

Exile

Fall 2004

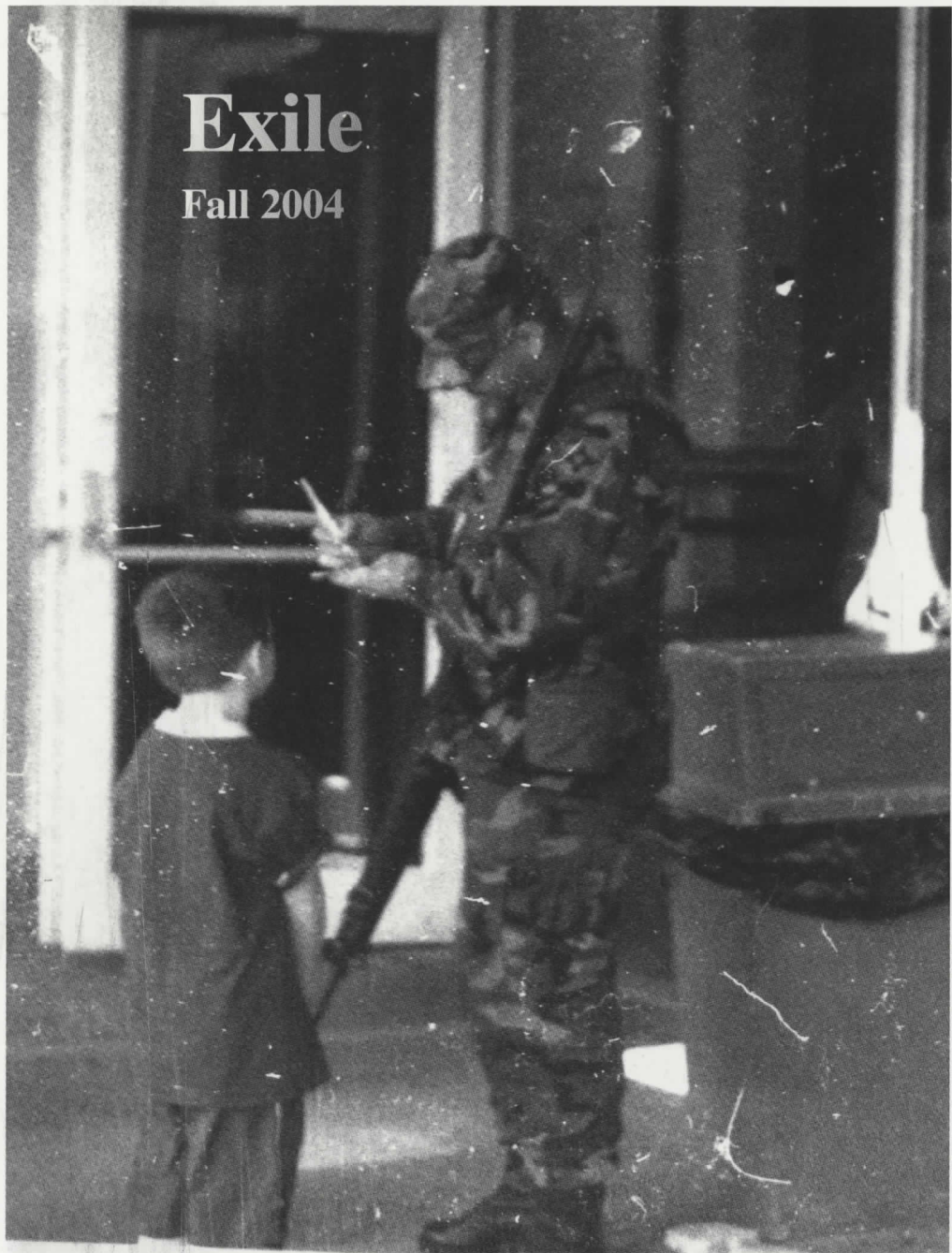


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Fall 2004

Exile

Denison University's Literary and Art Magazine

48th Year

Fall Issue

You of the finer sense,
 Broken against false knowledge,
 You who can know at first hand,
 Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:
 I have weathered the storm,
 I have beaten out my exile.

-Ezra Pound

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The Death of Phaethon

How does a god mourn: with fire, with falling
 Leaves from the limbs of his daughters, all bark
 Golden and ridden in lymph or amber
 Which flows into the seas burned by his son.
 The four horses scattered, chariot torn
 To and fro. Clymene laved her breasts in the
 Waters of the ocean by her son's grave.
 Phoebus could not keep Jupiter from his
 Striking, his bolts of fury, that would kill
 Phoebus's son. The grieving of a god
 Is silence, the sun not burning the earth
 For one day, men lighting feeble fires,
 None to rival the jeweled flames of heaven.
 One tear for innocence, one for false pride

One tear for innocence, one for false pride,
His strength too human, and too hot his pride.
 Torn from the skies, fearing the sting of the
 Scorpion, the claws of the crab, he dropped
 The reins, let the horses take him away,
 As so many of us have done, allowed
 Life to lead us down limitless caverns
 Of sorrow and joy. Many have been burned
 As the sun grazing the earth, turning it
 To desert. We dare not speak how or who
 It was that scorched our skin, made us doubt. We
 Know only what we tell ourselves, the lie
 That grief has a limit, emotion a
 Flat bottom, a shell's surface to be sought.

Sarah Bishop, '06



"Prelude to Keeping It Real" by John Buchanon, '05

Might as Well Have Been

I used to be interested in history until I found out the truth about history. That the Industrial Revolution did not come about when a man planted wires into the ground and grew computer-trees from which emanated computer plants. Bill Gates is not a robot. That the radio operators in the First World War did not sit on the top of radio towers and throw paper airplanes with messages written on them to other people sitting on radio towers. From one tower to another, all day long. When I got older, my grandfather said, "Well, that's just about what happened." Let me tell you this: There is a great difference between just and just about. Other things that are not true for those of you who have been misled: When Pearl Harbor was bombed is not when pearls became a valuable entity in the United States. When presidents' wives wear pearls, it has nothing to do with the fact that they are mourning the loss of the harbor. Also, in Vietnam, Viet Cong had nothing to do with King Kong, and in fact, there were not gorillas in the war. It's guerillas, and it's guerilla warfare, and that's another really big difference.

You know how I finally learned about history? It has everything to do with the Civil War. I had to give a presentation in fifth grade about the Civil War. I was thrilled to do it. We had to interview someone who knew a lot about it. My grandfather told me that because he had "been around since the dawn of man, you know that," he was clearly more than qualified to talk about it. So I relied on him for the information. My dad gave me a Dictaphone so that I could record him talking. I still have it, the tape, it's something else. My dad told me to take everything that grandpa says with a grain of salt. I told him I didn't have one and my father rolled his eyes. I went over to my grandfather's his house.

He was always in the radio room. He had a radio tower in the backyard and once he told me that he had personally climbed up a radio tower into the clouds and sawed off the topmost part and carried it down and planted it in his backyard. I knew he was joking. How could he carry something so heavy? He told me there is no gravity up there in the sky, and if you take something from a no gravity situation, there will be no gravity on it. "It makes perfect sense, now let me talk to Japan," he'd say, and he'd turn and talk to Japan in little dots and dashes and I'd listen.

Anyway, I had my pen and pencil in hand and I was up in the radio room, where we usually were if I

was over at his house. And as usual, he was smoking cigars that Cubans sent him from Cuba, via a direct line under the house, so he said. There was smoke everywhere and the Notre Dame game was on three dusty screens in silence because they were winning. See, he only watched the winning games, after the fact. If they lost, into the furnace the tapes went. It was a game from the seventies and real out of shape on the tape. He turned around and around in his chair, listening to Japan, or another country and finally got off the line. "You know what they're telling me today? They're telling me nothing. They think I'm a spy," he said, and he narrowed his old eyes a little and looked around the room. I laughed. He didn't say what he was spying about. He probably was a spy, or at least acted like one. Used code words that probably nobody understood, sometimes words that none of us understood. When he was done narrowing his eyes around the radio room, plastered with minted dollars and globes he asked, "What are we learning about today?" "The Civil War," I replied.

"Well, let me tell you the first thing about the Civil War. It wasn't Civil." He looked me dead in the eye. "No, no. We are not talking about a friendly war here today," he said. "But listen."

"The Civil War was all about a line being drawn right across the United States. Actually, it was a rectangle. And it was drawn in red marker across the land and fenced off with yellow tape, and this is what happened. There was a man in California named John Doe. No kidding! You ever wonder where the name John Doe came from, tell them your grandpa told you, he's the one who started the Civil War. Nothing to do with generics here today, Lauryn."

He lit his cigar again and pushed some buttons on the radio platform. "The Koreans are listening. Let's let them listen. John Doe was in California, and man he had some problems. He was a wisecrack with a gun. I heard that his daddy had tried to get him locked up because he was such a slapstick with a gun. He twirled that thing around his finger a hundred times in a row without stopping on good days, but never on rainy days. One day, John went into a local gas station in California. On the south side of the gas station there was an angry old lady who was mad at the cashier for the price of a gallon of milk and some cigarettes. On the north side there was a man who was in love with the cashier and was looking around for nothing to buy. You'll learn that later in life, how to stall for someone you love."

I shifted in my seat. He shifted in his and turned around. He offered me a cigar, and I accepted. I always did, and my parents always asked why I reeked of cigars when I would come home from his house, slightly off-balance. He started it off alright.

"So John walks in the door that day and shoots the cashier straight through the head and just walks

out. He's humming a tune, they said in the news, an old tune that only big brass bands used to play. He was wearing a tweed coat that didn't match his shoes and his pockets were laden with heavy bullets. He had a hat on his head and long hair. He just kept walking. The old woman in the store rejoiced because she hated the cashier, and the man started crying. He pushed the old lady and said, "How could you laugh at a time like this? I was going to ask her out on a date, I was." And the lady replied, "All over the price of a gallon of milk," and they got in a fight right there on the floor.

John kept walking and pretty soon, he was out of California. This was good, because by then there was a manhunt looking for him straight up north and south. The south was happy and the north was unhappy. He made it to Nebraska. And in Nebraska, he walked into a library about in the middle of the state and he shot the librarian straight through the head. And conveniently enough, the people on the south side of the library hated the librarian because she demanded books before they were due and charged people exorbitant rates in the instance that they became overdue, and the people on the north, being conservatives, liked the librarian for the very same reasons. So as soon as the librarian was shot up in the head, the two sides started fighting. You know what exorbitant means, yes?"

I puffed on my cigar and made notes in my books, nodded. Cashier, librarian, these were the facts.

"So, by this time, there's another manhunt on the loose and the police in California hear about the incident in Nebraska and they realize that the only logical thing to do is what?"

My grandfather stopped and I stared. He always stopped in his stories at some point for me to jump in. "I guess. I guess they would probably take the criminal tape and expand it from California all the way to Nebraska and start to fence the area off?"

"That's exactly what they did, you're a smart kid, I'll tell you what." My grandfather took the time to light his cigar again. He got ash on his Notre Dame sweatshirt, and the ash floated down onto the floor, onto a wooden floor full of ashes and cracker crumbs. "So, what happens next. John keeps on walking with his gun. He's got nine rounds left, and some extra ammo in his pocket. Do you know where he goes next? He's humming his tune, mind you, and he has put on his hat because the day is starting to wear hotter. He's twirling his gun and it never goes off. People to the right and left are scared as they see him walk. Well, anyway, he ends up in Utah- right at the northernmost point. And he stops in a bar for a little drink and there at the bar is a discrepancy about a poker game going on. Man on the south is blaming the bartender for cheating, man on the north knows the man on the south is the cheater, and is attempting to vindicate the bartender. Do you know what vindicate means?"

I nodded my head. He'd taught me that one before. The sun was high in the sky outside of the window and the radio was clicking in the background. "The Irish are listening, now," he said, as a green light went on in the corner. "And you know when they're listening, they're hearing something good," he continued.

"So anyway at this point, they have to keep stretching that police tape all the way through the third state so that they can catch John. But John makes it out of Utah and into Colorado and here, he shoots up a gas station. Same type of deal, if you believe me or not. People on the south keep getting angry at the people in the north. And the tape keeps on stretching. He travels through Nebraska and Iowa. He shoots up a local grocery store with his gun and then a movie theater. Two more managers down, people at the south and the north getting angrier all the time. Are you starting to follow me?"

I nodded. Indeed, it all seemed to be making sense. I was done with my cigar. The room was dark and filled with smoke, I was reeling around and the facts were reeling around in my head like the whir of the fan above us. My grandfather was gesticulating wildly in his leather chair, charged with emotion, eyes wide awake, entranced in his own story. And Canada had joined the show, a little green light in the middle.

"Where does he go next? I will tell you. To Illinois- through the great city of Chicago and starts some business there. They almost catch him, but he escapes on a tour bus full of old pink crones headed out of state. Then to Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, and then finally to Virginia. And here, I heard that as the sun set on the very day, John walked into the ocean with his gun, (another light blinks on the switchboard), clothing pulling up around him and floating in the water, and he disappeared and may be responsible for the large tides out on the Virginia coast, but this I have not proven, although I suspect that it is most likely true."

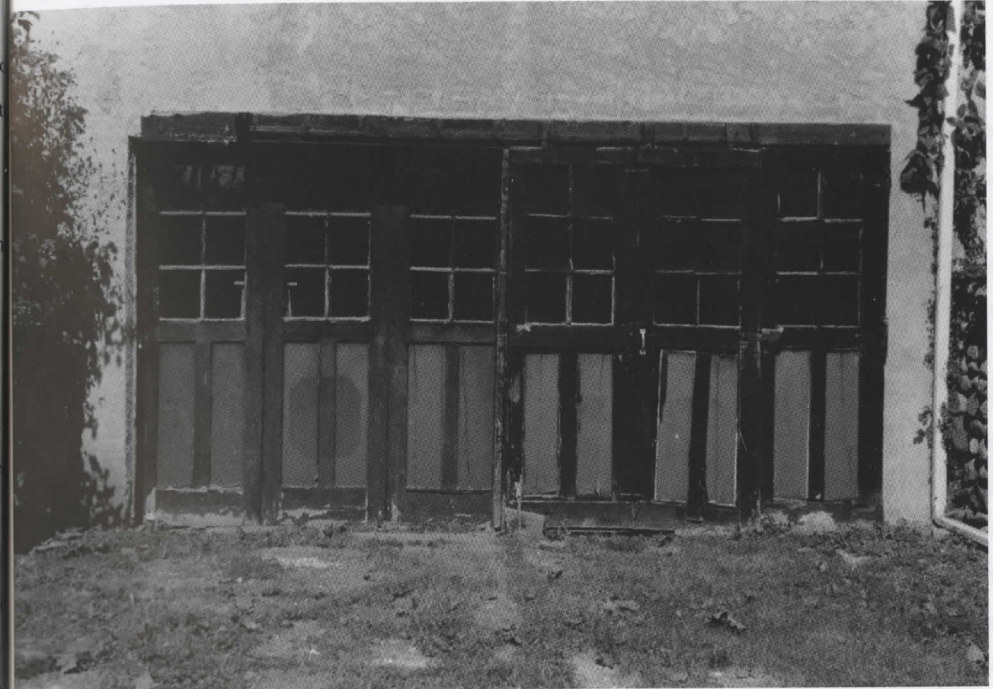
I was writing furiously in my notebook, I was taking it all down. I knew what I would put on the poster.

"So you see, because of John Doe, the whole war started. The Civil War which was not really civil, but rather rude. And then president Lincoln was shot at the end, which was a disaster for the country because, between you and I, I think that he was really holding it together. You should read some of his stuff. But that's long gone. And really, if you travel on down to the edge of some states, you can actually see the line that they have drawn and some of the police tape is still around. See, I even have some here in my office..." And he pulled out some old yellow tape and wrapped it around my wrist and with a crocodile tear in his eye said, "Take it, and go do the best presentation of your life." I gave him a hug and told him I'd enjoyed his story. He looked me in the eye and said, and had always said, "Take it all with a grain of salt, but know, just know these words: it might as well have been, girl." And as I walked out I thought I heard binary applause, but the voice was drowned out by volume, now turned up, on the three television screens.

Well, let me tell you what. The presentation didn't go over so well. I failed it. My teacher gave me a book about the real Civil War, which wasn't Civil, he had that much right, and I had to do a book report. She gave me a pitying look and said, "If only you knew the truth about the history of this great country. Really, Lauryn, where did you get this information?" I didn't answer her. I left the classroom and went home and opened the book. I read it page by page. It was horrible, and then I had nightmares for a week. I lost my passion for history right then and there, and I've never seen the world like I used to again. I didn't ever care to verify the gorillas or the shit about the pearls. Aside from the nightmares, I went over to my grandfather's house, which was right across the yard and threw my failed presentation at him. I gave him my two cents and told him that I would never take what he said again without first putting a grain of salt in the boiler. I would have given him a piece of my mind if that wasn't such a bad idea. And then I stormed out, even though he and my father had warned me, and only spoke to him on holidays. I was only ten and I had driven the wedge, no room for lame attempts at reconciliation over cranberries and turkey. It must have been the shock of it all.

He died a little while ago, and by then I'd figured out that he wasn't an ill-intentioned man. I figured it out the day he died, ironically enough, and I was finally old enough to understand the "might as well have been" stuff. I went to the funeral. I mourned with the mourners and over his grave I took back my two cents and the grain of salt. I told him I had become an English major so that I could write stories, tell people the truth, his truths, ones that I'd make my own someday as well. He said back to me, because seriously he inclined his head upwards in the coffin when no one was looking, and said, "I'm glad that you took those two cents back. They were the heavy burden of silence, I'll tell you what. Finally, can we agree, there might as well? There might as well have been someone named John Doe?" Indeed.

Lauryn Dwyer, '05



"Untitled" by Meredith Helfrich, '05

Poker Night at Shaw's

"What the hell was that?!" Shaw yelled, dropping his two playing cards on the poker table. Annoyingly enough he had a two of hearts and a three of clubs; his straight bluffing face would have won him some chips this hand. He picked them up hastily, but I was the only one who had seen them. Everyone else was looking around to see where the noise had come from.

Almost at the same time as the strange noise, which sounded like some sort of sci-fi ray gun, the light went out. A half second later a pot fell, a woman screamed in pain, and hot water mixed with steamy rice dribbled into the living room. The night, it would seem, was officially over.

The night officially began around ten when I arrived at my friend Shaw's house for his weekly poker night. Although these nights of cards and alcohol were frequent events, this would be my first appearance at one of them. To call Shaw my friend would be a bit exaggerated, although we'd known each other since college. He ran with the elite social circles in our New Haven school, a high life afforded by his rich family ties and astonishing passing record as starting quarterback on the football team. We had been roommates and he had been nice enough to let me tag along when he went out to selective parties and clubs, allowing me to bask in the limelight while he took center stage. These situations were always a bit odd; I always felt as if there were people looking at me and shaking their heads. Long stares and quiet whispers followed me at these places; my existence was only noticeable when I was near Shaw. I was a shadow, a figure that had just managed to sneak into places right as the door was closing.

The front door opened only just enough to look outside and not let any of the snow in. I was greeted by Mary, Shaw's wife of fourteen years. She kissed me on both cheeks and told me to come inside. The weather had been bad in northern Massachusetts, and the snow hadn't let up in days. To make things worse, a lightning storm was passing through, making for an unusual combination of dark white and electric yellow nights.

"Come on in dear, the boys are just sitting down," Mary told me, then went on into her usual gossip. "Did you hear what happened?"

I shook my head. I never kept up with the local hearsay, I was always buried at my typewriter trying to crank out something for the editors.

"The Remington girl had been having an affair with the mailman. Right under our noses! And to think I used to lend her stamps," I liked Mary, but she could go on chattering about local gossip for hours. One night a couple of years ago when Shaw was drunk he confessed to have married "that silly girl" to get in on her family's fortune. Shaw had always been looking for new ways to climb higher on the money tree.

After a brief walk through the ebony halls I ended up in the living room. A fire was crackling, throwing shadows on the faces of the men around the table. Empty beer bottles dotted the room, a pile was building at Shaw's seat. Shaw stood up and gave me a crushing handshake. Twenty years had passed since he put on his helmet and pads, but he still looked like he could wrestle a bear.

"How the hell are you, kid?" Shaw barked, and handed me a beer. "Mary why don't you actually do something around here and fix us some food? Jesus Christ, we're starving." Shaw always treated people like this. The men at the table looked down at their cards as Shaw's wife hurried out of the room.

I always felt out of place at these things, it had been this way since college. Shaw's friends had all come from wealthy families up north, and had been nicely placed in high class jobs after their time in school. While they went on to run steel corporations, railroad companies and law firms, I made ends meet by writing pieces for semi-prestigious literary magazines and newspapers. That's just way things have always been. While they had their lucrative checks and stock records lying around casually, I had rough drafts of articles and stories, freckled with my editor's blue ink.

I threw my coat on the sofa with the others. It was probably the most inexpensive one there, by about two hundred dollars or so. Shaw killed another beer and started dealing the cards and was commenting about the weather when he was cut short by a crack of thunder. He swore and kept dealing. Through the windows I could see the snow falling in milky white sheets. After two hands Mary walked in with some rolls.

"Now what the hell is this?" Shaw was pissed, as usual. "Mary, can't you bring us something with some goddamn substance? Like some steak or something?"

"I have some rice on in the stove," she said meekly.

"That will have to do for now. Jesus Christ." Shaw's words were beginning to run into each other. He turned back to the poker table and went on about how his wife was always screwing up, loud enough for her to hear.

"Shaw, let's just play," I said quietly. I didn't want this to situation to become any more uncomfortable than it had to. Shaw would keep going in he was allowed, and he had already been drinking.

He wasn't finished. The kitchen was connected to the dining room so Mary could hear every drunken

word as her husband berated the weather and her, but mostly her. The other card players just looked at their cards. In our junior year in college, Shaw got into a fight when he was drunk. I think it was cold and lightening that night too. The guy was sputtering blood and teeth but Shaw just kept hitting away and it took three guys to pull him off. Images of that night flashed back as I listened to him go at his wife. I could see through the kitchen door that she was beginning to sob.

All of a sudden, thunder cackled again, this time followed by the sound of the electric wires outside snapping. The windows shuddered and the lights went out. Mary, who was moving a boiling pot of rice must have slipped and dropped the contents on her foot. She screamed in the darkness.

“Jesus Christ.” Shaw stood up. In front of the dancing flames of the fireplace he looked pretty damn scary. He threw on a coat and hat and went outside to see what had happened. In his haste, he hit the corner of the poker table with his knee. In the dark I could see beer and poker chips swirling around on floor.

I pulled out my lighter and made my way to the kitchen. I helped move Mary to the sofa and wrapped up her foot. I thanked her, told her I was sorry for the evening and made my way for the door. I was putting on my coat and walking out when I passed Shaw stumbling in. He held the door open for me one last time as I left.

Julian Ybarra, '08



“Cogitating” by Adrienne Hunter, '07

Fall

During a solitary shuffle
through mid-autumn,
I could feel the trees
growing around me.
The shrubs stood on end.
Greenery trembled at my footfalls.
Branches reached out,
beckoning me to tend
the forest which had sprouted.

The setting sun drained my
leisure to landscape.
The moon was waning
inspiring a hearty lunacy in me.
I was a maverick in this land
of park rangers and tree huggers,
land-of-the-free-ers and
mother natures.
I was a bastard, with no mother,
no nature, no nurture.

Let the forest fall. Let it shrivel up.
Let it decay into brown and coarse
dry paper leaves. Color them
blood red, rancid orange,
sick, weak yellow.
My rustling steps leave a path of
grand silent collapse and
I walk away to let the woods starve,
smacking my lips on a crisp, ripe, green apple.

Jess Haberman, '06



"Milk Bucket" by Jen Keehner, '08

Jesus Christ Took My Baby Away

"The fuck is with all the flip-flops back there?"

"What?"

"Flip-flops. They were all over the place."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You know, flip flops, the kind of sandals. Thongs, whatever you want to call them. The kind that go between your toes and flip and flop and shit. You know what I mean now? Flips flops."

"I know what flip-flops are."

"So what's with them? They're all over the place."

"You mean in the stores or something?"

"No. At that school. Your friend's school we stayed at last night. Everyone at that stupid preppy East Coast school was wearing them. It's like they don't own any fuckin' shoes or something. It's not even just those douches with their collars up, it's everyone. Every student on that campus had a pair."

"Jerry. We were in Pennsylvania. That's not the East Coast."

"Isn't it?"

"No. In order to be on the East Coast I think you have to touch the coast."

"Screw that."

And our conversation ends there. I know if I argue with my brother anymore I'll only encourage him, but there isn't even anything to argue about. It's not like he even has a good point. He does this all the time, find any way to offend people and first offends them and then gets them to defend themselves, laughing the whole time because it's not like he really can be offended by anything because he really has no real opinions. My brother is one of those people who you could say doesn't care about anything. But then, when I think about it, I'm one of those people to.

Sometimes it's fun, like when we tell liberals that the Patriot Act isn't violating enough of our rights until everyone is yelling, or explaining to our conservatives that Saddam Hussein is our generation's Che Guevara, a brave revolutionary who is unjustly imprisoned and needs to be freed and immortalized. However, when it's just me and my brother he takes anything he can and twists it around and turns it into an argument that eventually ends in one of us yelling or laughing. I'm not in the mood for an argument now, so I just look out the window.

"Let's put in a CD," I say, looking over at him.

"What are you in the mood for?"

"I don't know." I know whatever I suggest will erupt into one of two things, either an argument or background information on whatever I choose. My brother has vast stores of knowledge and wisdom surrounding virtually every CD in his collection. Actually, what he considers to be knowledge and wisdom is really conspiracies he's read on the internet or heard from friends or made up himself.

"Ok. Shit. Let's listen to... fuck...Tupac sound good?"

"No, not now. I'm not in a rap mood."

"I am, and I'm driving."

What do I say to that? He is driving. I realize I've failed, because I wanted music I could relax to and ignore, and music that would prevent conversation. Instead I'm trying to ignore and relax gangsta rap, which will naturally be accompanied by a lecture from my brother on the life and times of Tupac Shakur, specifically detailing the conspiracies surrounding his death.

I'm looking out the window at nothing. Nothing but night and darkness and occasional lights scattered around but not the pretty kind of lights or anything, just dim yellow ones scattered around in fields off in the distance and hiding behind hills or maybe in farmhouses on the side of the road. I think we might be

in Maryland now. We're going to one of the Carolinas, I think the Southern one, the one with all the hicks who fly their Confederate flags and hate black people and were the first to secede from the Union. That's all I know about South Carolina, and all I know about North Carolina is that it's the Carolina that's North of South Carolina.

"So do you think he's alive or not?"

"Who?"

"Tupac. Did he fake his death?"

"No. I don't want to talk about it either."

"Yeah you do."

"No I don't."

"You have to accept the fact that Tupac is alive."

"Ok. You're right. Tupac is alive. He faked his own death so that he could sell more records. Now can we not talk about it?"

"No, because you don't understand why he did it. Tupac wanted to escape from the limelight. It wasn't about becoming popular. He didn't want or need the money. He was inspired by Machiavelli when he was in prison..."

I don't need to listen. I've heard most of it before. I look out the window again. I don't think I've ever been in Maryland before, but then I'm not sure if I'm even in it now. I don't know if the darkness with its scattered lights is what I would be seeing if I was in Maryland. I know I haven't been to either of the Carolinas.

"...always wore a bulletproof vest, every single night of his life. So where was the vest the night he got murdered? He was wearing it because he had planned the shooting. Suge Knight was driving the car and was the only witness to his supposed death but was never even questioned by the police because they were involved, they had been paid off and..."

No matter what we're listening to, my brother will do this. Every time we listen to Bob Dylan he talks about Hibbing, the town in Minnesota where Bob Dylan was from. And how he was born as Bob Zimmerman. And that "Positively Fourth Street" is about Fourth Street in Minneapolis. The only reason we care about this is because we're from Minnesota. Everybody in Minnesota is obsessed with any "culture" that comes out of it. Scott Fitzgerald, Garrison Keillor, Prince, Kirby Puckett, Josh Hartnett...

"...no autopsy and he was cremated the next day. The law requires an autopsy on all murder victims. Then you can't ignore how often the number seven comes up in his death. And seven is the number of heaven..."

We're from a town called Stillwater. It's a pseudo-small town outside the Twin Cities, the only real cities in Minnesota. Stillwater is very confused over its image, which is why I call it a pseudo-small town. It used to be a rustic little town, the first one in Minnesota, but now is torn between staying small and cute or becoming commercial and all about fast food and corporations or becoming a suburb of the cities. It's like a seventh grader deciding whether to be a goth or a prep or a nerd or a skater, et cetera.

"...so think about that. Who is the other celebrity to fake his death and then come back, bigger than ever and with the greatest following in history?"

I really wish it wasn't night, so I could actually see out the goddamn window.

"Francis?"

Shit, apparently he actually wants a response out of me.

"What?"

"Did you hear my question?"

"No."

"I was asking if you realize the connection between Tupac and the other historical figure who faked his death?"

"You mean Machiavelli again?"

"No. Jesus, man. Tupac is the Jesus of our generation. Look at it, a hero who inspires the poor and oppressed and changes the world through his words. And then things get rough, he gets executed but he's not really gone. It explains the significance of seven in his music, it explains why he refers to Suge as Simon, it makes sense. Totally makes sense. I mean, he had an album called *Resurrection*."

"You know, I don't think Jesus really faked his death. The story goes more like that he was executed and then he rose again on the third day."

"Yeah, he tricked everyone into thinking he was dead."

"Goddamn't, Jesus wasn't tricking people. He was actually murdered by the Romans."

"What the fuck? Aren't you an atheist anymore?"

"Yeah, but what's that got to do with it? The Bible doesn't say that Jesus faked his death. It's totally different."

"No, it's exactly the same. The hero. The villains. The oppressed. All the same characters. And after he dies his voice lives on, while he is also secretly alive and in hiding."

"Jesus didn't rise from the grave and just hide for a while. He walked around performing goddamn miracles!"

"Dude, Francis, do you believe in him or not? Make up your mind."

For the record, both my brother and I are Lutheran-raised atheists. Our town is pretty much all Lutheran, but with a good smattering of kids like us, coping with our disillusionment and searching for a more satisfying religion. The only other options in the town are Catholicism and that New Wave Non-Denominational Born-Again Jesus-Loves-You-Accept-Him-Into-Your-Heart-And-Give-Us-Money Christianity that does well with people who want some sort of insurance for the afterlife but aren't satisfied with what they've got so far. Jerry and I are both sick of what we've been raised with, but he tries to find new forms of "spirituality" while I don't really care as much. My brother has experimented with Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism, Transcendentalism, The Church of Scientology, and so on. He tries new religions the way the other kids in our town go through drugs. On the other hand, I'm satisfied with disillusionment.

"It doesn't matter whether or not I believe in him. You're changing the entire story of the New Testament just to prove whatever your point is. What the hell is your point? That Tupac is God?"

"No. I never said Tupac is God. I'm saying he just as important as Jesus for our modern society. And he did the same thing as Jesus, he needed an elaborate staged death so that his life would become more mysterious and his message more significant."

"I don't even know how to respond to that."

"You can just tell me I'm right if you want."

"Jesus..."

"Tupac."

"Shut the fuck up."

He just smiles and keeps driving. I wonder if he does have a point. I wonder if anything he said even makes sense. I wonder what South Carolina is going to be like. Or maybe North Carolina. I wonder if my relatives will recognize me. I haven't seen some of them in years. Or maybe I have and I forgot.

"Have you met her yet?" I ask him.

"Who?"

"The girl Merle is marrying."

"No. I wonder if she's hot."

"Grandma showed me a picture. She's not bad."

"Did I tell you about how I told my friends about it and they thought Merle was a lesbian, but then I told them that Merle is a guy's name."

"Yeah. Is Merle a guy's name?"

"I guess. I don't think Grandma would have let her grandson have a girl's name."

"Yeah, but Grandma doesn't really like Merle."

"Probably his name. Or this girl he's marrying."

I can't even remember if I like Merle. I remember that he wrote poetry. My brother would make fun of Merle would write it and email it out to people, and somehow I got on the list. It would always involve broken hearts or shattered dreams or torn ideas or fallen aspirations. Either that or oxymorons like "abstract concrete" or "organized chaos" or "a broken perfection." He also didn't use capitalization and avoided punctuation.

When I think about his poetry, I doubt that I could have ever liked Merle. This wedding is going to suck

We're in a diner now, somewhere in Delaware. Apparently we haven't gone through Maryland yet, because my brother got lost in Delaware during the night but didn't want to tell me. He got distracted during the Tupac conversation and missed a turn and we ended up lost for eight hours in the second smallest state in the union.

When I check a map in the diner, I realize there was no reason for us to ever be in Delaware. He says he wanted to see the ocean, but then realized it was too dark, and when he tried to turn around it just got confusing. Apparently Delaware is a peninsula.

"Did you know Delaware is a peninsula?" He's eating some kind of eggs that he only ordered because he hadn't heard of them before. Every time we eat at a restaurant he insists on getting something we don't have in Minnesota, although it ends up being something we do have under a different name. The strangest thing we've seen on a menu so far is "mush," when we were in Ohio. It's apparently something like oatmeal. The waitress compared it to grits. Our only experience with grits is the movie *My Cousin Vinny*, and neither of us could remember what they were in that.

"No. Maybe. I just remember that it's really small on maps. Why didn't we fly to South Carolina? How did you convince me to do this drive with you?"

"Because this is fun. And cheaper."

"Whatever." I don't even know if it is cheaper. I looked at the cost of flights and we could have gotten round-way tickets for under a hundred. But neither of us knew how to figure out if that was cheaper than driving, so we assumed driving was the cheap option. I'm not sure if I even want to go to this wedding. At least I'm missing three days of school for it. I told my teachers I was visiting college out East.

"Did I tell you the song I just wrote?"

"You wrote a song?"

"I write lots of songs."

"Ok. Which one are you talking about?"

"The one I just wrote."

"Yes, you told me about it."

"No, I didn't. But I'm going to."

"Yes, you did. It was about... your childhood? Love? Heartbreak? It was one of those, I can't remember which."

"Wrong. I didn't tell you. But the name of it is awesome."

"What's the name?"

"I can't tell you."

"'I Can't Tell You' is the name?"

"No. I want you to guess the name."

"How the fuck am I going to guess the name?"

"Just guess. I want to see if you can get it."

"You want me to just blindly guess words and see if they are the name of a song you just wrote? Jerry, there are millions of words in the English language. How the hell am I going to guess the exact combination of words you chose for your latest song?"

"Because, it's stuff we were talking about earlier."

"Is this about Tupac?"

"No. Close."

"Jesus?" "Naturally. It's about Jesus."

"Jesus... it is religious? What's it called?"

"Jesus Christ Took My Baby Away."

"..."

"Isn't that brilliant?"

"..."

"Jesus Christ Took My Baby Away."

"You wrote a song called 'Jesus Christ Took My Baby Away'? I thought you weren't religious? Aren't you a Taoist right now?"

"No. I'm looking into Jainism. But that doesn't matter. It's not a Christian song. But it could be. That's the point. Just think about the name. What's the first thing you think it's about?"

"Um... The Ramones. Because you clearly stole the name from the song 'The KKK Took My Baby Away.'"

"Exactly. So what's it about then?"

"Lack of originality?"

"Don't piss me off here," he says with a joking tone and a very passive-aggressive gleam in his eyes. I figure I should humor him, I don't think we need this argument to escalate into yelling. Not in a diner somewhere in Delaware.

"Ok. You want me to guess what your song is about. Is it about Jesus? Taking your baby away? As in, your baby died and went to heaven and it was Jesus' doing?"

"Perfect. But that doesn't have to be what it's about. It could be about anything.

"Like Tupac, or what?"

"No. Well, maybe. Just think about it. What else could those six words mean?"

"I don't know."

"Ok. I'll give you one. What if it's from the perspective of an old Jewish woman whose child just converted to Christianity. Or a Muslim whose child was just murdered by crusaders in the Middle Ages. How awesome that?"

"Beyond words."

"Or maybe baby doesn't mean child, it means girlfriend, or lover, or whatever."

"I'm not sure if this is an genius as you seem to think."

"You have to open your mind, Francis. You aren't evaluating it correctly. This song will be a hit. It will blow people's minds. Because it works on so many levels. Every word in the song could have multiple meanings. There are so many stories this song tells. Every one hears a different one. You heard one about a baby dying. Someone else hears one about The Crusades, someone else hears about Jesus dying for our sins, someone else hears one about Tupac. Maybe it's about a guy who's girlfriend left him because she became a born-again Christian or about a girl who chose a Jesus-guy over him or maybe his friend became a Christian and it changed her personality and she was never the same, like that Ben Folds song about acid, or it's about what you said, Jesus taking someone through death. Or it's about someone who's baby was killed in a gang fight with Tupac fans. Mystery. Various interpretations. It's what makes music. It's what makes art."

I am a little upset to realize that I like his point. I hate it when he has an idea that I like. Although I don't know that this song really sounds too good, he has a good point about mystery being the key to music, to art. But he's forgetting a huge element of it.

"Aren't you forgetting something? Something Tupac had and Jesus had and everyone who hits it big has have?"

"What?"

"Mystery isn't enough, Jerry. You need tragedy. You need an early death, shrouded in confusion and... you know, all that. Ambiguousness, or whatever."

"My song's got tragedy. It's about someone's baby being taken away."

"No, I mean you personally need tragedy. That's why Tupac is huge. He's got the good music and the mystery, but there's the tragic aspect to it. He never knew his father and he went to prison and he got in gang fights. It's why Jesus hit is so big, because he got nailed to a cross. Tragedy is the reason anyone cares about Jeff Buckley and Kurt Cobain and Buddy Holly and Jimi Hendrix and Biggy Smalls and Elliott Smith...and...and...and fucking Mozart! And Abraham Lincoln. And Ghandi, and JFK! If you want to be a hit you have to die young and suddenly and mysteriously."

"That's not true. Look at all the musicians who never died. Or the ones who did die and it killed their careers. Like John Denver, he hasn't become more successful since he died! And the Beatles, John Lennon died years after they broke up and they're still considered one of the greatest bands ever!"

His voice is rising and a couple people look over. I smile, because he knows I have a point and even though neither of us totally knows what it is, we won't back down.

"Unless you die, or at least pretend to, in a mysterious manner, you'll never make it big."

"Not all those people you named are really that big. And not all of them died in mysterious ways. And Abraham Lincoln wasn't even a musician."

"Yeah, but he's on the five. I was proving the point that no matter what your field is, you will be better remembered if you die tragically and before your time."

He sips his coffee. I don't think he even likes coffee, he just drinks it because it fits his image.

"So what is your song about?" I ask him. "You have to have written it about something before you came up with all these theories on what else it could mean. And you have to secretly have an answer to it. What else are you going to say in interviews when you're a big star and your fans want to know the secret?"

"I'm gonna say fuck you and ask you if you're going to finish your hash browns."

I hand him the hash browns and lean back in my chair, full from my omelet.

Neither of us says anything more. He's got me thinking about art and inspiration and fame. But then he looks up from his food, and the look in his eyes isn't joking at all. I can tell I'm about to get the real Jerry, this is going to be what he really thinks about music and art and inspiration and what his stupid song is about.

"When I was younger..." he says, talking slowly. I can tell he's talking slow so he can decide on his words and sound profound and make me really think.

"When I was younger, and disillusioned with being a Lutheran and a Minnesotan and all that, and having nothing more to our state than Bob Dylan and Jesse Ventura... well, that has nothing to do with it, not the Minnesota part. Well, I would think about religion and I thought that I didn't believe Jesus was God, but he was still, you know, a smart guy and wise and a good philosopher. But then I thought about it more. And I realized that yeah, it's a nice idea that the meek will inherit the Earth, but... Jesus is an asshole. He's egotistical, he's self-centered... he said he's the Son of fucking God. So you know what? I take Tupac over Jesus. Because I am the baby, that song is about my innocence. It's... okay maybe it isn't about that. Maybe it's about... I don't know where I'm going with this."

And then he laughs and takes another bite of my hash browns and I look out the window of the diner, at another boring state and decide it doesn't matter. None of it matters. Neither of us cares who is right and who is wrong and what makes good music.

I think about what it all means and what the this trip means and why we're in this diner and why this was created and for what purpose and who did what and how we don't even understand our own symbolism and metaphors because no one understands symbolism and nothing matters.

Fuck that. Fuck all of that. Metaphors are bullshit.

David Lovett, '08



"Untitled" by David Savoie, '08

Sonnets for the Musician that I Loved

I.

I met you of a Sunday, all roving
 aside, your brown-eyed hush, insistent touch
 cluttered in my hands, an odor: clove fling
 because "it was French." Only I thought much
 of them at this point. You joked freedom fries
 and I smiled. You made the lusty clear day
 an enjoyable one. You hint brown eyes
 have turned you on, and this I note away.
 You kissed my hand without permission there
 in the park, doves gray as suet and street ash.
 You kissed each finger as if then aware
 of my piano playing, your one splash
 with guitar lessons a funny story
 for me to repeat that night, not sorry.

II. Apology

I love you, and I am sorry for this.
 I do not know you, one who have sent me
 to the heights and the lowness in a kiss.
 You light up, sip deep that cigarette, free
 from the worry that some silly thing might
 want you more than the stars want gravity.
 But I do, and I am sorry for sight
 now. I can see you there, proclivity
 to you a curse. You lean, and I lean, know-
 ing it is time to leave. Our heat enclosed
 in the shaking of the windows, pillow
 of grass afterward. And your eyes are closed,
 I think that the sky is too much to miss:
 the heights and lows contained within a kiss.

III.

We have finished before we had begun.
 Alone I stand in this room, breath baited
 through. I build a house of cards, hearts for fun.
 It was the lack of calls that I hated,
 and I admit the lack of courtship. Wound,
 I stay in the corner, cheap lights blow up
 the stage, I sip up the foam off blank sound,
 a beer, cool, in the mouth, not a tune-up
 session alone in pink light. You, single
 beautiful disaster, are all I hate
 and all I need, a repair shot shingle

desperate building our enclosure, fate
 crueler than you. Response, no call lingers,
 and I trap what is left in my fingers.

IV.

Smoke from the grates rises slowly in streams
 on empty street corners turning like thoughts.
 Early morning shafts of light, sliced in beams,
 feel golden as apples gathered in clots.
 A young boy sits beheading bright flowers,
 estimating the time it takes to bleed.
 Each color, patient, waits out the hours
 to cause wrinkled brows that then quickly plead:
 "nothing is lifeless. Blood, like a river,
 flows by on an inner canvas of quiet."
 And the cold yawning ground brings a shiver
 beneath my feet, the seasons in riot.
 I see so much more loneliness in me,
 yet the world goes on breathing tree to tree.

V.

Although words leave me then tease me later
 I will live through this pause, shuffle to you,
 a stone unturned, and a love far greater
 lies in me than what lies dormant in you.
 One day you will fall, and not be able
 to lead a day without tripping up, this
 I am sure of. Everyone does, stable
 as you seem in being alone. Remiss
 it would be in calling you cold, for your
 hot kisses linger still, but I am warm
 like a fire in the heart. In secret for
 you I longed, now for myself I do form
 a strength to be a light on you. Slip through
 love, trip down words, I am fine without you.

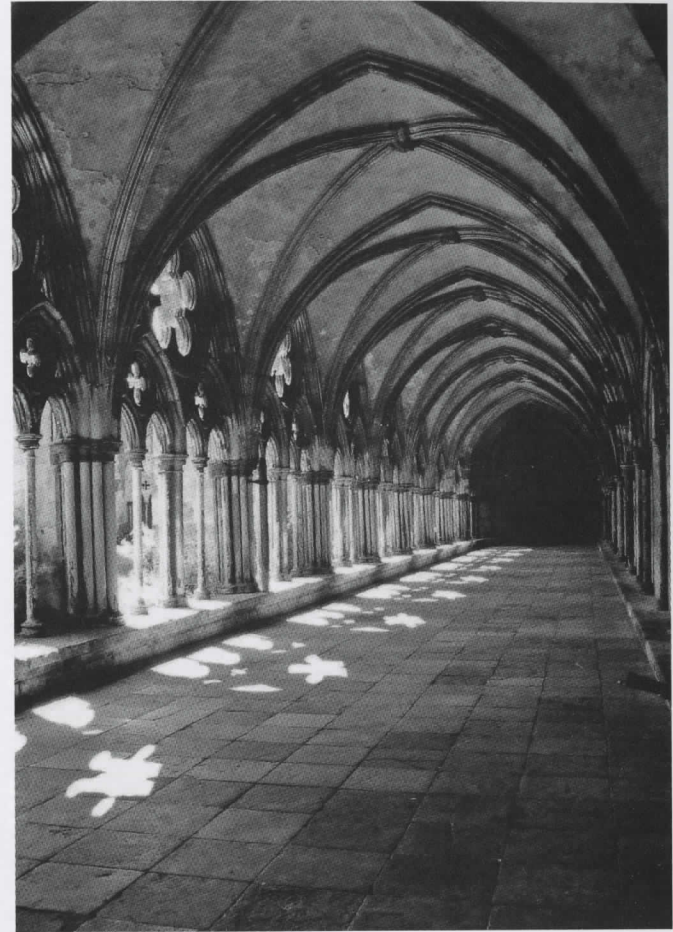
Sarah Bishop '06



"Future" by Jed Finley '05



"Untitled" by Kim Archibald '05



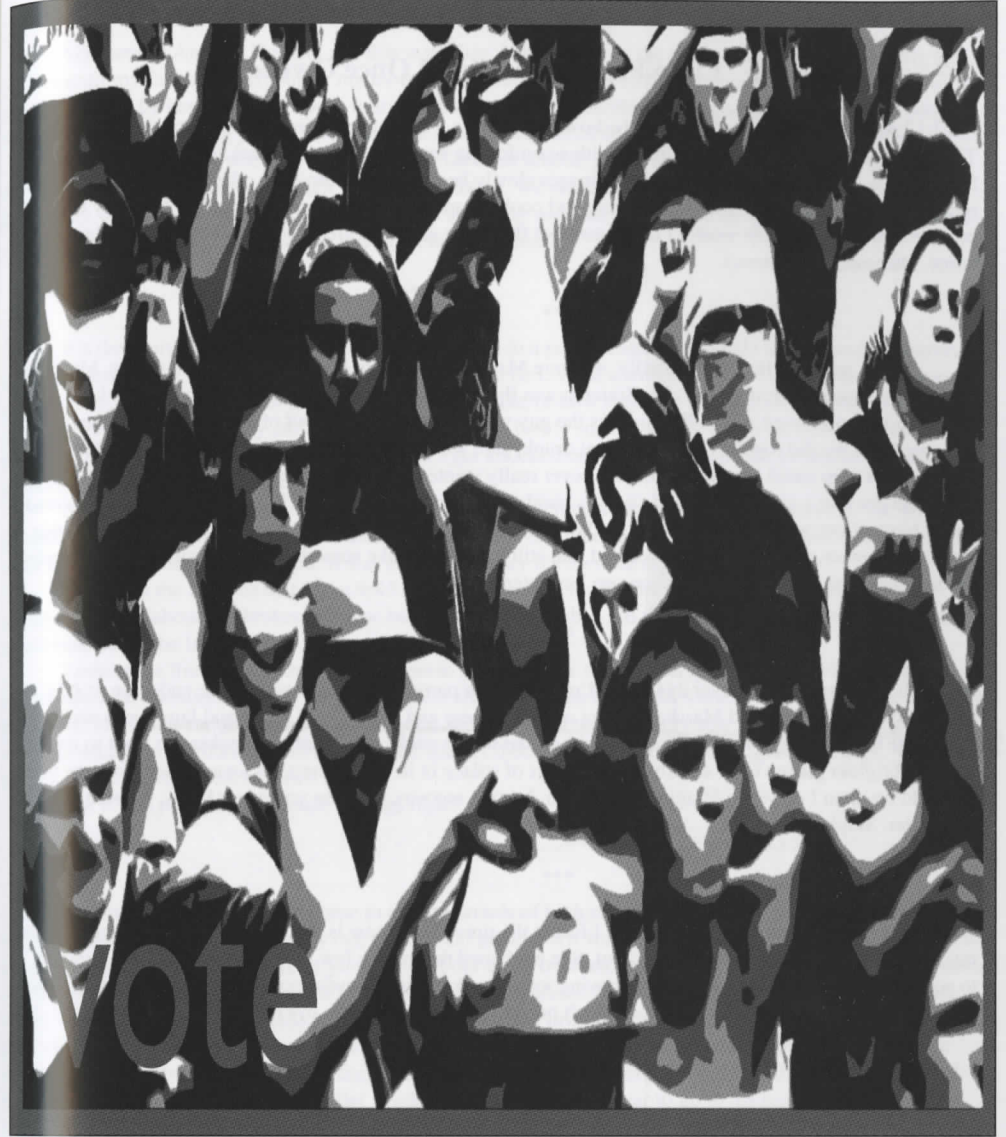
"Untitled" Kim Archibald, '05

next five years. Resources for the next fifteen years. Resources
 next twenty-five years. Resources for the next thirty-seven
 y five years. Resources for the next forty years. Resources
 next fifty-three years. Resources for your children. Resources
 xt seventy-eight years. Resources for the next eighty years
 next eighty-two years. Resources for the next ninety years
 xt ninety-eight years. Resources for the next hundred and
 ne next hundred and sixteen years. Resources for the next
 ur great-grandchildren. Resources for the next hundred and
 next two hundred years. Resources for the next three hun

VOTE 2004

Hard to imagine?

"Untitled" by Madeline Mohre, '08 and David Savoie, '08



"Untitled" by Katherine G. Armbrust, '06

Little Pieces of a Mind I Once Owned

It's 2:17 AM. High on speed, I sit hunched over examining a loaf of bread in a half-lit convenience store aisle. The whole row feels warm and inviting, with a comforting smell that takes me back to my childhood for a few seconds. My mind stops buzzing and images slowly begin to form into each other. I can see my mother, a picture-perfect June Cleaver replica, baking and cooking and cleaning in order to stay far, far away from the problems of the rest of the world. I can remember the sweet smells of fresh food waiting for me when I came home. Dammit, I love bread.

In all, we were five. Individually, we were Marshall, Brandon, Ronnie, Jason and Andrew. Marshall was the true punk (piercings and all), Brandon was the goofball, Jason hated authority more than I did but rarely said a word about it, and Ronnie was the guy who was the smartest out of all of us. Even though all it seemed like we did together was party, get drunk, etc., we actually knew each other really well. We were like brothers who cared for each other, but never really wanted to show it. I remember back when Brandon's girlfriend got into a car accident and she was paralyzed or something (it's all kinda foggy) and he was ready to kill himself but we helped him through. We were like The Ramones from the cover of *Rocket to Russia*, standing together, all wanting to be sedated, but still hoping to make something out of ourselves nonetheless. We had potential. But then again, everyone has potential.

It's Friday night all over again and I'm sitting at a party wondering how my life ended up as it is today. My old friend named Marshall brings over me a beer and it feels cold, crisp and familiar to my tongue. I still hate the way it smells so rancid sometimes, the way it stinks my breath and makes me want to dream of a better, brighter place. Yet, I still found some sort of solace in it. My future slips away faster from me than I can hold on, than I can even imagine holding on. I drink, anyway, because you never know, it could make me feel better. Stupid beer.

I forgot the year, I forgot the date, I forgot the time. All I know is that my guidance counselor told me my life would go nowhere if I dropped out. She explained that only a few drop-outs ever actually amount to something, and at most, work in low-paying jobs. I look her in the eyes, explain how I can't really care enough to study anymore, explain how I don't need to be told how to run my life. I walk.

The weekend is over with and it's back to Monday. Another empty beer can glides into the trash. The rest of the world has jobs and other important matters to attend to. I, on the other hand, am looking out my window, at the fragile suburban dystopia, looking the way perfect nuclear families lead their lives. Next door, I can see Mrs. Murphy running a vacuum cleaner through her house and I start thinking about my mother and all that she went through. I should clean this house one of these days. I clean her room all the time but it's kind of ironic I do that because she's dead and the place I live in isn't fit for a pig. I'm a lazy son of a bitch and while playing around with the remote, I still think there's some scary shit on Discovery Channel. Can't be any more frightening than my life.

My name is Andrew Holland and this is my life. I started out as the perfect offspring of perfectly normal parents until my father walked out on my mother. She was left with a child she loved to death but had no idea how to raise all by herself. So, at about fourteen, I started going downhill. I hung around with normal people who were slowly evolving just as I was: into the sick by-product of society. It wasn't post-puberty for us, it was a revolution. We smoked when we got the chance (even in school, just to irritate the higher-ups). We got high when we got the chance (even though I hated marijuana). We drank when we got the chance (just because). Eventually, we found some high-quality narcotics at a party and that became the thing we stuck with. I found my new best friend and it was named crystal methamphetamine.

It's the fourth of July and all is well. I get invited to a party at Jane Kaczynski's place and of course, accept the invitation. I promise my mother no drinking. I lied. What a stupid thing for her to ask of a fifteen year-old boy. And how stupid of her to believe my promise, or how stupid of her to hopefully believe it. *Of course*, I lied. I go to the party and get drunk so bad I can barely stand, much less talk like a normal human being. I spew ethnic slurs with relative ease until I got knocked onto my ass by the one person at the party who actually knew where Estonia was.

My mother spent that night home alone, probably watching some old sitcom, the news or the Weather Channel. Maybe even the Discovery Channel. Man, there was some scary shit on that: snakes and bears and other deadly creatures out for blood. It was especially scary if you were high.

Sitting on the hood of that car at 9:45 (when it was time for the fireworks from the park across the street), I feel bad about my broken promise but I never told her that. All the flowers in the world on her grave won't send away the lies I told.

Look at the fireworks in the sky. They seem so free. They went out of nothing into nothing. They commanded the attention of every person out there that night. The fireworks were loud and shrill like a gunshot, but I liked the sound and they made me feel good and hopeful. I was honestly able to believe at that point I'd someday escape my childhood and be a normal adult. I'd do as I promised and I'd graduate college. This was the last time I'd ever screw my own life up.

But it was probably the booze talking, right?

Eventually, we managed to come to the crossroads of high school life at senior year where we all had horrible grades and records, and only one of us could graduate (it was Ronnie). We all dropped out together on the same day, fueled by the desire of youth to spill our angst over and crush all beneath us. Turns out, we were all just young and stupid. We went back to living with our parents, but we all got jobs here and there. Some weren't always the most politically correct, like the ones that involved drugs and guns. A couple of us got jail-time along the way. About five years later, we had all but split apart. We lost touch and began to sink in the depression that comes with the realization that your life is going nowhere. Then, I found out Brandon killed himself. Overdose. It stung beyond belief inside, but I couldn't even bear to go to his funeral. That leads me to today, as I am sitting at home, thinking about all of the others. I know Marshall works a corner near our old school sometimes, trading drugs for cash. I know Jason gave up his dream of being a writer and replaced it with working as a waiter. Ronnie... I haven't heard from him in ages. He didn't seem like he really liked us so much anymore because we just gave up on school and life in general. I wonder whatever happened to Ronnie.

"That'll be \$9.53."

The clerk, a Latino guy whose accent has almost been completely covered by the veil of Americana, rings me up. I hand him a ten dollar bill.

"Forty-seven cents change."

I get tired of staring at the chewing gum rack and make the mistake of talking.

"Have you ever had a really bad dream, where you don't know where you are and you're lost in a hazy mist and you really can't comprehend the effects of your actions and how the words you say slowly drip from your mouth sound like nothing to you but make perfect sense to someone else, and then you wake up and it's the same way?"

He stops counting change and looks up at me.

"Are you high, man?"

I whisper my reply.

"Not anymore. Heh."

He hands me the paper bag with beer, potato chips, bread in it.

"Go home. It's not worth it. I should know. I did jail time for something like that. Look at me, thirty-five, working the grave shift in a middle of nowhere store."

I don't like being told what to do.

"Thanks for the advice. Next time I'll ask for it."

Speed is a killer. No, I'm serious, it turns out that if you do enough crystal meth you can die. I was reading an article in the newspaper this morning about a study. It talked about most always using it leads up to some sort of sexual disease because people tend not to care enough about what they are doing when they are high. Wow, I didn't know that. Honest to goodness, I knew about a lot of things but I didn't know that. I should probably lay off of it for a few days, anyways. My head is killing me.

I think about things like that while I walk home from the store. My daily walks home from the convenience store five minutes down the way from my home allow me some fresh air and a chance to contemplate the deeper meaning of things. Funny enough, I have whole days free seeing as I have no job, but I only actually put myself to good use for five minutes.

My house looks so beautiful from the outside, just the way my mother would have wanted it. She was a such sweet lady and I loved her so much. The paint hasn't slipped through the cracks of time quite yet and it still looks pristine. The garden has miraculously not been ruined either. "Hey Andy," Mrs. Murphy calls out. She smiles so perfectly that her teeth align just right and the world makes sense for a few moments. Then, she sees the yellow seeping through my skin, my bloodshot, sleepless eyes which makes me realize just how sick I've become. My euphoria trip has finally worn off almost completely and I'm beginning to regain some semblance of reality. Too bad reality and I don't get along very well.

I remember the first time it really hit home, when strangers noticed it most because I'm human and I care what strangers think. It wasn't the best of evenings: I didn't even notice the sun set that day because it wouldn't stop raining. It was just dreary, dull, ugly. I hadn't slept for a day and skipped school, and was running on adrenaline and crystals. I was doing homework and kept trying to figure out this math problem, but I couldn't concentrate. The numbers didn't fit right, like just the world seemed at the time: hazy, out of frame, drifting. The stress was heavy on my head, so I went for a short walk. I passed a small restaurant, one of those places that calls itself a "cafe" when it's just a diner. People were sitting at a few tables outside because the rain was beginning to stop. Still, the puddles got on my nerves and I kept circling around them. I noticed the strange

looks I got because the way I didn't walk in a straight line. Then, as my mind tripped, my body fell. Everyone else was chewing the scenery, while I was chewing the pavement. Bits of blood gushed, but I just noticed the eyes, wide and huge, just watching my every moment as I struggled to get to my feet but I didn't have enough strength. Nobody helped me up, either.

So, I went in around the back of our house for the hell of it. I mean, my house--I still have no idea why I call it "ours" when she has been dead for a while now. Anyways, I wanted to see the garden. Well, the remnants of a garden that is now a decaying mess of foliage; you know what I mean. Maybe I'd see the cat that sometimes came in and slept in the grass that hadn't been cut for a couple of months now. I'm not too big on animals, but somehow I liked that cat. It seemed like it cared enough about life to take care of itself, but it didn't care enough as to where it slept. It's things like that I admire about nature's creatures: the instinct of survival and the instinct to do what one feels at the same time.

The cat wasn't there so all I was stuck with was what the nagging guilt of a lawn gone wrong. It was so ugly that I should have just lit it on fire, let everything burn, and started from scratch. Being too lazy to get the gasoline, however, that idea remained on the drawing board.

When I got tired of the garden, I went in through the back door. Everything seemed normal until I noticed it was ajar a little bit. Okay, as crazy as this sounds seeing as I was tripping on acid less than twenty four hours ago, but I was sure the back door was shut completely. It was really bizarre; so bizarre that I decided that something was wrong. Someone might be inside. Maybe it was the paranoia that I read comes along with doing acid, but I swear, this was something else. I didn't quite really know what to do, so I took a little Swiss army knife out of my pocket, and pulled out the little blade. It was small and generally harmless, but if you stick it in the right place (somewhere around the neck) it hurts like hell. I should know; a guy named Brady Lewis pulled one out on me in eighth grade and almost sliced me open. Scary stuff. Luckily, the boys were around watching my back so I escaped alive. I still have a little scar, though; a gentle reminder of the trouble a little piece of metal can cause.

I walked in as silently as I could, but the floor was rather creaky, so I had to tiptoe past it to not give myself away. Everything seemed normal, untouched, in the kitchen. I paused, and tried to listen for any noise. I heard a gentle rustling of something upstairs. I didn't know what it was, but it was definitely something. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I realized how overzealous I was, going into possible danger with the smallest weapon in the history of mankind. Despite that, I had to find out what was going on in my house.

Maybe it was the cat. Maybe it had slipped in through the crack in the door and went around looking for something. No, that doesn't make much sense, because the door was never open in the first place and all the food was in the kitchen. There was nothing much upstairs except for books and I don't think many felines like to read old cyberpunk novels.

No sign of anything in the living room. I still heard the noise.

No sign of anything around the bottom stairs. The noise grew louder.

It was then I decided I would do something incredibly stupid. And something new too, that didn't involve alcohol or narcotics.

By the time I made my way up, I knew it was coming from my mother's room. Holding my breath as well as I could and stepping along silently, I tip-toed towards the noise, with every bone in my body shivering. For a second, I thought I'd fall to pieces.

The door was open and I could see someone's back. He was rummaging through a set of drawers filled with her clothes. He didn't seem like very big but it's never good to underestimate a potential threat. Dante Carlow taught me that.

I came to the conclusion that it was either do or die. Either I'd take this person out from my vantage point, or I'd just stand there like a lamb to slaughter. I couldn't walk back downstairs because the stairs creak so heavily when you move down, it's a wonder the whole neighborhood doesn't hear it. So I did it. I went inside the room, with no hope or prayer in the entire world, and decided I'd have to cut this guy open somewhere; probably his throat. The idea terrified me because as much as I was inclined to violence, I had a weak stomach and an even weaker heart. Even if the man mass-murdered my family, I'd have trouble killing him. I didn't want the guilt nor did I want dead body nor did I want to have to do something so deplorable.

Lucky for me and my conscience, I didn't have to make the decision. Why? Well, he turned around just as I was walking in. He pulled out a gun, too. Lucky me.

He stood there for a moment, his hands shaking holding a small Beretta. His breathing was soft and tempered yet growing heavier as time went on.

He was quite a sight. He looked to be about in his late twenties with a lanky frame covered by an oversized old Chicago Blackhawks hockey jersey and a ski mask that didn't help hide his beard. His jeans looked either acid washed or so ancient they had faded. You could easily tell he had no idea what he was doing.

After we stood there for what seemed like an eternity but was probably forty-five seconds, he spoke. "Drop the knife." His voice seemed so awkward uttering those words that it almost cracked. I did as he told, however, because today wasn't the day I wanted to die. "Now... s-show me..." he stuttered, "...where you keep your money. Or jewelry. Or whatever. Expensive shit."

I didn't respond to his request--no, demand--immediately because he was looking at me funny. Not "ha-ha" funny, but like he was trying to place me somewhere in the back of his mind. He looked like had seen me before. "Are you going to move... or not?" he asked, without taking a single step himself. He moved the gun a little closer to my face so I could see the little nicks in the grip that showed it was old and most likely used. A scare tactic that worked, so I moved myself out the door, all while keeping an eye on the inhuman object that could determine whether I live or die. And then he yelled something at me, in a tone made up of complete surprise and satisfied realization:

"Andrew?"

I couldn't believe it. This guy knew who I was. And now, he's probably going to kill me. Knowing my luck, he was probably that seventh-grader I stole money from when I was sixteen.

I turned around to face my killer. He had no mask on now, just his face. It looked tired and a little haggard, with an unkempt beard and hopeless, lost eyes. I didn't recognize him off the bat, but then I looked at the eyes deeper and I saw a face from my past that used to be like my brother.

"Ronnie?"

He nodded and smiled a little bit.

"Ronnie? Geez, Ronnie, is that you?"

He nodded, bobbing his head up and down in his little show of happiness.

"Andrew Holland... you old son of a bitch..." he whispered. I thought he'd raise the gun again because

I hadn't been called a son of a bitch in a long time, and whenever I was, it never turned out good. Instead, he gave me a massive hug and tossed his Beretta aside. I hugged him back after a moment of trepidation because it felt like we were young again, it felt like I was in the ninth grade again, living the best days of my life. For a second, everything flashed by: Marshall, Jason, Brandon, my old girlfriend Natalie, my old History teacher named Mr. Smith who was one of the coolest people I'd ever met, my high school, even Brady L. Heck, I even saw my mother living and breathing for an instant. It felt good to be remembered.

Never before had I enjoyed being called a son of a bitch so much.

For old time's sake, I took out a couple of beers and our graduating yearbook. The bottles clicked together like two lost souls reuniting. I took a sip which flowed down my throat like a gentle sweet wine when it was anything but. It was one of the few drinks I can honestly say I enjoyed every taste of.

"So what have you been up to?" he asked me. His tone was a lot more informal and relieved now, just as I was.

"Not much of anything. You know, the same old, same old. What about you?"

He shrugged. "Unfortunately, it's pretty obvious what I've had to resort to."

I paused and waited for an explanation but when it didn't come I asked him just why he was robbing.

"Well... I know I graduated from high school and ended up going to a community college and it all seemed to be coming up in roses... but when that ended, I was stuck with a job at a factory that really wasn't something that appealed to me. I was treated horribly and my boss was the most ignorant man you've ever met. I took a lot of verbal abuse from that son of a bitch, so I decided to tell him off one day. He fired me right on the spot and wouldn't recommend me for anything else because of what I said to him."

"What'd you say?"

"Well..." he thought aloud, "your wife is a whore, your mother is a whore, your sister is a whore, your aunt is a--"

"I get the point."

"Yeah, and that's not all. I basically ripped into every aspect of his professional and personal life, including the fact that he had a mistress, who was actually the only one who was really a whore. I wasn't left with much when he refused to pay me my last check, and it wasn't much anyways, so I thought I'd get a new job. Turns out, no one wants a guy who spent most of his high school career getting C's, D's and drunk."

"But you were the smartest one of out all of us! I mean, come on! You went to college, for Pete's sake! You were the one that cared about studying for the semester exams, you were the one that knew stuff about history and science--"

"I know, I know!"

"--you were the one that abandoned us senior year."

Silence.

"You don't need to be all quiet about it now. I mean, I can't say it really bothers me too much anymore. That was then, this is now. Maybe you've changed. What do I know?"

He remained silent. He tried not to look at my face when I said those words, but he couldn't help himself. "I'm sorry, Andy, but it's just that... you guys took all you had and threw it away... and I didn't want that to happen to me... and now... look at me *now*. I'm a complete failure." He almost began to cry, but he couldn't bring himself to it. He knew it was his fault.

"Don't worry about it," I consoled. "I don't blame you. If I had been smarter, I would have left us behind too."

He took one last sip of beer, put the bottle down and opened up the yearbook. "Wonder whatever happened to those people."

"Like who?" I asked.

"Like him." He pointed to Franklin Mazuchelli, a tubby, smiling teenager with blonde hair. "I used to sit with him at lunch."

I stared at his face for a few moments, then looked at his name, and back at his face. "Owns a restaurant."

"What? How do you know?"

"He always told us he would someday, and I never believed him, so we made a bet over it. Three years after graduation, I got a call from him and he wanted his \$15."

"Heh."

"Yeah."

"What about her?"

He pointed to his ex-girlfriend, his only one in high school. Maria Randalls.

"I don't know. I haven't heard or seen from most of these people in ages."

"Why don't you get a job?" Ronnie asked in an effort to change the subject.

I replied succinctly: "No experience. Where would I work?"

"Start from the bottom and work your way up just like any other American."

"You're one to speak."

His expression didn't change but I could see a subtle grin poking through his hazy eyes. "I know, I know, but hey, it's never too late. Not even for me. We all make mistakes. But we learn, right?"

"I guess."

"I mean, even I'm not so bad anymore. I used to steal from houses and then tear them up just out of the sheer frustration that I didn't end up being able to live a happy life like they did. But last time..."

He smiled. "I left out vandalizing everything..."

He glanced at the yearbook laying open and empty, filled with faces of the past that were forever immortalized on those black and white pages.

"Man, everything's gone away now. So many chances down the drain. I miss school sometimes. Everything was simple and defined. But not anymore. Nothing's easy, nothing's given to us."

And so Ronnie and I talked for hours on end, until our throats were dry. Reminiscing was a chore for me, but not for him. It was like free therapy, like he'd waited all those years just to spill his guts to someone. He kept on telling me about his life until I finally got him to go home, but not without trading numbers just in case I recover from the echoes of his voice in my ears for the next twenty-three years.

When you think about it, what happened with Ronnie was an incredible coincidence; him robbing my house and all. But that's what life is made up of... coincidences that change you forever. If I hadn't shared that one class in fifth grade with Brandon Peters O'Neill, then I might have never ended up as how I am today. If I hadn't ever left that house that one warm May evening to go bowling and then get high with some friends, I may have been able to say goodbye to my mother and told her how much I loved her. Maybe she wouldn't have suffered that stroke that evening. Maybe if I hadn't let go of Natalie, I'd be married right now with a bunch of children, all there to listen to me. Maybe to learn from me.

That's all life is. A bunch of regrets. Regrets are useless things that hold you down because tomorrow has enough problems of its own that you needn't waste time crying over the past. You just have to accept the cards you've been dealt, read 'em and weep, and move on. But not all coincidences are regrets, so good things can come from karma.

For example, if it hadn't been for Ronnie breaking into my house and sitting there complaining about his life to me for hours on end and wondering where the possibilities went, I might not be trying to get into college now.

Reyan Ali, '08



"Coffee of Tea?" by Alice Sommer, '05

Tainted Memories of June

The Sacré Coeur was bleeding
 the night we stood on the steps
 among the litter of drunks.
 I declared my love for Mark
 as I let you pull his kiss from me,
 inhaling guilt with your breath.

I will remember you like
 the artificial peach
 of that summer in Germany:
 walking barefoot over
 the warm half square patterns
 of sun on the wood floor.

In a breeze of cigarette
 smoke mixed with alcohol,
 one seventy degree night,
 you will be an image of red
 paint splashed across the left
 tower of a white church.

Melissa Holm, '05



"Untitled" by Meredith Helfrich, '05

Contributors' Notes

Reyan Ali is a first year student.

Kimberly Archibald is a senior who considers herself to be an amateur photographer and enjoys traveling worldwide for shots of the sublime. She's an English Literature major currently focused on a research project about Victorian women, madness, and desperation in marriage.

Kate Armbrust is a junior from warwick, Rhode Island working toward her BFA.

Sarah Bishop is a junior double major in English, with a concentration in creative writing, and Theatre. She hails from Nashville, TN and can be found most often in the costume shop making corsets or sewing pants, or reading/writing at her computer. She loves the finer things in life like puppies, kittens and short walks on the beach, and is excited to be featured in this literary magazine.

John Buchanon is senior from Michigan.

Lauryn Dwyer is a senior Cinema and English-Writing double major from the Chicagoland area. In a surprising turn of events, she is planning on attending law school next year.

Jed Finley is a 5th year senior communications major from Rumson, NJ. He is a DJ and a member of the executive board at WDUB. Other than drawing, Jed also spends his creative time writing short stories and is about to start work on the soon to be famous play "The Testicle Dialogs." He dedicates his drawing to his friend Liz, who he drew it for to wish her a bright future at Denison.

Jess Haberman is a junior English literature major. She is a member of Ladies' Night Out and works at the Writing Center. Jess has been published in three International Library of Poetry anthologies and at poetry.com

Meredith Helfrich is a senior from Saint Louis, Missouri, majoring in Environmental Studies with a concentration in Education.

Melissa Holm is a senior Creative Writing and French double major from Worthington, Ohio who hopes to continue her studies after Denison and earn an M.F.A. in Creative Writing.

Adrienne Hunter is a sophomore who "...shoots everything in sight. watch out. you may be next." She would like to thank her grandparents for coming up with the titles for these photos.

Jen Keehner is a first year potential Studio Art major from Plymouth, Michigan. In addition to photography, which she has been studying for the past three years, she also enjoys writing, being outdoors and waffle parties.

David Lovett is a first year student.

Maddie Mohre is a first year student from DeWitt, Michigan who intends on double majoring in Women's Studies and Studio Art. She likes running in her free time as well as playing soccer and the violin, reading and traveling.

David Savoie is a first year studio art/photo major who has been homeschooled since 2nd grade. He is a self-taught photographer who started working freelance in Columbus, shooting sports, portraits, and fine arts prints. He says that his work, "changes drastically from time to time, sometimes focusing on current events, but often reflecting a more personal side."

Dylan Seuss is a sophomore.

Alice Sommer is a senior Art History major and Religion minor who is currently doing her senior research on the contemporary photographer Sally Mann.

Julian Ybarra is a first year student from San Antonio Texas, majoring in Communications.

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All submissions are reviewed on an anonymous basis, and all editorial decisions are shared equally among the members of the editorial board.

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