

Metamorphoses 2001-2002

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The Dream

By Iris Woolverton

There is a twilight sleep called semicolon
Brought on by a certain mad professor
His is a left-handed world

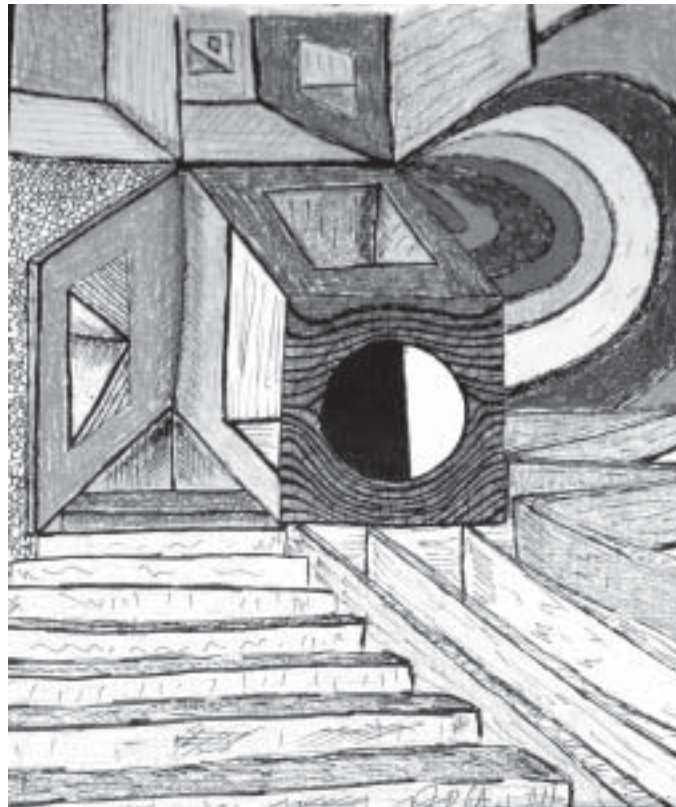
In this primeval broth
Bloated periods chase pot hooks
Birthed by bad writers—
Left hand that is

Ironies lay in debris, rusting away
Fire-breathing hyphens lurk in syntaxes
Frying unsuspecting commas
As they swim by

Sated obese platitudes, quiet for the now
Will once more bore to death
Unwilling readers—
They are bottom feeders

Ever faster the madman stirs the brew
Whirling swirling rhymes rise
To the surface, emitting flatulent
Burps.

Awake, Awake, I scream as
Chittering verbs swarm towards me
Ah, I open my eyes to sanity
To righthanded normality



Jason B. Robbins
"Which Way is Up"
Pen and Ink Colored Pencil
12"X16"

The Knife

Robert Vincelette

It was the morning of my tenth birthday. The excitement of the day was shooting through my body like a lightning bolt. I couldn't wait to see what I would get. I opened all my presents. They were boring gifts like clothes and toys that would be old by the end of the day. The last one was from my father. It was an old pocketknife that his father had given him. Its rustic handle of carved ivory was yellowed from time. I opened it up with great ease to show my worried mother that I would be careful not to cut myself. She didn't like the idea of my having a pocketknife of my own. The blade gleamed like a mirror and was sharp as a new razor. My father told me that I was old enough to have it. I could tell from the way his face looked that it meant a lot to him, even though I had never seen him use it before.

One summer day when school was out, my friend and I were home alone. It was one of those days when the boredom was so thick you could taste it. We had nothing to do. I thought I'd show my friend the place that I cherished most: a small grove of trees down the street by the canal, my little forest. We got there in the middle of the afternoon. It was hot; the midday sun irritated our shoulders on the way, making the shade of the eucalyptus trees a welcome refreshment. I loved walking up to that place as the aroma of the trees and plants filled the air. I could hear the canal singing in the distance as

the water made its way over and around the rocks. It was so peaceful: our own little paradise away from the crazy world. I showed my friend some things like the boat I made from an old milk jug. It wandered down the canal aimlessly, a lost abandoned ship looking for its way home. Everything was calm, quiet, and fun.



Daniel Rodriguez

"Japanese"

Pen and Ink

8" X 10"

they would burst, one section at a time in my mouth. Sweet, tart, sweet, sweet, and tart! The best thing about these berries, though, was the way they tasted in my dad's cobbler. Hot out of the oven with some vanilla ice cream on the side. The berries just melt in your mouth, with the ice cream to cool your tongue down! Oh, my stomach is growling now! I'd better not spoil my appetite.

I hopped back on my bike to hurry home to where my dad was mixing up his famous batter. It may have only been famous in our family, but I'd bet if we were the sharing type of folks, that others would love it just as much. There are just some things in life you just don't want to share and my dad's cobbler was one of them. I truly think he had some kind of magic powder that he used to make it so addictive. I never asked what. I should have. Shortly after this, my dad was diagnosed with very high blood pressure and cholesterol. As it was, he felt he was living on borrowed time since his dad died of a heart attack at the young age of 49. And my dad was 40.

He didn't make another cobbler for nine years, when I asked for one for my Sweet 16. Unfortunately, all those years of not making them meant forgetting some of the ingredients that made it good. Plus, he was making everything low fat and low cholesterol. It just didn't taste the same. Since the Griffin's never wrote down a recipe, that one was now officially in the grave with his mom. He had been the only one keeping it alive. To this day, he and my sister still mess around trying to find the exact balance of all the ingredients to make that famous cobbler. They've come close, but not quite. Personally, I think they just need to find that magic powder!

Mess

Jacquelyn Smith

Mess in my house. Fed up, boxes closing up my spaces, stealing my peace. I am chased away. I feel guilt, I flee the work but am drawn to it at the same time.

Papers. I unsee them.

Phone calls. I push them down.

Bed and books call to me. I go.

When will I start to own the whole house?

The mess owns me. It keeps me unused.

Where is my gumption? Where is my core?

Where is the part of me that will save me from being swallowed by the mess?

Come forth.

I need you.

I want my honor, my glory,

my home of beauty and peach.



Diana Lamb

"Despair"

Scratch Board

8.5"x11"

son the ways of the world, hand down the legacy, carry on the name. I would be a good student. I watched my father closely, always gauging his moods, staying on his good side, trying to be the son he never had. At the same time, I wondered how I could get married, have children, and still carry on the family name. To this day I don't know if my father had the slightest idea of what was going on in my mind, but in any event, a strong bond developed between him and me. He taught me how to build a playhouse, swim in the pool, and ride a horse. I even had archery lessons. These things he lavished on me generously, I'm sure, were to make up for what he lacked in his own childhood.

I remember one day he came home with a large box. My sister and I were excited to have this unexpected present. He made a big deal, as he always did, about the presentation. Making us wait by giving us hints and trying to get us to guess what was inside. Telling us we would be the only kids on the block to have them. When the moment finally came to unveil the contents, we were high with anticipation. I was usually the lucky one, as so often was the case when it came to these little impromptu offerings, for when the boxing gloves were revealed, much to my sister's bewilderment, I was ecstatic. I couldn't wait to put them on and beat the crap out of her. I guess it showed in my eyes because Barbara, my sister, who was three years my senior, had no interest in going ten rounds with me and bequeathed me her gloves. She had no intention of making a game out of it. We had our share of knock down, drag out, hair pulling, pinching, slapping, and biting contests. All impromptu and initialized I'm sure by some type of perceived injustice. Most of these little contests of

power I won from sheer endurance and obstinacy. I also won because she suffered from asthma and had no desire to be the toughest woman in the world.



Brent Thornton

"Dogs"

Ink on paper

16"x16"

I guess that's how I ended up here on that hot summer day, surrounded by the neighborhood gang, boxing gloves hanging conveniently at home. At four feet tall and seventy pounds dripping wet, attitude was my equalizer. I was the natural leader of the girls on the block, all three of them. I was the only one that would stand up to the bullies that played havoc with us on our way to school. I was the good son. Up until then my only experience with actual hand-to-hand combat was limited to the technical decisions won over my sister. Bolstered by these fanciful victories, I was now about to engage in my first fistfight with Jack Pace, the arrogant, self-appointed leader of the

boys that day. Confrontation: that's the best way I can describe it. Memory fails me as to the exact words or circumstances that got me here, but in any event, whatever it was, a challenge, a nasty remark or just plain bad timing, I rose to the occasion. As I verbally promoted my abilities with words like "come and get it" or "you think you're so tough," Jack and I began the traditional circling. Arms at the ready, fists clinched, and complete with our ringside audience that allowed no retreat, we encompassed each other. The smell of sweat mixed with dust, a smell that will forever take me instantly back to my childhood, filled the confined space. Suddenly, everything is in slow motion. I somehow enter the eye of the storm, as if I were on the outside looking in. A calm washes over me and I become strangely curious, wondering if indeed I could do this and what it would feel like. In my revelry and without foreplay, I suddenly felt excruciating pain in my nose that spread up my nostrils and earthquaked in my head. It was over in a flash. I remember little else as fist connected with nose, obviously my nose. I saw stars—no joke—real stars and the next thing I knew, I was sitting back on my keester. Any thought of retaliation or just plain getting up, anytime soon, was completely out of the question. I was down for the count. As I sat there shaking my head unable even to be embarrassed—that would come much later—trying to get my eyes to stop revolving around inside my head, I knew instantly that this wasn't the way I wanted to go through life solving my problems. New avenues for this exuberance would have to be found. That was basically the end of my violent years. All future energies were focused on avoiding any physical confrontation whenever possible. The boxing gloves were put away and although I

continued to hang with my dad, I knew something basically changed inside me: I would have to start finding out who I was. Patricia: she might not be such a bad person after all even if she were just a girl.

The Ring

By Jacquelyn Smith

Dad's wedding ring came to me after he died.
The pierced garland design is nearly gone,
rubbed off
by his husband/sailor/fireman/father
working hands.
The warm weight of it comforts me.

His ring was freshly bright when he held
me as an infant.
"Jacquelyn," he said, "When you were
born, your fanny fit in the palm
of my hand and your head came to
the crook of my elbow."
He loved to tell me that story, me, his five-
foot-ten daughter.
Was his ring a prison he chose for himself?
All that bickering and sniping, so painful
for us kids to watch.
When he up and died at age sixty, sick
three months and gone.
It still brings tears to my eyes twenty-
three years later.
His spirit once told me, "I hold the moun-
tains in my hands.
I dwell in the waters."
Are those shiny flecks in the soil and river
you, Dad?
Did you teach me to break the prison walls
by your sad example?
Is that why I had my wedding ring melted
down after the divorce?

ya ta go to the river and get some black-berries for a cobbler I'm makin' tonight for dinner. I've got the milk cartons all rinsed out for ya already. Ya just got to go and git 'em." My dad was from the South and you could still tell by some of his words, like his "ya" for you. Also, all his "r's" sounded like the "a's" in the word vitamin. Sometimes, it made me giggle.

"No problem." I uttered. But what I really want to say was *Whoopee!* But I didn't want my brother to hear. If I made it sound like I was upset about going, I wouldn't have to worry about his presence ruining my fun. Older brothers do that every chance they get, and mine was no different. If I even hinted that I was excited about this, he would find some way to ruin it. This way, he would just laugh at me and possibly stick out his tongue. I climbed out of the pool and quickly dried off. Pulled my shorts on and walked inside to where Jay was. He's 14 and exactly double my age this year, although you couldn't tell by the way he acts. He's as childish as some of the boys in my class.

"Ha-ha! You have to ride your bike to the river! Try not to get lost!" Jay teased. Typical. He is so predictable. I hope he grows out of that or he will never get a girl! I just pushed past him to the kitchen of our three-bedroom, two-bath, 1200 sq. ft. home. It was small but cozy. A little too cozy at times. My dad was making sure the insides of the milk cartons were dry and no longer smelled of milk. I guess that last one wasn't quite clean enough yet. My only indication was the sour look on his face.

"Here you go kiddo. Take these three, this fourth one isn't quite, uh, up to par." My dad said. And then finished with

"... and hurry up, I'm gonna start makin' the batter for it in about a hour."

"Okay dad. I'll be back before then." I yelled back as I grabbed the milk cartons and ran out the door. I jumped on my ten-speed bike with the curly bars and took off. The bike was a little tall, but my parents said I would grow into it. Besides, it made me feel older. At least I acted older than my brother did.

The bike trail was only a short mile from the house, but the best blackberries were quite a bit farther. I'd been black-berry picking before, and I knew all the best spots. The ones that aren't as picked through because they're further up the trail. Like even the squirrels were too lazy to retrieve them.

Pant, pant, pant. Almost there! Oh, I can smell them just as sure as I can hear the water from the river trickling, making its way in between the brush and rocks in the shallow bed. I veered my bike off the trail onto the rocks to my final destination. It was a beautiful day. Birds bickering over the gentle summer breeze, grasshoppers playing the fiddles on the back of their legs, and right in front of me a praying mantis, so still on the branch as if he saw me and were holding his breath. I love this place! I opened the mouths on the rinsed out milk cartons and began my gathering. The arrows showing you how to open the paper milk cartons always looked like a smile to me. So, at school where no one would get mad at me, I drew two eyes above it. Then I made it talk. What an imagination!

I picked more than enough for the cobbler within twenty minutes, but I had to keep replenishing the ones I ate. I love biting into those ripe berries! And how

With shining face of youth, with warmth inherent.
 He knew the days when warmth had been his own,
 not borrowed from a cup of liquid life.
 But those days were gone, now hidden beyond the fog.
 Fountains of youth were few and far too high
 A price for him to pay. And so he stood
 Before the Phoenix, he in smoldering ash.
 "Life," he said, and turned to face the moon.

Shard

By Iris Woolverton

After our wedding,
 my husband left forwork.
 I spent the evening playing
 slot machines in the Nevada club
 to pass the time.
 I won twenty dollars.



Vanessa Johnson (VanWolf)
 "The Famish Fight"
 Pen and Ink
 15" X20"

Dad's Cobbler

Sunshine Griffin-Duffy

Summertime. No word is sweeter to a child still of school age. To me it meant becoming a mermaid for eight hours a day. Looking back, I'm surprised I didn't develop gills for all the hours spent in the pool. I loved swimming. I would hold my breath as long as possible, just so I could enjoy the quiet my underwater world had to offer. No traffic, no fighting over t.v. shows, no yelling. Just the sound of the water moving around me, my bubbles floating to the top, and sometimes, if I listened real close, I swear I could hear the wasps land on the water and take their drink! Nothing could interrupt my quiet fantasyland...except...

"Sunshine! Sunshine? Are you back here?" bellowed my dad—although, underwater, it didn't sound like a bellow; it sounded more like a muffled question. But I knew he had to be pretty loud for me to hear. Woosh! I erupted to the surface so quickly my ears popped. Was I in trouble? I couldn't tell. As a typical Gemini, I can read everyone—except a typical Virgo, which my dad was. His angry voice sounded to me just the same as his proud voice, his joking voice, and his sad voice. Maybe that's because my dad rarely showed any of those emotions. And with such a poker face! I bet he won a lot of hands in the Navy!

"Yah dad, I'm heer." I answered. I hope I'm not in trouble.

"I've got a chore for you. I need you to do me a favor." *Oh God*, I thought, *this is worse than being in trouble!* "I need

A Kiss Remembered

By Frances A. Cota

There was a sternness in him bordering on meanness.
 Ice-blue eyes held terror.
 No gentle touch or loving pat came from those tough hands.
 His lips had never touched us.

A table filled with food and clothes enough.
 The home was always warm.
 We never knew that this was not all there was to love.

Every child left as soon as possible and never returned to that cold, unfeathered nest to live. Those unknissed children somehow learned from the world around them how to love.

Weddings

By Mischelle Sammons

The only wedding I never attended was my own.
 I was a bridesmaid for Monique—my dress was mint;
 A flower girl for my aunt—she's remarried now;
 My brother had to move up the date of his wedding. I was there.

Three times I was the maid of honor:
 At Jenalee's I fell flat on my face trying to catch the bouquet;
 I told Donna we could keep driving

if she was having doubts;
 Jodie was so big I thought she would have the baby during the ceremony.

My mom's friend Judy made a beautiful bride—
 My mom made the dress I wore as I dropped flowers down the aisle.

My wedding dress is white—fit for a princess.
 It's still hanging on the door in my parent's spare room.

Today

By Georgie Bergeron

And now my robe knocks clutter from tabletops and shelves, sweeps cutlery from the counter.
 And now Hank Williams wails his woes of lonesomeness and cold, cold hearts.
 Jimmie the brakeman whines his complaints of trifling women and too much drinking.
 The van rests on ruined tire remnants, a decrepit catamaran on an ancient trailer connected for towing. Going nowhere.
 And now the laundry reflects painful light as it flops and thrashes in the wind.
 The air reeks of creosote and horse dung.
 The neighbor's dog, its coat like something found in the bottom of the Goodwill box, assaults my ears with harshness.
 And now dust balls glare at me from corners. Unopened mail lies in heaps like rubble. The linoleum feels gritty under my feet.
 And now I smell chicken roasting in the oven, sizzling fat, the odor of onions.
 And now I think I'll eat.

Calls I've Been On

By Deborah Keeling

I've been on a call, where a two-year-old boy was throwing up fat, white, two to three-inch long worms. he was sitting outside on the ground crying. His parents looked up at us in bewilderment. They had saved the worms in a green 7-Up bottle.

I've been on a call, where an old man collapsed while fishing at the lake. As I did chest compressions, I whispered to him that if he didn't come back, he wouldn't get to go fishing again.

I've been on a call, where a young man who was getting ready for high school had caught himself in the front zipper of his pants. All we could do was calm him down. He needed a surgeon to unzip him.

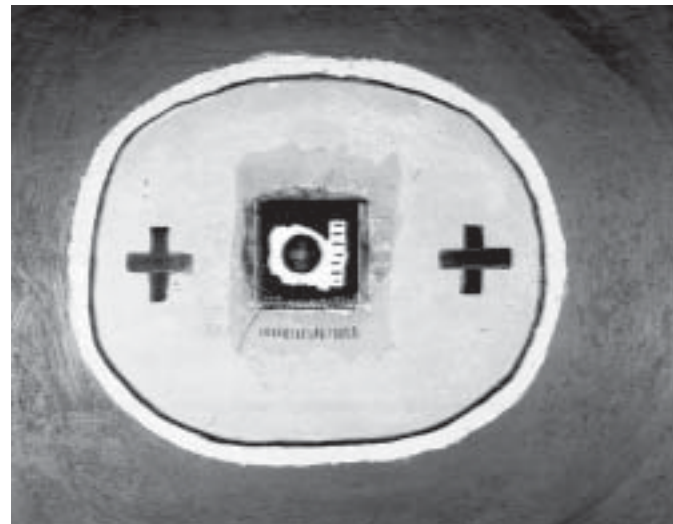
I've been on a call, where a four-month-old baby girl wasn't breathing. The resuscitator mask wouldn't fit. I covered her tiny mouth and nose and sent small puffs of air to her lungs. She tasted like sweet milk, smelled like baby powder, and felt soft as silk.

I've been on a call, where a woman was having difficulty breathing. She was raising three grandchildren and had bouts of asthma. The little house they lived in had no heat. I think it was the lighted burner on her gas stove that was making her sick.

I've been on a call, where a man was having difficulty breathing. His eyes were wide, and all he kept saying was "Death is staring me in the face." I wondered how he could keep talking if he couldn't breathe.

I've been on a call, where a woman was having an epileptic seizure. I'd been there before. Her children had called; she didn't speak English. She couldn't afford the medication she needed.

I've been on a call, where a girl had rolled her car one rainy night. I stood with the rain running off my helmet and listened to the reep, reep, reep of the windshield wipers on the upside-down car. I got down on my knees, crawled in the window opposite her body, and shut off the wipers.



Matt Thatcher
"Two Red Crosses"
Mixed Media
45"X30"

Reflections

Frances A. Cota

They emptied out her house.
Rooms where we had spent
happy hours together now were bare.
Count on your fingers
how many friends you have.
Ones you can laugh with
and cry with
in the same breath.
So few. So few.
They knew I loved her
and came to me with two
small wall mirrors as a keepsake.
Nice mirrors with beaded, wooden frames.
I hung them in my bedroom against
a stark, white wall.
There in the glass
her face interspersed with mine,
her smile reflecting in my tears.

Going Back

By Shirley Davis

What possessed me to
drive that dilapidated old diesel
through seven hours of sleet
listening to its arthritic engine
coughing and hacking through
cobblestone corridors of time
just to see my abandoned
childhood home
barely standing in the
battering storm
the entry door held by a single
aching hinge
slapping shutters beating
rhythmic bleats
swallowed by hiccups
sobs and staccato rain

Ecclesiastes

By Kevin S. Howe

First Place, Cerro Coso Literary Awards 2001

"What's going On?" he asked and slapped
a hand
Across the back of the older man, who stood
With thoughts astir and coffee cup in hand.
The rain that drizzled mixed his mocha-java,
Weakening the warmth and caffeine slowly.
The older turned to face the younger man
With early morning clouds dispelling
behind him,
And sipped again the bitter, weakened drink.
"Life," he said, and strained to see the sun.
Though hid behind the clouds, its rays of red
And golden lights penetrated the foggy mass.
Then turning back, he chanced to see the
moon,
Pale as death against the light-blue sky,
Now fading; and by noon it would be gone.
The night, eclipsed by day, would be no more.
And yet, the rain, which only hours ago
Had fallen like mad, still drizzled on.
Oh, rain, indeed. This spitting from the clouds,
These little drops that barely wet the skin,
Were hardly rain. Last night: now that was
rain!
The sight of glorious lightning, white as life,
Flashing across the thunderheaded sky.
Torrents of water, poured from every cloud,
Flooding the land with sustenance, with life.
The drops which here and there escaped
the fog
Were just enough to drive a person mad.
No life in them—a mockery of life
They were, spitting in his warmth and
strength.
He turned again to face the younger man,
Feeling the breeze bring air as bitter as
Coffee across his cheek. The drink was gone;
The warmth now spent. The man before
him stood

all mine. Just think, boy, one day you can have one like her." A chilling thought at best, but he loved her. Al walked off, laughing the laughter of a madman. I can never forget that laugh, kind of like you would imagine a madman laughing when it rained.

Al's house was a ramshackle affair, hand built from rocks taken from the Kern River. It was completely surrounded by junk. Unless you knew it was there, it looked like an extension of the rest of the junk. The tree where they would do their drinking was located right beside his house. At some point after the meal was done, Al would walk toward his place. It was considered impolite to stare, so everyone would pretend not to look, but a hush would start to fall over the crowd.

During the B-B-Q the alcohol would flow like rain during an afternoon thunder-shower in Arkansas, so sometimes Al would go to his house and not return. Other times, however, he would come back out carrying his banjo. Soon as he would start to tune up, others in the crowd would go to their vehicles and get out their instruments. While they were tuning up, the laughter would return even louder, people calling to one another, and a festive mood would come into play.

We had our own brand of music. City folks call it "Hillbilly," but we call it "Blue Grass." That's what color the grass was in the fields in the South where it was originally played. The same city people also tried to give what we did a name; they called it a hoedown. We were migrant workers in the old days, and when the music started we would throw the hoe down, stop working and start to dance. At least that's what my Granny told me.

The music and the dancing would start. Usually one person would call the

music while everyone would have fun. Peels of laughter echoed off the mountainsides, with Al laughing the loudest.

Along about midnight, the party would break up, drunks going home hollering at each other. Many deals were made and disputes settled without violence. Rides were shared for those with way too much to drink. We thought these times would never end, but all good things must.

The Government considered all of us squatters since we didn't actually own the land but mined it for gold, loosely speaking. In the late 70's, they started to condemn our houses as unfit residences, and one by one we all moved away. They brought in huge tractors to destroy our homes and anything associated with us. Except for the memories. They tried to tell us Al was crazy since he hardly ever spoke to outsiders. We didn't trust outsiders, and when they took our homes, we trusted them even less.

Today, with three exceptions, the homes are gone and the people have either moved away or died. But for those of us who lived there, the memories remain vividly alive. The Tree of Wisdom and Knowledge remains, and sometimes when life starts to get me down, I go there to relax.

Early in the evening, as the wind groans through the pine trees, if you listen real close you can hear the music way off in the distance and the voices as they echo to each other. On the darkest of nights you can hear the laughter of a madman: he has the last laugh on all of us.

To the Madam in the Purple Spandex

By Jeffrey D. Peoples

I get them a lot. People that assume I should have a political alliance with all the people that have skin pigmentation darker than a cardboard box. They speak of roots. They expect some special bond between one Branch—Me, another Branch—DMX, and the Roots—Africa. You are here because of your Roots, they say. See, they say, looking at my skin, you look like them: don't you care about them?

You said to the professor that you wanted to ask a black man how he felt about his ancestors in Africa participating in the slave trade. How, you asked, how do you come to accept that your own people sold your Roots into slavery, traded them into misery—for a roll of tobacco and a few straw hats? It's because of the bond we have, right? The Roots. You think that because my skin color comes from Africa, I must share a deep bond with the suffering of slavery.

Well. I've never really bought into the Roots analogy. I never imagined myself as a tree, Madam. To fancy myself, I sometimes even imagine myself as a magnificent orchard. A Royal Orchard, even better. Not a peasant orchard, in which you would find only a few dozen trees here and there, but a Royal Orchard, with trees lined up in ranks further than the horizon, so that standing in the middle, the expanse can trick the eyes into believing they are looking at a forest. And your Skin Color, Madam, stands as one tree in a Royal Orchard with rolling trees, nebulous in size. So you can imagine: finding that tree took considerable effort and time and brought me by many other

trees and through many other orchards.

But I am there now. I sit under the tree, writing this letter to you. And I see that the Roots do run deep. They run far enough and deep enough, as most of my other trees do, so that they penetrate the orchards of other people. These other trees, in the other orchards, share the same roots as my tree, in my orchard. But this tree has no unique beauty or form that sets it apart from the other countless trees around it. To my left is Hair Color, to my right is Eye Color, and a few yards ahead of me sits plainly and untouched, Ear Shape.

So to answer your question Madam, I feel no more about the slavery of Africans than you feel about the Muslim conquest of Constantinople.

Your question implies that I should identify with my Skin Color's ancestry. You imply that my Skin Color's Roots touch so close to my core that the slightest vibration will upset me. When in fact, Madam, I have found that Skin Color is as accurate of a measurement of affinity as Eye Color or Hair Color.

I thank you, however, for giving me a reason to walk through my beautiful Orchard. On my walk, I did pass by a few uniquely beautiful trees. Picasso himself may have planted them. One (Ethics) stood there with its bark as thick as thirty children. Its multi-colored leaves saturated the Orchard floor like old ideas left behind, while its enormous branches at ten-arms' length held ripe fruit, some oozing with tradition. Another tree, still a sapling in my Orchard I had supposed to be Knowledge, was such a nutritious mix of green shades that the gods must have watered it themselves. It carried only a few leaves, its vine-like branches still bare for the cultivation of fresh leaves. Both trees had roots that flowed along the ground like tentacles, reaching far beyond the boundaries of my own Orchard, above and below ground.

So before seeking out your tree of Skin Color, I decided I would follow the Roots above the ground of Ethics, the tree with the thick bark, to a neighboring Orchard. There I found a tree very similar to my own and by its side stood Knowledge, also akin to my own. Out of curiosity I went looking for this neighboring Orchard's Skin Color. I eventually found it, and the bark was a pasty pink and slightly peeling, as if worn by age and weather. I followed its roots and only a few entered my Orchard, and that is how I eventually found my own Skin Color. My Skin Color, however, is brown—like a Hershey Kiss—and weather and age hasn't worn it down yet. In order to find another Orchard with a tree similar to my Skin Color, I followed the large bulk of the roots along the floor of my Orchard. My roots eventually split up into two different Orchards. I arbitrarily entered the second Orchard.

The Orchard's Knowledge tree was withered and unkempt like a tree from a gloomy forest story. Its bark had been split down the center, as if a Giant's axe had cut it from the top down and a few crumbled sticks scattered the dusty ground. I then saw the Orchard's Ethics. Lack of care or some catastrophic event like lightning had no doubt stunted the growth. Its branches jutted out like crooked walking sticks, and rotten fruit dangled wearily from the tips. Walking deeper into the Orchard, I spotted the tree of Skin Color. It was virtually identical to my own, yet a little darker, almost the color of a rich chocolate chip. Compared to the Orchard's tree of Knowledge and tree of Ethics, its tree of Skin Color was pleasant, gentler on the eyes, and lighter on the mood—almost neutral even.

After stumbling back to the split, I took to the first Orchard. After seeing where my Skin Color's Roots brought me the first time, I was uneasy about visiting a similarly dreary scene.

Perhaps the shock and contrast of my last visit made my jaw drop and my pupils expand. But there before me my eyes ascended a structure so grand that I could not take it all in one glance. My eyes had to dart back and forth, from branch to branch, from leaf to leaf, in order to survey the entire tree. In fact, the tree seemed to have once been the two separate trees of Ethics and Knowledge, but the roots, the branches, and even the bark had entwined to form a single structure. Furthermore, luscious fruit and smooth dewy leaves weighed down each half of the tree so heavily that the only reason it did not collapse on itself was because the bodies of the two separate trees worked together to keep it erect. And shaded a little bit beneath a golden apple, bobbing from one of the enormous branches, stood the Orchard's tiny tree of Skin Color.

The bark was as dark as oil and scaly as a lizard, but I could not help but ignore that tiny tree and fixate on the tree that stood looming in heroic size over it. For the sake of my own pride, I followed that Orchard's Ethics and Knowledge Tree Roots out in order to discover if they touched mine at all.

A few of its Roots, like long fingers, met my tree's Roots at the edge of my Orchard. Even the slightest nurture from that great tree was enough for me to stick around and try to tend the soil at the boundaries where my Orchard met with the other.

And for a moment, I had forgotten about the tree of Skin Color—the insignificant tree with roots that can take you to Orchards with the most treacherous Trees, or with the same chance take you to an Orchard of unequalled beauty. Since it is such an unreliable tree, I decided never to follow its Roots in search of an Orchard that can nurture me.

Sincerely,

From Whom It Does Concern

glass chimes.
Moving forward, discussion of heaven over
health-conscious kibble eats time
before a question comes to rise.
"Where in the world have you been all my
life?"
Moving Backward,
"All my life... Moving backward."

Keysville

By Robert Brown

Second Place, Cerro Coso Literary Awards
2001

It was a blistering hot summer day, and the very long school year was finally at an end. In two more months I would be twelve years old. Finally I would be allowed to move to the adult table at mealtime. We are "hillbillies," a very unique breed, and until age twelve you are considered a child and eat your meals with the kids. Then one day, *poof*, you get promoted and move to the adult table to eat.

That day we had our first B-B-Q of the year. Every summer the area people would get together on the weekends to eat and party. I lived in Keysville, and we were always known for being different. It seemed since time immemorial that we were not only different from everyone else, but we were also despised by the entire valley; we were either displaced Southerners, Kentuckians, or second generation Gypsies from Germany.

On B-B-Q days, we all got together and pooled our meager resources. Individually, we had very little, but when twenty-five to thirty families got together it made for a real feeding. This time we were all gathering at the home of Al Coe,

local junk man and legend. The laughter echoed off the mountainside. There were people everywhere it seemed. All the personal feuds were forgotten for the day.

There was junk everywhere, old mining cars, antique cars that we kids would play Bonnie and Clyde on, piles of clothes—junk that the minds of kids could make into anything their hearts desired. We were never bored when we were at Al's.

There was this oak tree that everyone told us was a day older than God himself under which the adult males would gather to drink alcohol. It even had a name, "The Tree of Wisdom and Knowledge." It was called this because the drunker they would get, the bigger the lies got. A recently caught fish would go from ten-inches long to fourteen-inches long in minutes. While the men were telling lies, the women would be preparing the meal, with the exception of the main courses which were cooking while the tales were being traded.

This particular time, Al's wife Hazel had been to the beauty parlor and had had her hair done. She had on a powder blue skirt, which was dirty with an egg stain on the front, dirt caked on her legs, and a watch on her wrist that had never worked since the day she got it. But she had the most beautiful hairstyle of anyone there that day.

Al Coe had a long white beard, one shiny white tooth right in the middle of his mouth, and long, stringy white hair. To me, he always looked like how I would picture God, only much dirtier. He never changed his clothes until they started to rot on him. You can imagine the smell.

I was staring at Hazel, noting the contradiction of her hair to the rest of her, when Al approached me from behind. "Woo, Wee, ain't she a beauty. And she's

tion: I thought if I did that I would at least find the road we lived on. My hands, feet, and ears no longer hurt; they just felt numb. Shortly, I felt tired, and the snow blanket looked inviting. I forced myself to keep shuffling along until I came to the intersection of the highway and the gravel road we lived on. I had traveled on a parallel course. I still had the same distance to walk as I had leaving the stream. I plodded towards home. The dog recognized where we were and left running towards the house.

Half an hour later, my mother was instructing me to place my hands and feet in lukewarm water. At first, I felt nothing, but in a short while I felt intense pain as if needles flowed through the vessels instead of blood. My extremities remained sore for a few days. But, like any other eleven-year-old, I shelved the entire incident as soon as the pain was over. My tolerance for the cold was never the same after that day. It was as though my body no longer trusted me as its caretaker. Only several years later did I contemplate how badly that day could have ended.



Jaye Lyn Martin

"Twins"

Pencil and Colored Pencil

22"X16"

Watchdog

By David Rutledge

As the light
Goes out
The watchdog slowly
Creeps in.
He knows I'm
Awake, hiding,
Hiding by not talking,
Hiding by not moving.
I don't think the dog
Is watching over me
But the dog is watching
Whether or not
He's waiting to
Prance at me like prey
Or prance at my predator
I do not know.
But the dog is watching.

From the Past

By Brian Rapp

Moving forward, a shrinking woman places plates on a table where candles draw the only light. Steady ghosts flounder softly, and her make-up is in place.
Moving forward, Joliet is put in the past: a man, a history. Chipped metal bars and infrequent sunlight.
Moving forward, the doorbell mumbles C; oak creeks, then a simultaneous greeting is slurred. There is a quiet haunting immediately following.
Moving forward, He enters the kitchen with complacency and a subtle scowl.
"Would you like some wine?" as a half-full

On Jeralken

By Mischelle Sammons

A hot summer day
-mid August. I stare
out the window. Hopeless
beads of sweat drench my brow

Blank walls
decorate the house. Even
the caged tarantula
seeks a way out

Across the chasm, coolness
Beckons, but
no breath is there. A
frozen sickle takes a swing

My mind takes me
to places I don't want to go.
And says things no one
wants to know.

A hot summer day
-mid August. I stare
out the window. Hopeless
beads of sweat drench my brow

Haiku

By Georgie Bergeron

Wind is from the south
And I swear I smell the sea
In this bare desert



Alice Forrester

"Coyote's Dream: Seven Birds Chasing the Big Dipper"

Oil

24"X18"

Red Rock Canyon

By Jesse Harris

The incredible distance of the desert
seems to continue forever.

As my father and I kick over our motorcycles
the engines whine, and billows of gray
exhaust pour out like smoke from a raging
forest fire.

We ride for hours, flying through the tight
trails at breakneck speeds.

Following closely at his tail, I can see
through the dust to his green Kawasaki.

We return to the truck after hours of riding
through the endless desert, tired, dirt
encrusted, and loving it.

The Fox

By Jeff Chartier

This winter the temperature was more likely to be below zero than above and the snow was incredibly deep, the deepest I had ever seen. We laughed as we watched the red fox glide gracefully across the snow followed by my dog, Tika, in clumsy pursuit. Her progress was slowed all the more from continually breaking through the snow's crust. I felt some humiliation for Tika as she was led in circles and mercilessly taunted by her superior cousin. The fox was even bold enough to join its unseen audience by stopping occasionally to sit and watch Tika's hopeless effort to close the distance. No longer entertained, I loaded the clip of my rifle and inserted it sharply. My father prevented my leaving the house by reminding me that it was too close to sunset and would soon not be legal to hunt.



Brian Rapp "Eagle Cap Wilerness" Acrylic 20"X23"

When I woke up early the next morning, light was beginning to creep through my south-facing window. I dressed hurriedly, choosing my winter jacket instead of the warmer, enveloping snowmobile suit. I didn't eat breakfast or pack a sandwich as I typically did. Instead, I put only one box of ammunition in my coat pocket. I readied my best rifle and started out following the trail of the fox accompanied by Tika.

The tracks, half covered by drifting snow, were easy to follow and showed sporadic searches by the fox for plump little field mice. Tiny, dark-red droplets, in sharp contrast to the almost pure white of the snow, were an indication of the fox's success. Its marks led to a huge stack of alfalfa hay bales in the middle of the same type of field. This pasture was undoubtedly teeming with mice. I was surprised to find the prints instead lead to the haystack and up into it. About halfway up the stack there was a small crevice. I moved the bales at the entrance further apart and was both relieved and disappointed that the fox wasn't there since a cornered animal can be very dangerous.

The Fox Continued

I began making ever-widening circles around the haystack until I picked up the trail leading from the stack. The imprints I found were fresh; they were made a few minutes to a couple of hours before. The fox had spent the night buried in the haystack. With renewed excitement, I quickly set out following these clean prints. The dog obviously now had the scent; she hurriedly followed the paw marks with her nose low to the ground, blowing snow away from her nostrils with spurts of heavy breaths. The tracks led us to a shelterbelt about a mile further away. There we found about ten acres of randomly placed trees, with a deep streambed that ran along the side just to the north. Within this isolated forest were hundreds of pure white jackrabbits lying still and undetected, set into motion only when we came too close for their comfort; then they would bound away on a zigzag path. I was sure the fox would be found here.

Until then I had been intent on the trail and oblivious to the weather. Now I noticed how still and quiet the air had become. An ominous sky was entirely overcast with the sun undetectable. After leaving the haystack, we had been traveling almost straight east and I hadn't noticed the dark wall closing in behind us. Light snow was beginning to fall.

The snowfall was increasing rapidly and the horizon disappeared behind it. The flakes were now large and heavy and the wind was picking up. Thoughts of the fox and the high price that I could have obtained with its luxuriant fur were dismissed. The quickest route home was through the ravine and across about two miles of rough, plowed, and snow-covered field. The snow over the stream looked like light powder and there was no way of telling how deep it could be. The small amount of water at the bottom wouldn't be a problem since it would be frozen solid. However, getting my boots filled with snow and my feet wet was a serious concern. I decided to take the risk; the visibility was now down to a couple

hundred yards and a storm like this sometimes lasts a day or longer.

I found deep snow about a third of the way across the stream. Instinctively, I shifted my weight forward onto my shins and knees. This way my pant legs remained down around my boots keeping the snow out. Occasionally I lost my balance and fell forward, catching myself with gloved hands. Straightening myself, I would pull my hands out of the snow and some would stick inside the gloves around my wrists.

The dog was reluctant to follow, but now I could hear her right behind me. I was sinking to just above my waist and Tika's head was at about the level of the snow. She must have panicked because she began jumping onto the back of my legs. I was sent sprawling forward and she would stand on my back, as if I satisfied her as solid ground. I struggled to throw her off and moved a few steps forward, only to be sent flying into the snow again. It took extraordinary effort to make it up the bank.

When I reached the top, I removed my gloves and shook the snow out. My hands were red and wet. Snow was packed inside the top of my boots. I tried to scoop out as much as I could with my fingers. My ears were so cold they felt as though they were on fire.

There were just dim outlines of the trees on the other side of the stream and nothing but white obscuring every other direction. I set out on a course that I hoped would lead me home. My teeth were chattering; my ears felt like ice and hurt when I touched them. I knew my feet were wet and they also felt cold. I tried to walk quickly but it was difficult.

I had heard stories of farmers getting lost during a blizzard walking only a few hundred yards between their barns or houses. I had thought they were ridiculous and that these stories couldn't really have happened. But I understood now how it was possible. Every direction looked the same. My visibility was restricted to a few yards—no landmarks visible or hints from the sun, just a fresh white blanket on the ground and heavy snow falling.

I would try to walk the same direc-

We played there a couple of hours. I whittled some sticks to a sharp point with my knife. My friend found some sturdy twigs and string to make a bow. Now we had a weapon and we could live off the land. We took some sporadic shots at a squirrel, but they were so far off he didn't even jump. He looked at us for a second as if to laugh at us for being such poor archers and ran off. I watched him until he was lost in the trees. We decided to go home for some food.

On the way home we came up with a great idea to picnic in our paradise. We got some hot dogs and matches and went off to start a cook out. After thoroughly clearing out a spot to make sure that there were no leaves, we started a small fire on the rich black soil hiding underneath. We cooked our hot dogs over the fire. They sizzled, popped, and bubbled as we turned them in the fire. The bright yellow and orange flames crackled as they put out a comforting heat on our faces. Unlike the harsh, intense heat from the sun, this was softer and calmer. We sat back and enjoyed the fire; it seemed as though nothing could be better. Lying down in the crunchy foliage I noticed the clear blue sky starting to turn to a darker shade of blue. My mother would want me home soon. We decided to put out the fire and get on home.

I started looking for an old bucket one of the many passersby might have carelessly thrown into the grove but couldn't find one. All we could find was an old towel. We tried to smother the fire with the towel. I threw it on the fire like my mom would have put a sheet on the bed. The towel was ballooned out like a

parachute as it slowly fell to land in the fire. Just as it softly touched down, we heard a violent explosion. A ball of fire shot up into the air like an exploding car at the end of a chase scene. We saw the trees go up in flames and did the only thing we thought we could, run.

Three days later I decided to go back to investigate. Trenches from the tires of the fire trucks scarred the undisturbed soil leading to the trees. The familiar aroma I grown so fond of was replaced with a charred smell of a burned up, old wet log. My feeling of peace had changed to guilt. I slowly walked up to the remnant of the log that had once been my stool. Its new jagged edges would never be sat on again. There was my knife, lying in the soil charred and wet. I picked it up to take a closer look. The yellowed ivory was now black. The hinge for the blade had already started to rust from the water of the fire trucks. The knife opened with a gritty force, instead of the smooth ease I once enjoyed. When opened, the once shiny blade now looked sad and abused. I was disappointed in myself that I had let my father down.

I pulled the knife out of my toolbox the other day. I realized that I never used it since that time even though it cleaned up well. My father never asked about it either. Maybe my son will take better care when he gets it.

Mother-in-law tongues

By Shirley Davis

A fat pot of
Mother-in-law-tongues
stands sentry in
our small entry hall
its towering tongues
nearly touching the ceiling
the sticky points of
shorter stalks
scraping my skin
each time I go out
or come in

Knock-Out

By Patty LePera

Third Place, Cerro Coso Literary Awards 2001

I remember it was hot, August hot. A clamor of kids had gathered around us kicking up dust from the unpaved street. Fueled by their shouts and excitement, my adrenaline was in overdrive. Just to the left of me, I caught a quick glimpse of Betty, my best friend, with a distinct look of concern on her face. All the other faces were a kaleidoscope blur, except for one, Jack Pace. We were close, in your face close. Nose to nose, mustering up as much concentration as humanly possible for eight-year-olds to muster, egging each other on. The pounding in my heart forced me to take fast, shallow breaths as the scene whirled around me. The rational thought process crumbling, succumbing to the opaque ringing in my ears. Reason and self-control, emotional governors not yet fully developed, couldn't

shield me from this older more basic emotion- anger. The stage was set, tension was high, and all interested parties were in position. What I had playacted with other kids, siblings, and my dad was now being put to the test. Something was closing in on me, an ebbing pressure. I was going to suffocate if I didn't do something soon, if I didn't strike out, that hot summer day.

My father worked nights, so in my early years, days off from school were spent mostly in his shadow. He came from a large Italian family of eight brothers and sisters with strong ethnic ties that spanned time and country. He wasn't a big man, but his body had a quiet strength gained from hard work. A grade school dropout during the height of the great depression, he made the streets his school and survival his homework. His good looks opened doors, but his self-assurance, born from the hard streets, made him popular with men and women alike. Generosity and a salty wit were spread around like seeds in a field, not so much from a sense of good will or camaraderie, but for the harvest of favors they would reap. The godfather would have been proud. I look back now and describe him with the experience of an adult, a scrutiny lost to a young child. In my eyes, back then, there wasn't anything he couldn't do. I respected and loved him unconditionally. It made me burst with pride when I saw that love reflected in his eyes. Every time he told me I was special, there wasn't anything I couldn't do, even be president someday, if I wanted to.

Being the second child in a row to disappoint him by emerging as a Patricia instead of a Patrick, I instinctively felt I had to make it up to him. I had to fill the place in his heart reserved for sons: the spot that commanded the man to teach his

they would burst, one section at a time in my mouth. Sweet, tart, sweet, sweet, and tart! The best thing about these berries, though, was the way they tasted in my dad's cobbler. Hot out of the oven with some vanilla ice cream on the side. The berries just melt in your mouth, with the ice cream to cool your tongue down! Oh, my stomach is growling now! I'd better not spoil my appetite.

I hopped back on my bike to hurry home to where my dad was mixing up his famous batter. It may have only been famous in our family, but I'd bet if we were the sharing type of folks, that others would love it just as much. There are just some things in life you just don't want to share and my dad's cobbler was one of them. I truly think he had some kind of magic powder that he used to make it so addictive. I never asked what. I should have. Shortly after this, my dad was diagnosed with very high blood pressure and cholesterol. As it was, he felt he was living on borrowed time since his dad died of a heart attack at the young age of 49. And my dad was 40.

He didn't make another cobbler for nine years, when I asked for one for my Sweet 16. Unfortunately, all those years of not making them meant forgetting some of the ingredients that made it good. Plus, he was making everything low fat and low cholesterol. It just didn't taste the same. Since the Griffin's never wrote down a recipe, that one was now officially in the grave with his mom. He had been the only one keeping it alive. To this day, he and my sister still mess around trying to find the exact balance of all the ingredients to make that famous cobbler. They've come close, but not quite. Personally, I think they just need to find that magic powder!

Mess

Jacquelyn Smith

Mess in my house. Fed up, boxes closing up my spaces, stealing my peace. I am chased away. I feel guilt, I flee the work but am drawn to it at the same time.

Papers. I unsee them.

Phone calls. I push them down.

Bed and books call to me. I go.

When will I start to own the whole house?

The mess owns me. It keeps me unused.

Where is my gumption? Where is my core?

Where is the part of me that will save me from being swallowed by the mess?

Come forth.

I need you.

I want my honor, my glory,
my home of beauty and peach.



Diana Lamb

"Despair"

Scratch Board

8.5"x11"

son the ways of the world, hand down the legacy, carry on the name. I would be a good student. I watched my father closely, always gauging his moods, staying on his good side, trying to be the son he never had. At the same time, I wondered how I could get married, have children, and still carry on the family name. To this day I don't know if my father had the slightest idea of what was going on in my mind, but in any event, a strong bond developed between him and me. He taught me how to build a playhouse, swim in the pool, and ride a horse. I even had archery lessons. These things he lavished on me generously, I'm sure, were to make up for what he lacked in his own childhood.

I remember one day he came home with a large box. My sister and I were excited to have this unexpected present. He made a big deal, as he always did, about the presentation. Making us wait by giving us hints and trying to get us to guess what was inside. Telling us we would be the only kids on the block to have them. When the moment finally came to unveil the contents, we were high with anticipation. I was usually the lucky one, as so often was the case when it came to these little impromptu offerings, for when the boxing gloves were revealed, much to my sister's bewilderment, I was ecstatic. I couldn't wait to put them on and beat the crap out of her. I guess it showed in my eyes because Barbara, my sister, who was three years my senior, had no interest in going ten rounds with me and bequeathed me her gloves. She had no intention of making a game out of it. We had our share of knock down, drag out, hair pulling, pinching, slapping, and biting contests. All impromptu and initialized I'm sure by some type of perceived injustice. Most of these little contests of

power I won from sheer endurance and obstinacy. I also won because she suffered from asthma and had no desire to be the toughest woman in the world.



Brent Thornton

"Dogs"

Ink on paper

16"x16"

I guess that's how I ended up here on that hot summer day, surrounded by the neighborhood gang, boxing gloves hanging conveniently at home. At four feet tall and seventy pounds dripping wet, attitude was my equalizer. I was the natural leader of the girls on the block, all three of them. I was the only one that would stand up to the bullies that played havoc with us on our way to school. I was the good son. Up until then my only experience with actual hand-to-hand combat was limited to the technical decisions won over my sister. Bolstered by these fanciful victories, I was now about to engage in my first fistfight with Jack Pace, the arrogant, self-appointed leader of the

boys that day. Confrontation: that's the best way I can describe it. Memory fails me as to the exact words or circumstances that got me here, but in any event, whatever it was, a challenge, a nasty remark or just plain bad timing, I rose to the occasion. As I verbally promoted my abilities with words like "come and get it" or "you think you're so tough," Jack and I began the traditional circling. Arms at the ready, fists clinched, and complete with our ringside audience that allowed no retreat, we encompassed each other. The smell of sweat mixed with dust, a smell that will forever take me instantly back to my childhood, filled the confined space. Suddenly, everything is in slow motion. I somehow enter the eye of the storm, as if I were on the outside looking in. A calm washes over me and I become strangely curious, wondering if indeed I could do this and what it would feel like. In my revelry and without foreplay, I suddenly felt excruciating pain in my nose that spread up my nostrils and earthquaked in my head. It was over in a flash. I remember little else as fist connected with nose, obviously my nose. I saw stars—no joke—real stars and the next thing I knew, I was sitting back on my keester. Any thought of retaliation or just plain getting up, anytime soon, was completely out of the question. I was down for the count. As I sat there shaking my head unable even to be embarrassed—that would come much later—trying to get my eyes to stop revolving around inside my head, I knew instantly that this wasn't the way I wanted to go through life solving my problems. New avenues for this exuberance would have to be found. That was basically the end of my violent years. All future energies were focused on avoiding any physical confrontation whenever possible. The boxing gloves were put away and although I

continued to hang with my dad, I knew something basically changed inside me: I would have to start finding out who I was. Patricia: she might not be such a bad person after all even if she were just a girl.

The Ring

By Jacquelyn Smith

Dad's wedding ring came to me after he died.
The pierced garland design is nearly gone,
rubbed off
by his husband/sailor/fireman/father
working hands.
The warm weight of it comforts me.

His ring was freshly bright when he held me as an infant.
"Jacquelyn," he said, "When you were born, your fanny fit in the palm of my hand and your head came to the crook of my elbow."
He loved to tell me that story, me, his five-foot-ten daughter.
Was his ring a prison he chose for himself?
All that bickering and sniping, so painful for us kids to watch.
When he up and died at age sixty, sick three months and gone.
It still brings tears to my eyes twenty-three years later.
His spirit once told me, "I hold the mountains in my hands.
I dwell in the waters."
Are those shiny flecks in the soil and river you, Dad?
Did you teach me to break the prison walls by your sad example?
Is that why I had my wedding ring melted down after the divorce?

ya ta go to the river and get some blackberries for a cobbler I'm makin' tonight for dinner. I've got the milk cartons all rinsed out for ya already. Ya just got to go and git 'em." My dad was from the South and you could still tell by some of his words, like his "ya" for you. Also, all his "r's" sounded like the "a's" in the word vitamin. Sometimes, it made me giggle.

"No problem." I uttered. But what I really want to say was *Whoopee!* But I didn't want my brother to hear. If I made it sound like I was upset about going, I wouldn't have to worry about his presence ruining my fun. Older brothers do that every chance they get, and mine was no different. If I even hinted that I was excited about this, he would find some way to ruin it. This way, he would just laugh at me and possibly stick out his tongue. I climbed out of the pool and quickly dried off. Pulled my shorts on and walked inside to where Jay was. He's 14 and exactly double my age this year, although you couldn't tell by the way he acts. He's as childish as some of the boys in my class.

"Ha-ha! You have to ride your bike to the river! Try not to get lost!" Jay teased. Typical. He is so predictable. I hope he grows out of that or he will never get a girl! I just pushed past him to the kitchen of our three-bedroom, two-bath, 1200 sq. ft. home. It was small but cozy. A little too cozy at times. My dad was making sure the insides of the milk cartons were dry and no longer smelled of milk. I guess that last one wasn't quite clean enough yet. My only indication was the sour look on his face.

"Here you go kiddo. Take these three, this fourth one isn't quite, uh, up to par." My dad said. And then finished with

"... and hurry up, I'm gonna start makin' the batter for it in about a hour."

"Okay dad. I'll be back before then." I yelled back as I grabbed the milk cartons and ran out the door. I jumped on my ten-speed bike with the curly bars and took off. The bike was a little tall, but my parents said I would grow into it. Besides, it made me feel older. At least I acted older than my brother did.

The bike trail was only a short mile from the house, but the best blackberries were quite a bit farther. I'd been blackberry picking before, and I knew all the best spots. The ones that aren't as picked through because they're further up the trail. Like even the squirrels were too lazy to retrieve them.

Pant, pant, pant. Almost there! Oh, I can smell them just as sure as I can hear the water from the river trickling, making its way in between the brush and rocks in the shallow bed. I veered my bike off the trail onto the rocks to my final destination. It was a beautiful day. Birds bickering over the gentle summer breeze, grasshoppers playing the fiddles on the back of their legs, and right in front of me a praying mantis, so still on the branch as if he saw me and were holding his breath. I love this place! I opened the mouths on the rinsed out milk cartons and began my gathering. The arrows showing you how to open the paper milk cartons always looked like a smile to me. So, at school where no one would get mad at me, I drew two eyes above it. Then I made it talk. What an imagination!

I picked more than enough for the cobbler within twenty minutes, but I had to keep replenishing the ones I ate. I love biting into those ripe berries! And how

With shining face of youth, with warmth inherent.
 He knew the days when warmth had been his own,
 not borrowed from a cup of liquid life.
 But those days were gone, now hidden beyond the fog.
 Fountains of youth were few and far too high
 A price for him to pay. And so he stood
 Before the Phoenix, he in smoldering ash.
 "Life," he said, and turned to face the moon.

Shard

By Iris Woolverton

After our wedding,
 my husband left forwork.
 I spent the evening playing
 slot machines in the Nevada club
 to pass the time.
 I won twenty dollars.



Vanessa Johnson (VanWolf)
 "The Famish Fight"
 Pen and Ink
 15" X20"

Dad's Cobbler

Sunshine Griffin-Duffy

Summertime. No word is sweeter to a child still of school age. To me it meant becoming a mermaid for eight hours a day. Looking back, I'm surprised I didn't develop gills for all the hours spent in the pool. I loved swimming. I would hold my breath as long as possible, just so I could enjoy the quiet my underwater world had to offer. No traffic, no fighting over t.v. shows, no yelling. Just the sound of the water moving around me, my bubbles floating to the top, and sometimes, if I listened real close, I swear I could hear the wasps land on the water and take their drink! Nothing could interrupt my quiet fantasyland...except...

"Sunshine! Sunshine? Are you back here?" bellowed my dad—although, underwater, it didn't sound like a bellow; it sounded more like a muffled question. But I knew he had to be pretty loud for me to hear. Woosh! I erupted to the surface so quickly my ears popped. Was I in trouble? I couldn't tell. As a typical Gemini, I can read everyone—except a typical Virgo, which my dad was. His angry voice sounded to me just the same as his proud voice, his joking voice, and his sad voice. Maybe that's because my dad rarely showed any of those emotions. And with such a poker face! I bet he won a lot of hands in the Navy!

"Yah dad, I'm heer." I answered. I hope I'm not in trouble.

"I've got a chore for you. I need you to do me a favor." *Oh God*, I thought, *this is worse than being in trouble!* "I need

A Kiss Remembered

By Frances A. Cota

There was a sternness in him bordering on meanness.
 Ice-blue eyes held terror.
 No gentle touch or loving pat came from those tough hands.
 His lips had never touched us.

A table filled with food and clothes enough.
 The home was always warm.
 We never knew that this was not all there was to love.

Every child left as soon as possible and never returned to that cold, unfeathered nest to live.
 Those unknissed children somehow learned from the world around them how to love.

Weddings

By Mischelle Sammons

The only wedding I never attended was my own.
 I was a bridesmaid for Monique—my dress was mint;
 A flower girl for my aunt—she's remarried now;
 My brother had to move up the date of his wedding. I was there.

Three times I was the maid of honor:
 At Jenalee's I fell flat on my face trying to catch the bouquet;
 I told Donna we could keep driving

if she was having doubts;
 Jodie was so big I thought she would have the baby during the ceremony.

My mom's friend Judy made a beautiful bride—
 My mom made the dress I wore as I dropped flowers down the aisle.

My wedding dress is white—fit for a princess.
 It's still hanging on the door in my parent's spare room.

Today

By Georgie Bergeron

And now my robe knocks clutter from tabletops and shelves, sweeps cutlery from the counter.
 And now Hank Williams wails his woes of lonesomeness and cold, cold hearts.
 Jimmie the brakeman whines his complaints of trifling women and too much drinking.
 The van rests on ruined tire remnants, a decrepit catamaran on an ancient trailer connected for towing. Going nowhere.
 And now the laundry reflects painful light as it flops and thrashes in the wind.
 The air reeks of creosote and horse dung.
 The neighbor's dog, its coat like something found in the bottom of the Goodwill box, assaults my ears with harshness.
 And now dust balls glare at me from corners. Unopened mail lies in heaps like rubble. The linoleum feels gritty under my feet.
 And now I smell chicken roasting in the oven, sizzling fat, the odor of onions.
 And now I think I'll eat.

Calls I've Been On

By Deborah Keeling

I've been on a call, where a two-year-old boy was throwing up fat, white, two to three-inch long worms. he was sitting outside on the ground crying. His parents looked up at us in bewilderment. They had saved the worms in a green 7-Up bottle.

I've been on a call, where an old man collapsed while fishing at the lake. As I did chest compressions, I whispered to him that if he didn't come back, he wouldn't get to go fishing again.

I've been on a call, where a young man who was getting ready for high school had caught himself in the front zipper of his pants. All we could do was calm him down. He needed a surgeon to unzip him.

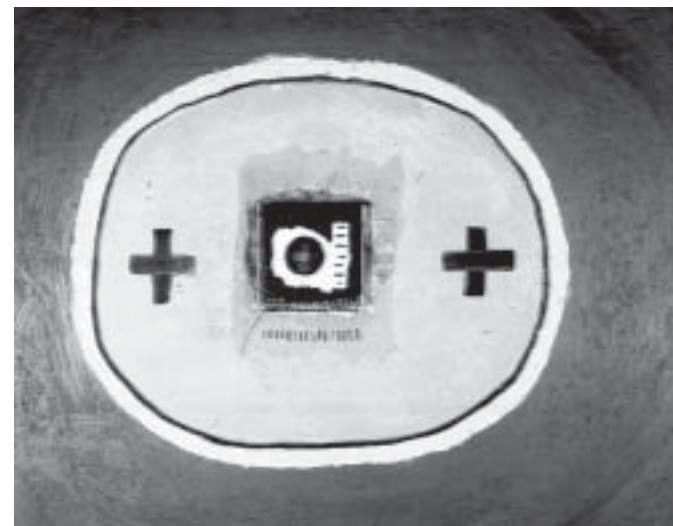
I've been on a call, where a four-month-old baby girl wasn't breathing. The resuscitator mask wouldn't fit. I covered her tiny mouth and nose and sent small puffs of air to her lungs. She tasted like sweet milk, smelled like baby powder, and felt soft as silk.

I've been on a call, where a woman was having difficulty breathing. She was raising three grandchildren and had bouts of asthma. The little house they lived in had no heat. I think it was the lighted burner on her gas stove that was making her sick.

I've been on a call, where a man was having difficulty breathing. His eyes were wide, and all he kept saying was "Death is staring me in the face." I wondered how he could keep talking if he couldn't breathe.

I've been on a call, where a woman was having an epileptic seizure. I'd been there before. Her children had called; she didn't speak English. She couldn't afford the medication she needed.

I've been on a call, where a girl had rolled her car one rainy night. I stood with the rain running off my helmet and listened to the reep, reep, reep of the windshield wipers on the upside-down car. I got down on my knees, crawled in the window opposite her body, and shut off the wipers.



Matt Thatcher
"Two Red Crosses"
Mixed Media
45"X30"

Reflections

Frances A. Cota

They emptied out her house.
Rooms where we had spent
happy hours together now were bare.
Count on your fingers
how many friends you have.
Ones you can laugh with
and cry with
in the same breath.
So few. So few.
They knew I loved her
and came to me with two
small wall mirrors as a keepsake.
Nice mirrors with beaded, wooden frames.
I hung them in my bedroom against
a stark, white wall.
There in the glass
her face interspersed with mine,
her smile reflecting in my tears.

Going Back

By Shirley Davis

What possessed me to
drive that dilapidated old diesel
through seven hours of sleet
listening to its arthritic engine
coughing and hacking through
cobblestone corridors of time
just to see my abandoned
childhood home
barely standing in the
battering storm
the entry door held by a single
aching hinge
slapping shutters beating
rhythmic bleats
swallowed by hiccups
sobs and staccato rain

Ecclesiastes

By Kevin S. Howe

First Place, Cerro Coso Literary Awards 2001

"What's going On?" he asked and slapped
a hand
Across the back of the older man, who stood
With thoughts astir and coffee cup in hand.
The rain that drizzled mixed his mocha-java,
Weakening the warmth and caffeine slowly.
The older turned to face the younger man
With early morning clouds dispelling
behind him,
And sipped again the bitter, weakened drink.
"Life," he said, and strained to see the sun.
Though hid behind the clouds, its rays of red
And golden lights penetrated the foggy mass.
Then turning back, he chanced to see the
moon,
Pale as death against the light-blue sky,
Now fading; and by noon it would be gone.
The night, eclipsed by day, would be no more.
And yet, the rain, which only hours ago
Had fallen like mad, still drizzled on.
Oh, rain, indeed. This spitting from the clouds,
These little drops that barely wet the skin,
Were hardly rain. Last night: now that was
rain!
The sight of glorious lightning, white as life,
Flashing across the thunderheaded sky.
Torrents of water, poured from every cloud,
Flooding the land with sustenance, with life.
The drops which here and there escaped
the fog
Were just enough to drive a person mad.
No life in them—a mockery of life
They were, spitting in his warmth and
strength.
He turned again to face the younger man,
Feeling the breeze bring air as bitter as
Coffee across his cheek. The drink was gone;
The warmth now spent. The man before
him stood

all mine. Just think, boy, one day you can have one like her." A chilling thought at best, but he loved her. Al walked off, laughing the laughter of a madman. I can never forget that laugh, kind of like you would imagine a madman laughing when it rained.

Al's house was a ramshackle affair, hand built from rocks taken from the Kern River. It was completely surrounded by junk. Unless you knew it was there, it looked like an extension of the rest of the junk. The tree where they would do their drinking was located right beside his house. At some point after the meal was done, Al would walk toward his place. It was considered impolite to stare, so everyone would pretend not to look, but a hush would start to fall over the crowd.

During the B-B-Q the alcohol would flow like rain during an afternoon thunder-shower in Arkansas, so sometimes Al would go to his house and not return. Other times, however, he would come back out carrying his banjo. Soon as he would start to tune up, others in the crowd would go to their vehicles and get out their instruments. While they were tuning up, the laughter would return even louder, people calling to one another, and a festive mood would come into play.

We had our own brand of music. City folks call it "Hillbilly," but we call it "Blue Grass." That's what color the grass was in the fields in the South where it was originally played. The same city people also tried to give what we did a name; they called it a hoedown. We were migrant workers in the old days, and when the music started we would throw the hoe down, stop working and start to dance. At least that's what my Granny told me.

The music and the dancing would start. Usually one person would call the

music while everyone would have fun. Peels of laughter echoed off the mountainsides, with Al laughing the loudest.

Along about midnight, the party would break up, drunks going home hollering at each other. Many deals were made and disputes settled without violence. Rides were shared for those with way too much to drink. We thought these times would never end, but all good things must.

The Government considered all of us squatters since we didn't actually own the land but mined it for gold, loosely speaking. In the late 70's, they started to condemn our houses as unfit residences, and one by one we all moved away. They brought in huge tractors to destroy our homes and anything associated with us. Except for the memories. They tried to tell us Al was crazy since he hardly ever spoke to outsiders. We didn't trust outsiders, and when they took our homes, we trusted them even less.

Today, with three exceptions, the homes are gone and the people have either moved away or died. But for those of us who lived there, the memories remain vividly alive. The Tree of Wisdom and Knowledge remains, and sometimes when life starts to get me down, I go there to relax.

Early in the evening, as the wind groans through the pine trees, if you listen real close you can hear the music way off in the distance and the voices as they echo to each other. On the darkest of nights you can hear the laughter of a madman: he has the last laugh on all of us.

To the Madam in the Purple Spandex

By Jeffrey D. Peoples

I get them a lot. People that assume I should have a political alliance with all the people that have skin pigmentation darker than a cardboard box. They speak of roots. They expect some special bond between one Branch—Me, another Branch—DMX, and the Roots—Africa. You are here because of your Roots, they say. See, they say, looking at my skin, you look like them: don't you care about them?

You said to the professor that you wanted to ask a black man how he felt about his ancestors in Africa participating in the slave trade. How, you asked, how do you come to accept that your own people sold your Roots into slavery, traded them into misery—for a roll of tobacco and a few straw hats? It's because of the bond we have, right? The Roots. You think that because my skin color comes from Africa, I must share a deep bond with the suffering of slavery.

Well. I've never really bought into the Roots analogy. I never imagined myself as a tree, Madam. To fancy myself, I sometimes even imagine myself as a magnificent orchard. A Royal Orchard, even better. Not a peasant orchard, in which you would find only a few dozen trees here and there, but a Royal Orchard, with trees lined up in ranks further than the horizon, so that standing in the middle, the expanse can trick the eyes into believing they are looking at a forest. And your Skin Color, Madam, stands as one tree in a Royal Orchard with rolling trees, nebulous in size. So you can imagine: finding that tree took considerable effort and time and brought me by many other

trees and through many other orchards.

But I am there now. I sit under the tree, writing this letter to you. And I see that the Roots do run deep. They run far enough and deep enough, as most of my other trees do, so that they penetrate the orchards of other people. These other trees, in the other orchards, share the same roots as my tree, in my orchard. But this tree has no unique beauty or form that sets it apart from the other countless trees around it. To my left is Hair Color, to my right is Eye Color, and a few yards ahead of me sits plainly and untouched, Ear Shape.

So to answer your question Madam, I feel no more about the slavery of Africans than you feel about the Muslim conquest of Constantinople.

Your question implies that I should identify with my Skin Color's ancestry. You imply that my Skin Color's Roots touch so close to my core that the slightest vibration will upset me. When in fact, Madam, I have found that Skin Color is as accurate of a measurement of affinity as Eye Color or Hair Color.

I thank you, however, for giving me a reason to walk through my beautiful Orchard. On my walk, I did pass by a few uniquely beautiful trees. Picasso himself may have planted them. One (Ethics) stood there with its bark as thick as thirty children. Its multi-colored leaves saturated the Orchard floor like old ideas left behind, while its enormous branches at ten-arms' length held ripe fruit, some oozing with tradition. Another tree, still a sapling in my Orchard I had supposed to be Knowledge, was such a nutritious mix of green shades that the gods must have watered it themselves. It carried only a few leaves, its vine-like branches still bare for the cultivation of fresh leaves. Both trees had roots that flowed along the ground like tentacles, reaching far beyond the boundaries of my own Orchard, above and below ground.

So before seeking out your tree of Skin Color, I decided I would follow the Roots above the ground of Ethics, the tree with the thick bark, to a neighboring Orchard. There I found a tree very similar to my own and by its side stood Knowledge, also akin to my own. Out of curiosity I went looking for this neighboring Orchard's Skin Color. I eventually found it, and the bark was a pasty pink and slightly peeling, as if worn by age and weather. I followed its roots and only a few entered my Orchard, and that is how I eventually found my own Skin Color. My Skin Color, however, is brown—like a Hershey Kiss—and weather and age hasn't worn it down yet. In order to find another Orchard with a tree similar to my Skin Color, I followed the large bulk of the roots along the floor of my Orchard. My roots eventually split up into two different Orchards. I arbitrarily entered the second Orchard.

The Orchard's Knowledge tree was withered and unkempt like a tree from a gloomy forest story. Its bark had been split down the center, as if a Giant's axe had cut it from the top down and a few crumbled sticks scattered the dusty ground. I then saw the Orchard's Ethics. Lack of care or some catastrophic event like lightning had no doubt stunted the growth. Its branches jutted out like crooked walking sticks, and rotten fruit dangled wearily from the tips. Walking deeper into the Orchard, I spotted the tree of Skin Color. It was virtually identical to my own, yet a little darker, almost the color of a rich chocolate chip. Compared to the Orchard's tree of Knowledge and tree of Ethics, its tree of Skin Color was pleasant, gentler on the eyes, and lighter on the mood—almost neutral even.

After stumbling back to the split, I took to the first Orchard. After seeing where my Skin Color's Roots brought me the first time, I was uneasy about visiting a similarly dreary scene.

Perhaps the shock and contrast of my last visit made my jaw drop and my pupils expand. But there before me my eyes ascended a structure so grand that I could not take it all in one glance. My eyes had to dart back and forth, from branch to branch, from leaf to leaf, in order to survey the entire tree. In fact, the tree seemed to have once been the two separate trees of Ethics and Knowledge, but the roots, the branches, and even the bark had entwined to form a single structure. Furthermore, luscious fruit and smooth dewy leaves weighed down each half of the tree so heavily that the only reason it did not collapse on itself was because the bodies of the two separate trees worked together to keep it erect. And shaded a little bit beneath a golden apple, bobbing from one of the enormous branches, stood the Orchard's tiny tree of Skin Color.

The bark was as dark as oil and scaly as a lizard, but I could not help but ignore that tiny tree and fixate on the tree that stood looming in heroic size over it. For the sake of my own pride, I followed that Orchard's Ethics and Knowledge Tree Roots out in order to discover if they touched mine at all.

A few of its Roots, like long fingers, met my tree's Roots at the edge of my Orchard. Even the slightest nurture from that great tree was enough for me to stick around and try to tend the soil at the boundaries where my Orchard met with the other.

And for a moment, I had forgotten about the tree of Skin Color—the insignificant tree with roots that can take you to Orchards with the most treacherous Trees, or with the same chance take you to an Orchard of unequalled beauty. Since it is such an unreliable tree, I decided never to follow its Roots in search of an Orchard that can nurture me.

Sincerely,

From Whom It Does Concern

glass chimes.
Moving forward, discussion of heaven over
health-conscious kibble eats time
before a question comes to rise.
"Where in the world have you been all my
life?"
Moving Backward,
"All my life... Moving backward."

Keysville

By Robert Brown

Second Place, Cerro Coso Literary Awards
2001

It was a blistering hot summer day, and the very long school year was finally at an end. In two more months I would be twelve years old. Finally I would be allowed to move to the adult table at mealtime. We are "hillbillies," a very unique breed, and until age twelve you are considered a child and eat your meals with the kids. Then one day, *poof*, you get promoted and move to the adult table to eat.

That day we had our first B-B-Q of the year. Every summer the area people would get together on the weekends to eat and party. I lived in Keysville, and we were always known for being different. It seemed since time immemorial that we were not only different from everyone else, but we were also despised by the entire valley; we were either displaced Southerners, Kentuckians, or second generation Gypsies from Germany.

On B-B-Q days, we all got together and pooled our meager resources. Individually, we had very little, but when twenty-five to thirty families got together it made for a real feeding. This time we were all gathering at the home of Al Coe,

local junk man and legend. The laughter echoed off the mountainside. There were people everywhere it seemed. All the personal feuds were forgotten for the day.

There was junk everywhere, old mining cars, antique cars that we kids would play Bonnie and Clyde on, piles of clothes—junk that the minds of kids could make into anything their hearts desired. We were never bored when we were at Al's.

There was this oak tree that everyone told us was a day older than God himself under which the adult males would gather to drink alcohol. It even had a name, "The Tree of Wisdom and Knowledge." It was called this because the drunker they would get, the bigger the lies got. A recently caught fish would go from ten-inches long to fourteen-inches long in minutes. While the men were telling lies, the women would be preparing the meal, with the exception of the main courses which were cooking while the tales were being traded.

This particular time, Al's wife Hazel had been to the beauty parlor and had had her hair done. She had on a powder blue skirt, which was dirty with an egg stain on the front, dirt caked on her legs, and a watch on her wrist that had never worked since the day she got it. But she had the most beautiful hairstyle of anyone there that day.

Al Coe had a long white beard, one shiny white tooth right in the middle of his mouth, and long, stringy white hair. To me, he always looked like how I would picture God, only much dirtier. He never changed his clothes until they started to rot on him. You can imagine the smell.

I was staring at Hazel, noting the contradiction of her hair to the rest of her, when Al approached me from behind. "Woo, Wee, ain't she a beauty. And she's

tion: I thought if I did that I would at least find the road we lived on. My hands, feet, and ears no longer hurt; they just felt numb. Shortly, I felt tired, and the snow blanket looked inviting. I forced myself to keep shuffling along until I came to the intersection of the highway and the gravel road we lived on. I had traveled on a parallel course. I still had the same distance to walk as I had leaving the stream. I plodded towards home. The dog recognized where we were and left running towards the house.

Half an hour later, my mother was instructing me to place my hands and feet in lukewarm water. At first, I felt nothing, but in a short while I felt intense pain as if needles flowed through the vessels instead of blood. My extremities remained sore for a few days. But, like any other eleven-year-old, I shelved the entire incident as soon as the pain was over. My tolerance for the cold was never the same after that day. It was as though my body no longer trusted me as its caretaker. Only several years later did I contemplate how badly that day could have ended.



Jaye Lyn Martin

"Twins"

Pencil and Colored Pencil

22"X16"

Watchdog

By David Rutledge

As the light
Goes out
The watchdog slowly
Creeps in.
He knows I'm
Awake, hiding,
Hiding by not talking,
Hiding by not moving.
I don't think the dog
Is watching over me
But the dog is watching
Whether or not
He's waiting to
Prance at me like prey
Or prance at my predator
I do not know.
But the dog is watching.

From the Past

By Brian Rapp

Moving forward, a shrinking woman places plates on a table where candles draw the only light. Steady ghosts flounder softly, and her make-up is in place.
Moving forward, Joliet is put in the past: a man, a history. Chipped metal bars and infrequent sunlight.
Moving forward, the doorbell mumbles C; oak creeks, then a simultaneous greeting is slurred. There is a quiet haunting immediately following.
Moving forward, He enters the kitchen with complacency and a subtle scowl.
"Would you like some wine?" as a half-full

On Jeralken

By Mischelle Sammons

A hot summer day
-mid August. I stare
out the window. Hopeless
beads of sweat drench my brow

Blank walls
decorate the house. Even
the caged tarantula
seeks a way out

Across the chasm, coolness
Beckons, but
no breath is there. A
frozen sickle takes a swing

My mind takes me
to places I don't want to go.
And says things no one
wants to know.

A hot summer day
-mid August. I stare
out the window. Hopeless
beads of sweat drench my brow

Haiku

By Georgie Bergeron

Wind is from the south
And I swear I smell the sea
In this bare desert



Alice Forrester

"Coyote's Dream: Seven Birds Chasing
the Big Dipper"

Oil

24"X18"

Red Rock Canyon

By Jesse Harris

The incredible distance of the desert
seems to continue forever.

As my father and I kick over our motorcycles
the engines whine, and billows of gray
exhaust pour out like smoke from a raging
forest fire.

We ride for hours, flying through the tight
trails at breakneck speeds.

Following closely at his tail, I can see
through the dust to his green Kawasaki.

We return to the truck after hours of riding
through the endless desert, tired, dirt
encrusted, and loving it.

The Fox

By Jeff Chartier

This winter the temperature was more likely to be below zero than above and the snow was incredibly deep, the deepest I had ever seen. We laughed as we watched the red fox glide gracefully across the snow followed by my dog, Tika, in clumsy pursuit. Her progress was slowed all the more from continually breaking through the snow's crust. I felt some humiliation for Tika as she was led in circles and mercilessly taunted by her superior cousin. The fox was even bold enough to join its unseen audience by stopping occasionally to sit and watch Tika's hopeless effort to close the distance. No longer entertained, I loaded the clip of my rifle and inserted it sharply. My father prevented my leaving the house by reminding me that it was too close to sunset and would soon not be legal to hunt.



Brian Rapp "Eagle Cap Wilerness" Acrylic 20"X23"

When I woke up early the next morning, light was beginning to creep through my south-facing window. I dressed hurriedly, choosing my winter jacket instead of the warmer, enveloping snowmobile suit. I didn't eat breakfast or pack a sandwich as I typically did. Instead, I put only one box of ammunition in my coat pocket. I readied my best rifle and started out following the trail of the fox accompanied by Tika.

The tracks, half covered by drifting snow, were easy to follow and showed sporadic searches by the fox for plump little field mice. Tiny, dark-red droplets, in sharp contrast to the almost pure white of the snow, were an indication of the fox's success. Its marks led to a huge stack of alfalfa hay bales in the middle of the same type of field. This pasture was undoubtedly teeming with mice. I was surprised to find the prints instead lead to the haystack and up into it. About halfway up the stack there was a small crevice. I moved the bales at the entrance further apart and was both relieved and disappointed that the fox wasn't there since a cornered animal can be very dangerous.

The Fox Continued

I began making ever-widening circles around the haystack until I picked up the trail leading from the stack. The imprints I found were fresh; they were made a few minutes to a couple of hours before. The fox had spent the night buried in the haystack. With renewed excitement, I quickly set out following these clean prints. The dog obviously now had the scent; she hurriedly followed the paw marks with her nose low to the ground, blowing snow away from her nostrils with spurts of heavy breaths. The tracks led us to a shelterbelt about a mile further away. There we found about ten acres of randomly placed trees, with a deep streambed that ran along the side just to the north. Within this isolated forest were hundreds of pure white jackrabbits lying still and undetected, set into motion only when we came too close for their comfort; then they would bound away on a zigzag path. I was sure the fox would be found here.

Until then I had been intent on the trail and oblivious to the weather. Now I noticed how still and quiet the air had become. An ominous sky was entirely overcast with the sun undetectable. After leaving the haystack, we had been traveling almost straight east and I hadn't noticed the dark wall closing in behind us. Light snow was beginning to fall.

The snowfall was increasing rapidly and the horizon disappeared behind it. The flakes were now large and heavy and the wind was picking up. Thoughts of the fox and the high price that I could have obtained with its luxuriant fur were dismissed. The quickest route home was through the ravine and across about two miles of rough, plowed, and snow-covered field. The snow over the stream looked like light powder and there was no way of telling how deep it could be. The small amount of water at the bottom wouldn't be a problem since it would be frozen solid. However, getting my boots filled with snow and my feet wet was a serious concern. I decided to take the risk; the visibility was now down to a couple

hundred yards and a storm like this sometimes lasts a day or longer.

I found deep snow about a third of the way across the stream. Instinctively, I shifted my weight forward onto my shins and knees. This way my pant legs remained down around my boots keeping the snow out. Occasionally I lost my balance and fell forward, catching myself with gloved hands. Straightening myself, I would pull my hands out of the snow and some would stick inside the gloves around my wrists.

The dog was reluctant to follow, but now I could hear her right behind me. I was sinking to just above my waist and Tika's head was at about the level of the snow. She must have panicked because she began jumping onto the back of my legs. I was sent sprawling forward and she would stand on my back, as if I satisfied her as solid ground. I struggled to throw her off and moved a few steps forward, only to be sent flying into the snow again. It took extraordinary effort to make it up the bank.

When I reached the top, I removed my gloves and shook the snow out. My hands were red and wet. Snow was packed inside the top of my boots. I tried to scoop out as much as I could with my fingers. My ears were so cold they felt as though they were on fire.

There were just dim outlines of the trees on the other side of the stream and nothing but white obscuring every other direction. I set out on a course that I hoped would lead me home. My teeth were chattering; my ears felt like ice and hurt when I touched them. I knew my feet were wet and they also felt cold. I tried to walk quickly but it was difficult.

I had heard stories of farmers getting lost during a blizzard walking only a few hundred yards between their barns or houses. I had thought they were ridiculous and that these stories couldn't really have happened. But I understood now how it was possible. Every direction looked the same. My visibility was restricted to a few yards—no landmarks visible or hints from the sun, just a fresh white blanket on the ground and heavy snow falling.

I would try to walk the same direc-