

TORRID LITERATURE JOURNAL

NATIONAL POETRY MONTH

Lost

Featured Poets:

Anne Bise | Kira Webster | And Many More!

Must Read Fiction:

"Circle Circle Dot Dot" | By Noah R. Sebek

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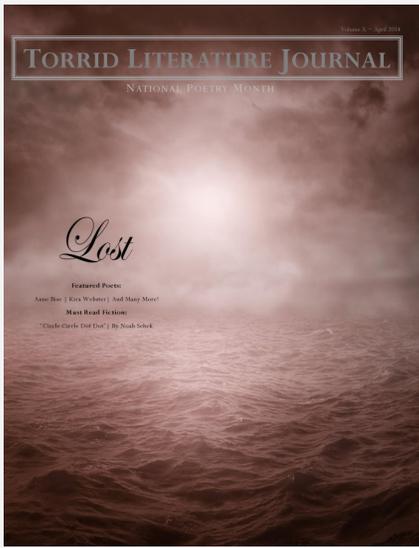
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All members of our team will be listed on the Masthead section of our website. In addition, members of our team will gain valuable experience while making an impact on the literary community. If you plan to apply for a position, please keep in mind that your time commitment will vary depending on your position and the project you are working on. However, please plan to spend a minimum of 2 hours a week with a 6 month to 1 year commitment to the position. Everyone on our team will need to be familiar with the products and services we provide, as this is the best way for people to understand our mission for the culture of literature and art.

All positions can be fulfilled remotely unless otherwise noted.

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Credits:

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¹ "National Poetry Month FAQ." Poets.org. Academy of American Poets, n.d. Web. 17 Mar. 2014.

FROM THE EDITORS

Lost and Found

With the onset of National Poetry Month, we are excited to present you with our latest release of the *Torrid Literature Journal: Volume X Lost*. Putting this particular issue together was a unique experience. During our production process, we quickly realized this was going to evolve into our largest issue to date. This had nothing to do with us though. This journal by itself is nothing but pages. This journal by itself has no value or measure. The writers make this journal what it is. Their poems and stories turn this journal into something more. They give this journal its substance and structure where it transforms into a powerful movement with the purpose of promoting the power of art, the power of expression through literature.

Leo Rosten said it best, "A writer writes not because he is educated but because he is driven by the need to communicate. Behind the need to communicate is the need to share. Behind the need to share is the need to be understood. The writer wants to be understood much more than he wants to be respected or praised or even loved. And that perhaps, is what makes him different from others." Readers read because they are looking for something. At the same time, writers are on the other end of that spectrum ready to meet readers halfway because they have something to say. It's only natural. It's a process. It's a journey. It's a lost and found journey where writers and readers can simultaneously lose and find parts of themselves in this equal exchange that tends to take place within the pages of a book.

One of the concepts I love about this journal is the diversity of the content. I can assure you that readers will never get bored with this publication because of the vast array topics that are covered. In addition to the poetry and fiction section, Jacob Erin-Cilberto makes another appearance in this Journal with a review of *Weathering the Wilderness*, a book of poems written by the late Richard B. Hoffman. Interviews, book reviews, and guest articles are a valuable component of the *Torrid Literature Journal* as they support the informative side of the content we aim to provide our readers. We look forward to building upon this concept and collaborating with more writers in the future.

Another noteworthy aspect of our tenth volume is the Hall of Fame segment where we announce our 2014 inductees. What makes this so unique is that the Hall of Fame members were chosen by you, our readers. You told us through votes which writers from our 2013 candidate list should be recognized for their literary excellence and we listened. Our Hall of Fame, like this journal is another avenue that allows us to support our writers. Make sure you check out our Hall of Fame membership list on our site for an extended look at the bios and publication credits of our writers. We look forward to seeing our Hall of Fame membership grow as we continue this tradition of providing writers with another platform to share and promote their work.

Our journal isn't the only item worth celebrating. Last month we kicked off our 3rd Annual Romancing the Craft of Poetry & Fiction Contest. We are very excited, as this is our third year hosting this literary contest. Our contest is open to writers of all ages and

geographic location and it ends on June 30th. We have increased the cash prizes for our winners and all entrants will receive a one year online subscription to our literary journal. Visit our site for detailed submission guidelines. We are looking forward to the opportunity of being able to recognize writers for their phenomenal craft in literature.

In addition to our ongoing contest, we also have another installment of our open mic series that will take place in the coming weeks. As many of you know, we are based out of Tampa, Florida. However, I am well aware that a large percentage of our readership comes from around the country and the rest of the world. If you are located in our area, I want to invite you out to our event. Regardless of where you live though, I want to encourage you to attend an open mic or poetry reading in your area. Sharing your work with others is a wonderful experience. Just being an attendee in the audience alone will change you and help you grow. As a person who frequently attends these types of events, I find that there is something captivating about poetry performed in front of an audience. It is as special of an experience as reading a book is. It moves you. It compels you. It is an intimate experience because someone took the time to practice a piece for everyone in attendance.

We are waist deep in the 2014 year and what a year it has been. The content in our journal is a treasured keepsake because of the timeless relevancy of the material kept inside. The poems, stories, and articles will be as relevant tomorrow as they were when first published. If at any time, you find yourself in need of a surge of inspiration or encouragement, pick up one of our journals and spend some time with our writers. They will show you how to indulge in the habit of dreaming. Is that not one of the principles of art?

We write with a purpose. We write for release. We write to take ourselves from one point to another. We write for the freedom of it. We write because we can and there has never been a better time to celebrate the power of words than during April, which is National Poetry Month. Become a contributor to the legacy of poetry. Do something great that supports the culture of literature. Share a poem on your blog or at poetry reading. Consider making a chapbook or purchase one from a friend. Attend a workshop or join a critique group. The only limitations that exist are the ones you set yourself. Set short and long-term goals for your dreams. Put one foot in front of the other so to speak. Each foot forward is a step in the right direction. You will not fail if you never quit.

Be you. Be blessed. Be torrid.

Sincerely,

Alice Saunders

Follow me on Twitter:
@lyricaltempest

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NATIONAL POETRY MONTH

By Alice Saunders

As a lover of words, I consider April to be one of the most exciting times of the year. Since 1996, April has been known around the literary community as National Poetry Month. We have the Academy of American Poets to thank for creating this month long celebration where everyone, libraries, teachers, bookstores, publishers, writers, and the like, can participate in celebrating our diverse yet beautiful legacy of poetry. The Academy of American Poets explains it best: “The concept is to widen the attention of individuals and the media—to the art of poetry, to living poets, to our complex poetic heritage, and to poetry books and journals of wide aesthetic range and concern. We hope to increase the visibility and availability of poetry in popular culture while acknowledging and celebrating poetry’s ability to sustain itself in the many places where it is practiced and appreciated.”¹

Although poetry should be (and it is) celebrated all year long, the goal of NPM is to highlight the past and ongoing accomplishments of poets. In addition, this month long celebration strengthens support for poets and poetry by providing poets with the opportunity to reach the media in creative and innovative ways. This celebration also lends support to publishers and booksellers as it encourages increased sales, which in turn places a demand on the publication and distribution process.

This month furthermore has an impact on the youth and young adults in our community as it allows for the subject of poetry to become an important part of the school curriculum. Last, I want to point out that this month acquaints people with the pleasures of reading poetry. There is not a literary group, business, school or part of society not impacted by NPM. The reach is endless.

NPM is different from any other month because it entails exposing poetry and the aspects of it to people who are unfamiliar with it. Therefore, setting the goal to write frequently is a good start. However, I want to encourage you to go a step further. Consider participating in the popular blog phenomenon where bloggers are challenged with writing and posting one poem per day during the month of April. If you participate, make sure you use the popular hashtag #napowrimo so other bloggers will see your posts.

Even if you don’t write and post a poem each day during the month of April, don’t lose sight of the purpose. The goal is to get you

writing more. Consider playing around with different styles and techniques. The other goal is to get people to read more poetry. Consider doing a small blog tour. If you have a large blog following, consider becoming a stop for someone on his or her blog tour. You can also interview a young poet in high school or college, or a poet who has recently self-published a chapbook or book of poems. You can even open your blog up to allow for guest posts. Remember to re-blog and share posts with your followers as well. Interacting with other bloggers is a great way to connect and build a following.

Another way to celebrate NPM is by attending a poetry reading or open mic event. If this is not something you normally do, then this will be a great way for you to step outside of your comfort zone. These events not only help you grow but they help connect you with other writers who are looking for growth and exposure as well. If there are no events like this in your area, consider starting one at your local library, coffee shop, or even on school campus. Reach out to people in your community and create a planning committee. It is never too late. Even if open mic events and poetry readings aren’t quite your style, creating a platform where people can come together and express themselves through art may be something your local community needs, especially if there isn’t one already. With the recent increases in technology, many people around the world have started an internet radio and/or podcast show, which allows people to host open mic, and poetry shows completely online. If you are eager to share your work with others but you don’t have the time or ability to get out and drive, then this is another good option for you to consider.

In continuing with this theme, you can look into attending workshops or conferences. Workshops usually last one day or less unless they are part of series, which continues over the course of a set period. Workshops are perfect for people looking to build their skills and hear from key speakers in the field. If you have experience in the field of poetry consider teaching a workshop yourself. You can have a teen poetry workshop catered to help the youth in your community develop their poetry and spoken word skills or you can have one for adults that provides education on how to publish and market their work.

The possibilities are endless. Another way you can show your support is by donating books to your library. Visit your local library

and inquire about their donation policy. If they do not accept book donations, ask about their suggestion policy. As you come across books that you notice are not available in the library, make it a regular practice to suggest that these titles be included for circulation.

Staying on the subject of books, if you know of a friend or family member who is an avid reader, consider buying a book of poetry for them as a gift. A subscription to a literary magazine or journal will work also. Consider the people in your circle and community. If anyone you know is selling a book, purchase a copy from them and place it in a location for others to read. You can focus on areas where people gather such as a coffee shop, a hair salon, or maybe even a doctor’s office.

If you love to read and give feedback or reviews you might want to consider offering yourself up as a beta reader. Many times, when authors finish a book or get near to completing one they start looking for test readers who will take the time to read their work and provide honest feedback before it is released to the public. Another idea is to create a book club or join one where the focus is on books written by local authors in your community. You can take this idea a step further by posting reviews on a blog or a website similar to Goodreads.

These are just a few basic ideas to get your creative juices flowing. Whatever you do to celebrate NPM, keep in mind the purpose behind it. We have a rich poetic heritage that continues to grow with time. I see this in my own community every day. The arts scene in Tampa is thriving with activity. We have an open mic event almost every night of the week, sometimes twice within the same day. Various artists are releasing new books, chapbooks, and spoken word albums. There are workshops for teens and adults with new ones created on a regular basis.

There are countless ways you execute the goals of NPM. I mentioned a few of them herein as a preface to my next question. Is poetry missing in your community? Is there a lack of activity in general when it comes to literature and the arts? Get a group of people together and start engaging in activities that help increase the availability of poetry in your community. We all know that literature is a valuable part of expression and therefore it is a necessary component for a successful society.

REVIEW: WEATHERING WILDERNESS

Review by Jacob Erin-Cilberto

As I read this wonderful book of poetry by a poet who left us much too soon, I am startled by the keen insights of life and environment presented in such superb allegory. There is definitely a story within a story written in Richard's words, and we are so lucky he shared these words with us.

The book starts out with a poem called "The Lives of Fish." And we humans are like the fish themselves, swimming in a world that is heading for demise. He speaks of "dead birds" and how they keep appearing. Their presence causes unease and blemishes a peaceful scene of two fishermen casting their lines in calm water. But at the same time, there is a touch of mystery with the sedan parked by the lake and the person sitting in it, who is not quite visible to the naked eye. Male or female? We don't know---could be a woman who lost her job and is pretending to be at work. She could be reckoning with herself, deciding on a plan to go forward, or she could be contemplating suicide...we know life can teeter like that as circumstance dictates the emotional rollercoaster that we live every day. And then it could be someone doing surveillance, someone watching us destroy the planet and ourselves. And then "the fishermen have vanished." And life as we know it becomes an empty "lakeshore and parking lot."

His next poem "I only Have Two Hands" expresses the idea of us wishing we had the capacity to do more things at once. We feel we would accomplish so much more. The truth is we need to "cultivate certain buoyancy" with what we can do. And in this poem Richard alludes to the "perfect scarlet snail" which could further the idea that we need to slow down, enjoy what we have and get the most out of the life we have the hands to work with.

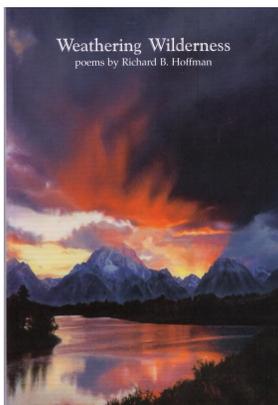
"Lost Pod" is a poem that deals on the surface with whales. But the poem reminds us that as much as whales have their methods to protect themselves in their own environment, they have to surface for air, and this puts them in the precarious position of dealing with humans and danger. Just as humans can live in an idealistic world, a safe world for a time, but sooner or later have to come up for air and then deal with society's predators. Speaking of which, his poem "Night of the Predators" gives an allegorical look at the plight of humans and what is all around us to poison us. In the poem we deal with actual predators in the desert, "Sidewinders, jumping spiders, mountain lions. / It's like those mass murderers of whom the next-door neighbors/ always say, By day so quiet and calm and mild. / then after dark reverts to wild."

Richard's poem "Red Canyon" reveals that "The view has gone complicated, / red ruined castle, earth's secrets exposed/ or else something beautifully broken." The view gets complicated, distorted and the scenery diminishes. We destroy our planet; we destroy ourselves and each other. Readers can relate to "Then a pang something like guilt. My heart/ is a trap, with unhealthy attractions held in solitary/ and where low-level conflicted regrets collect like plaque."

We become aliens in our own life, we become alien from our planet...and as is written in "Meteor Wars" we "are all in a sci-fi movie with Earth's comfortableness compromised" and our humanness and our hearts compromised as well. And as Richard states in one of the final poems in the book, we "Beat a Blue Retreat." Just as the whales retreat after surfacing and seeing how polluted the air of life has become, we as humans retreat when we see how society has become so polluted with hate and lies.

There is Blue Retreat in Richard Hoffman's poetry, there is calmness within the storm, maybe there is hope that we can turn it around and revive ourselves and our society, so that one day we, like the whales, can come up for a breath of reality, and find a comfortableness just like we find in our idealistic fantasies. So sad, that this clever and insightful poet has already left us, but his mark is already stamped upon his readers, and what he has given us will be etched into our memories as we ourselves try Weathering Wilderness.

Jacob Erin-Cilberto (author of *Intersection Blues*)



Order your copy today:

Weathering Wilderness

By Richard B. Hoffman

Link: <http://amzn.com/098420038X>

Open Mic Night

Price: Free!

Tampa's family friendly open mic
With Special Guest Host
R.J. Kerker

When: Saturday, May 31, 2014
Time: 8:00 PM - 11:00 PM
Where: The Bunker (f.k.a. Tre Amici)
1907 N 19th St. | Tampa, FL 33605 | P (813) 247-6964
Contact: Tiffani Barner | tbarner@torridliterature.com

www.torridliterature.com
<http://www.facebook.com/tlopenmic>

Join TL Publishing Group and the Tampa community as we celebrate poetry and the arts with our open mic event. Our open mic events are always family friendly and provide an open platform that welcomes all types of artists. In the past, numerous singers, musicians, bands, comedians, poets, spoken word artists, and storytellers have blessed our stage, leaving the microphone in flames.

At our upcoming event, we have R.J. Kerker as our special host for the evening. R.J. is a member of the American Song Box band and a long time supporter of the arts community in Tampa, Florida. He also co-hosted open mic night at Café Kili for several years before retiring to focus on other musical projects. Visit his band page to learn more:

<http://facebook.com/american-song-box>
<http://reverbnation.com/amersongbox>

Visit us during open mic night to learn more about the performers for the evening. There is no charge to attend this event. All performers, emerging and experienced artists, are encouraged to come out and participate. Sign up starts at 8:00 PM.

Please visit our website and like our fan page on Facebook to receive important updates regarding this upcoming event:

<http://www.facebook.com/tlopenmic>
http://www.torridliterature.com/Open_Mic.html

If you are interested in being a featured poet at one of our events, please contact Tiffani Barner at tbarner@torridliterature.com.

CROSTOWN

By Clinton Inman



Clinton Inman was born in Walton-on-Thames, England in 1945, grew up in North Carolina, graduated from San Diego State University in 1977, and he is a high school teacher in Tampa Bay. He lives in Sun City Center, Florida with my wife, Elba.

ODE TO LITERATURE

SUMMIT

By Kay Gosack

confined and trapped inside by mother nature's wrath,
imprisoned in your own mind,
you become entranced by the fire's destructive dance.
you watch as the flames engulf the memories you hope to destroy,
as you sit ensnared yet quivering with restrained grief,
wracked with perpetual guilt and gloom,
plagued by these endless perplexities that haunt your heart,
for the ambiguities of your life only become more vague
as your ambitions, desires, and nostalgic dreams burn in the pit.
this ceaseless spiral of anger and pain,
of sadness, acceptance, dejection,
your body has become too frail for its own moods
as you collapse in a heaping pile of ash and tears.
the magnetism from polar opposites is tearing you in two,
as you realize you need to say goodbye to half your heart,
to let go of a part of yourself you hoped to hang on to forever.
with nothing left, you feel the void,
this vacuum of smoldering impatience,
jealousies and animosities set ablaze
to help smother the ineffable sensation of irritability that torments your soul.
hypnotized by the orange glow,
you realize the impossibility of being who everyone needs you to be.
you sit and stare,
beguiled and captivated by this grotesque nightmare,
paralyzed by these debilitating fears of an uncertain fate,
resentful of the constant iteration of the fire's lowly screams
because your own voice has been reduced to a shallow whimper.
with nothing left to hold on to,
you reach inside for a blistering shock of truth,
or maybe just the hope that physical pain will outweigh the mental agony
as you rock yourself to sleep.

Kay Gosack is a poet and writing has always been the easiest way for her to articulate her thoughts and emotions. She uses her life experiences to create poetry that conveys her interpretation of the situations at hand. Gosack only hopes that one day her words can influence and inspire other individuals as previous writers have done for her.

A.J. Huffman is a poet and freelance writer in Daytona Beach, Florida. She has published six collections of poetry, available on *Amazon.com*. She has published her work in numerous national and international literary journals. She is currently the editor for Kind of a Hurricane Press literary journals (www.kindofahurricanepress.com).

THE ROAD TO CHARMING ROAD

By A.J. Huffman

is a never-ending stream of amphibical,
ribbiting drones. The sight
of them induces immediate nausea. I close
my eyes and count

down
to
inevitable
pouting
pucker.

Marissa Laven is twenty years old and she is currently a student of Sage College of Albany in Albany, New York. Her hometown is Schenectady, New York. Laven is an English major and wants to be an English teacher. She is an avid reader and her favorite book is *Jane Eyre*.

OUR LADY'S TEARS

By Marissa Laven

Oh Lily, your scent is intoxicating
Your Presence tells me that spring is here
You look so pure in all your white
But if I were to partake in you
I would surely meet death's delight.

Oh my fair Lily, never did I see such beauty
It is said that you are born from our holy Lady's Tears
Oh how I wish I could keep you near
But my dear just last week you killed my cat
And I can't have that.

Oh Lily, as I pull you from the ground
Please know that I mean to keep you around
You are just too important to me.
Though we can not touch
You are to be a surprise in my husband's lunch.

Oh sweet Lily, I know you will help me
In making his stomach bleed
His vision will blur and his heart will beat no more.
Oh how, I will miss you so
I will just have to wait for next spring for you to grow.

Tracey S. Rosenberg is the author of a historical novel, *The Girl in the Bunker* (Cargo Publishing), and a poetry pamphlet, *Lipstick is Always a Plus* (Stewed Rhubarb).

SHOPPING

By Tracey S. Rosenberg

Every new man
I try on like a dress.
Most I don't bother with, just flip past on the rack –
too frumpy, too fussy, snatched away
by a shopper more fetching or more desperate than I.
The few I carry to the dressing room
I examine from all angles in a one-way mirror.
Most of them simply don't fit
my sharp angles – my elbows, especially. I tend
to roll over in bed
and jab
so he strikes back in sleepy annoyance
or slips, as if the sheets can't hold him, over the edge,
crumpling like a flower of fabric
on the dressing room floor,
a discarded dress I never really wanted to buy

Mariel Arriola is a senior in high school, hoping to be a successful writer one day.

EXPERIENCE

By Mariel Arriola

I think of all the people I have ever intertwined with,
You are the worst – and the best

I have loved people before, during, and after you
But each pales in comparison

I have felt heartbreak many times,
But the hurt you inflict makes every other insignificant

When I see a poem about love, break ups, relationships,
I think of you before anyone else

Sometimes you are the only one who comes to mind,
The only one

I suppose you could say that all my experiences
With love and loss are thanks to you

Without you, I would not feel as if
I have experienced it all

Without you, I would not feel as if
I have experienced anything at all.

Heather Hartung is a stay at home mom and psychology student. She describes her style, literary and otherwise, as eclectic. She writes what comes to mind and makes her feel better. Currently, Hartung is exploring her spiritual side and where the journey has taken her so far.

A TESTAMENT OF AFFIRMATION

By Heather Hartung

A pillar, the keystone of a structure
Strength to carry the world
Sounds like a myth, a legend, doesn't it?
Still, we are indoctrinated to believe it is what we must be
When life's burdens are upon us.

So, there I stood
Small as I was
With arrogance and anger feeding me
My fortitude competed with the best of them
As I plowed ahead, taking advantage of the free will afforded to me.

Time and again
I met the challenges...alone
Determined...to make it on my own
Full steam ahead, stopping to break down many times along the way...
When suddenly, the task seemed hard, too much to endure, I had lost too much of myself.

And I cried, "Why does it have to fall on me? Nothing is *never* enough...and I need help!"
I finally found an answer, in my time of greatest need
I began to feel the stirrings of change, as inherent goodness began to consume me
And, my spirit awoke, from its hiatal dormancy, as I drank the Living Water that took away my thirst
And, I welcomed Christ to walk with me, as I relinquished my earthly burdens into the hands of my Creator.

Now, here I stand
Small as I am, alone as I may look
A living testament to trial and error
Hard choices and sacrifice...Humility and Faith
I am full to bursting with the Spirit that embodies humanity
Bearing the love that we all so desperately need.

From here, I will stand
Significant as I am...Never having been alone
Courageously, Humbly, and Faithfully
Shouldering the task set forth for Mankind to receive
For the inner spring has been sprung
To flow forth, to spread Truth, and belong to a new kind of reality.

Kira Webster is a junior at Webster University. She is a psychology major with two minors in business and French. Webster's father is a writer, and she has been writing for as long as she can remember. Webster loves to sing, act, write, draw, drive, and read.

HOME

By Kira Webster

Two concealed disasters,
Both alight and blazing.
The rollercoaster of my heart,
You make life amazing.

Brilliant like the sun,
More chilling than ice.
You frighten and destroy me,
But it's worth the price.

Dry my tears, scare off my fears.
The way you break my heart.
There you go, making me glow.
You make igniting an art.

Round and around we go,
The tortuous webs we weave.
Set me on fire, fulfill my desire,
Push and pull. Toss and retrieve.

I swear I want to change.
I want to make us last.
But while our future is strong,
So are ghosts from the past.

Large flames cast long shadows,
Sometimes we're left in the dark.
But you find me with one look,
You'll always be my spark.

When the ghosts take over,
And ashes swallow our flame,
The world doesn't know what its lost,

Yet time goes on the same.

Two candles march onward,
Without you, it's so unclear...
So come when you need a match,
I'll always be here.

ADDICT

By Kira Webster

I'm stuck in your oceans,
It can't get any higher.
Drowning up in the sea,
Drunk from the waves,
Not allowed in reality.
Floating down, break the surface.
Sober, no help from medication.
Because my imagination
Is my intoxication.

I'm stuck in your atmosphere,
You're making me soar.
My head suffocates in clouds,
Control lost, forevermore.
The stars call my name,
I can hear them so clearly.
Their lights dazzle my eyes,
Yes, you dazzle them severely.

How can I see?
Out of sight, out of mind.
That's how it has to be.
But in my sight,
In my mind,
You are all I see.

Turn off the world.

Turn off the time.

Turn my eyes to your face.

Let me go blind.

Vincent Miskell's poetry and parodies have appeared in *The Lyric*, *Mobius*, *Asimov's*, *Star*Line*, *Scavenger's*, *Medusa's Hairdo*, *Aoife's Kiss*, *From the Asylum*, and the 2006 *Rhysling Anthology*. Currently, he is a writing instructor at two South Florida universities.

DEATH'S OPEN DOOR POLICY

By Vincent Miskell

We are all destined
to take advantage
of death's open door policy,
falling through in the mid-stride
of our lives or reaching past the threshold
with crinkled fingers.

Some of us, too, stumble
in as children,
playing in a dimly lit hall
where echoing danger warnings
go endlessly unheeded.

But never mind,
we all land together finally
in that same dark office.

When our dead eyes adjust,
we find the office completely empty
and as still as any old unring black telephone.

Although our impromptu or scheduled appointments
are always mandatory,
death keeps no office hours
preferring to work in the field—
stamping the living
with invisible dates of expiration.

Death's office is always open—
still, we must wait an eternity
in darkness, in silence,
clutching our abandoned hopes
like canceled checks as proof
that we paid so dearly with our lives.

George Freek is a poet/playwright living in Belvidere, Illinois. He writes when the urge strikes him. His poems have recently been published in *The Missing Slate*; *The Entroper*; *The Poydras Review*; *Bone Parade*; and *The Vein*. His plays have recently been produced by The Roxbury Repertory (MA); The Gaspipe Players (PA); The Auburn Players Community Theatre (NY); the Lee Street Theatre (NC); and The Complete Theatre Company (NYC).

VARIATION ON A THEME BY FROST

By George Freek

Order is anathema to nature.
As the autumn sky blooms,
the roses wither.
It's the seasonal gloom.

And I notice dismay
where squirrels wildly scurry
to hoard some nuts.
But crows block their way.

Leaves float down in death,
in yellow and brown,
falling to their permanent rest,
without a sound.

The stars are silent,
their light drips from a tree.
I look at the moon.
But it won't look back at me.

WAITING AT THE BUS STOP

By George Freek

The clouds disturb my mind.
They hide the sky.
They absorb the light.
Their dialogue is with the night.
The moon waits in solitude,
as is its way.
It has nothing to say.
An ominous crow
screams at the sky.
No one else hears it.
Nothing replies.
An oak turns it back
and covers its eyes.

I feel my life is
an accident, for which
I must apologize.

Nathan Smith currently works as the Youth and Children's Director of Pleasant Garden Baptist Church. He loves hiking, writing and fish tanks. He and his wife live in North Carolina.

THE CRACK

By Nathan Smith

God, my mind, my mind is under attack.
It's gone down a tunnel too far to turn back.
It leads to the bottom on the ocean, where all has turned black,
With pressure pushing like click, clack, then crack
You're so far away, like the surface I once hit with a smack.
Then with a tug, you pull me up, water sliding off my skin like it was mack
You took me from the water, the pressure, and the constant attack
And then there in the forest, I found you by the old shack
I spoke to you there, where I laid down my pack.
My prayers were nothing more than a cough and a hack,
But you said you loved me even when I gave you flack.
Then I realized, God, you're the highest on the rack.
And that I was here, at the bottom of the sack,
With your grace constantly compensating for my lack
And healing my skull when it has a crack.

Mollie Kervick is a recent graduate of Bates College and a Northern Connecticut native. Soon she will teach at a charter school in Boston, working to infuse poetry into the daily lives of her students. Kervick is a lover of Ireland, craft beer, and grandfathers. Her writing has appeared in *Knee Jerk Magazine* and on *Irishcentral.com*.

ART AFTER GUNSHOT

By Mollie Kervick

Last night the wind woke me, squeaking
through the cracks in my windows. So
I got out of bed, pulled on pants and my coat
and went for a walk.

At three in the morning the streets were empty,
except for a mutt and some beggars. I gave
an old man, under a fire escape, an old dollar
from my pocket. That's when I found you,
there on the sidewalk, a fresh oval wound
in your side.

I knew I only had a few hours to paint
the mural with your blood. I didn't use any tools
except my bare hands and a ladder to reach
the top of the building. I smeared your remains,
like translucent shadows on the cracks
in mortar and red brick.

It was hard to decide what to paint
on the wall; I was limited to only red
and my fingers. But I started with a line
that became an open hand holding half of
an empty heart.

It's my best kept secret, these paintings
I make with blood. What would
the town say if they knew? Because it's
one thing to see half a man's head spilled
on the street, but another to see him made
into art on your neighbor's wall.

But the wind keeps blowing me out of bed
and there is no shortage of bodies. So they'll
keep popping up around town, these murals
of hands holding halves of seedless, red hearts.

Kay Gosack is a poet and writing has always been the easiest way for her to articulate her thoughts and emotions. She uses life experiences to create poetry that conveys her interpretation of the situations at hand. Gosack hopes that one day her words can influence and inspire other individuals as previous writers have done for her.

UNKNOWN

By Kay Gosack

the anguish of ardent conflict claws at your heart
as you are engulfed by this monotonous despair.
you sit- destroyed, damaged, broken,
pleading for an answer as to where everything went wrong,
staring at your fragmented reflection and your artificial smile of disrepair,
tethered to your past
yet unable to tear though the chain of remembrance.
there is an indefinable yearning for days that are dead,
this thread to the past you refuse to break,
reminded by beautiful scars of rancor and remorse,
your memories and wishes intertwined
into a harrowing tunnel of doleful contempt.
you're standing in the middle hanging on to the past and future,
being torn in two with no where to belong,
stuck within the plumbing depths of your fears,
this perpetual gloom and seclusion that your life has been whittled down to.
with each passing hour the string attaching you to familiarity splinters,
and you're being forced to let go of your toxic past,
the pernicious shadow cast by a selfish soul,
but you cannot abandon what once was.
consumed by these conflicting moments of maudlin affliction,
nostalgic addictions, contradictions in your heart,
you are submerged in an unrealistic realm
of delusions blurring out the truth.
your mind is erasing the truth,
and now you sit- confused, crippled, broken,
grasping for an answer as to where everything went wrong,
staring into the insipid abyss,
tearing into the cavities of your heart,
wondering if you'll ever be whole again.

Miriam Kirschner is a rising sophomore at Bennington College studying literature and drama.

MOTHLIGHT

By Miriam Kirschner

Heaven is sweating outside.
The moth on the glass door beats his wings,
which are whiter than moonlight when the moon
is full and white.
It's the lamp inside he wants,
the dull yellow blaze of the imitation flame.
Who can blame him?
Who wouldn't lose the moon with the dull yellow
blaze so close it can almost be tasted?
That kind of hunger tastes good.

Clinton Inman was born in Walton-on-Thames, England in 1945, grew up in North Carolina, graduated from San Diego State University in 1977, and he is a high school teacher in Tampa Bay. He lives in Sun City Center, Florida with his wife, Elba.

FIRE FLIES

By Clinton Inman

They glitter and glow like stars
The fire flies we chase in summer sky.
When we catch them in our hand
There is much we cannot understand.
What power made them glow and why
The ones we catch and place in jars
Will not shine as if they somehow refuse
Until we open the jars and turn them loose.
But just like us whether a fly or kid
No light shines under glass or lid.

ECLIPSE

By Clinton Inman

Through cracks in old cabin wood
The sun's eclipse ran across my floor
Like a garland of little golden smiles
Across the table and up the wall
As if they meant to give me call.
Perhaps the sun was all the while
Trying to show me something more
Than any store bought telescope could?

Anne Bise is an avid poetry writer who enjoys writing about topics spanning from the naturalistic to the humoristic. Her heart overflows with a passion for the written word. Her goal is to instill that same love for writing in those around her by, as Hemingway so beautifully puts it, “sitting at a typewriter and bleeding”. That prospect alone is what keeps her hanging on, hoping, day by day.

THE DEATH OF A POEM

By Anne Bise

Dear Poem:

You wretched thing, you horrid waste
You are way too long and terribly paced
You despicable misuse of perfect space
You are nothing special, and disturbingly plain
Even your name brings my penmanship to shame
Allow me to rid myself of this abominable pain:
I'd rather spit fire, than retire and waste my brain cells on this poem.
I'd rather swallow cinnamon than be written in this poem.
I'd rather pull out a tooth than suffer my youth, on this poem.
I'll crumble your ashes into the wastebasket
I won't spend time preparing you a casket
This is the death of a poem, never to be told
Your words are cold, and-if I may be so bold
You old thing, your alliteration stinks
Like the Titanic, your boat will sink
Your stupid stinky words will submerge
From this place, you will finally be purged
I hope that this all goes down in flames
And I'd rather enjoy if you were maimed
Your ink, like blood, spilled across paper
I'll spare you the gore, we'll get to that later
Buried and soiled, your soul will spoil
There in that place you will bring me no toil
I will remember you for nothing at all
The poem to whom I will never call my friend
You are about to meet a murderous end
This is the death of a poem, never writ
And might I add, you are a piece of shit
You won't hear a buzz, not even when you die
At least Emily Dickinson heard a fly, maybe you might cry
But, I, dearest poem, I will say nothing but goodbye.

Alyestal Hamilton lives in Ontario, Canada where she is an emerging writer and poet. Hamilton's poetry can be found in the anthology *The Calling* and the most recent issue of *BLACKBERRY: a magazine*. What inspires her to write is the power of words to convey love, emotions, and observations of the world. Hamilton hopes that through her writing she is able to convey not only the words of her heart, but the hearts of others.

BAKERS MAN

By Alyestal Hamilton

It's like

I got ink on my fingers and in the palm of my hand
The way a baker's got flour on their cheeks
Or sand on an archaeologist's knee

It's like a painter who's got paint on his shirt
Or after a game a soccer player is covered in grass stains

And even after a few days it doesn't seem to wash off
People I meet glare at the marks as if they were signs of leprosy

But it's of worth
Because it is a reminder that I gave birth to the thoughts in my mind

I was able to put a voice to thoughts in word formations
Sometimes they rhyme, sometimes they don't

And when I give birth to these words
There are no contraction-like warning signs

I could be riding the bus or standing in line
It could be free verse, it could be rhyme
When constants and vowels string together words
That form phrases
Constructing sentences
Enabling a time for action
Where these ideas
In the form of words
Have to be purged

My ideas and thoughts never have to be perfect
As long as I have paper and pen to cradle the new birth to warmth

The words sometimes flow like ink out of the pen I use
The ideas come out of me like water from a fountain

Chris Farrell is a young writer from Connecticut. He earned his MFA in Creative Writing from Western Connecticut State University, and currently teaches freshman writing courses at Westchester Community College. His poetry has appeared in *Connecticut Review*, *The Aurorean*, and *Barefoot Review*.

TRAIN

By Chris Farrell

I love the train.

The way all I have to do is get on
and it just goes.

When I first get on I'm alone
in an empty car and I can stretch
out until my wrists peek out past my sleeves
and feel cold metal against my skin,
like sneaking a hand beneath the other pillow.

Then I am aware
of others on the train and for a moment
I feel lazy, but it passes,
as though the thought remained stationary as my head moved -
- I moved, and left it behind.

But I don't move.
The train moves.
The Earth moves.
I'm just along for the ride.

So I sit and listen to Kurt Cobain
and Sid Vicious swap stories and I dig the sound
of the colors coming out of Charlie Parker's saxophone.
I remember reading an article about that -
about seeing sound -
and how it must make the whole world brighter.

The world! Outside it blows past
in a great rage,
hurrying to get to wherever I was.
It presses against the train
like a late passenger desperate for the ride,
but this is my ride
and the world has no place here -
The faces blur together indistinguishable
and each building connects with the next
so a church becomes a factory becomes a house becomes a school
becomes a hospital
until it's a graveyard
passing by too quick to read the names or dates
so they're just stones in a field,
polished to reflect the sun.

The sun! Out the window I can see the sun and know it as the sun
and I have pity for the great flame
for all those years it hung in the center
and people said it did not,

without any recourse but to beam
and beam until they saw.

And still we say "it rises" and "it sets" while it just
hangs, innocent and unassuming.

Curse the sun
that sheds light and makes sharp
a world I know to be dark and dull -
so I pull the shade,
exercise my strength over the giant yellow dwarf,
blocking it from view and casting shadow
into my seat and for a moment
I wonder why have windows at all
save to see only blurs and the forsaken sun.
I have a mind to board up the window,
to bring nail to wood and keep the outside out
and I am furious in my intent.
But the train soothes,
soft headrest like mother's fingers in my hair
and I forget my rage,
forget the sun
forget the world
forget the train
forget myself
until there is only nothing,
a glorious nothing that spreads itself
epic over my resting head and mother's fingers,
over the graveyards, hospitals, schools, houses, factories, churches,
over the faces of the faceless,
over my bare wrists and over the tracks,
over where I was and where I'll be.

I close my eyes
and realize nothing changes
until the train slows to a stop,
and fluid blurs become solid shapes,
and the shapes have meaning,
like letters in a familiar language
of which I can be a part,
once I step onto the platform
and realize I'd rather be blinded
by light than by darkness -
at least there is a difference
when I open my eyes.

Jaimie Miller is married with two beautiful children. Miller is also a Graduate of Troy University and working on her Masters degree at the University of West Alabama.

ADDRESS IN THE STARS

By Jaimie Miller

"That same blue moon that I'm looking up at
Is the same one that you're looking down on.
Just like you're looking down on me too.
The sad thing is there's no address in the stars
And no postal service to send my thoughts on to you.

Yea, I know you're all around me
In the sun, in the rain, and in the wind.
But I can never lose the scarred image of your eyes;
The haunted eyes that still obscure my every move
Like a cloudy, storm streaked, blood red sky.

My thoughts are all jumbled up
And twisted like my insides.
It still hurts to move on
But moving on is all there is to do.
I just wish I didn't have to move on alone.

For every heart you break you pay a price,
But I'm the one that's paying the most here.
They say I lost you, but I know where you are.
The only problem is finding you
Out there among the stars.

I could've cried 'don't go, please!'
And as a matter of fact I did once or twice.
Ah, but it didn't do any good.
That's obvious since you still left
Or got lost as they always say.
Yea, that's what they all say.

I lost my keys once before,
But that was nothing new.
I have felt the trend of loss before,
And not just a time or two.

I have dropped my cell phone
Until it shattered in tiny pieces.
The art of breaking things in life
Shows no sign of ceasing.

I have missed the bus before,
I have been slammed into a wall.
I've skipped school once or twice,
Forgotten memories I'd like to recall.

I walked away from true love
And ran head first into those who broke my heart.
And I've broken hearts too you know,
Like yours a few times.
I'm sorry for that too.

Oh, I'll see you again one day,
Out there dancing on the clouds.
And every time there's a thunderstorm I know
It's you moving around.
And when the lightening strikes
It's only you cracking a smile.

There's that ol' blue moon again,
The same one you're looking down on.
I know you're looking down on me too.
The sad thing is there's no address in the stars
And no postal service to send my thoughts on to you..."

Sarah Brown Weitzman, a Pushcart nominee last year, has had work in numerous journals and anthologies including *Art Times*, *The North American Review*, *American Writing*, *Potomac Review*, *The Bellingham Review*, *The Mid-American Review*, *Rattle*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, etc. Her second chapbook, *The Forbidden and Other Poems* was published by Pudding House in 2004. She is the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. A full-length book of her poems, *Never far From Flesh*, came out in 2005. Her latest book, *Herman and the Ice Witch*, a children's novel, was published in 2011 by Main Street Rag A former New York academic. Sarah Brown Weitzman is retired and lives in Florida.

CHANGELING

By Sarah Brown Weitzman

In the morning I wake quite myself
but an old lady in the bathroom mirror

has stolen my face and when I shed my robe,
I discover she's replaced my body too.

No matter how I sneak up to the glass
there she is looking straight at me.

Even if I jump back fast she gets there first.
Lately she's been stepping in front of me when

my photograph is taken. Though I must admit
she's done a good job of making herself

look an awful lot like I might look
when I get really old. But since I am not there yet

or at least not nearly as old as that woman,
I've decided not to give her any satisfaction.

From now on when I comb my hair or apply
make-up, I'll gaze into one of my old photos.

Arpa Mukhopadhyay, a software engineer by profession, started writing at the age of ten, and painting at the age of five. Born in West Bengal, India she migrated along with her family to Mumbai, where she now works as a senior software professional. Her writings were first published in *Walkopedia* - where her travelogue was shortlisted for the 'Best walks contest 2011'. With that she officially entered the art circuit and there has been no looking back since then. Her paintings have appeared on cover pages of magazines like *Ehsaas* and her short stories have won her awards and accolades. Her short stories and poems have been published in anthologies *A World Rediscovered*, *A Poetic Bliss*, *Impossible Spaces* and many other prestigious journals and books, the world over.

HIGH ON LIFE

By Arpa Mukhopadhyay

When the rains hit the pavements,
 parched and dry,
When the trees sway with the winter
 breeze, careless and wild,
When the flowers wake up and bloom
 to spring's merry tunes,
Inebriated with the beauty of nature,
 I am not the same, I am on a high
 When life challenges me with its
 convoluted twists and turns,
When at the crossroads, the road not
taken is the road that I opt to tread on,
When flipping through the book of memories
brings back tears of happiness and joy,
 Intoxicated with the wonders of life,
 I am not the same, I am on a high
When the voice that matters the most,
 is the voice that comes from within,
When the biggest ecstasy in life is discovering
 love, and the magic that comes with it
 What good are the liquor, the grass
and the weed to me, when I have it all to get high
 I am high on this addiction called life!

Samontha Forbes currently attends Lehman College as a full time undergrad student. She is from Jamaica W.I. and now lives in New York. A creative writing major, Forbes works on her poetry and writing every day. She recently won second place in the CUNY/Labor Arts 2013 contest for her poetry.

ROSY

By Samontha Forbes

I walked down the hall,
a tremor of revulsion rippled through me
as I considered the life I now led.

I was a long way from the cottage
in the woods,
I could still hear that knock at the door.

The Prince, cursed to be a bear
by a red-eyed thieving dwarf,
at the dwarf's death and the curse lifted, Snowy married the Prince.

And I tagged along
to marry his milk-sop younger brother.
Who told them I wanted to marry him?

I want the handsome and heroic Prince.
Snowy could never understand the passion
within a man like him, she is such a weakling.

He needs an adventurous, passionate,
and bold wife.
He needs a partner that will match him in all ways.

The Prince needs me.
I would make a better wife
And later, a better queen for him and his kingdom.

Snowy betrayed me when she took him from me.
Her sniveling and simpering fooled the kingdom,
but not me.

For now, I will enter this chamber,
milk-sop brother and all the trappings,
but one day, the Prince will come to crave me.

Deborah Rocheleau is a writer and language fanatic. Her fiction has appeared on the *Tin House Open Bar* and in *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* and *Mock Turtle Zine*. She is currently writing a contemporary young adult novel. She blogs at deborahrocheleau.wordpress.com.

POMPEII

By Deborah Rocheleau

The gods must be impressionists
painting constellations that resemble
Greek heroes like an urn
resembles the deceased.
Then a classicist came alone
and buried the whole lot in molten ash
their bodies preserving a mold
to be filled by archaeologists
turned Michelangeloes.
The Italian sculptor once said
He did not create the angel
simply chipped away the excess stone
until he'd freed the being within.
The Pompeii statues are faceless
features scrubbed clean
by the breath of the volcano
that preserved them.
Yet they endure
crouching in the dust
as they wait for a true artist
to set them free.

Jason Hill in 2009 – 2010 was a contributor to the online music site, tinymixtapes.com, where he had regular music reviews published, as well as the occasional non-fiction piece. This is one of the first things he finished since returning to fiction, and having so enjoyed your journal. Hill recently resumed work on his graduate degree at Texas A&M University - Commerce and he is also working on a biography of John Coltrane, as well as editing his first attempt at writing a novel.

GONE

By Jason Hill

The only thing left in the whole field was a tractor stopped
Dead in the rows grown over with yellow barley,
The cistern on the far side of where the barn once stood
And the chimney – still standing, but no longer shaded by the
White oak with limbs bent for tire swings and tree houses
And afternoon climbing. Gone but not in the fierce sense
Of going, the one we love most leaves savagely with words
Hardly meant and bags rudely stuffed. And not gone like summer
When it chooses to collapse at dusk one evening and cold crisp
Fall awakens in its place. Not gone like the dog that had to be
Put down when he tore out of the back of the pick-up after
A rabbit he glimpsed in the recently hewn hay meadow as the truck
Rumbled by the barbed wire fence defined pastures. Well
Shed of all this pre-fabricated godliness
And ephemeral conspiracy, it is no longer trite to admit I die
A little each hour, a lot each day.

Christina Mengis is 38 years old. She lives with her husband Christopher Mengis and her step-son Chris Jr. in Portland Oregon. Her hobbies include, reading mystery novels, cooking for her family, and working in her garden.

I WAS THINKING ABOUT

By Christina Mengis

I was thinking about
How you hung up there
On that cross for me,

I was thinking about
How they nailed you up
And stood and watched you bleed,

I was thinking about
All the love you have
For me and my family,

You forgave our sins
And let us in
Into Eternity,

You're Jesus Christ
I worship thee
And your Trinity,

I was thinking about
How you loved me first
And set my soul free,

You're Jesus Christ
The only son
And I love thee.

Craig A. Hart is an editor, writer, publisher, and poet. His prose and poetry have been published both traditionally and independently. Early in 2012 he founded *The Rusty Nail* literary magazine for which he now serves as editor-in-chief and in January 2013 he began Sweatshoppe Publications where he is currently the executive publisher.

CHRISTMAS LOSS

By Craig Hart

Christmas will never be the same
because of what you did.
Selfish, thinking only of yourself,
not seeming to care that
I will never again be able to smile
on the happiest holiday of the year.

You should have said something,
explained yourself, apologized,
or at least given some sign that
you recognized what you were doing.
With 365 available days,
why choose this one?

One day I might be able to forgive,
but I will never forget.
And if I do, every year
I will remember, on Christmas Day,
how you closed your eyes for the last time
and left me all alone.

Alexandra Ambrose is a Creative Writing student at Southern Oregon University in Ashland, Oregon.

WAITING

By Alexandra Ambrose

When guys drive fast,
I like to sit in the passenger's seat
with the windows up,
watch the speedometer swivel
to 90 and it feels comfortable
like me at 25.
As he switches gears,
the muscles in his arm tense
quiet now
but waiting until the car
skids across the line,
playing chicken with a tree or telephone pole

We take corners
drift around them
wheels crunching on gravel
the car's nose and trunk
at odds with each other—
we can't do this at safe speeds.

I don't cringe when
he pulls the e-brake
without warning
and we skid to a stop.

I like the big trucks,
so tall I have to scramble in
like a little kid.

We're driving upriver
too fast on unstable rocks
that smash into the sides
and wreck the paint job.

We're airborne
til our heaviness
pulls us bouncing to the ground.

We can be invincible
because we know that there is death
we can get this close
and taste smoke off burning rubber tires
with the engine grinding in protest
against us.

I like waiting for the crash.

Jen Susca is almost 17 years old. She has written and self-published two books, one of which was accepted to the second round of the Amazon Break-through Novel Award. She plans to study creative writing in college.

GIVING UP ON A DREAM

By Jen Susca

To the dream
I carried with me
for all my life,
I'm beginning to see
that it was you
that carried me.

Like a patient with
the faintest pulse,
I put myself out of sorrows
by losing hope.
I let them tell me it's no use.

Waiting for you
to wake up
and say
"I've still got a few tricks up my sleeve!"

Oh, my dream.
You were the reason
to get up in the morning,
to try to make you
come true.

And even as the doctors
pull out the IV,
I shed a tear
as I hold my breath
and watch you lose yours.

You were never fair to me,
I loved you more than you
ever loved me.
I waited for you to take my breath away,
but you never did.

and even now
as I am full of air
I ponder
what it would be like
to breathe life
into you.

A CORNER OF THE UNIVERSE

By Neha Praseed

A man pulls up
To a corner of the universe
At least it seemed that way to him
But it was just space
Just space
Large enough to breathe out his problems
That no one has been cursed to hear
He closes his eyes and counts to ten
And feels the air trying to console him
The air the Titanic felt
before it sank
He peered into the endless abyss
Home sweet home
He leans closer, closer, closer still
But he doesn't jump
He doesn't want to but his feet
don't agree
He's falling
But he smiles as the air rushes by
At least he didn't jump.

REALITY

By Neha Praseed

It wasn't very long ago
When the wind called out to me
To seek the old abandoned road
And escape reality.
I shrugged and headed in, I did
The wind had never lied to me
I let the clouds lead the way
To escape reality.
The road was such a dingy place
I looked up to the trees
They shook their leaves and smiled down
This was the road for me
Soon the road was littered
With footprints that belonged to me
I never stopped my walking
What has become of me?
I looked up to the skies and cried
But no one answered me
The wind just smirked and wafted away
I was alone with reality
alone with reality
I am alone with reality.

Dionne Evans is from North Carolina, born and nurtured in this area, the suburbs of Greensboro, North Carolina. After several years of working in the Banking Industry and while working fulltime in an administrative position, she returned to school and graduated a couple of years ago from Brookstone College of Business, Greensboro, North Carolina. She has always had the desire to write, whether it be poetry, or songs for enjoyment. She feels that this is indeed a beautiful gift and wishes to share it with others.

AS I HOPE

By Dionne Evans

As I hope beyond that which I cannot see,
I must rely on Him, to guide me,
To guide my footsteps as He said He would,
If only I trust Him, as I should.

To know that He is a man of His word,
Even when life is unsettling and absurd,
Because as I hope; peace be still,
For He does have a plan for me, that is His will.

THE GIFT

By Dionne Evans

I am fearfully and wonderfully made,
By my Heavenly Father who loves me,
He knew me while I was in my mother's womb,
And wanted the best for me,

He gave His Son, Jesus - his best gift to me
The Savior who is no longer in the tomb,
Who has redeemed me from the hand of the enemy,
The Messiah, He's the one, who sets us free.

John Kaniecki writes poetry for the enjoyment of the art. Kaniecki has been published by *Struggle Magazine*, *The Blue Collar Review*, *Burning Books*, *Jerry Jazz*, *IWW Newspaper*, *Protest Poems*, and others. Though political or moral in nature he writes in various forms. He has been married over eight years to his wife Sylvia. He is a member of the Church of Christ at Chancellor Avenue where he sometimes preaches and works on outreach. He is a firm believer in the power of poetry to transform society for the better. The artist he most admires is Woodie Guthrie because he lived what he wrote and what he wrote was wonderful. He also recently won the Joe Hill Poetry Labor Prize where he read his poem "Tea With Joe Hill", in front of a crowd of over six hundred people in Banning Park, Los Angeles.

R-E-V-O-L-U-T-I-O-N

By John Kaniecki

R is for the righteousness of our fight
E is for the evil that permeates this place
V is for the victory on which we set our sight
O is for the overwhelming odds we face
L is for the love that we show one another
U is for the undeniable force we possess
T is for the talents we will discover
I is for that ignorance the we must address
O is for oppression the foulest crime
N is for now, as now is the time

Ankita Anand was a general secretary at the National Campaign for People's Right to Information, an editorial assistant at Penguin Books India, and a member of People's Union for Democratic Rights. She is the co-founder of a theatre group, Aatish, which produces socio-political plays. As a freelancer she writes and edits, and works with Samanvay, IHC Indian Languages' Festival. Her poetry has been published in journals like *The Indian Review of World Literature in English*, *Labyrinth* and *Black Cat Lit* (to be published), and her articles in print and online media like *Civil Society Magazine*, *India Today Aspire* and *Talking Cranes*. She lives in New Delhi.

THE DREAM OF SLEEP

By Ankita Anand

The heavy heat of the noon
That dulls but doesn't allow ease
Is borne only in the hope that soon
Evening will visit with its subtle breeze
But when that doesn't happen, and there's still no respite
Wait for dreamless sleep to put its gentle hand across you, just as you like

Gwendlyn Martin is a freshman in community college pursuing a degree in English and Creative Writing. Martin currently lives in a small Illinois town but hopes to soon move to Seattle. She is fascinated by the tiniest bits and pieces of life, and loves to learn. Between schoolwork and being with her loved ones, Martin studies Kitchen Witchery and other interesting aspects of the Wiccan religion.

THE ADDICT

By Gwendlyn Martin

The addict wants the poison-
The very thing that cures
Their aches and pains,
To stab them in the back.

The addict wants everything NOW,
It has to be right now
Otherwise life isn't worth living.

The addict wants to spite
Their enemies by carving
Insults into neat flesh
And throwing themselves
Deeper
Into the clutches of razorblades.

Deep- so deep they drown
In a bottle of Absinthe and choke
On the cotton candy smoke
Building in their lungs.

The addict wants satisfaction;
To be satiated,
To feel full instead of
Empty.

The addict wants no more,
Swears this is the last time.
Wants the pain to go away
And the numbness to take over
And they want explosions and bombs and anything that'll blow their brains out because then they can stop thinking.

The addict just wants to feel full.

MARIONETTE ILLUSION

By Kaitlin Artis

Your hands were skilled
at tearing things apart
and coaxing them back together
with honeyed promises
with mesmerizing lies
you oiled gears,
wound springs,
painted a coat of polish.
It didn't matter
if it was a music box,
a child's toy,
or human.
Everything performed better
after you finished.

Perpetually sanguine,
you sauntered
on sidewalk ledges,
bounded
from bench to bench,
spread your arms out
and waited to fly.

Brilliant with your hands,
better with words.
The first to suggest outrageous ideas,
the first to laugh incessantly,
the first to dance
in the absence of music.
You amused yourself
for hours on end,
but you were never
as impulsive as you acted,
were you?

You never
lacked things to say,
to do.
Never looked back,
or faltered.
Entirely self-sustaining,
you were proficient with your hands,
and even better with words.
If you'd wanted to,
couldn't you have fixed yourself?

You handed out fragments of sunlight,

as if you had an infinite amount to give.
Was that why you broke
into so many pieces?
You shattered,
and kept it all to yourself.
Your sharp movements jarred
those shards,
set them loose,
let them cut through
everything.

Just you
left behind,
but you were already vacant.
Have you always been empty?

You were skilled with your hands,
but better with words.
After you cohered
fragments together again,
they performed better.
Yet you left yourself
in pieces,
desolate
on stark stage,
with the forsaken beat of your heart.

Suzane Bricker writes for a living. And until her fingers stop working, or she gets a "real job" that pays benefits and allows her to take vacations, she will continue to do what she is doing right now. So, from journalism to online teaching, Bricker has used her skills to pay her mortgage and feed her dogs and herself. However, she would like to have her words recognized, and to think that artistry is not just about the struggle for existence.

My Nephew

By Suzane Bricker

There are few angels in this world,
But I have met one.

Most of the times,
He is just an ordinary boy.

But,
Every once in a while,
His voice becomes animated and his words so soft and clever,
That he instantly transforms into a symbol of serenity and sweetness;

Of peaceful humor.

And, through his words,
He reaches down into the depths of my soul and evokes a type of laughter which is at once
Refreshing and cleansing.
As pure as he is.
As innocent as
His responses are to me.

Then, just as quickly,
He transforms back into the normal boy he is.
A child transfixed in front of a video game,
Fingers deftly manipulating the levers of an electronic device
While uttering nonsensical words
That define his conquest of imaginary enemies.

But, I have learned,
That such occurrences are oft repeated.
And,
That my nephew can bring joy into my life,
Which few others will produce.

Somehow, he is able to shatter the silence of pain,
And fill a deep abyss of unexplained experiences
With the challenge of acceptance.
For, he is a child whose understanding of the world clearly defies
His mere 12 years of existence.

An angel, nonetheless.
Of that I am sure.

And, when he transforms ever so quickly, from ordinary child
Into a creature of ageless wisdom,
I am not surprised.

In truth, I have learned to admire his unique powers,
So, I welcome such occurrences,
And cherish the feelings of serenity
Which he brings to me.

FICTION

THE INITIATION

By Francine Garson

Francine Garson's work has appeared in several print magazines and ezines. Her flash fiction received a first place award from the League of American Pen Women in 2010 and a second place award from WOW-Women On Writing in 2013. A former college counselor and law school administrator, Francine reads, writes, and attempts to play the piano in central New Jersey. Learn more about her at francinegarson.com or follow her on Twitter at [@francinegarson](https://twitter.com/francinegarson).

If you are applying as a transfer student, please explain your reasons for leaving your previous college. Have you ever been the subject of disciplinary action? If so, please explain. Attach additional pages as necessary.

Absently stroking the smooth skin above my left breast, I wonder how, or even *if*, I can tell my story again, but realizing I have no choice, I begin to write.

#

After hitting the snooze button for the third time, I surrendered to my alarm clock's call. Forcing my eyes open, I spotted two white envelopes peeking out from under the door. Even from my bed, I recognized the column of y-shaped symbols decorating their borders. Racing past my sleeping roommate, I snatched up the envelopes addressed to *Lisa Mullaney* and *Stacey Nolan*.

"Stacey, wake up. I think we're in!"

Stacey bolted up and stared at the envelope I had just thrown at her head.

"Ouch! Omigod! Open it!" she blurted out in a quick staccato.

We tore the envelopes open and simultaneously read...

Congratulations!

You have been offered a bid to Upsilon Upsilon Upsilon.

Be in your room at noon today.

"Yay!" we screeched in stereo.

My chest pounded as I realized that Stacey and I, childhood friends and now college roommates, would soon belong to the most sought after sorority on campus. We had visited twelve houses during Rush Week. Pretty girls had led us into modest, but well-maintained homes. A large kitchen, a flat screen TV in the living room, and wireless internet service were standard amenities. The small bedrooms were shared. After dorm life, the sorority houses seemed like luxury hotels.

We visited Tri-Upsilon for the first time on the last day of Rush Week. Its location on a grassy knoll away from the other sororities, fresh coat of white paint, and candy apple red door flanked by potted geraniums distinguished Tri-Upsilon's exterior just a little, but not too much, from the other houses. A Jessica Simpson look-alike opened the door, and we stepped onto an Oriental rug that covered a large portion of the polished hardwood floor. 'Jessica,' who introduced herself as Tiffany, escorted us with a group of eight other open-mouthed sorority wannabes through the house. A sunken living room equipped with a massive stone fireplace, buttery soft leather couches, the kind of carpet that feels like a newly mown lawn, and the requisite flat screen TV was our first stop. The kitchen boasted granite countertops and a tiled floor. Each sorority sister had her own room furnished with a queen-sized bed and a celebrity-sized closet. We were led back into the living room for the traditional meet-and-greet, where Tiffany was joined by a group of similarly drop-dead-gorgeous Tri-Upsilon sisters. Although the conversation was friendly, relaxed, and even gossipy, I was keenly aware that our social status, academic credentials, and maybe most importantly of all, physical appearance had been carefully assessed.

"I would die to get in there!" Stacey squealed as we walked back to our dorm.

"Me too! I never imagined a sorority house could look like that. You'd never guess from the outside," I said.

"Do you think they liked us?"

"I don't think it's just about liking us." I said. "I think they're looking for a type."

"Well, they're all beautiful and really bright. And, now that you mention it, there is something else about them...it's like they know they're special. I wonder if they were like that before they pledged."

"And I wonder if they think we're like that," I finished her thought.

That night as Stacey slept in the bed across from mine, I thought about whether one or both of us was, or could be, *like that*.

Stacey and I had met in Mrs. Taylor's first grade classroom. Spotting the red plush fur and white bulging eyes sticking out of my new pink backpack, Stacey had whispered, "Is that Tickle Me Elmo?" We sat together at lunchtime that day and for the rest of the year. Stacey and I grew from Barbie-playing, hopscotching girls into boy-watching, mall-shopping teenagers. She was Homecoming Queen, and I was Prom Princess. She was president of our senior class, and I was editor of our school newspaper. She dated the star of our high school football team, and I dated the tennis captain. We had been best friends and college roommates. Now, we were also Tri-Upsilon hopefuls.

As Rush Week continued, Stacey and I visited several of the sorority houses again. We quickly lost interest in the friendly-enough, smart-enough, pretty-enough girls living in nice-enough houses. Stacey and I each checked off Upsilon Upsilon Upsilon as our only choice for sorority membership.

#

The morning disappeared as Stacey and I prepared ourselves for the noontime summons from our sorority sisters-to-be. Blowing off Psychology 101, we showered, flat-ironed our hair, and meticulously applied makeup. A heap of clothes lay on our floor as we rejected not-quite-right pants, tops, and shoes. Finally, similarly dressed in our most flattering jeans, form-fitting shirts, and pointy-toed boots, we sat on our beds and waited. When the knock finally came, Stacey and I ran to the door. Tiffany walked in with a blue and silver balloon bouquet.

"Congratulations!" She hugged each of us and placed the balloons on our windowsill. "Follow me."

We walked into the sparkling sunshine of a perfect fall day and climbed into a white convertible adorned with blue and silver streamers. Tiffany drove us to the main Quad, where we joined another white convertible and with horns honking, headed toward the sorority house. When the car doors

opened at our destination, I recognized Melissa and Jillian from Rush Week.

We followed Tiffany and the other drivers into the house and were led into living room, where Ashley, the sorority's president, and the other sisters were waiting. After much hugging, congratulating, and champagne toasting, Ashley called for attention.

"Congratulations, Lisa, Stacey, Melissa, and Jillian. Out of the hundreds of girls seeking acceptance here, we've offered only four bids. We're very selective and only invite girls who we feel will really fit in and are willing to make the commitment that Tri-Upsilon requires."

As we felt the power of being *chosen*, the four of us edged closer together on the couch.

Ashley continued. "We're a small group of only sixteen sisters. After your initiation, we'll be twenty. The bonds of sisterhood that you form here are unbreakable and will last throughout your lifetimes. Tri-Upsilon alumni from all over the country have achieved very high positions in business and government. We have ambassadors, CEOs, federal judges, real estate tycoons, and many highly placed women out there. When you graduate, you'll have a lot of help in moving you along whatever career path you choose."

Stacey squeezed my hand. This was going to be even better than we'd thought.

"The four of you are a pledge class. The bonds that you form with each other will be the strongest of all. You are responsible for each other, and each of you will be judged by the behavior of the others."

Ashley went on to explain that the next two weeks would be filled with pledging activities. Some would be educational, but most would be social.

"After the pledge period, Hell Week will begin, ending with your formal initiation. We don't haze pledges, but it won't be fun," Ashley smiled. "Anyway, that should bring us to the end of the semester and your dorm room commitment. So, you'll be able to move into the house right after initiation."

The four of us burst into spontaneous applause.

"That's what I call bonding!" Ashley said. "Now who's hungry?"

#

The two-week pledge period passed in an idyllic blur of revelry. Flirting with cute boys at socials, playing drinking games, stealing an intramural baseball trophy from a fraternity house, and learning more about our new sisters filled our days and nights. Lighthearted stories about first kisses and childhood mischief evolved into personal revelations about sexual experiences and parental divorce. After two weeks, Stacey and I began to feel a strong connection to the two other girls in our pledge class.

Hell Week began on a Sunday evening with a cell phone summons from Ashley. The four of us were to report to the house at eight o'clock that night. Stacey and I met Melissa and Jillian on the Quad. Together, we trudged up the hill to the house. A black-clad Tiffany answered our knock and ushered us into the living room. The other girls, also dressed in black, were waiting for us.

Ashley stepped forward. "Welcome to Hell Week. I'm glad that you all arrived together. That's a good sign. Tiffany will be your Hellmaster, which means that she'll be your main link to the sorority. During this week, the four of you must take orders from any of us at any time," she pointed to the sixteen initiated sisters. "When Hell Week is over next Saturday night, you will be formally initiated." Ashley handed each of us a printed list of rules and told us to return to our dorms.

Agreeing with Melissa's suggestion that we walk to the Student Union and go over the rules together, we settled ourselves on the faded brown velour couches in the lounge area.

Upsilon Upsilon Upsilon

Hell Week Rules

- 1. You will dress in head-to-toe black at all times.*
- 2. You will not wear makeup.*
- 3. You will not talk to any males, except professors or school officials.*
- 4. You will not miss any classes.*
- 5. You will answer your cell phones at all times, except while in class.*

"Well, we all knew this week wouldn't be fun, but I don't think it'll be too bad," said Melissa.

"And they were so nice to us during pledge period," Jillian added.

"It'll be fine. I'm not worried," Stacey agreed.

We returned to our dorms and prepared our black outfits for Monday. The next morning as I sat in Spanish class trying to remember how to conjugate a verb, I saw the missed call signal on my phone. *Yo hago. Tu haces. El hace. Nosotros hacemos.* When class was over, I listened to Tiffany's voice summoning me to the sorority house. Wearing a black hooded sweater and black jeans, I headed up to the house and rang the bell. Tiffany glared at me.

"Didn't you read the rules, Lisa? Your jewelry isn't black and neither are your sneakers. Take them off."

I removed my offending silver hoop earrings and Nikes.

Tiffany handed me an art history book. "I need you to carry this to class for me."

I reached down to put my sneakers back on.

"Leave them, here. They're not black."

"You're kidding, right?" I asked.

"Just be glad your socks are black."

I looked around at the house I so desperately wanted to join, and with just black socks on my feet and her art book in my hand, I followed Tiffany to class.

When I got back to the dorm, I told Stacey about my shoeless trek, left voice messages warning Melissa and Jillian to wear *head-to-toe* black, and pulled a pair of ebony boots out of my closet.

That night, or the next morning actually, the four of us were called to the house at three A.M. When we arrived, we were handed toothbrushes by a smiling Tiffany, who was beginning to look more like a deranged Barbie than a Jessica Simpson clone, and told to scrub the house's already immaculate toilets.

The following night our three A.M. phone call instructed us to meet on the Quad, where we were ordered to run its perimeter.

Groggily attending class, we napped through dinner, and responded to a strange variety of cell phone demands. We delivered dripping ice cream cones to the initiated sisters, dried their hair, and polished their nails. We responded to an endless series of pop quizzes on Tri-Upsilon history, and were ordered to perform twenty sit-ups (good for us anyway) each time one of us offered an incorrect response. *When was Tri-Upsilon founded? 1937. How many girls formed the first chapter? Twelve. How many states (not colleges, girls) have Tri-Upsilon chapters? Forty-two.*

Hell Week dragged on until it was finally Saturday, and our cell phones rang at six P.M. "Hell Week is over. You've survived. Dress nicely and meet us at the house in two hours," Tiffany's voice instructed.

As had become our custom, the four of us met on the Quad. We linked arms and began to walk, making our final journey as uninitiated pledges, together.

Ashley was waiting for us at the door of the house. She led us upstairs into her room and told us that after changing into the four shimmering white evening gowns laid out on her bed, we were to meet her in the living room. In awe of the beautiful dresses and the significance of our upcoming initiation, we stepped out of our own clothing and into the gowns. After changing, we headed down the stairs and met the initiated sisters in the candlelit living room, warmed by a glowing fire.

Ashley's face flickered in the light cast by tall pillar candles as she began to speak. "Welcome Lisa, Stacey, Melissa and Jillian to the sisterhood of Upsilon Upsilon Upsilon. As you know, our symbol, the Greek letter upsilon, is a y-shaped letter. Every girl who has joined us has marked her initiation by branding the upsilon symbol onto a ceremonial plaque.

Tiffany, who had been hidden in shadow, handed Ashley a large wooden plaque marked with a profusion of randomly placed y-shaped upsilons. She handed me a poker.

"Lisa," Ashley continued, "please walk over to the fireplace and hold the poker in the fire for thirty seconds. Then, brand the plaque. Tiffany, please turn the lights on."

As I took the poker and held it in the flame, Tiffany snapped a picture. Then, I solemnly branded the plaque. I watched as Ashley called each of the other three girls in my pledge class to repeat the ritual.

"Girls, your initiation is almost complete. But, a mark on a plaque isn't a symbol that you can carry with you forever. Each one of us must keep the upsilon close to her heart."

The sixteen fully initiated sisters slid their gowns off their shoulders, exposing small y-shaped scars just above their left breasts.

I turned to Stacey, whose eyes began to fill. Jillian looked at me and grabbed Melissa's trembling hand.

"Are you kidding? You want us to brand ourselves?" I shrieked.

"Lisa, please lower your voice. No, we don't want you to brand yourselves. You'll brand each other."

I started to shake. "You're crazy. You're all crazy. I'm not branding myself or anyone else!" I yelled.

"Lisa, calm down and be reasonable. I know this is a surprise to all of you. But, it's a Tri-Upsilon tradition. We've all done it, and it's not as painful as you think."

"I won't do it!" I shouted.

"Then, you'll automatically be de-pledged."

I shook my head and looked at my friend. "S-Stacey..."

She opened her mouth and then closed it. Melissa and Jillian stared at the floor.

"Fine," I hissed.

Still wearing my white gown, I strode out of the house and into the cold night. Shivering and alone, I waited for the others. I waited. And I waited. I walked back to my dorm, sat on my bed, and waited for Stacey.

#

The next morning, gazing at Stacey's neatly made bed, I shrugged off my white gown, and pulled on a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt. Racing out of the dorm, I headed to the Office of Greek Life.

A young secretary with a blonde ponytail greeted me pleasantly, "Can I help you?"

"I'm Lisa Mullaney. I need to see the director. It's an emergency!"

"Just a minute, Lisa. I'll see if she's free."

Too agitated to sit, I paced. Back and forth. Back and forth.

A tall gray-haired woman, smartly dressed in a navy suit, stepped out. "I'm Mrs. Ross, Director of Greek Life. Please come in."

I followed her into a large, light-filled office and started to talk. Rush Week, the pledging, Hell Week, and the initiation nightmare. I told her everything.

Mrs. Ross said she'd spoken to dozens of girls over the years about sorority secret rituals and hazing. She said she'd never seen one break the code of silence until today.

"So, I'm the first?" I asked.

"No," she responded. "Actually, a girl named Melissa was the first. Then a 'Jillian'..."

"So, you know." I interrupted her.

"Yes, I know. You're a very bright girl, Lisa, but not bright enough. I saw the photo of you holding the poker over the fire."

"B-but, we all posed like that. That was before they told us that we had to brand each other. D-did you talk to Stacey?"

"Yes. Stacey came to see me too. In fact, she was the one who showed me the picture. I know the whole thing was your idea, Lisa, and that you did the actual branding. I have no idea why you'd want to topple Tri-Upsilon, but your plan failed. The sorority will remain on campus, but you will not. The campus police are outside. They'll escort you to your dorm and wait while you pack up your belongings."

"But, Mrs. Ross..."

"Our conversation is over, Lisa."

As Mrs. Ross reached for her telephone, making it clear that I had been dismissed, her silk blouse gaped just above her bra. And that's when I saw it...the faint outline of a y-shaped scar just above her left breast.

CIRCLE CIRCLE DOT DOT

By Noah R. Sebek

Noah R. Sebek is currently an 18-year-old high school senior from Whitney M Young Magnet High School on the west side of Chicago. With college just looming around the corner, he decided to write a piece primarily from the perspective of a young child. Sebek used this as an outlet for some of his current thoughts and worries. This quickly transformed into a time-skipping narrative, focusing more on "ignorance is bliss" and the enjoyment of youth than just the thoughts of a five year old.

"I now pronounce you man and wife."

"Are you sure that's right?" she asked meekly.

"I think so," he responded. "I think that's all you really need."

"Oh. Alright then." She smiled, looking down at the ring on her finger. "I guess that means we're married, then?"

"Sure looks like it." I looked at my left hand, and then the ground. "I hope you're happy with this, Sally."

There was a moment of quiet, with nothing but the sound of the other children back on the playground, feet crunch-crunching on the wood chips, the old steel-chain swings creaking. Sally and I sat, examining the cherry-red, hard candy marital promises adorning our small, left hands. I may not have shown it, but I was really quite fond of Sally. Well, about as fond as a five year old could be. It's always hard to tell at that age. I *do* know I enjoy the time I spend with her, sitting (read: fidgeting uncontrollably) next to her during lunch, right before we went outside for recess. I even shared the Nestle Crunch bar from my "Extra Cheesy Pizza Lunchable" with her, even though it's my most favorite candy bar ever. If that's not love, then I don't know what is.

I looked back towards her. The sun framed Sally Rockford in all of her pigtailed glory. Well, I guess it's Mrs. Alexander Reed now. We were married. We said our "I do's" and got our cootie shots. I'm pretty sure that's everything you need for a marriage, anyhow.

"So. Um. What do we do now?" Her question caught me off guard. "I would ask my mom but she still hasn't gotten back from her work trip."

"Well..." I stuttered. "I guess we go on our honeymoon? I'm sorry. I'm pretty new to this marriage thing."

"That's alright. I am too." She looked down at her feet. She was a quiet girl. She could listen to me talk about anything. No one else really listened. Mom and Dad were too busy with my little brother and sister, and all of my friends just disagreed with me (which I don't get, because Godzilla would totally wipe the floor with King Kong if they got into a fight, no matter what Tommy thinks). She was one of the few people my age that seemed to enjoy listening more than talking. She could listen, she could think, and she could have fun with me. I think those are all of the important criteria for wife selection. She also has a Slip n Slide, which is also a pretty rad plus.

I was pretty nervous about proposing, though. I felt for sure she would say no. I mean, she has her whole life ahead of her. I didn't think she'd want to be tied down to a simple monogamous life just yet. She has high hopes and even higher potential, and she could probably get into any grade school of her choosing. She's got it made. And me? I'm just a bummy five year old, sitting around on the playground, staying up past my bedtime, getting grounded. I'm no good for her. She doesn't need a man like me. We weren't really compatible, not even as friends. I mean, she was a girl. I was not a girl. This opposing-gender friend dynamic seemed to not only be avoided, but generally looked down upon by our peers. Sure, we could wave hi and throw things at each other, but boys and girls weren't supposed to hang out with each other (unless we were forced to have a play date by our parents). No one even dared to mention marriage.

Well, except me, when I proposed to her so long ago. Two (or maybe even three) hours later, we were wed. And now we're sitting here, on some far off corner of the playground, sitting and thinking in silence, with nothing but the companionship of our spouse. This marriage thing seems pretty awkward so far. We'll see what happens, but I think I'll stick with it.

~

What a great way to spend a seventeenth birthday; didn't do a damn thing, as per usual. Haven't had a birthday party since that sleepover in 4th grade. There was a surprisingly large amount of sleep that occurred that night, which is atypical for a "normal" sleepover. I felt it was a disaster at the time, and haven't had a birthday party since. I don't mind at this point, though. I'm not one for tissue paper and halfhearted gifts anyhow.

Spent most of the day studying (read: dicking around on the internet and avoiding opening the AP Review books) and had a slice or two of cake. Such is the life of an Honors high school student with an early May birthday. My nights are filled with procrastination, reluctant work, copious naps that don't do anything but make me more tired, and me beating myself up over my (lack of) work ethic. The mornings after are blurs of reluctant risings, groggy eyes, and half liters of coffee. Can't wait for college.

I really wish Sally called. I know I've been really busy recently, but I would still love to talk to her. It has been way too long since we've spoken, but that can't be helped. Everyone loses friends. I shook some of the sleep out of my eyes. I reached into my closet behind the dusty hiking-boots box and the pristine-condition empty Vans box. I pulled out the box that had my beat up old Converse high tops in them. Too torn up to wear, but too many fond memories to throw away. Also, they served as an excellent hiding spot for my half-empty pack of Marlboro Red 100s. I shoved the box into the pockets of my jeans and headed outside, grabbing the leash and our chocolate lab Stephen. I didn't even need a furry little excuse to be wandering about outside. No one else was up at 2:17 AM in my house for me to lie to.

Left the phone inside. Not expecting any calls, especially from Sally.

~

Three weeks. Three whole weeks since the ceremony. We've been married for almost a month, and no one has found out. It's been pretty grand so far. We share lunches everyday (which is fantastic because Sally has these incredible oatmeal chocolate raisin cookies that her mom bakes that are the most delicious thing to ever grace my very seasoned and experienced 5 year old tastebuds) and sit together on the playground and in class. I don't think I could live without her. She makes me feel so... so alive. You know how you feel when someone bigger than you, probably by four or five years, is pushing you on the swing? Your feet claw at the air, you rush past the ground, and you hurtle towards the sky? That split second, where you feel weightless, levitating, floating? That's how I feel when I'm with her. Except I usually don't throw up after being with her for five minutes (It's not my fault, really. I have a pretty weak stomach when it comes to swings. And airplanes. And rollercoasters. Especially rollercoasters.)

There was just something about her. From the sunlight trapped in her bouncy golden locks to the freshly pressed vermilion dress that smelled of dryer sheets and pre-adolescent glee, she had a magical sort of air around her. A sort of ephemeral, mystical quality, not like the allure of a bearded

Chris Kringle or the magic of finding the exact Lego block you needed to connect the two turrets of your Star-Wars X-Wing Fighter model. It was something unique to her, and I still couldn't put my finger on.

Happiness came pretty easy to us. Neither of us asked for much. We both just wanted to be happy with someone, to be able to talk freely about anything, to nap occasionally for intervals of ten to twenty minutes, and eat sweets (we split cookies and candy equally; Sally didn't like frosting, so I got to keep all of the cupcakes). A pretty simple existence. We lived well, and we lived happily. Neither of us could ask for more.

~

5 years and 172 days. That's... probably around a million days or something. That's how long I've been alive. And I can truly say, not a single one of those past days could even be compared to today.

It started like a normal day. I woke up, kicked off my Star Wars: revenge of the Sith sheets, and groggily sauntered over to my dresser. I swapped out my oversized hand-me-down sleepshirt for a handsome, hilarious graphic t-shirt. This one said "Be Nice to me or I'll Sic My Ninja Monkey's On You". Comedic genius. I pulled on a pair of pants that made that swish-swish sound when the pant legs brushed together as you walked. Might be too hot for long pants, I figured. No matter; this normal looking pair of pants boasted zip-off legs as one of its features. So much versatility. I'm like a five-year-old pants ninja. I tucked the polyester pant legs back in the drawer, taking care not to misplace either of them, in which case I would have to walk around with only one pant leg and that would look ridiculous. The other kids would ridicule me. I couldn't have that.

I ran downstairs and poured myself a bowl of Kix Puffed Corn Cereal. It tasted alright, as per usual. I glanced at the box: "Kid tested, Mother approved." I don't know what the hell that means. I wish mothers approved of more decent cereals, such as Count Chocula or Cocoa Crispies or Cocoa Puffs or something that didn't taste so... un-chocolatey. I'm sure Moms would like the taste of those obviously superior cereals better than Kix or Cheerios (not Honey nut or chocolate Cheerios; just the regular old boring ones). Maybe they're secretly stockpiling the good cereals for themselves. That makes a lot of sense, actually. Get it together, Moms. We're onto you.

Well, then I jumped into the car, waiting to painfully bear the excruciatingly boring car ride to school. 7 painful minutes later, I was in front of my cute little school. I jumped out of the car, waved bye to my Mom, and joined the kids entering the front doors of the learning institution. I set my lunchbox in my locker, and walked into the classroom. It was decorated wall-to-wall with festive ribbons. I was perplexed, and then it hit me: this was Field Day. Today was the day where all of us students took a break from the strenuous tasks of counting pictures of animals and spelling words and reading entire sentences and got to go outside and play. Not just for recess, mind you, but for the whole day.

Glorious.

I bent down to tighten the Velcro on my light-up-when-you-step sneakers, which were the coolest thing since crustless peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. It was then that I realized, "Hey Alex. You can't just go out there and run around like a fool today. You're a married man, now. You have a family to look after, a wife who cares about you. And the stork may bring kids any day now. You can't go get scraped up before that happens. You have responsibilities, duties (haha duties), things to accomplish."

I was right. I stood up, sighed deeply, and looked for Sally. I picked her out of the mass of fidgety five year olds waiting to run free outside, and made my way over to her. She smiled as she saw me, and didn't say a word. I loved her smile. She was one of those people who didn't smile often, so when she did, you know it meant something.

We spent the rest of the day, undisturbed, just sitting together. It was so comfortable, just plain wonderful. Her head rested on my shoulder, and my arm made its way around her shoulder. A smile spread across her face, and it stayed there for the rest of the time we were together.

It was wonderful.

~

It's so painful. It's almost unbearable, really. Sure, maybe all other seventeen year olds would say that waiting for a call you're expecting is horrible. But it's much worse when you're hoping for a call you know won't come.

I think I was finally starting to feel the effects of the cigarettes on my lungs. There was just a tickle I felt sometimes, when I was sprinting to catch the train. The damn Metra schedule. Sporadic train times and a whole lot of stress. Only one more year of this, thank god.

It was the second week of June, now, and Junior year was coming to a close. Not my favorite year, by far. Wish it were as carefree as Kindergarten. Those were the days... hanging out with friends the whole day, nap time. God, it was magnificent. That's where I met Sally in the first place, at the ripe young age of four and a half. We really didn't worry about anything back then. She didn't know her Mom died, and she smiled back then. Her smile started fading away as time wore on and life became less a wondrous fantasy and more a harsh reality. I don't think I saw her smile at all during the latter portion of seventh grade, and that was the end of it. I mean, everybody loses friends as time wears on, no matter how close.

We didn't talk much then. That was her last year at school, the end of it. If kindergarten was blissful ignorance, then sixth grade was the calm before the storm, and seventh grade was the torrential downpour that followed.

I wonder what she'd think of me now, face faintly illuminated by the glowing tip of a half-finished cigarette, laying in the middle of the field of the park we used to play in. I had to take care to ash the cigarette to the side of me, as not to have the still-hot ashes singe my face. I don't know when not getting burnt tobacco remains all over me became a priority or even a worry. We never worried about things back then. We couldn't. We were young and much happier.

I can't get over it, though. I'm a rational, reasonable person (as far as I can tell). You shouldn't be this upset from missing someone you were close to. Yes, you don't talk anymore, you don't sit together and do nothing together, you don't do anything together. You can't hold onto everything good forever. That was certain. Just as certain as the adenocarcinoma in Sally's pancreas, just as certain as her eventual slow, painful end. Everybody loses friends. Some to distance, some to time, some to terminal pancreatic cancer. You can't get hung up on that forever. Sally eventually got over the fact her mother had the same affliction, and she was hopeful she wasn't a lucky winner of the cancerous genetic lottery. Some people have all the luck at the worst of times.

The glowing tip of the cigarette fizzled at the end of the filter. I stood up and stomped it out. I walked over to my bike, checked on the chain to make sure it didn't slip off again. I patted my pocket to make sure I still had my reds, and got onto the old, steel Schwinn frame. I looked up at the few stars visible in the sky, still shining relatively brightly even throughout all of this light pollution. I can't get hung up on her death forever. There will be many more deaths in my lifetime, and I can't internalize it, pretend to control it. I'll just need to shoulder it and move on. Isn't that what us adults are supposed to do? Feel less, live more. Strange how maturity works.

I made my way home, threw the bike in the garage, and kicked off my shoes as I went upstairs and laid down. I didn't check my phone: I wasn't

expecting any calls.

~

Two. Whole. Months. This is the longest I've ever stuck with anything. I can barely focus on a TV show for a half an hour. But I've toughed it out. I've been a (happily) married man for the last two months of my life, and I've loved every second of it. Sally is just so wonderful, and we're so genuinely happy. She's been over at my house already, and I've met her dad without any difficulties. Still haven't met her mother though. She's still on that business trip. But if the snack time with her father was any indication, I should be able to ace the part of "meeting her parents". I was damn adorable, and her father never once questioned my ability to become the breadwinner for our little family. Well, maybe that's because we haven't told anyone we're married yet. We're getting to that part. But we both know, and that should be all that matters, anyhow.

Sally's opened up a bit more. She definitely speaks more now than she did before, and her smile is becoming more and more frequent. She asked how I was enjoying it, these last few months. I told her it was fantastic.

"Oh," she said smiling. "Do you think we will last?"

"Yes." I responded. "I think we'll last for a long, long time. Forever wouldn't be an over exaggeration."

That's the truth. These two months felt like forever. I'm sure a "real" forever wouldn't feel much different. She smiled, larger than I've ever seen. I leaned in and kissed her on the cheek, almost automatically. We both immediately leaned away, blushing, and saying "yuck", "eww", and etcetera. We looked back at each other. We smiled and laughed. Maybe the kissing thing would have to wait a while. But this marriage thing is definitely wonderful so far. I think I'll stick with it.

LIFE OR DEATH?

By Chase Parnell

Chase Parnell is a law student in Missoula, Montana. He is an avid trail runner and newlywed. He enjoys life in Montana, but will someday return to Oregon where he feels most at home. He has previously published his writing in *Trail Runner* magazine and is currently working on a young adult novel set on an island in the Arctic.

Do I have the courage? Not the kind you need to stand up to an antagonist, nor the type to throw caution to the wind and make a risky investment, but the shameless courage that is needed to simply say hello to a beautiful woman.

This particular beauty is sitting in the seat next to me. We are leaving Manhattan heading to the Upper Eastside on the green subway line. Normally, I zone out by breezing through some obscure novel, but today I am absurdly distracted. Her body is so close to me; inches separate us. My eyes cannot help but catch every possible glimpse of her. I see her unnaturally soft looking lips, her perfect hazel eyes, the cute well-dressed clothes, and the subtle mannerisms where love is born. Like mine, she has a vulnerable introspective demeanor that seems to be yearning for contact.

Today, today is the day. I am in control of my life. It is my role as a man to at the very least, JUST say hello!

Out of the corner of my eye I see her gently pull her brunette bangs behind her ear. And then, then I witnessed hope! I caught it. I saw the unmistakable. It was only a shutter but it was absolutely there. Her eye quickly shot towards me with her lip slightly curling to a smile.

Is this really happening? I jump to all possible positive conclusions. *She's the type of girl I could fall in love with. I'm tired of being alone! I'm tired of not taking the risk and living with the what-ifs. I can't continue on in this life with so many reservations and failures. It's pathetic.*

Her softness and vulnerability were palpable. Her femininity caused a rush to my cold dark heart. *I want to protect her, to hold her, to tell her everything is going to be ok. Yet...I haven't even said hello.*

I have been single for 4 consecutive years, my sentiments on love and relationships reek of apathy and pessimism. *Maybe it would be better to just let this one go. I'm 34 years old, when do I throw in the towel?* Something inside of me spurred me on; I know in my heart that life is best spent shared. Dark features, no make-up, true beauty, a prize, my heart's desire. *Please God, give me the words to say.* My breath quickens, my palms are flowing. Is the prize worth the risk? Is the risk worth the prize?

She is reading. *If only I knew the title; I would read the book in a night. Which words catch her interest? What makes her stir or chuckle with delight?* Serving as a bookmark, I see her ticket. She was to get off at Castle Hill Avenue. Only 20 minutes away. I get another flash of failure. *I can't let this slip through my fingers!* The attraction was unlike anything I had ever experienced. It was so natural--almost carnal.

Ok, time to act! Just say hello and ask her how her day was. My mouth starts to open, I inhale to get the air to speak, I am about to project an audible sound, to open my heart and show my cards...but I retract. I sink in; back in to myself, the shell, the weak and dumbfounded.

I realize I am on the edge of my seat in a strained position, my face is contorted with regret for not having spoken ...and she glances again. *Oh God! What is she thinking? Why am I sitting like this? She probably thinks I am high or disturbed or something. God, end me now.*

Dim lights and gray cement are flying by. The sound of the subway is deafening; it creaks and bounces, always moving, never still or silent. But this offers me a ray of hope; there is adequate noise to drown out my failed attempt to communicate. Even if she rejects me, no one around will witness my inadequacy.

Stop it! Be positive. You are a good looking guy, good job, and women have liked you in the past...just stay cool. I relax back into my seat and decide to regain my composure. If there is one thing I have learned in this life, it's that you have to make conscious decisions about how you are to feel and live. You have to make the decision to be happy, you have to decide to not give up, and you have to choose your mindset. Nothing just happens by itself or falls into place. I pull on the strings of my hoodie, run my fingers through my hair, take a deep breath, and focus on getting back in the game.

15 minutes till she departs. *Ok, still enough time to introduce myself and get her name.* I look up and see her reflection in the opposite window. She was looking back at me. I quickly turn my head away. My face is red with embarrassment. *How does she have this kind of control over me? This is not natural -- there is something wrong with me.* I felt weak, my limbs were weightless. My heart literally felt pressure from her eyes. And she saw my face. She knows that

I, me, my soul and life, exist!

I imagine her lying beside me in a park. Face to face on a gentle hill we look into each other's eyes. Each feeling like their love is greater. We are shameless, no fearful shroud, no thought of rejection, just love. She is mine and I am hers completely.

As if she could feel my desire, she places her left arm on our shared armrest. Her hand is soft, pale, angelic, and oh my God, it is barren. No shiny rock to crush me. *She wants me to talk to her. She is blatantly showing me her solitude.*

A bump in the track, the subway jumps, her forearm brushes mine. She turns to me as if in slow motion, raises her brow and timidly says, "Sorry." I smile then look away with embarrassment; as if she knew my whole procession of thought, how I had practically already given my heart to her. Of course she does not know this, but I keep my face turned from her, towards the hell that is everything else.

5 minutes. *In the name of life, love, and fate; I have to act or she will be gone forever!* My destiny depends on an overcoming, a conquering-- of insecurity, of fear, of second rate life.

Then it hit me. *I am incapable. I cannot do this. I am undeserving. Who am I to have such a blessing? The miracle of two people and equal love will never grace my life.*

I stand up and walk away from her. As if this were an act to maintain my dignity, I shallowly go, not looking back. I didn't want to watch another dream walk out of my life. I could not bear it. I admit defeat.

I get off the subway and walk the dark streets. I enter my flat which offers no solace. All my creature comforts are revolting. Even the thought of drinking myself into oblivion lacks appeal. My loneliness is deafening. *What is the point of all this? Who have I become?* The intense gloom and anger are suffocating. A dark shroud is covering me. Dirty clothes get thrown on the ground and I get in the shower to wash away my shame. The water comes rushing down and I begin to cry. I weep. I can taste the salty tears. My face strains with sorrow, my shoulders convulse, I go to my knees. Time stands still. It hurts. How it hurts!

I will never say hello.

No

By Kimberly Dorffner

Kimberly Dorffner is currently enrolled in high school and will be graduating in 2014. She loves writing and finds that it often consumes most of her free time. Dorffner plans to go to Towson University after graduation to study education and creative writing, so she may teach a creative writing class.

"I'm only seventeen, Kyle! You can't really expect me to do this with you," I say as I stand with you in the woods behind our school. The ground is completely covered with leaves and the trees have a thick layer of moss.

I can tell you're thinking about how to get me to do this. I wait impatiently for what you will say next. I get a little anxious to hear you speak. When did I let you have the control? It's almost as if you're the one who decides how I feel. I'm not even my own person anymore. A bit of time passes and you still haven't said anything. Why are you keeping me waiting here?

The chilling November breeze sends shivers down my spine, adding to my anxiety, and I only want you to hold me. Your touch will pour the heat back into my body, but I know that won't happen.

You just stare at me, allowing me to get lost in your eyes while the wind whips through your straightened hair. Your muscular structure and height make me look petite, it's almost awkward. We're so different, yet our lives are so similar. I remember the way you looked at me when I told you I was in the detention center all summer and I remember the way your voice changed when you told me you were in a similar place. We've known each other since we were born and I can't remember a time when I didn't love you. A seventeen-year crush is hard to ignore. No wonder it was so easy for you to connect with me and make me want to do this. You've always had a way with words, and I make it so easy for you to manipulate me. I'd do whatever you want, but you take advantage of it. My mind wanders, forcing me to think of what happened when I saw you after I was out of the hollow hell I'd endured all summer.

"How did you even end up there, Kyle?" I ask you hoping for an answer that wouldn't scare me. I didn't want to hear the words murder or theft but I knew one would come shortly.

"I attacked this guy for his money. I took sixty dollars, and a gold watch, and ran," your expression and voice overflow with regret. You haven't wronged me, but my heart fills with forgiveness for you. Maybe it's because I know the man you robbed will never feel this way.

You step closer to me and grab my hand, my heart beats faster as it always does when you touch me. I love this feeling, and how it doesn't happen with anybody else. You send me on a natural high. You pull me into you and in a moment we become one. It's only for a few seconds though; you pull away as more people come into the park.

"I love you. I want to be with you, I just can't right now," you whisper in my ear. Your hand slips out of mine and you walk away.

We've already been standing here for a long time and now you're taking even longer to speak. Finally, you take a breath and I know what words are about to follow. Sometimes I think that I know you better than I know myself.

"You told me you would... Please, Ashley? You got my hopes up, don't crush them," you say, giving me the cutest puppy-dog eyes and brushing a bit of brown hair out of my face with your finger-tips.

The guilt rises in my body and my eyes fill with tears. I can't hurt you but I can't give my virginity to a guy in the woods either. The confliction takes over my thoughts, preventing me from thinking, and I want to run from you. I begin to allow the tears to run over my eyes.

"Kyle, I love you. Isn't that enough?" I ask. My voice is shaky and you gently wipe away my tears. All I can do is stare into your deep brown

eyes as you stare into my bright green.

"It is but you promised. When a girl breaks a promise, I don't care how amazing she is, I leave. She doesn't exist to me anymore. Remember that promise? You promised because you love me, now you can prove your love," you say surprisingly cold.

Without even realizing it, I've become trapped. Those words put me in the worst situation I could have imagined. I can't let you slip away, but I can't give you something that means so much to me.

I guess you've picked a nice place though. The wind runs its fingers through our hair and the sunlight dances on your face. For the most part, these woods are pretty open, but you've assured me that we're perfectly secluded. Nobody can see us.

"Please, Ashley, it's not that bad," you say as you gently run your hand down the side of my body and I can feel the warmth of your touch through my clothes. It calms me down a bit, but not enough for me to do this with you.

You've got me in an awkward position now. I said I'd do this, but how can I? I've loved you for so long but we've never been more than friends, yet we're standing here trying to make this seem simple. I want this to make us become something more, but will that happen? This is stupid, you don't respect me. You only want sex but I want love. This isn't right, it shouldn't be like this.

Finally, I make up my mind after standing with you for what feels like an hour. I don't want to hurt you, I would never want to hurt you... it wasn't supposed to be this hard. I cringe and feel like I might be sick.

"I-I can't," I stutter nervously and look from you to the ground. I don't want to see your reaction.

"Come on. Please?" you say as you put your arms around my waist, pulling me into you. I can feel your heart beating and I don't want to move. I want to stay in your arms forever, but I know what you want.

I step out of your arms and push you back. I only meant to put some distance between us, you weren't supposed to fall. You deserve it though. I said no. I would say no again, but right now I'm at a loss for words.

"Fine," you say emotionless as you stand up. You stare at me a moment before walking away.

I follow you, not knowing where to go, and realize I don't even want to look at you. Keeping my head down, I follow the sound of leaves being crushed. My mind wanders to what my friend Ashley told me when I told her about our plans.

Honestly, Ash, I don't support your decision, but I want you to know one thing-YOU are in control of whatever happens. It takes a lot to say yes but it takes so much more to say no.

We're out of the woods now and you turn to look at me. No words are exchanged but I can tell you're more than angry.

"I'm sorry," I say hoping for a hug or some type of verbal response. You just nod and leave.

I ruined it. I let you down and I let you slip away. I feel like I've failed you in some way even though I know, you're the one that failed me. The regret begins to set in when I can't see you anymore. I shouldn't feel this bad, I did the right thing. You had ill intentions and ended up ravaging my heart. I almost want to cry but I remember what my cousin, Amy told me a few days ago.

When things get rough-- just look around. The sun will still be shining and the world will still be turning. If you can see that, then you're not dead and the world didn't end.

I smile lightly, because I realize that she's right. I'm still alive and the world didn't end, even if the love I give is never returned.



Torridian
Poets & Writers
Hall of Fame

"Preserving the culture of literature."

TL Publishing Group

Please join TL Publishing Group in welcoming the 2014 Torridian Hall of Fame members. These eight writers were all published in Volumes V - VIII of the Torrid Literature Journal. They were chosen through a voting process where they received the highest votes in their category. These writers are from all over the world and each one of them has a unique style that draws attention to their literary craft. If you are unfamiliar with their work, make sure you get ahold of the volume in which their work appeared. You can purchase a copy of our journals at any time by visiting our online store.

Additionally, please visit our website to learn more about our 2013 and 2014 Torridian Hall of Fame members, including their writing history and other places where you can read their work.

Our Hall of Fame serves as a platform to preserve, honor and promote the growth and culture of literature. Follow us as we prepare to vote for our next season of inductees for Volumes IX - XII of the Torrid Literature Journal. Voting starts October 1, 2014 and runs through February 1, 2015. More information will be provided closer to the start of the next voting season.

VOL. V
Evolution

Amanda Gayle Oliver
Poems: I Never Read the Bell Jar | You're Gone

Bio: Amanda Gayle Oliver is a Southern Belle by birth and a New Englander by heart. Born and raised in Alabama, Oliver was first published in the Birmingham News at the age of 16. She graduated from the University of Alabama at Birmingham with a BA in Literature and Creative Writing. Most recently published in the *San Diego Poetry Annual*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, and for *Steady Moon Press*. Her work has also appeared in the *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Emerge Literary Magazine*, *Barefoot Review*, *Lamplighter Review* and for the *Canadian Alzheimer's Society*. Her poetry and prose concentrate on taking what the world sees as ugly and making it beautiful, giving a voice to the voiceless, and human connection. Oliver has had three plays (*Stuck*, *Elevator Music*, and *Lines*) produced in Alabama. She currently snuggles with her husband in Nashville, TN.

Alice Recker
Story: Winter Solitude

Bio: Alice has been published in *Looking Back* magazine in 2013 as well as *Torrid Literature Journal* and successfully edited a memoir *Seeking Northwest*. She is a contributor to the *New Madrid County Missouri History and Families* published in 2013. More recently, she has self-published a fiction book in the mystery genre, *Heart of the Wheat Shaft* which is in paperback and kindle on *amazon.com*. She does freelance writing for clients who want fiction and non-fiction pieces written. Alice lives in the Kansas City, Missouri area and continues to write.

VOL. VI

Erosion

Jim Landwehr
Poem: Can't Be Beat

Bio: Jim Landwehr enjoys writing creative non-fiction, fiction, and poetry. His first book, *Dirty Shirt: A Boundary Waters Memoir* will be released by eLectio Publishing on June 17th, 2014. He has non-fiction stories published in *Boundary Waters Journal*, *Forge Journal* and *MidWest Outdoors Magazine*. His poetry has been featured in *Verse Wisconsin*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, *Echoes Poetry Journal*, *Wisconsin People and Ideas Magazine*, the *Wisconsin Poets Calendar*, *Off the Coast Poetry Journal*, *Heavy Bear* online magazine and others. He also has a fiction story published on the Free Zombie Fiction Blog. Jim lives and works in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Connie McDonald
Story: Forbidden

Bio: Connie McDonald is from Dunedin, New Zealand. She just turned 20 years old. McDonald enjoys full immersion in life and the documentation of this through writing, photography and drawing. She is currently studying at Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand. Her work can be seen at www.conniephotog.tumblr.com.

VOL. VII

Breakthrough

Shirley Kuo
Poem: Raymond Chandler's Grave

Bio: Shirley Kuo, is a Pushcart Prize-nominated, sixteen-year-old poet currently residing in sunny California. Her work has previously been published by the *Young Adult Review*, *Episodic*, *The Cuckoo Quarterly*, *American Athenaeum*, *Winter Tangerine Review*, *Hemingway's Playpen*, and others. Kuo breathes for books, early sunrises, and Satie's *Gymnopédie No. 1*.

Brittany Zelkovich
Story: Fallen Star

Bio: After conquering short story telling, with multiple publications under her belt, Brittany finds herself delving into the world of Science Fiction/Fantasy Novel Writing. One short novel rough draft awaits editing, as another novel is just beginning. Find her published works online at *The Blue Guitar Magazine*, *The Gila River Review*, and of course, *Torrid Literature Journal*. Also, follow her writing adventures, as well as her Pacific Northwest adventures, at her blog at iemergedinlondonrain.wordpress.com.

VOL. VIII

Revolution

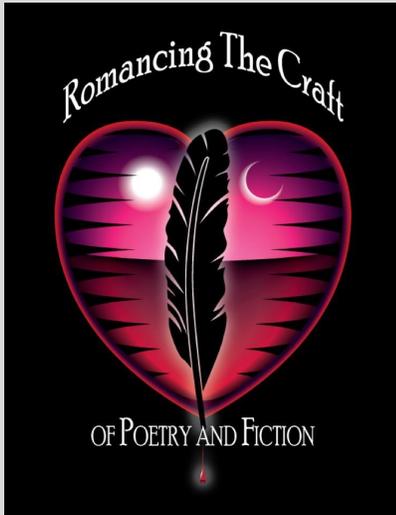
Raquel Laureano
Poem: Invasions

Bio: A first generation Puerto Rican -American, Raquel G. Laureano, is a poet, artist and freelance writer. Using the medium of words, she enjoys painting the emotions and scenarios of life on the canvas of personal experience. When she's not reading, Raquel devotes her spare time to her creative endeavors. She currently resides in the Windy City. www.AngelFireStar.com.

Grant Feters
Story: Co-Co's Toy Box

Bio: Grant E. Feters East Tennessee Author of 7 fiction and non-fiction books. Children's, YA, paranormal, & adult fiction. Grant attends 5 different writing groups in the area. His short stories have been accepted for publication in several publications. His current projects are *The Magic Cape*, a middle grade tale, about a magic towel found mixed in with the family laundry; *Crazy*, an adult fictional story about an unemployed engineer; and *Cooties* a children's story that shows how we have both good and bad cooties.

3RD ANNUAL ROMANCING THE CRAFT OF POETRY & FICTION CONTEST



2013 Contest Winners:

1st Place: Venturesome Visionary (Poem) by Amy Pacini

2nd Place: The Last Leaf (Poem) by Chris Farrell

3rd Place: Wrinkled Sheets (Short Story) by Mollie Markowitz

2012 Contest Winners:

1st Place: The Killing Fields (Poem) by Marchell Jefferson

2nd Place: No More Games (Short Story) by Mary Hendrix

3rd Place: Reflection (Poem) by Sarah Marie Mooney

Our annual contest has a low cost submission fee and is open to all themes and genres of poetry and fiction. Emerging and established writers are encouraged to participate.

Guidelines:

- Submission Period: March 1, 2014 - June 30, 2014
- Seasoned and new writers are encouraged to submit. Also, there is no age limit or geographic location requirement.
- All work must be previously unpublished.
- For each entry, please upload up to three poems or a fiction story with 3,000 words or less. There is no word limit for poems.
 - The entry fee per submission is \$5.00 USD.
 - There is no limit to the number of entries you may submit, but each entry requires a separate \$5.00 submission fee.
- We accept simultaneous submissions, but please notify us immediately if your poem or story is accepted for publication elsewhere.
- All rights revert to the author after publication.
- All entries will be considered for publication in the Torrid Literature Journal.
- All entrants will receive a one-year online subscription to the Torrid Literature Journal (4 online issues).

All contest submissions should be submitted through the use of our site on Submittable at <http://torridliterature.submittable.com>

Winners & Prizes: Three winners will be selected during a blind judging process. Winners and their selected work will be announced in Volume XII of the Torrid Literature Journal which will be released October 1, 2014.

The prizes are as follows:

Third Place: 1) \$100.00 USD Visa Gift Card; and 2) 1 print copy of the Torrid Literature Journal.

Second Place: 1) \$200.00 USD Visa Gift Card and 2) 1 print copy of the Torrid Literature Journal.

First Place: 1) \$300.00 USD Visa Gift Card and 2) 1 year print subscription to the Torrid Literature Journal (4 issues).

All winners will receive recognition in the Torrid Literature Journal and on our website. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Alice Saunders at asaunders@torridliterature.com.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

TL Publishing Group is always looking for submissions. We publish 4 issues a year and our journals are available online and in print. When it comes to reviewing a submission, we don't look for a particular theme. We look at the work itself, specifically its message, delivery, and structure. We accept a variety of submissions including: poetry, fiction, and articles. We also accept requests for interviews and book reviews.

All submissions may be uploaded by visiting:

<http://torridliterature.submittable.com/submit>

We encourage everyone to become familiar with the Torrid Literature Journal first by reading previous editions. This will give writers a general idea of the type of content we look for. Our submission period for the Torrid Literature Journal is year round and our response time varies depending on the volume of submissions received.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact Alice Saunders at asaunders@torridliterature.com. We look forward to the reading experience.



Dear Reader,

There are many ways to describe literature, its purpose and effects. We want you to grasp the understanding that literature is the powerhouse of everything. The writing housed within these pages is a powerful reminder that we are not alone in our experiences. As we have mentioned before, nobody can capture a moment of time like a writer can. They can sensationalize a moment of time that can invoke a page turning desire for more of what only a writer can provide.

Life happens. In between life continuing, we easily become caught in the entrapment of our circumstances. We lose ourselves, and sometimes it is the good parts that we lose while we hold on to things that we should let go of. Sometimes we need to refuel. Writers get this. Literature is a seed that creates roots and fruits. Our writers are the farmers who leave a harvest for the readers to reap. This harvest does not expire. We know this be true, as many of us have worn out copies of our favorite books that we continue to reread from to time because the pleasure we get from going through its pages never stop. It is a feeling that leaves you sated yet thirsting for more.

Thank you for continuing to stick with our writers as we journey through the vast landscape of life to unearth the finest literary treasures. If this is your first experience with us then we want to welcome you to our Torridian family. We hope that you are overflowing with motivation by the time you reach this point. We want to saturate you with positive energy. We want to inspire you to follow your own dreams and goals.

Celebrate National Poetry Month by leaving your literary footprint across the canvas of life or help someone else do the same. We look forward to new journals, contests, and other exciting features as we continue on this path of discovery to unveil some of the most phenomenal writers that exist on the literary scene. See you soon in Volume XI - The Butterfly Effect.

- Editorial Staff



Join TL Publishing Group as they celebrate National Poetry Month with the release of the *Torrid Literature Journal – Volume X Lost*. This latest installment in their literary series is their largest one yet with over 40 poems and short stories that perfectly capture the beauty of the written word. The poems herein are as diverse in style and format as they are in topic, yet they all have one thing in common, they all say something worthy of the reader's attention. The same concept applies to the fiction content. Whether the stories provide laughter, tears, or some other emotion, they without a doubt will entertain the reader. They will capture the reader's attention with the first opening line and hold the reader's attention captive to the writer's creativity. It is worth mentioning that something powerful happens when you combine the imagination of a reader with the creativity of a writer. The experience is dynamic.

There are several other features worthy of mention. The first is a must read book review of *Weathering Wilderness*, which is a collection of poems by the late Richard B. Hoffman. Jacob Erin-Cilberto, author of *Intersection Blues*, is the writer of this reputable review that breaks down the entire book by giving the readers a look at the inside parts that make up the whole collection.

What's more, TL Publishing Group always has an exciting event or literary happening that is taking place. Inside this issue, they announce the new members of their Hall of Fame for literary excellence. The 2014 members are recognized for their contributions to literature. Another announcement that will capture reader's attention is the 3rd Annual Romancing the Craft of Poetry and Fiction Contest which started March 1st and continues until June 30th.

Readers can be assured that after reading this issue, they will be inspired to take their celebration of National Poetry Month to the next level by embarking on their own literary endeavors.

Contributors: Jacob Erin-Cilberto; Kay Gosack; A.J. Huffman; Tracey S. Rosenberg; Marissa Laven; Mariel Arriola, Heather Hartung; Kira Webster; Vincent Miskell; George Freek; Nathan Smith; Arpa Mukhopadhyay; Miriam Kirschner; Clinton Inman; Anne Bise; Alyestel Hamilton; Chris Farrell; Jaimie Miller; Sarah Brown Weitzman; Mollie Kervick; Samontha Forbes; Deborah Rocheleau; Jason Hill; Christina Mengis; Craig Hart; Alexandra Ambrose; Jen Susca; Neha Praseed; Dionne Evans; John Kaniecki; Ankita Anand; Gwendlyn Martin; Kaitlin Artis; Suzane Bricker; Francine Garson; Noah R. Sebek; Chase Parnell; Kimberly Dorffner



3rd Annual Romancing the Craft of Poetry & Fiction Contest

Submission Period: 3/1/14 - 6/30/14

Entry Fee: \$5.00

Submit: <http://torridliterature.submittable.com/submit>