling, Suzanne Collins, or Mary Downing Hahn—or a Broadway superstar—whichever comes first. But for now, she enjoys reading, gardening, photography, and spending time with her amazing family and friends.

Meg Bakken

Meg Bakken teaches third graders in the town of Scotland. Her students, colleagues, friends, and family bring sunshine to her day. Besides antiquing with her charming husband, walking with her little rescue dog, and playing with her sweet rescue cat, she enjoys a good cup of coffee.

Laura Bittner

Laura Bittner is a fifth grade teacher and lover of reading. When she is not in her classroom, she can be found reading, listening to music, traveling, hiking, kayaking, baking, or spending time with her crazy, wonderful family.

Alexandria Bottelesen

Alexandria Bottelsen is a graduate student at the University of Connecticut working towards her Master's in Curriculum and Instruction. She recently finished her student teaching at E.O. Smith High School and is currently placed as a writing support intern at Smith Middle School in Glastonbury. Outside of her classwork and internship through Neag, she is the Coordinator of High School Outreach for the UConn Writing Center. Through the center she works as a peer tutor, does research, and works with local middle and high schools to open peer-based writing centers of their own.

Caitlin Donahue

Caitlin Donahue is a fourth year English and creative writing teacher at Stafford High School. After graduating with a BFA in Writing, Literature, & Publishing from Emerson College, she earned her MA in Curriculum and Instruction from the Neag School of Education. She is also a UConn English Early College Experience adjunct. In her fleeting spare time, Caitlin enjoys learning karate, boating, and playing alto saxophone in the South Windsor Community Band.

Amanda Greenwell

Amanda M. Greenwell is a former high school English teacher and current Writing Center Administrator at the University of Saint Joseph. She also teaches courses in children's and young adult literature and English education in the English Department at Central Connecticut State University. Currently, she is a doctoral student in the English Department at the University of Connecticut, where she focuses on children's and young adult literature. She enjoys writing creatively and is determined to make more time for it.

Erika Karwowski

Erika Karwowski is a 5th grade teacher at South Elementary in Windsor Locks, and previously taught 4th grade in Woodstock for four years. She attended Endicott College for her undergraduate studies in Elementary Education, and earned a M.A. from Fairfield University in Curriculum and Instruction, with a focus in Literacy. During the institute, many of her pieces were inspired from her time as an employee at a local family amusement park; her experience there offered endless writing opportunities.

Julia Kneeland

Julia Kneeland has been teaching in Connecticut public schools for the past twenty-five years. She started her teaching career in music education. Then she got her cross endorsement in elementary education. For the past fourteen years she has been teaching language arts and social studies in fifth grade in Tolland. For many years she has had the privilege of participating in the Teacher-as-Writer Workshops at UConn. She has a passion for writing and often shares her writing with her students.

Jacqueline Kremer

A teacher of young children since 1986, Jacqueline is happiest when she is baking chocolate chip cookies, skiing/running/hiking/bicycling/walking/figure skating, surrounded by children's books, shopping at Goodwill, laughing at the antics of her two (mostly grown-up) children, and spending time with her wonderful husband. She is passionate about learning ... learning ... learning! Jacqueline walks through life with a joyful smile and a grateful heart.

Susan Laurençot

Susan Laurençot teaches English at Montville High School. She enjoys bringing her love of writing and literature to her students.

Amanda Ligas

Amanda Ligas teaches history at Granby Memorial High School. Although she prefers reading over writing, she faced her fears of writing this summer at the Connecticut Writing Project Summer Institute at UConn. She looks forward to sharing everything she learned with her students.

Barbara Merkelson

Barbara Merkelson received her BA in English from SUNY-Albany and her MS in Education from Central Connecticut State University. She attended the CWP Summer Institute in 1989. She retired from the Bloomfield School system in 2007.

Gilbert Moon

“Bridge” was selected from a collection of poems written over a period of forty years from enlisted military duty assignments in the western Pacific to a brief period of photographing African wildlife on the Serengeti grasslands and in Botswana’s Okavango Delta. A Connecticut Writing Project Summer Institute participant in 1990, Gil Moon later taught English to retirement; toured Poland, Israel, and Italy on seminars; rafted the Grand Canyon’s 270 miles of rapids; and with five grandchildren as blessed distractions is currently spending lots of time editing new work and revising past efforts.

Jennifer Norman

Jennifer Norman is an educator at H.H. Ellis Technical High School in Danielson. She is the mother of Samuel (age second grade and boogers) and Claire (age kindergarten and bossy pants). She is married to Mr. Glen, a dairy farmer (age tired and joyful). Together they make their home in Griswold on Norman Road. They are aware that this is also their last name, but get a chuckle when people point it out. Jennifer enjoys baking bread, making ice cream, and generally goofing off with friends and loved ones. She can often be found writing lesson plans while driving her McCormick Farmall 200.

Bridget O’Connor

Bridget is a seventh grade English/Language Arts teacher. In addition to teaching, Bridget enjoys reading long novels, hiking, playing piano, and writing about life’s awkward moments

Courtney Payzant

Courtney Payzant teaches high school at Lyme-Old Lyme High School. While she is passionate about teaching high school English, she also enjoys coaching track and is currently pursuing a master’s in English. She manages her busy schedule with the loving support of her fiancé (who is also a coach and teacher) and their two funny little puppies.

Joanne Peluso

Joanne Peluso is an English teacher at Bristol Eastern High School and a member of the CWP Summer Institute Class of 2007.

Kimberly Perschmann

Currently in her 14th year of teaching ELA and her ninth year at Northwestern Middle School in Regional District 7, Kimberly Perschmann earned a bachelor's degree in English and education at Central Connecticut State University. She completed a master’s program in Holistic Thinking through The Graduate Institute, and most recently received her administrator’s certification, although for now she remains in the classroom. As a 1999 CWP Summer Institute Fellow, she embraces the teacher-as-writer

philosophy, writing poetry on her own for years. She has participated in many poetry workshops, and over the summer won Third Honorable Mention in the Flash Ekphrastic National Poetry Competition. When she's not teaching she's usually hanging out with her three children, reading, watching a movie, binge-watching great TV, or hiking with her dogs.

Rebecca Snay

Rebecca Snay teaches sixth grade at Juliet W. Long in Ledyard. She is currently in her third year of teaching English Language Arts. When she is not reading or writing with her students, she enjoys breaking out into song with her ukulele.

Marc Zimmerman

Marc Zimmerman is beginning his 18th year at Bristol Eastern High School. He has taught a variety of subjects from full year grades 9-12 English to Creative Writing, Journalism, Media Literacy, Drama I and II, and Mythology. He has begun using his experience at CWP 2016 in a district level literacy team to offer PD sessions to teachers in English, History, and World Language. An avid runner, he often thinks on the run—literally. Many of his creative ideas come out when he runs, and he has to try to remember the details by the time he gets home. He will complete his 10th marathon in Hartford this October just in time to clean up and drive to his sister's wedding that night.