Echoes & Images

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Grand Adventure

Nikki Futch
First Place, Poetry

The car was another home that summer
I was packed in the back
With all mom’s stuff
Stacked so high
Dad couldn’t see behind us

It didn’t matter much
The road was empty, minus us
The ground was flat
Like it was levelled on purpose
Though man could never get it that perfect

There were small, random stands of trees
Busy being lonely
Mom constantly read
Romance novels on her iPad
We were all bored

Dad doesn’t like to talk while he drives
Mom and I ran out of words
They played the music I like
Because they were leaving me
I was content to sing or sleep

I didn’t mind the emptiness around
On our grand adventure
I counted wind turbines
Followed power lines with my eyes
Until the horizons

I saw mountains that looked out of place
Like they’d been dropped there
Or pinched like fabric,
To smooth the rest.

Mom stocked up on snacks
Because we all expected her to
She brought that smelly popcorn
That only she likes
With every crinkle of the bag
A smell would waft through the car
That dad calls eau de dog breath

I could almost see our ties in Flux
Tighter or looser- I didn’t know
Slowly let go of my cell phone
Though I had more use for it
Then more than ever
A young man sat in the corner of the local café on Main Street. He couldn’t have been no more than in his early 30s, yet he sat as if he bore 80 years’ worth of life on his shoulders. His eyes were hollow and didn’t seem to quite focus on anything particular. A sandwich and fries sat on a plate in front of him barely touched with his cold water sitting beside him half full. I had to wonder why this man was eating alone and seemed to be in such despair. Beside me I heard a little two year old squeal in his mother’s arms. The young man flinched when the chubby little boy let out his high pitched cry. I glanced around the room thinking I finally had this young man figured out for I, too, had once gone through this state in my life. To my left there was a family with a mother, a father, and their two children. One of the children was about 10 years old and she was twisting her napkin to make some kind of shape. Her sister was older and in her teens. She seemed to not even want to be in the café in the first place. There were all kinds of people of different ages and backgrounds in the café, and if someone would take a moment to look around he would see something beautiful. Yet the young man didn’t see any of this. His eyes were straight ahead, his body was like stone, and his mouth was set in a grim line. One may mistake him for a statue if it wasn’t for the rhythmic breathing he exhibited.

I slowly got out of my seat and made my way to his booth. When I sat across from the young man he didn’t even seem to see me. His eyes never moved, as if I were transparent. “Son,” I said in a quiet voice, “what’s your name?”

At first I thought he wouldn’t answer, and I was prepared to probe him until he found his voice. I was shocked when his lips began to move, and in just above a whisper he announced that his name was Bryan Philips. I took a deep breath and prayed for the right words to give to Bryan. He needed help, yet his condition was difficult to fix and would only be healed by time.

“Nice day out isn’t it?” I asked.

“Yes, it is a nice day, I suppose,” Bryan said with a hint of annoyance in his voice. I decided to get right to the point of the conversation and directly address this young man’s problem.

“Where did you serve, Bryan,” I inquired, a little louder than before.

This question made him truly look at me for the first time, and at that point I knew I was right in my earlier assumption. The young man, like me, was experiencing the aftermath of war, better known as PTSD. I knew this because I, too, had once gone through this journey in my life and in some ways was still experiencing it. Something like PTSD never truly left you, but it could be healed a little over time. He sat up a little taller, placed his arms on the table, and began to talk to me. I told him how I served in the military in my younger days, and he shared with me his stories of his days in the military, which were quite recent. He told me of a bomb that went off where he was stationed and a friend of his was killed. Bryan began to tell stories of how guilty he felt to be alive because on numerous occasions, he was the one that should have been dead, yet it wasn’t him who died. What was locked inside of Bryan was finally
coming to the surface because no one in the civilian world could understand the feelings he had or understand where he was coming from. Only after you have walked in the shoes of a soldier could you get even a glimmer of Bryan’s emotion. What I understood most of all that he shared with me from his days overseas was the fear, the loneliness, and the feeling of losing one’s self day after day.

“No one here gets it,” Bryan said with disgust in his voice. “Do they even care? Do they even have a clue? Why? Why are we fighting? Why are men dying?”

I looked Bryan straight in the eye and said, “look around, Bryan.” He glanced around the café, then turned his attention back to me. There was no understanding in his eyes. He didn’t see what I saw and he may not for a while.

“Bryan, truly look around this time. In this café I see people who are happy, people who are free from fear, people who can raise their families in peace and can hear their children laugh. Yes, these people may be oblivious to some of the aspects of what goes on in the military or overseas, and some of these people don’t even care. They are too busy with their own lives to think twice about us soldiers who have fought or are fighting right now, but that doesn’t mean that all mankind is like that.”

I could tell Bryan was getting agitated by my words. I continued on. “Let me ask you this, Bryan. Would you want these people to know, I mean truly know, the aspects of war? Do you want them to feel the feelings you are feeling right now?”

Bryan shook his head slowly. “I wouldn’t wish that upon anyone who didn’t have to know.” His eyes started to glimmer like a fine mist in the morning, and he took in one long breath, closing his eyes.

We talked for a few more minutes, not about anything in particular, just about life. Whether Bryan realized it or not, this was the beginning of healing for him. It would take time and commitment by those around him, but Bryan would be alright. I could tell he had a good heart and a gentle soul; it had been covered up by the horrors of war. The sun was starting to disappear and the sky shone beautiful colors of red and purple.

“I guess I should go now,” Bryan said with more voice than he had when I first met him.

“Would you like me to give you a ride?” I asked, concerned because there was no one around.

“No, I just live down the street. I can roll there in no time.”

His words didn’t provoke much thought because I assumed he meant roll down the road in his car. That thought was immediately rectified when he asked the passing waitress if she could bring his wheelchair from the back of the café. Once the wheelchair was brought to the table Bryan laid down some money, told the waitress to keep the change, and lifted himself up with his solid arms. It was a bit of a struggle for him to maneuver himself from the bench to the chair. I tried to help, but he brushed me off saying he would get it. I didn’t want to insult him, so I stood back and watched.

Once he was finally in the chair he shook my hand with a firm grip and looked me directly in the eyes. “Thank you. I’m still trying to get used to this awful contraption,” Bryan said motioning to the wheel chair, “yet I thank God for it because what would I do without it?” He began to wheel himself out of the café and I held the door for him. I never spoke another word to the young man, but I will always remember Bryan and the men like him who have come home from war to a world which they don’t recognize.
Recess Freedom

Teresa Cornett
Honorable Mention, Poetry

High pitched squeals of girls and boys
Rush to grab a seat on freedom’s ride
Careful to avoid puddles of mud which
Seek to soil the soles of rubber shoes.

Fastest feet secures prized seating on
High swings, rusty strands of clinking chains
Bound betweenst a half-moon seat
Slightly twisting in the spring time breeze.

Couples pair, three friends beside
Separated by the single letter A
Written within the silver frame
Still teaching while the young play.

Thrusting legs forward
Tugging arms backward
Curling legs backward
Pushing chest forward.

Higher, higher, and higher yet
Feet greet the sky in competition’s might
Soaring through skies like wingless birds
Eyes viewing earth from heaven above.

Faster, faster, and faster yet
Floating through space with swinging arcs
Daring to stretch forth, as if in recline
Feeling sublime while closing the eyes.

A whistle blows, a teacher motions
Final fling of freedom’s sweet flight
Hands release into sprouting wings
Soaring through the air once more.
It’s not all that common for someone in their early thirties to be afraid of the dark. In fact, many people find it a bit strange for anyone outside childhood to harbor the foolish fear, and Aislin knew this all too well, but she simply could not help the fact that when the lights went out an unsettling feeling would slowly overtake her. Her stomach would begin to twist and knot, she would become incredibly anxious, and everything around her would seem to come alive in the dark. Sadly, this was not something she had not grown accustomed to, nor did it seem to be subsiding as she grew older. Of course she knew that monsters didn’t exist, but knowing something and believing it are two completely different things. As a child, she had been quite terrified of the dark and its unknown secrets, and could remember calling for her dad in the late hours of the night to check her closet and under her bed. He would often show up for breakfast with circles under his eyes, and would fight to stifle several yawns, while drinking his morning coffee. She smiled as she thought of this. She had been quite fond of her father, and missed him dearly ever since he passed away two years back. He had been one of six deaths, due to an unfortunate accident at work. She wasn’t quite sure of the details surrounding the tragic event, and no one ever seemed to talk about it. She had learned to avoid the topic altogether, as any attempt she made to learn about it failed rather quickly. This only provoked her curiosity regarding it that much more, but she had caught a snag in her investigation, and decided to set it aside for now. Hopefully, someone would come forward with new information in the near future.

Aislin lay in her bed, surrounded by the shadows of her room. It had been two hours already, and it still felt as though sleep was out of reach. The room was quiet, but outside of it she could hear an assortment of different noises. The refrigerator had kicked on three times since she had first laid down, the staircase boards creaked with an eeriness, and her son had been shuffling around in his sleep all through the evening. Thank goodness he had avoided the phobia afflicting her. After another hour though, she finally fell asleep.

“Mom! Mom! Mom!” Aislin opened her eyes slowly. She felt groggy, and it took her a few seconds to actually comprehend what was going on. Her son, Johnathon, was standing beside her. His red and black, plaid pajamas were wrinkled and wet with sweat, and his hair was a mess. “It’s ten o’clock, Mom. Are you going to cook breakfast today?”

“Oh my dear! I’m sorry, honey, I must have been sleeping really sound.” This was a lie. She had actually slept rather lightly, and wanted to push a few more minutes of rest before starting her day. She got out of bed, and pulled back the window curtain. Sunlight flooded the room, and for a brief moment stung her eyes. This created a slight headache in the back of her head. The morning did not seem to be going in the best of directions, but after a deep breath she was ready to face it with steady optimism. She didn’t want Johnathon to think anything was wrong, and especially didn’t want him to think about monsters. Lord, if he starts that... her thought trailed off.

The rest of the morning progressed in a positive manner. The pair ate breakfast,
took their showers, and finished their morning routines. They had several activities planned for the day before Aislin had to work, and it had been awhile since she was able to spend any time with her son. Her work schedule had been quite frustrating, and mixed with her inability to sleep well, rather hellish.

“Are you ready to head to the park?” Her son nodded in high spirits. He had been excited ever since she mentioned the idea yesterday.

The car ride there seemed longer than normal. Almost like the road stretched out indefinitely, no matter how far they drove. It wasn’t long, though, before they finally reached their destination. The sun was now high in the sky, and was shooting its rays over the playground. At least it’s going to be a beautiful day, Aislin thought. Her eyes were heavy, but the coffee in her hand would remedy that shortly. She didn’t care for the taste of the drink, but it definitely helped to sustain her consciousness throughout the day.

As soon as Jonathon opened the door on his side of the car, he was off sprinting for the multi-colored playground. He had nearly tripped over himself before making it there, and quickly jumped into the sandbox. Aislin laughed to herself as she watched her son dump a bucket of army men into the make-shift desert, and begin setting up bases for the soldiers. She had decided to bring a book, and found an empty bench on which she could read while watching her son. It wasn’t long before her mind dived into the book like her son had done in the sandbox, and everything around her seemed to vanish. Words painted pictures, pictures came together to make a movie, and the movie seemed to hold her attention tightly. I guess I better check on Jonathon. She said to herself as she folded the page she was on, and closed the book.

“Jonathon!” She called out. There was no response. Maybe he didn’t hear me? It was quite possible that he was also lost in his own imagination. She called out again, but still no answer. She felt her heart speed up. This seemed to be the automatic response parents got in this sort of scenario. Her mind raced, and filled with all the worst-case possibilities. “Jonathon!!” She yelled.

“I’m right here, Mom!” Her son came walking out of a wooded area slowly. Aislin felt her heart almost stop, as if it had skipped a beat upon seeing him. She ran to her son, again as a parental precaution, wanting to make sure he was okay. She doubted anything bad had happened, but she still needed to believe he was unharmed.

“Are you alright?” She said slightly out of breath.

“Yeah, I was playing with the Bugaboo.”

“The what?”

“The Bugaboo.” He held up an old doll.

“Jonathon, you can’t just take things you find laying on the ground.”

“I didn’t; she gave it to me. She said I could have it to take home. Is it okay with you, Mom?” Aislin looked at the doll he was holding. It was fairly small, about the size of her hand, and needed a good washing. She wasn’t exactly sure how long it had been outside, and didn’t want to risk bringing anything home, such as bedbugs or any other insects. She took one more look at the doll. Its red eyes stared back at her.

“I guess it’s alright this time.” She said to her son. The boy hugged the figure tightly, and placed it in the bag with his sand-covered army men.

The drive home was equally as dull as the ride to the park, and Aislin felt herself dreading the coming night. She dropped her son off at her mother’s, and made her way to the hospital where she worked. It was going to be a long shift.

The hospital was close to her mother’s home, and she quickly found

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herself parking her car in the parking garage of the massive facility. It hadn’t always been this big, but as time progressed it grew and grew, until it eventually became a trauma level hospital. She didn’t mind working in such a big location, and actually preferred it. She was almost always busy, and this made time go by fairly fast.

Aislin turned off the ignition and reached in the back seat for her badge. She remembered leaving it next to her son’s car seat, but for some reason or another it wasn’t there. *Don’t tell me I left it at home again!* She turned to look, and jumped. The strange doll was sitting in the seat where her hand was, and was again staring at her with its dull crimson eyes. The loosely matted hair was over her face, and the thing was buckled up, oddly enough. I guess Jonathon forgot to take it inside. She un buckled the toy, and set it in the front seat. *Well, at least I’m awake now.*

Her shift went by rather quickly, and she found herself with a bit more energy than expected. She also had felt awkward all evening, as though something were following her in the shadows of the hospital. More than likely it was just her paranoia and personal fears, but this had felt different somehow. She knew she couldn’t explain it, as it was one of those things someone would have to experience in order to understand what she was talking about.

After picking up Jonathon, the two returned home and got ready for bed. The evening was very quiet, and after dinner, they both decided to retire early. He was worn out from a day of playing, and she from a long day of work and several nights of poor sleep. Aislin read her son a story, and tucked him in bed, before readying herself for the same. She had decided to place the new toy next to him, and shut the door. Another surge of excitement ran through her, as she made her way to her bedroom. This had derived from a different source, and for the first time in a while, she felt she would be able to have a good night’s rest. Aislin hastily changed into her two-piece, flannel pajamas, brushed her teeth hurriedly, and climbed into bed. Her eyes began to feel heavy, and not long after that she found herself lost in her dreams.

“Mom!!” Aislin heard her son scream. She quickly jumped out of bed, and ran toward his room. That same maternal instinct guiding her movements. She pushed open the door, and found her son clutching his legs. His eyes were wide, as he pointed at the closet. “It’s a monster!” “A what?” Her heart sank. *Not him too!* She shouted in her thoughts.

“I swear, Mom.” His finger stayed in position. Aislin slowly walked to the closet door and placed her hands on the white, wooden handles. She could see the silhouettes of its contents through the panels. She took a deep breath. *Monsters aren’t real...* She reminded herself. The door swung open, and nothing. No monsters, no trolls, just an empty closet filled with her son’s clothes and shoes.

“See Jonathon, I told you; they aren’t real.” She felt awkward telling him this, when she scarcely believed it herself.

“She was in there… I know she was.” It appeared as if nothing was going to shake his determination toward the idea. She turned back around to face the closet. *Wait a minute! She?* 

“What do you mean she?” She asked him.

“I don’t know. I couldn’t see her face, but her arms were weird looking, and she had dark red eyes that glowed.” He held up his arms, and made a hook-like figure with both of them. It seemed like he was trying to tell her that the elbows worked opposite of his. “They looked like this, and they were really long. She said she was hungry.”

Aislin took a step inside the closet, and turned on the light. She assumed this
might quell his argument, and hopefully allow him to fall back asleep. It was then she felt something underneath her foot. She looked down, and there, staring up at her was the old doll. Its red eyes look directly into hers. She knelt and picked it up. *This? I thought I laid this down next to him?* She placed the doll under her arm to prevent her son from seeing it. She wasn’t quite sure if this thing had triggered the nightmare, but it was better to play it safe, she thought.

“Honey it was just a dream. There is nothing in your closet.” She stroked his hair, and kissed his forehead. “I’ll leave the hall light on for the rest of tonight. Please, try to get some more sleep.”

Aislin returned to her room and placed the doll in an empty chair beside her bed. She thought about the events of today: the finding of the strange toy, the paranoia she felt at work, her son’s sudden nightmare. They were coincidences, sure, yet they felt like so much more.

“I’ll get rid of it tomorrow.” She leaned over and turned off the table lamp. Darkness quickly surrounded her, and now appeared to be even darker than it had been before she had awakened. She felt a sigh pass through her lips, and turned on her side. “Not again…”

An hour or so passed, and Aislin still found herself wide awake. No matter how hard she tried, she could not push the strangeness of today outside her mind. At least things were somewhat returning to normal. Her son resumed his shuffling and the wooden stair steps their eerie creaking noises, and the refrigerator had kicked back on after a short break. Aislin closed her eyes; she knew this was as normal as things got at night in her home.

*Creak…* the sound was faint, but given its unfamiliarity with the others, it sounded more like gunshot. Again, she heard it… *creak….sccrraattechh.* She refused to open her eyes. Sometimes it was easier to find bravery from behind shut eye lids. At least you couldn’t see what to be afraid of. The scratching and raking of something continued, and grew louder as it persisted. It sounded like someone dragging a washing machine, or some other heavy appliance, across the floor without the rubber stoppers on the bottom. It was scraping the floor.

Aislin opened one eye, and then the other. Her room was completely empty. *I guess I was dreaming it, and just made myself scared.* This seemed to calm her down a bit. She took one glance around the room, and upon making it to her closet heart the scratching once more. This time was more audible, and almost sounded as if something was behind the doors. Her eyes were locked on the closet, and she found herself unable to move. She was now frozen in fear.

The scratching continued for a few more minutes, before ceasing completely. Still Aislin’s gaze remained on the closet doors. Something was there; she knew it this time. It had to be that, or she was going crazy. Her mind ran wild with different courses of action, but only one of them seemed reasonable. She would have to check the closet.

She pulled back the blankets covering her, and slowly rose from the bed. Her eyes never left the closet doors. One of the doors opened, not very much, but enough to be noticed. She swallowed a gulp of air, and steadied her nerves. She took a step towards the cracked door. Again it moved, and just like the last, only a few inches. Aislin stopped dead in her tracks. The crack was now big enough for her to at least peer inside, and she was close enough to reach out for the handle. She could feel hear heart beating rapidly, and her breathing had become erratic. It was heavy and labored, as if she were barely able to breathe. *Wait a second, that isn’t me.* Her hands began to shake as she reached for the door. It was cold. She pulled it open cautiously.
“Hungry...” A pair of red eyes glowed in the darkness, as Aislin screamed.

“What have we got, Dick?”
“I’m… not sure sir. This is beyond me, and it’s definitely nothing I’ve ever seen.” The detective approached the house. His face had hardened a bit as he prepared for the worse.

“Sir, you’re going to want these.” The officer held out a pair of gloves.

The house was covered in blood. It started out in small splotches at the entrance, but as he made his way to the master bedroom it intensified greatly. In the bedroom, he found a young woman handcuffed, and seated on the bed. Her eyes were red from heavy crying, and she appeared to be in a state of shock.

“What happened here?” The detective asked one of the officers out loud.

“The Bugaboo…” Aislin said in a whisper. The detective turned to her. There was no life in her eyes, and at this point, he wasn’t even sure if she was sane.

“It’s obvious it’s a murder sir. There was a child here, but his room is just as bad as this one. We haven’t found a body either.” The detective nodded, and headed for Jonathon’s room. If possible, his room had been painted in blood far worse than anything else. Even he found it hard to determine its original color. As he looked around, he noticed a trail of smeared blood. It looked as if something had been dragged back towards the closet door, which remained only a few inches open.
The Mantis

Teresa Cornett
Second Place, Poetry

Unexpected moments of life refresh one’s soul
like washing dishes behind a window frame,
Mr. Praying signals from antennas
to his creator, and mine
just for me.
Mantis sticks his quick landing
like a gymnast confident upon her mat,
alien head bowed, spiny arms folded,
sending.
Celestial Passion

Ebony and ivory, keys pressed and heard
Trepid movements, long fingers in flurry
Sound sweet and trepid, memories to come

Dress obsidian, a velvet room
Smell of perfume, filled glass
Frosty blue eyes, a perfect night

A cold night, amidst the calm water
Music in mind, soft skin shudders
Warm lovers kiss, under pale light

What will soon be, desires finally free
Shadows so lithe, moon in admiration
Wonderful darkness, envious lonely stars
The Solution to the Problem of Death

I used to be afraid of death. In fact, for a period of a few months, I let it consume my mind for the better part of the day. As an adolescent, I struggled with age-related changes in meaning and purpose, along with the constant fear of it all being in vain even if I did find meaning and purpose. I wandered through the darkest, most nihilistic shadows of my psyche in those early years, trying to find that white light at the end of the inevitable tunnel.

I spent evening after evening perplexed about the nature of my own existence, and I lost faith in all of the religious structures I had in place to answer these questions. I was left with an uncontrollably questioning mind and no foundation of explanation to point it to. The days became tolerable after a few months, but for years, the evenings would occasionally come to haunt me with a feeling of desolation and despair.

I cannot point out on my timeline when the paradigm shift began. I was around 18 years old, and I began to look around at all the fascinating people and possibilities that surrounded me at my new home in the New Mexico mountains. Key aspects of my personality were developing, and as my self-esteem became more established, so did my overall happiness.

I realized something then – this short life was a blank slate, and I could fill it with any crazy, off-the-wall story that I wanted. Suddenly, I had shifted from despair over the lack of an inherent purpose to joy in the freedom to create my own. No longer did life look like a meaningless burden with no cookie at the end of the line.

After moving out on my own, I realized that I could go anywhere I dreamed of and make a living. I had a serious case of wanderlust, and I envisioned becoming a bartender who toured the big cities of America by taking up employment for a few short months at a time. I fantasized about a writing career where I built my very own hermit house in the mountains and lived out my own, perhaps more fortunate, version of The Secret Window.

I was excited, full of enthusiasm for the potential paths I had before me. I felt liberated by my ability to write the story of my life, but there was still something missing. My heart still longed for something I could consider universally meaningful. Without a sense that the labors of my life would contribute to something significant, the freedom I was so delighted with felt hollow.

It was around this time that a good friend gave me a book called The Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are by Alan Watts. I read the book in two days and realized that my existential woes had been put to rest with the philosophies it contained. I soon discovered his ideas were far from just his own, but were a fundamental part of many forms of human spirituality when traced back to their original nature.

The idea is both simple and yet entirely impossible to fully comprehend and communicate through any verbal language. It comes down to the realization that we are nothing without our context. Our physical bodies could not exist without the physical landscape and atmosphere of the Earth. We would have no energy without the burning of the sun. We’d have no solar system, no galaxy, without the conditions of

Victoria Hewlett
Second Place, Non-fiction
the early Universe.

Neil Degrasse Tyson, the celebrity astrophysicist, once said, “not only are we in the universe, the universe is in us. I don’t know of any deeper spiritual feeling than what that brings upon me.” Such was true for me after I came to terms with the implications of my new perspective. No longer did I have to fear death, for no longer was I the same self I had once worried about losing in eternity. I had shifted from this fragile fleshy vehicle to the totality of the Earth’s biosphere and to the limitless ceiling of stars above it. Finally, I realized what it is I had been looking for all these years. I found my solution to the problem of death. I am not afraid anymore because I realize that I am none other than the universe itself.

To realize I am not limited to my own body is the ultimate form of liberation. When circumstances arise that are a burden, even a tragedy, I can rest assured that it is all part of the harmonious flow of the Universe. Understanding that I am, in fact, an integral part of the whole picture and that each phenomenon, person and event is also a part of that same whole has given me the ability to reserve judgement of positive and negative, good and evil. It has not eroded my moral compass – if anything, it has sharpened it. “Treat others how you would like to be treated,” I was always told, but now I can simply remind myself how absurd it would be to stab myself in the back.

To reach this understanding takes a certain amount of ego death. It takes a realization that the self we experience from day to day, the constant movie we see from the perspective of this body, the sense of being that we have had since we were children is, in some ways, fundamentally flawed. It takes the understanding that the classic self is an illusion; it is a network of electrical activity buzzing in the brain, which is entirely a product of its environment, both physically and qualitatively. It takes acknowledging that we are nothing without everything else, and in that sense, we are everything else.

I used to be afraid of death, but it was those months and years of struggling with the idea of losing myself entirely that helped me to realize who I really was in the first place. Liberation from the mentality of being a poor-little-me, stuck in an uncaring Universe that is entirely separated from my self is an invaluable gift, one that has changed the course of my life. To be able to look into the stars and see a mirror, to be able to take warmth and comfort in that perception, is the ultimate form of belonging, of joy and of unity. I am not afraid of death because to know I will die is to realize what a miracle it is to be anything at all.
An Ambitious Afternoon

Emily Joyner
Third Place, Poetry

The teeth marks
On the enormous stick
Which is much too large
To be of any use;
These are the epitaph
Of a people who
Tried to do too much.
We, like the dog,
Possessed by intense
Joy, know no bounds
Until the bounds know
Us: like the measurements
Of a very fresh grave.
Nose buried deep in
The dusty water;
And the gushing steps,
The frenzied pleasure
At being a part
Of this earth.
Literally
The dust of the earth;
We are,
We are.
And in the wasted
Field: a jungle of
Weeds and abandoned
Wire, the great beast
With a sound like
Our communal rage,
Chews up the earth
Row by row
And spits it out
Into our imaginary
Graves.
Cleaning My Car Out for the First Time in Too Long

Nikki Futch
Honorable Mention, Poetry

Sunglasses that my mom bought me
Notes from high school, memories
Clear glasses for my dad’s safety
A belt, a shirt, some blue febreze
Some hair pins, an Adele cd
Zebra tape beneath the seat
A veritable library
Some yarn and 3 pair of earrings
A moon pie, French fry, free parking
A test with my first college C
Motor oil, gas receipts
A box of melted zyrtec D
Birth control I got for free
Coupons for ramen and lunch meat
And sitting in the driver’s seat:
The culmination- today. Me.

.
On The Raft

He reached too high towards the stars in too literal of a sense.

The hospital room’s mood matched the rhythm of my heart beats. Slow and soft. The light coming from above reflected off the beige tiles below, casting everything in that business-toned color. Beeps and breaths and subdued sobs. There was a sink. There were disposable gloves on its counter. A sofa, a couple of paintings, a television, all bought wholesale from Wal-Mart. My two children were beside me, finally aware that the great price of being was ending. And before me was an uncelebrated tragedy.

Simon on life support. My husband was in no shape to talk. Machines spoke for him instead. The tubes running into his nose made breaths that sounded as unnatural as an AC unit, that sounded too much like a gust traveling through a cave. His scrubs were white and clean. I’m sure the staff thought they’d be a fitting replacement for robes in Heaven. This was and wasn’t the man marking two decades of good and bad memories. He had the same curly hair, the same crooked fingers, the same wedding band. But he wasn’t snoring in his sleep.

I looked to our children, Gloria and Daniel. The girl wasn’t a girl anymore. She’s now twenty and goes to a college ten miles down the road. A Business Major. One could describe her through floral terms. Gloria’s a blossoming flower, a rose with few thorns, a Lily of the Valley, what have you. She has his eyes and my nose and will probably grow up to be just like us both. Daniel was only thirteen. Youthful-sounding adjectives would be fit for him. Brave, clever, a little sentimental, always looking for fun where he can find it. He has my nose and his eyes.

I don’t yet know how he’ll end up.

“Go on,” I said to the nurse. “Tell them the diagnosis. I’d prefer not to.”

“Certainly,” she said, tapping her clipboard’s backside in either impatience or stressful compassion. “Four weeks have passed since your father entered his coma. Since he hasn’t come out of it yet, it means, well, he probably never will. Your father’s in what we call a vegetative state.”

Gloria lowered her head a little. Daniel took two steps towards Simon, both of them muffled by unjustified guilt.

“Damn it,” my daughter said. “That’s what I expected to hear, but I still had hoped. Never would’ve thought a simple call-in could’ve caused something like this.”

Four weeks ago, a street with seven houses lost power. Simon was sent to fix it. Apparently, he wanted to get back to Daniel’s birthday party as soon as possible, so he decided to climb the telephone pole without taking the time to slip on his harness. At least he managed to fix the power line before he slipped and fell those twelve feet. Stubborn bastard. Never could stand to do anything he didn’t want to. And he loved his son. One of his good traits that contrasted with the rest. My heart sighs at the sight of Simon’s current state, but a few blue patches of flesh can’t help but feel avenged.

“So are you going to take him off life support?” Gloria asked. “Is that what this is about?”

“Maybe,” I said. “It’s a… really tough decision we’ll have to make.”

“Well,” said the nurse, “I brought you the papers for it like you requested.”

She passed me her clipboard and a pen. On the sheet were a bunch of empty
lines yearning for my name. Would signing it feel like writing an execution warrant?

“What do you think I should do, Gloria?”

“There’s no good answer. If we don’t let daddy go, the hospital bills will make us poor. He wouldn’t want that. But if you do sign that, he’ll—”

“He’ll be gone forever, and it’ll seem like I killed him. I’m aware of that.”

“No matter what you decide, it’s not your fault, Mom. The ground and gravity killed him.”

And in Daniel’s head, he said: I killed him by having a birthday party.

“Will dad go to a better place when he dies?” my son asked.

“Honey, you know I haven’t been religious since I was your age. I can’t give you an answer. Grandma and Grandpa might be able to, but I can’t.”

“A little religion sounds nice at the moment,” Gloria said.

“Not to me. If your father ends up in Heaven, that also means my brother’s in Hell. Believe whatever you want by all means. But I’m not going to change on account of this. Simon wouldn’t want me to.”

“Isn’t it scary to think you’ll never see him again after he dies?” Gloria asked. “To think that the closest you could every get to having him back would be digging up his bones?”

“Am I afraid of eternity, you mean? No. People are afraid of eternity simply because we’re finite and evolution drives us to do as much as we can. There’s a sense of urgency coloring our every thought. That’s why we’re afraid of eternity. We view our time like we’re a man lost at sea, like there’s an endless ocean behind and before us. This moment is like a raft we hold onto for survival. We love our rafts because it saves us from the ocean. It feels like we’ve been on it for an agreeable amount of time.

Neither too long nor not long enough. But we worry our skeletons won’t find it as comfortable. That, one day, our rafts will take on too much water and sink. What silly assumptions. A fear of eternity is really a love for the present.”

“And do you love the present?”

“No,” I said, handing the clipboard back to the nurse, “but I’m still not ready to say goodbye to him.”

If only Simon stared at me with open eyes rather than closed ones.

“Kids, you stay with your dad for a while bit longer, okay? I…I need to stretch my legs a little.”

So I turned away from Simon for what probably wouldn’t be the last time and stepped out of his hospital room. The hall outside was painted the same business beige. There I saw Andrew sitting on a bench chair, leaning against the wall. His eyes drooped with pity. Maybe guilt. He rose to his feet and gave me a little kiss in the lips. I recoiled just a bit.

“How’s he doing, Mary?”

“No better. The nurse says Simon’s a vegetable.”

The man I was guided to by an ache in my cheek sighed and slouched.

“Of all the people this could’ve happened to, why’d it have to be you?”

“It didn’t happen to me. It happened to Simon.”

“You don’t deserve to see him like this.”

“I might not have to for much longer. To let him go, to cast him into the open ocean, all I’d have to do is sign a paper.”

“Do you plan on it?”

“It’s a difficult decision,” I said. “Killing Simon would give us hope of paying off his hospital bills, but it would also take away any hope of him ever waking up.”

“I know you’ll make the right choice.”
“You’re too good of a guy to realize it, but, deep down, you’re hoping the right choice would be killing him. Because that’d mean you wouldn’t have any more competition.”

“That’s probably right,” Andrew said. “Sorry to be so insensitive.”

“No matter what my decision ends up being, just know you’re not going to factor into it.”

“I wouldn’t want to.”

“It’s funny,” I said. “How many times have I thought of leaving Simon? Too many to keep track of. What’s the big difference between me leaving and him dying?”

“Leaving him would be your choice.”

“And now both my options entail never talking to him again. It’s just that one carries a little more finality than the other.”

Andrew took my hand and squeezed my palms.

“Look,” he said, “maybe we should call you a priest or something. My family knows one.”

“You know I’m-“

“It’s not just for you. Gloria and Daniel could use a little comfort.”

“They’ll need to learn how to deal with loss one day.”

“Both of us know they’ll never be able to get used to it. Nobody can. Calling a priest would just make things easier for them.”

“Fine. I guess there’s nothing wrong with another Father being around, but that doesn’t mean I’m taking their first one off life support. Not necessarily.”

Andrew and I sat down together. Then a weighty quiet descended. There were only the sound of gurneys wheeling down distant hallways and our own breathing. Simon and I, we are and we were not perfect. Our frozen half-smiles have filled many picture frames. They may all be held up by stripped screws, but that doesn’t mean they weren’t taken. And taken they shall be.
Persephone

Joy Harrison
Honorable Mention, Poetry

The leaves fall briskly
Orange covered ground
Shriveled and scattered
Wind howling under full moon
Baring of the trees

The forests are naked
Cold air cuts to the bone
Ground frozen hard to the touch
White diamonds begin to fall
Covering the dead saplings, the frosted earth

The Sun rises high in the east
Bringing life to the meadows
Wind is soft, warm, and sweet
Joyous aroma of life is in the air
For now, Persephone has come home

The sky brighter, doves fly
Smells are luscious
Flowers and crops plentiful
She’s done her deed
Now she must go down below

The crescent is full and bright
She honors her deal with Hades
Returns to the buried depths
Saddened by what she has left
Now as is above, is below with death
The Brink of Nothing

On a warm day in Knoxville, the air was muggy, almost unbreathable. I was 10 years old. I had no idea what it meant to have money. I had grown up with nothing. It was just me, my father, and his junkie girlfriend. When I came home from school every day I never knew if I was going to be able to eat or even shower. We were always on the brink of having nothing.

I had been living with my father for a few years now. My mother gave me up, as she could no longer care for me. The pain-killers always came first. I was always a second priority. Moving in with my dad seemed to be an upgrade at first. He had a steady job working in a saw-mill, processing lumber to make saw dust. Sometimes, I would watch. He ended up getting fired after five years of working there. I was never sure why.

We ended up getting evicted, so we went to live with his mother. He had found himself a new girlfriend, Tanya. I hated her. I knew from the moment I had met her she was bad news. She moved in and brought all of her baggage with her. She was addicted to narcotics. Soon after, so was my father. The only income we were bringing in was my dad’s unemployment check. We were also on food stamps as well. Every time he got his check on Tuesday afternoon, we would go to his dealer. I would sit in the car and wait patiently, although I knew what was going on.

I would always hear them describe what they wanted to buy. I’d hear them say they were getting a “Roxy” or a “tab,” to which I caught on in no time. I would always go to the fridge after school, starving from a long day of classes. It never failed to be empty. I knew we got food stamps, but where did they go? Turns out, they were selling them for pills. Even at my age, I was deeply angered. I would go to my room and scream and cry. I didn’t want to live this way.

It got so bad that we would go weeks without water and electricity. I would go to friends’ houses just to have a hot shower. Our house was disgusting, neglected. I had lice every other week, and they ended up cutting all of my hair off in 4th grade. I was ashamed. I knew that other people knew I had nothing, but I always kept my grades up and never wanted to leave from school. The school was my safe-haven. There, I always had food and water. Unlike most of the kids my age, going home was the worst part of my day.

In the end, my father chose drugs over me. He and his girlfriend left for San Antonio, Texas, abandoning me in a home filled with nothing but ragged furniture and regret. I moved in with my grandmother shortly after, and I live with her to this day. I graduated high school with honors, moved on to college, and am pursuing a career in the health field. I refuse to let my past push me to the brink of nothing.
Dad

Smell of smoke, pile of ash,
cigarettes used,
traces of a smoker’s presence.

Silver moon, blood wood,
bloody clotted mess,
wood that needed scrubbed.

Porcelain dove, painted cross,
sterile rooms,
decorated white place of death.

Whirring machines, silent nurse,
what is expected of us,
quiet is trying with shaking tears.

Tight embraces, gentle vernacular,
whispered amongst strangers,
words are meant to ease the pain.

Traces of life blown away,
wood made pristine, young,
decorated things out of sight.

Quiet made unnecessary,
words will be disremembered.
Force Majeure

Kelly Tolley

First Place, Visual Arts

acrylic on two canvases

Spring 2016. Volume 26
City at Dusk

Cody Buczkowske
Honorable Mention, Visual Arts
unedited digital photography
Untitled III

Sydney Carter
Honorable Mention, Visual Arts
charcoal on paper

Spring 2016 . Volume 26
Nightmare Suit

Christina Lane

charcoal on paper
Killer Lovers

Clearly black liquid,
Trickle, trickle, trickle.
Slipping, slipping down.
Stinging, seeping,
Drowning one hundred percent.

Whirls of puffs and clouds,
Choking life on each breath.
Inhaling death and exhaling life.
Is it worth your stick or pipe?

Handfuls, mouthfuls.
For healing? Or for stealing?
Given by law, prescribed,
Or choosing to choke on the dirty find?

In different forms it comes:
In needles, bottles, joints, and drums.

Round and round,
Spinning circles.
Up is no longer up
But rather upside-down.

How enjoyable is it;
To maim an unborn?
To unknowingly beat a small one?
To separate your closest loves
By getting high on some drugs?
Or getting low on a beery flow?

Hope you enjoy it ‘til your last sip;
It may lead to your last trip.
Hope your lungs will hold,
While you puff away,
Pouring into them a smoky mold.
Hope it fills your happiness
As you fill your veins full;
Shooting your brain until it’s dull.
Hope the popping leads to stomach’s delight;
This wasn’t supposed to be your last night.
Midnight Flight

Kelly Tolley
Second Place, Visual Arts
collage

Spring 2016 . Volume 26 28
Starburst

Zackery Sturgill
digital art
Self-Portrait

Breana Wallen

graphite & charcoal on pastel paper
Cat

Tiffany Washburn

pen & ink on paper
The Serpent’s Dream,
a myth poem

Zackery Sturgill
Honorable Mention, Poetry

Time for bed and dreams of sweet harmonic chaos.
   Blowing and twisting earth, quaking winds,
       A flood in the sky, meteors fall to earth like hail stones,
           Gravity loses its grip, all reality fades.
   Oceans turn into a forest of iron death,
   Spewing gasses so vile
The concept of life becomes nothing more than a myth.
   Winds of sand and fire sparkle before you see
       The vast void of oblivion,
           And the inner understanding of absolution.
       Tree sap turns to ice and the world around us freezes over.
Another lifeless rock in the emptiness of space.
   Time to wake up, see the world as it slowly dies.
       Those who can stop it do nothing but watch
For it is not yet their time to plant
       The spirit of the Phoenix within this world
       And in the hearts of mankind. ‘Til then
The serpent sleeps and dreams its
   Sweet dreams.
Broken Memories

Sarah Harkleroad
Third Place, Visual Arts
graphite & charcoal on paper

Spring 2016 . Volume 26
Untitled
(pages from altered book)

Breana Wallen
mixed media
I sing the body electric; the armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them.
Take Flight

Beep! Beep! Emily slams her hand on the alarm clock to silence it. It feels like she just went to sleep five minutes ago. She crawls out of bed and wonders into the bathroom to turn on the shower. The hot water helps wake her up, but then her nerves set in. Today is her first day at her new job--Wings Air Rescue. This is the day she has been waiting for since she graduated nursing school. She has wanted to be a flight nurse since her dad took her to see one of the helicopters when she was six years old. She feels weird not putting on her scrubs to go to work in the ER. As she puts on her flight suit and pulls her hair back in a ponytail, she feels excited and cannot wait to get this day started.

She pulls up to the airstrip and walks over to the helicopter. It looks a lot bigger than she remembers it. The last time she was at the airstrip was when she was doing her training, which was over two weeks ago.

“She’s pretty, ain’t she?” Emily hears a voice behind her. It is still kind of dark, so she cannot see who it is. Then the stranger steps out to where she can see him. It is her new partner, Doug. He is tall and slender with dark brown hair that is starting to gray. He has a smile on his face and walks over to put his arm around her shoulders.

“Nice to see you again, Doug,” Emily says.

“Nice to see you, too. Are you ready for today, kid?” Emily smiles and shakes her head, yes. Doug has been friends with Emily’s dad for a long time, and she does not know how she got lucky enough to have him as a partner. He has been a medic for almost 26 years and has worked on a helicopter for almost ten. He knows his stuff, and she’s excited to get to learn from the best.

They walk around the helicopter and he reminds her where everything is at and how everything works.

“It’s real simple, kid. You know how everything works. Patient slides in here, you sit in the seat at his chest, I get the seat by his head. The narcs are in this black box, and it’s your job give them out.” Doug turns to look at her. “I know you’re nervous, but I know you know what you’re doing. I won’t let you do nothing stupid, and the key is to keep calm. We don’t get our patients very long, and we do what we can while we have them.”

Emily just nods her head. She does not talk much when she is nervous. They walk into the little building where the pilots, medics, and nurses stay when they’re not on calls and where they sleep when they are doing 24 hour shifts. There’s a short bald man standing in the little kitchen area drinking coffee.


“Of course I do! Nice to see you finally get to work with us. We are the best ya know!” Sam offers out his hand to Emily.

“It’s nice to finally get to work with y’all, too. I’ve heard a lot of things about you,” she says as she shakes his hand.

“Oh, I know you’ve heard all good things about me, but Doug’s probably a different story!” He laughs and winks at her.

Yeah, all good things. Just that you can be batshit crazy, and that you’re on wife number four, who just happens to be almost fifteen years younger than him, She thinks to herself.
They stand around for another thirty minutes drinking coffee and talking. They then do all the inventory checks and restock the drugs and supplies that they are low on. Sam decides to take the helicopter out for a test flight. Emily loves being in the helicopter and is disappointed that the trip only lasts twenty minutes. It is almost one when they get back and are finished checking everything. They wonder back inside, and Doug flips on the TV and settles down on the couch.

“Make yourself at home, kid. Sometimes we’re here for a while before anything exciting happens,” Doug tells her and motions for her to sit down in one of the recliners. She sits down and flips the recliner back. They are watching some show that Emily has never seen before. It seems like hours go by and nothing happens. She begins to wonder if they are actually going to get a call today. Doug reaches into his pocket and pulls out a can of Skoal.

“I thought you quit,” Emily smirks.

“I did. Don’t tell my wife,” Doug says as he puts a pinch in his mouth. Emily is laughing as dispatch comes across the radio putting them on standby with their first call of the day.

“Show time, kid!” Emily and Doug jump up as Sam walks outside to start up the helicopter. All three of them climb in. Dispatch radios back and tells them to go in route. Emily’s heart is racing as they lift off the ground. She cannot help but fidget as they are on their way to the scene of the accident. Emily has run many calls while working for EMS for almost eight years, but this call is different. She knows it will be bad because that is the only type of calls Wings run. With EMS you never really know if the call will be serious or not, but with this job she knows to expect the worse. She goes over the call in her head, six year old male, severe burn injuries to his arms, broken leg, and a severe head injury.

Five minutes later, they arrive at the accident on the side of the highway. Emily jumps out of the helicopter and sees two cars that have hit head on. One of the cars has smoke coming off of it and white foam all over it. She smells gasoline and something that smells like burnt flesh. The other car has two white sheets draped over the driver and passenger seats and there is another white sheet laying on the ground. Emily and Doug walk over to where there is a little kid lying on a stretcher. A fireman starts telling them what happened and the extent of the child’s injuries. He is the only one that has survived the crash. The patient has a broken femur, collapsed lung, a couple broken ribs, burns on his arms, and a severe concussion.

They load him up into the helicopter and take off towards the hospital. Emily and Doug get to work on their patient. They work well as a team, and they know exactly what to do. Everything is going well, and the hospital is in sight, then the child goes. Emily panics. She cannot let this child die. Normally, CPR is not done on a helicopter because there is not enough room. Luckily, this patient is small and Emily is rather small herself. She starts compressions on the child’s chest, trying with everything she has to get his heart beating again.

She is still performing CPR when they land at the hospital. The ER doctor and nurses are at the helicopter door as soon as it opens. Doug tells them what happened, and one of the nurses, with curly hair, takes over CPR and asks Emily how long she has been performing it. She tells her “three minutes” and watches as the doctor feels for a pulse.

“I can’t find anything. Let’s get him inside.”

They roll the poor kid inside. Emily stares at the doors to the entrance of the ER. Doug comes up behind her and puts a hand on her shoulder.

“You okay, honey?”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she answers. Emily
is not sure how she feels right now. Half of her wants to throw up, and the other half wants to march into the ER and do everything she can to make sure that little boy lives.

“We did everything we could, now it’s in their hands. You did good, kid. I don’t think I’ve ever actually seen CPR done in a helicopter,” he chuckles, but seems impressed and turns to get back inside the helicopter. Emily follows, but her mind is racing as she climbs back inside. Can I really do this for the rest of my life? Do I want to do this every day? There’s a lot of death, can I handle it?

She’s staring at the window and realizes how beautiful the view is. She thinks this is what I’ve wanted to do my whole life. As she looks over the beautiful Tennessee Mountains, she realizes how amazing this is and how lucky she is to be able to do this. They land back at base and clean the helicopter up.

The rest of Emily’s 12-hour shift is quiet. They run one more call: an elderly woman has wrapped her car around a tree. Her injuries are not as bad as the child’s, and she’ll make a full recovery. They get a visit from EMS, go to get fuel, and eat dinner together. When 8 o’clock rolls around, Emily is tired and is ready to go home. She wonders if the little boy made it or not. Doug meets her at her car to make sure she is okay. He tells her, “Don’t dwell on every bad call you get. You’ll get bad ones and you won’t be able to save them all. That’s one thing you can’t change. I’m always here if you need to talk.” He pats her on the back and says goodbye.

Emily smiles, “Thanks, Man,” she tells him. “See you next shift.” She really is lucky to have a partner like Doug.

“See you then, kid.”

When Emily gets home, she watches the news to see if there is anything about the accident or the boy. She sees nothing. Now she will never know what happened to him. She contemplates asking her friends that work in the ER to see if they know anything, but she doesn’t. She knows stuff like this will happen all the time, and she guesses she will just have to learn to live with that.
Good Enough

Joy Harrison
Honorable Mention, Non-fiction

She awoke one day and felt as if everything had changed. Suddenly everything was different: she was different, and the world was different. The girl who once cared so much for everyone and everything found herself not caring for anything, at all, anymore. She felt broken on the inside, and it hurt for her to breathe, for her dreams were now nightmares, her light was now turned into darkness.

When did it all change? What made her feel so low that she felt as if she were at the bottom of a dark, earthy pit, grasping at dirt and roots, trying to get a little bit higher, a little bit closer to the light from which she had fallen so far? Each morning she awoke, and while looking in the mirror, it was as if she was staring back at a complete stranger – her long blonde hair, naturally brown, her bright blue eyes, naturally green. She had changed so much through the years while living this rollercoaster of a life on which her highs were so high she felt as if she were on top of the world, yet her lows were so low it was detrimental to her and those around her. She felt sometimes as if she were ready to get off the ride for good.

If only she could have seen herself as those around her did, saw an innocence so pure, a smile so bright, a laugh so angelic you felt the love radiating from her. Why couldn’t she see? Why didn’t she understand she was good enough, she was worth it, and she deserved as much as anyone to be happy and to be loved? She tried her hardest to see the good within herself, to be happy, to be motivated to live, or even just to get up out of bed, but she couldn’t. All she saw was darkness and confusion that consumed her every thought. She tried to cover up the pain with multiple inflections, yet nothing lasted. She felt as if she were drowning, and each day she survived was one long, painful breath.

Then one day, the pain was gone. She felt something that she had never felt, yet longed for: she felt warm, but not hot, she felt cool, yet not cold, and the light was every color, yet absent of color at the same time. She had finally found her peace and happiness, a feeling of ecstasy. As she walked, her long, dark, beautiful hair flowed, and her white night gown rustled on the floor with each step. In all actuality, those who saw her vibrant, beautiful smile sadly realized she was anything but happy when they found her. She was cold, still, and absent. They tried to rush her to the hospital, but it was too late. Bethany had finally found acceptance and truth as she stood at the end of the long, cold hospital corridor.

Looking back at her lifeless body lying on the stretcher, she realized the truth. If she would have seen what others had seen, if someone would have told her, “You are good enough,” maybe, just maybe, she would not have been ready to end her life so soon at the age of 25, a mother of two. But she did, and her ride did indeed stop at the bottom, one last time.
It is a ghastly summer. It has been sixty-two years since I left Holland, and though I always meant to come back, I was afraid to do it. Just the same, I find myself on the side of the road with a backpack and a lot of regrets. From the place where I stand, just in front of the post office, I can see a lemonade stand, like the one Peter and I built before the war. Behind it is a lot of apartments, and a couple of kids are sitting in the stand with their feet up, but they aren’t selling anything. There is a sign above the stand which demands five cents for a glass. I smile. What will they do with five cents?

I gaze down the row of houses and let out my breath, hauling my bag over my shoulder. I know the house, of course, and I do not want to go back. When I stand outside the crumbling fence, with my hand on the gate, I flinch. I feel that the disease of the place is crawling out of the chimney and down into my lungs, and I am afraid.

Inside the house, there is nothing but dust. The air is thick with cobwebs and the walls are heavy with stains. I stand by the door, and for a moment I can see them, my parents, beside the kitchen table, young again. Now I am the old one. Everything is the way I remember it, but nothing is the same. It is the same furniture, of course, and the same walls. But the familiar smell is gone. There is nothing cooking on the stove, no fresh flowers on the windowsill. Now all I smell is dust and the rust of forgotten things.

The stairs protest beneath me as I tiptoe toward the attic. I avoid the room to the right, where my friend and his family were imprisoned for all that time. But I visit the room on the left: my old bedroom. Pushing open the door, flakes of paint fall into my hair. It seems almost a sacrilege to set foot in the room where I grew up. It was a room made for a little girl, and I am an old woman now. The bedspread is covered with flowers, and I realize that it is no different from the one I have now.

I leave the house. It is broken and full of holes, and in a few years, it will be gone. When I left it the first time, at the age of thirteen, and got on a train headed for Germany, I had dreams of seeing it again. But now it only hurts me. Now I remember my parents and my brother and sister, and the two cats, Marj and Ilsk, and it seems unfair that I have lived, while they are gone. There were three Jews in our attic, once upon a time, and they are dead as well, except for the child, who is an old man now. I wonder if I would have come back to Holland if he had not been dying. I always wanted to, but I was afraid to see how much the place had changed.

I never understood why Peter came back after everything that happened. I moved to New York after we were released, and tried to forget about everything, but he stayed and was forced to remember. I walk down the sidewalk, skipping over the cracks in the pavement, and think about all the people who are gone. Holland is not the same. The people on the streets are strangers, but one of them points me to the hospital. Standing outside the building, I wonder if I have made a mistake. Maybe it was a mistake to come here after everything was over. I came looking for closure, but now, at the close of things, I almost wish I had
stayed in New York. I tell the girl at the desk who I am there to see, and she takes me to a small, dark room. I stand there, holding on to my passport, clinging to my escape like the child that I am.

The curtains are pulled tight around the bed, making me feel shut out and insignificant. The nurse beckons for me to go in, but somehow I feel that that is not enough. I await a sign from Peter, and he coughs. And now I feel that if I do not hurry, he will die as I wait.

When I enter, I think I have the wrong room. It is only because his eyes light up with recognition that I do not leave. He is pale, and his hair is gray. He hides his hand under the blankets, but not before I see that it is more bone than skin.

“Emma,” he whispers, his voice dry like sandpaper.

I go to him, sitting on the bedside chair. I force myself to smile.

“Hello,” I say.

I think he must know that we are both on the verge of tears, because now he laughs. But it sounds as if he is in pain.

“I must look like a ghost to you,” he whispers.

“I don’t care,” I tell him. “I am just glad you are alive.”

“Not for much longer,” he says.

I shake my head, but he does not let me speak.

“I am not afraid of dying,” he tells me. “It might hurt. I don’t care about that.”


He moves restlessly under the sheets.

“I’ve thought about you a lot lately,” he says.

I feel guilt choking me. I have not thought about him as much as I should. I tried too hard to forget him.

“Thank you for coming,” he adds. “I know you didn’t want to.”

I sigh.

“I am still the selfish girl you once knew,” I tell him. “I came back because I want forgiveness.”

“What is there to forgive?” he asks.

“Forgive me that I survived,” I beg him. “Forgive me for running away and leaving you here alone. Forgive me for being the only one left alive.”

“Okay,” he says. “If that’s what you want, I forgive you.”

I shake my head.

“I don’t, though,” I explain.

He laughs.

“Emma,” he says, “You haven’t changed at all. I thought you might, but you haven’t. You are still the most innocent person I ever met. You’re seventy-five years old. It’s about time you grew up.”

“You don’t understand,” I cry. “I won’t grow up because of those things. You know me. I always lived in the past. We went to school together. We played checkers in an attic with padded walls. And we built that lemonade stand on the street behind my house, remember? You are my innocence, Peter.”

When I see the tears falling on the sheets, I realize I am crying.

He laughs softly, and I hear him tuck in his breath.

“Did you love me?” he asks, teasing me. I put my hand on his bare head.

“No,” I tell him. “But I could have. I could have.”

I feel the tears pushing at the corners of my eyes, and I am unsure whether I am happy or sad, until I see him smile.

The next day, I stand alone and watch two strangers lower him into the earth. There is only me and them, and a corpse, and an empty hole. I pull my coat tight around my cold chest and dig my hands into the pockets, clutching my passport. I think about staying in Holland and learning to love my home again, but I know that when the morning
comes, I will be on a plane to New York.

The men finish putting the earth over Peter’s coffin and I think about the house I grew up in. I always loved that house. I always loved Holland. But I hated the memories. I had spent a lot of time running. But something told me that New York couldn’t hide me from myself any longer. I had always known Peter was the only good thing left in my world, but I had been afraid to admit it. I had been afraid to admit it and make it real, and now he was gone.

The men packed up their things and shook my hand and departed. I did not watch them go. I just stood there, and the wind unraveled my hair. I almost kicked off my shoes and went home barefoot, but my feet were not as strong as they had once been.

Innocence is a hard thing to come by, but it is awfully easy to lose. I know this, because when they broke down the lemonade stand, the price was two cents instead of five, and they were selling souls.
I learned a lot about myself in Seattle, spiritually, emotionally, but most of all, mentally, which I suppose is to be expected seeing as how all feelings derive, or are at least sent through, the brain. Seattle made me explore the parts of myself I would normally shut off. I would wander the streets at night with my headphones and think. The key ingredient, though, was not the time I spent poking at the things I had been trying to avoid and even run from, but the focus that I had been allotted by my environment.

Seattle is a huge, sprawling city, but unlike other big cities, it’s a fairly quiet one with a lot of coffee shops, malls, and huge clothing outlets. The food ranges from exotic seafood to homegrown fried chicken. It has a really grunge, even dirty aura to it. Not dirty like a refugee’s hovel in Syria, it’s more along the lines of a friend you have that cleans his house once every other month, but you don’t say anything because you don’t want to come off rude. You really enjoy being there, and he’s probably the best friend you’ll ever have, but sometimes you really wish he’d pick up more often. Maybe that’s for the best, though. You wouldn’t want to take away from what the city, or this metaphorical person, is. So, yeah, it’s dirty. There’s clutter. There are homeless almost everywhere. And the buildings are tight and pushed together. Some people are rushing to get places, while others simply meander about, living life. Some ride bikes, some skateboard, but most walk or ride the bus. Traffic can be fairly heavy. As long as everyone is flowing, it tends to be ok. If somebody wrecks, however, it can shut down traffic for blocks. What’s amazing is that you can see Mt. Rainier from almost everywhere in the city. It’s a constant backdrop for the whole area, and it’s absolutely beautiful.

The people are incredibly friendly, which is surprising for a big city. Almost every other major city I’ve been in, the people are usually angry – at other people, at their cars, at their bank accounts. Hell, most of them are pissed off that other people are happy. Not in Seattle, though. There’s always at least one person who’s willing to help out with whatever problem you’re having, except for the homeless. Everyone awkwardly avoids them, ignoring their existence. I mean, people do that everywhere, but more so in Seattle because there are a lot more homeless. You can only get asked for money so many times before you finally get tired of it. At the beginning of my stay, I would give money to anyone that asked for it. If they were in such dire shape as to lower themselves to begging for money, then they obviously needed it more than me. That being said, it got annoying being constantly asked for money. I started to resent it. I don’t know if that speaks volumes about me or about everyone as a society. You try to do what you can for people, but you can only give so much. Maybe that’s the real problem: the fact that there’s a limit to how much we will give. The truth of the matter is we could give more. We could provide for people who don’t have the fight in them to provide for themselves anymore, giving them hope. We don’t, though. We’re not willing to sacrifice our own convenience. I’m guilty, too. Probably always will be. It makes me sad to realize that I can help, but I’m not willing.

I had more realizations about...
myself while in Seattle. I discovered a social anxiety I didn’t know I had. It’s awful, actually. I learned I can’t deal with social situations without friends. I needed somebody to mediate the conversation and draw me in, but I didn’t have anybody up there like that. At work I could do little more than grunt at my coworkers, because every time I went to respond to a question, my throat would clench up from the nervousness I was feeling. I couldn’t merely go out in public and strike up conversations with people. I remember my brother sending me off to some pinball arcade to get me out of the house. I walked three miles there only to walk in, feel overwhelmed by the amount of people there, and walk three miles back. On top of that, just when I was coming out of my shell to Billy and his friends, it was time for me to fly back to Tennessee. I also became aware of how pointless it was to be angry at things. I’m not talking about “my girlfriend just cheated on me” kinds of things. I mean getting angry because “somebody decided to come in and eat 10 minutes before close” kinds of things. The effort I spent being pissed off because I had more dishes to clean could have been used getting them cleaned so I could go home.

Don’t mistake all this to mean I didn’t have a good time while I was up there. When I wasn’t pondering life or holed up somewhere, I was river tubing with my brother or visiting one of the islands. I went from coffee shop to coffee shop enjoying the feel and comparing drinks. I would wander the streets in the middle of the night, partially because it would help me think and partially because it was dead. It made me feel like I was the only person alive in the city, like the city was mine. I could go where I wanted and be whoever I wanted. Growing up, I never really got that. So when I stepped outside for a breath of fresh air, it was more like a breath of freedom, of being at peace with my lot in life.

My main goal right now is to get through college and go back to Seattle so I can breathe freedom again. Seattle is the only place I’ve ever felt at home, the only place I’ve ever been to without being judged under the ever looming eyes of a mom who only sees fault. I was free to be me, and that’s all I really needed in life. It’s still all I really need. In the meantime, I’m going to keep pushing and get back to that city I love.
Out of the Darkness

Will West
Honorable Mention, Fiction

Though his eyes were shut, the piercing flash of light still caused him to squint. His eyes popped open.

One, two, three, fo—
The thunder rolled ominously, causing his bed to vibrate.

Three and a half seconds. I could calculate how many miles away that lightning was if I remembered the speed of sound...

In the pitch dark, he rolled over onto his back and used the edge of his sheet to buff the face of his new watch. It was a birthday present from his girlfriend just the day before, and he took pride in its ‘fresh out of the box’ appearance. He hit the light on his watch.

10:13. Everyone should be asleep by now, and Mom won’t be back for at least another hour. Seems like midnight is pushing it, even for a birthday party with friends. Typical though. Dad is on a business trip, so Mom goes and throws a birthday party. Although I guess that is pretty considerate of Dad. Then again- The room lit up, but this time, he was wide eyed. Going from absolute darkness to total light shocked his system, and his eyes strained to focus before the light instantly faded again.

One, two, three-
This time, the thunder clapped, and was followed by a deep reverberation that shook the entire house.

I know light is essentially instantaneous, but what’s the speed of sound? He was hot, so he took off his shirt and tossed it onto the floor. He repositioned himself on his bed, lying this time, flat on his back. Rain began to fall, but not like in movies, starting out slowly and increasing in speed. No, this rain sounded as if the floodgates of heaven had been released all at once. It pounded on the roof like the sound of hundreds of race horses.

He always enjoyed the sound of the rain; it was soothing to him. He closed his eyes again, only to be greeted again by another strike of lightning. His eyes popped open.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven...
Now only a faint gurgling sound presented itself as thunder. The storm was moving out, but the rain was steadily beating on the roof; the race horses continued. He closed his eyes again, this time turning over onto his stomach with the right side of his face pressed against his pillow.

That was pretty cool. The thunder sounded like a gunshot that started the race horses that are going insane on the roof. Although, I’m sure the sound is somewhat exaggerated since I’m on the third floor of the house.
He took a deep breath and exhaled while adjusting into his bed, then focused on the crashing rain to woo him to sleep.
I still...
He yawned, interrupting his train of thought.
I still wish I knew the speed of sound. I’ll look it up in the morning.

Then the looming darkness that surrounded him seemed to penetrate his mind; his brain emptied, and he drifted asleep.

In his dream, he heard a sound. He looked around but didn’t see the source, nor could he identify the sound. It was muffled,
but when he tried to process it, he immediately forgot what it sounded like in the first place. He panicked.

His eyes darted open. Staring at the ceiling of his room, he realized he was breathing heavily, and that he had somehow gone to sleep on his back. Again, he cleaned the face of his watch with the edge of his bed sheet and then activated the light.

10:42. Really? I can’t stay asleep longer than that?

He stared for the ceiling a moment then realized the rain had ceased.

Guess I missed the end of the race.

Continuing to stare at the ceiling, he tried to focus on his ceiling fan. He knew it was there and knew that it was on; he could hear its near silent hum. But it was too dark. All he could see was nothingness; like staring into a black hole.

I wonder if this is what it’s like to be blind?

He heard soft footsteps downstairs. He looked at his watch, this time forgoing the cleaning process and skipping straight to the backlight.

10:46. Mom isn’t supposed to be back yet... Maybe she got done early? I didn’t hear her turn off the security system.

Unsure about the situation, he rolled over in his bed, this time moving closer to the center of it. The footsteps stopped abruptly. He laid completely still, focusing only on the sounds coming from beneath him.

Did I set the security system?

The footsteps resumed below him.

Oh ok. Mom is just back a little early.

Then, he could tell by the distinct creaking that she was going into the basement.

Ok. She thinks I’m asleep...

He laid there for a moment, scratching the top of his head.

So now is my chance to get in the scare of a lifetime. But if I do this, I’m going to have to be stealthy. Game plan? Just think ‘what would Batman do?’

Slowly, stealthily, and as silently as he could, he held his breath and got out of his bed. He picked up his iPod and quickly opened a voice memo and hit record, then put his iPod and his phone in the pockets of the athletic shorts he was wearing.

Ok, I’m recording. This is going to be great. Now, I’ll peek out from around my bedroom door...

He made his way from his nightstand to his bedroom door and cleared the corner the way he had seen it done in ample movies.

Now I will slowly make my way down the stairs to the main floor. But I have to be careful because when I hit the main floor, I’ll be right above her...

From his door, he crept to the top of the stairs, then in somewhat of a crouch, made his way down them.

Her reaction will be priceless.

Once he reached the main floor, he stalked his way to the top of the stairs then maintained a position behind the door. He looked at his watch. Hitting the light again, he saw that it was 10:53.

5 seconds... 10 seconds... 30 seconds...

He waited in anticipation, palms sweaty, listening intently to the sounds coming from the basement. She was clearly looking for something and wasn’t trying to be too quiet about it either.

1 minute... 1 minute 30 seconds... If she doesn’t hurry, my iPod is going to run out of storage for this voice memo.

Finally, the fumbling noises stopped. Footsteps in the basement again, then she was coming up the steps. Her knees weren’t making the crackling sound they typically did when she went up and down stairs, but he noticed that a half a second too late. She had taken one step away from the top step when he said in a hushed voice from behind her:

“Buh-hoo!”

He saw the figure jump, but it wasn’t the
typical reaction he got from scaring his mother. She spun around.

*Oh no.*

She wasn’t a she. Though the lighting was almost non-existent, he could tell that this was clearly a man, smaller in stature than he.

“Don’t move,” the intruder said.

Immediately, his mind went into task mode.

Surprisingly, he wasn’t scared. He knew what he had to do and he was going to do it.

*I guess I didn’t turn on the security system.* Ok. *Will this be easy or hard?*

He heard a clicking sound. He could see the man had a gun drawn and had put a distance of about four feet between them and stopped, gun leveled.

Ok. Not easy. Definitely hard. *I just have to talk the man with the gun down off the ledge, then I get the gun from him and hold the high ground until the police show up.*

“Woah easy!” he said, trying to sound as casual and soothing as possible. He raised his hands into the air in front of him. He sidestepped out of the intruder’s sights slightly, but the gun seemed to follow him.

“Easy… What are you doing?”

“Don’t move”

“Alright. No problem.”

He steadily inched toward the trespasser, trying to slowly close the gap between them.

*If I get close enough, I might be able to grab the gun.*

“I said don’t move!”

Through the darkness, he could see the intruder tense up. He stopped his advance.

Ok. *Never mind… Now we try smooth talking.*

“We can talk about this. Just put the gun down. Whatever you are trying to do, it isn’t worth a lifetime in jail, is it? You don’t want to kill me. You know they will find out. They always find out.”

Looking down into his left hand, the intruder shifted his stance to conceal the firebox he had taken out of the basement.

Really? *He took that? I mean it makes sense, but unless he needs tickets to Disney World or my birth certificate, that box won’t do him much good.*

“There is nothing valuable in that box. Certainly nothing worth going to jail for.”

“Then why lock it up?” the intruder retorted in a quiet, muffled voice.

“That… is a very good question. I can see that you don’t believe me. Would you believe me if I opened it and showed you?”

“Where’s the key?”

*Great. I’m going to have to show him where the key is. Which means I have two options: I take him to the real key, or I try to get Mom’s gun. But there’s no way I could get the gun out of its case without him realizing. Which means-*  

“Well where is it?”

He could tell the burglar was uneasy.

Through the blanket of darkness, he could see the sweat glistening on the intruder’s forehead.

“It’s in the basement.”

“Lead the way.” The intruder commanded, but maintained his position.

*Here we go.*

Slowly, he tensed up all of his muscles and turned around toward the stairs. He heard the intruder exhale, so he tried to spin around and drop at the same time.

Concurrently, the room lit up around him, and the walls echoed with the ear shattering sound.

Time seemed to stop. He fell to the ground, landing flat on his back, but felt nothing. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the intruder drop the firebox and bolt out the door. The box landed on his foot, but he didn’t feel it. To no avail, he tried to gather his thoughts despite the shrill ringing in his head. His sister came running out of her room.

“What happened?” she asked
frantically.

“9-1-1.” He pointed toward the kitchen, coughing, struggling to get the words out. “Tell them… address… ambulance.”

His sister ran into the other room and got on the phone. He began to regain his strength. Suddenly, his mind was completely aware, and he began to assess the situation.

Must be the adrenaline kicking in.
Let’s see what the damage is.
He rolled onto his side so he could reach over his back, and realized that it was soaked in blood. He found the entry point centered directly between his shoulder blades.

So that’s why I can’t feel my legs.
Please tell me there’s an exit wound.
A sharp stab of pain hit the base of his skull, and he flopped back onto his back, writhing in pain on the ground, gasping for air. Struggling to remain coherent, he began probing his chest for an exit wound. He couldn’t feel anything, but noticed when one of his fingers sunk into a hole a few inches left of his sternum.

Through the spine, punctured lu…
The pain was unbearable now. It felt as if his chest was on fire, and he could hardly breathe. He curled his upper body into a ball on the ground to try and ease the pain, but it wouldn’t stop. He flattened out again on his back, pressing the back of his skull into the ground to find a place where the pain went away; however, he was making no progress. Then, suddenly, the pain completely ceased. He took as deep of a breath as he could muster and with a bloody hand, he pulled his phone out of the pocket of his shorts.

I have to call her.
He held down speed dial number 3. While the phone rang, he yelled for his sister.

“I love you. Tell everyone else I love them too.”

“Hello?” a somewhat drowsy yet comfortably smooth voice said from the other end.

“Hey babe,” he responded, trying to sound as collected as possible “I need you to stay calm and listen carefully.” She chuckled.

“Woah there. Alright handsome. What’s up?”

“I’ve been shot. It went through my spine. One of my lungs was punctured and has collapsed. I’m not sure about my heart.”

For a few seconds, nothing but silence came from the other end. He looked down at his watch, seeing that it was covered in blood. He then looked at his chest, noticing his sister had turned the light on, and that he was lying in a puddle of blood.

“Turn the light off!” he shouted to his sister. He didn’t want her to see him like this. It was taking all he had to focus on staying awake, and the light just added to the noise in his head. The light went out above him, and he was left in complete darkness.

“Ok.” His girlfriend finally responded after maybe 8 or 9 seconds, clearly choking back tears. “Ok, what can I do? Have you called an ambulance? How do you feel right now? Are you goi-” She stopped mid-sentence, trying to catch her breath.

“No. I’m not. I’m sorry. You know this isn’t where I wanted it to end. I always wanted…” The left side of his body went numb. He dropped his phone. He was completely oblivious to his sister in the kitchen still on the phone with the emergency dispatch and to his little brother walking down the stairs to investigate the noise that had roused him.

He struggled to pick up his phone out of the pool of blood with his right hand. Pulling the phone up to his ear, he struggled to draw enough breath to utter one more sentence.

“I love you.”

“I love you too! With all of my heart I love you! Hang in there!! Just hold on! The ambulance will be there soon!” As the rest of his body went numb and the phone fell
from his hand, he could hear her sobbing. In that moment, he wanted nothing more than to wrap his arms around her and tell her it would be ok. But this time, it wouldn’t.

The darkness that was around him seemed to infiltrate his heart, his mind, and his very being. His vision left him. Everything was one massive dark blur. He struggled to suck in each breath but no longer felt any pain. In fact, he could feel nothing. No longer trying to form thoughts, process information, or even move his body, his eyes drifted closed.

A seemingly lifeless corpse lay there in the darkness, sinking, so it seemed, into a pool of crimson blood; drowning into black oblivion.

Though his eyes were shut, the piercing flash of light still caused him to squint. His eyes popped open:

The Light.
Judges

Art Brown, this year’s Visual Art judge, is an award winning graphic designer with twenty years of experience in corporate and academic settings. He has created work for Fortune 500 companies and numerous regional companies and organizations. His corporate experience includes positions as art director and creative director at successful advertising agencies throughout the region. Currently, Brown is the creative services coordinator for Milligan College. Brown holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in studio art/graphic design from East Tennessee State University and has served as an adjunct instructor of communications at Milligan College since 2010. In addition, Brown has been instrumental in the development and implementation of a graphic design major and minor at the College. He will transition to full time faculty this summer as Assistant Professor of Communications, teaching graphic design. Brown is also an accomplished artist and printmaker. His work has been included in local, national, and international exhibitions. He recently displayed work in the national juried show “New Impressions in American Letterpress” at the Hamilton Wood Type and Printing Museum in Two Rivers, Wisconsin. Brown’s list of accomplishments also includes numerous local and district-level American Advertising Awards and a logo design published as part of Logo Lounge 6: 2,000 International Identities by Leading Designers, 2011.

Gerrie Fischer, this year’s poetry judge, is a published writer and long-time Head of the Writing Center at Wellington College in Bladensburg, Maryland. Retired now, she is an avid reader and writer, publishing last month in Thor’s Hammer and Pentimento. Several of her poems have appeared in the Best of the Net anthologies and her most recent work, Invective Slide, will be published in chapbook form by DiPrima Press in early 2017. She serves on the board of the local library and arts council.

This year’s Fiction judge, Rita Quillen’s novel Hiding Ezra was released in March of 2014 from Little Creek Books; it was a finalist in the 2005 DANA Awards competition, and a chapter of the novel is included in the new scholarly study of Appalachian dialect just published by the University of Kentucky Press entitled Talking Appalachian. Her poetry chapbook, Something Solid To Anchor To, was published in 2014, and a new full-length collection, The Mad Farmer’s Wife, will be published in 2016 by Texas Review Press. One of six semi-finalists for the 2012-14 Poet Laureate of Virginia, her poetry received a Pushcart nomination as well as a Best of the Net nomination in 2012. Her most recent collection Her Secret Dream, new and selected poems, is from Wind Press in Kentucky and was named the Outstanding Poetry Book of the Year by the Appalachian Writers Association in 2008. Previous works are poetry collections October Dusk and Counting the Suns, as well as a book of essays Looking for Native Ground: Contemporary Appalachian Poetry. She lives and farms on Early Autumn Farm in Scott County, Virginia. You can contact her through her Facebook author page, linked at left on the main menu.

Kimberly Wheeler, this year’s Creative Non-Fiction Judge, is a Kingsport native who has taught English for twenty years at area high schools. She received her Bachelor’s Degree from ETSU and her Master’s Degree from Tusculum University. She writes a blog that skillfully intertwines pop culture with matters of faith. You can read her blog at www.kimberlywheeler.me.
Contributors

Cheston Axton is the product of his mother, Robin Axton, and apprentice to Tempi Hale. As a mischievous little scamp, he would often find himself in adventurous worlds, or saving some race from near extinction, and this led him to the literary arts. Now he writes about his adventures, fears, laughters, and other such criteria, in the pursuit of making it his primary employment, while also navigating his path towards his doctorate degree. Through the guidance of several professors, his girlfriend, and the support of his mother, his graduation from Northeast is nearly at hand.

Cody Buczkowske is a sophomore at Northeast State. He enjoys hiking and photography.

Sydney Carter is a freshman who has done art for as long as she can remember. Her aspirations are to improve upon her art while inspiring others in the process.

Terri Cornett resides among the protective hills of East Tennessee, hills from which her Appalachian family roots run deep. After having raised a daughter of whom she is most proud, Terri is pursuing an English degree with anticipation of a technical writing career. However, due to her love of literature, she has not ruled out a teaching career. Primarily, her poetry focuses on life’s darker issues and death’s inevitability. Holding an appreciation and passion for old things, she spends her spare time photographing dilapidated barns, roaming forgotten cemeteries, and collecting rare late nineteenth century hymnals. Her poetry can be viewed at www.terricornett.com.

Daniel Ellis is an avid gamer and aspiring writer. He enjoys stories filled with character growth and personality. He hopes one day to finish a novel or two and until then he’ll keep growing in his writing skills.

Nikki Futch is an English major who has lived in Kingsport most of her life. It feels to her as though she’s been writing almost as long, though she still feels like she’s just getting the hang of it.

Sarah Harkleroad is a student who has a love and passion for art. She hopes to transfer to East Tennessee State University and major in Interior Design.

Joy Harrison is in her fifth semester at Northeast State double majoring in Social Work and English. She decided to return to school after finding her career as a tax specialist dissatisfying. Joy has been writing in journals since she was twelve and enjoys writing fiction as well as nonfiction. Currently, she works for a nonprofit organization called The Paranormal Phenomena Research Society as a grief counselor and historic researcher. Her passion is finding beauty and creativity in circumstances that otherwise would be detrimental and depressing. She believes that everyone should be heard, alive or dead, which is why most of her nonfiction is based on actual deaths that she has been, in some way, close to whether by circumstance or chance. She has witnessed a lot of death and tragedy throughout her life and she uses writing as a way to examine
and deal with it. She loves fantasy and supernatural literature and hopes one day to finish and publish a gothic novel that she has been working on since 2003.

Ashley Hefflin is a sophomore at Northeast State who loves to read and write. Her major is Secondary Education and she plans to graduate with a degree in Human Services. Ashley loves working with children and people in need. Her wish is to further her knowledge in properly helping those in need.

Bridgette Hensley is a 19-year-old freshman at Northeast State majoring in Nursing. She is excited about her future. Bridgette grew up without her parents, which serves as the inspiration for her story.

Victoria Hewlett is a Sociology/Communications student at Northeast State who aspires to go into Political Science and Economics. She is the Regional Vice President of the Tennessee Phi Theta Kappa region, a chapter officer of Alpha Iota Chi, and a member of CLASS, the Debate Club, Toastmasters, and the Scholars Foundation.

Emily Joyner is a dual enrollment student at Northeast State, with plans to attend ETSU in the fall and study psychology. She loves to create things, and hopes that everything she creates will not only reach others, but bring glory to the name of God.

Christina Lane is a student at Northeast State who has several hobbies in the arts, including writing, painting, and playing music. She states that the arts allow her to express her emotions in a way that is healthy and creative.

Zachary Ledlow is a student at Northeast State. He was born in Texas in 1996, but moved to Tennessee while in the second grade. He enjoys traveling and contemplating life.

Cassie Massengill is an English major in her last semester at Northeast State. She plans to go on to ETSU and pursue a career in speech-lspeech-language pathology. She loves to write in all genres, but especially poetry.

Katie Moody is a sophomore at Northeast State who is majoring in Studio Art and plans on either going to ETSU or Milligan when she graduates this spring. She enjoys drawing, reading, and learning new things. She hopes to one day become an art teacher or work in a gallery.

Jozie Rutledge is a nursing major at Northeast State, and her goal in life to become a flight nurse. Allison Smith is a student who loves to draw and paint. She wants to be an animator.

Tayla Sluss is a twenty-two year old from Johnson City majoring in Speech Communication. She loves to write poetry, but only when the mood hits her just right. Her passions - of either love or hate - usually spark her poetry. She enjoys being a part of Toastmasters at Northeast and spends much of her time on campus as a tutor of Spanish when not in classes. Tayla hopes to get a Master’s degree in Speech-Language Pathology from ETSU. Her life verse is Ephesians 4:29 “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minster grace unto the hearers.”
Allison Smith is a student who loves to draw and paint. She wants to be an animator.

Zackery Sturgill is an Interior Design major and psychology minor. He hopes to one day be a design psychologist. He is a fan of theater, old films, mythology, and fantasy literature. He is a dreamer at heart and often questions the norms of society. He is known by his friends and family for being creative, unorthodox, and obsessed with river otters.

Killian Thomas is an English major living in Jonesborough. He has been writing for about four years, and, in the future, he would like to be a writer or an English teacher.

Kelly Tolley is graduating from Northeast State this spring. She loves to paint with watercolor and acrylic. She enjoys spending time with friends and has recently discovered a newfound curiosity for astronomy.

Breana Wallen is a student at Northeast who wants to remain mysterious.

Tiffany Washburn is a freshman at Northeast State who is majoring in Studio Art. She has a tremendous love for art and hopes to be an art teacher one day.

Will West, an avid adventurer from a young age, takes pleasure in traveling and exploring all parts of the world. Will has been a die-hard Star Wars and Batman fanatic since his birth in 1998, and has (in his opinion) an unrivaled collection of Star Wars memorabilia. He also enjoys writing, teaching, and composing piano arrangements. Most important to Will is his faith, and he strives to “Live Inside Out” for God.
Echoes and Images 27

Echoes and Images, Northeast State’s student literary magazine, invites submissions of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and visual art.

Prizes will be awarded in each category:

- First Place: $50.00
- Second Place: $35.00
- Third Place: $25.00

The competition is open to current students at Northeast State.

All entries must be original and previously unpublished, and contributors agree that the submitted work may be published by Northeast State in Echoes and Images or other college publications, in print, or online.

Students may enter in all four categories.

Poetry, Fiction, and Non-fiction must be submitted online through the Echoes & Images website. An online entry form must accompany each submission.

For Visual Art, students must submit their original works to the Humanities Division Office, H129, and each entry must be accompanied by a fully completed entry form obtained from the Echoes and Images website.

Results will be announced early in the spring semester.

Visual art entries must be picked up by the end of the spring semester.

Entries should be submitted in the Humanities Division Office, Room H129.