Full Issue

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Spring 2000
St. John Fisher College

The Angle

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Letter From the Editors

As always, spring is the time of change and breaking away from dormancy. Those sentiments are reflected on our own campus. Students are getting ready to begin yet another summer or a new phase in their lives. The campus itself is getting a face-lift as we watch the new renovations getting underway, in anticipation and even frustration.

Many of these themes are reflected in this last issue of the 1999-2000 academic year. There are poems that deal with self-exploration and change; others that pay tribute to someone or something that may very well be gone.

Our own Angle is among those things that will be going through some changes as the upcoming academic year approaches. The fall will welcome a new editor to the staff. Melissa Slocum will be joining Sarah Crimmins in heading up the publication of the Angle. Also, thanks to efforts of Joe D’Angelo, the Angle will soon be able to be viewed on the Web. He will also help implement new methods of receiving submissions via e-mail, that should make it easier and more efficient for all.

So we at the Angle would like to wish all a happy and fruitful summer! Enjoy the issue!

Sincerely,
Sarah Crimmins
Monica Hopkins

Co-editors
The Angle
The Angle

Spring 2000

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* Indicates students in MJ Iuppa’s Senior Writing Seminar
First Prize Winner

Percolating

After lunch
The sound of brewing coffee
Perks my mood
Smiles lost in the bottom of charcoal spills
Iridescent swirls on top –
Liquid caffeine

All collecting in a pot that
We never wash anymore
Simply rinse quickly
Before each use
Remembering to throw dried-up, used grinds
Into trashcans with no bags

Chewed up gum
Turquoise blue and lime green wads
Cling to the side
The coffee’s done
Rushing to raise my Daily Delight
Mug to my lips

Steam soothes my eyes
Happy as its blackness sears
Down my throat
Color flushes crimson in cheeks
Oh – how much better an addict feels
After just one sip

-Sarah Beales *
Second Prize Winner

A Two Mile Drive

"Almost sixty degrees in February,"
the man said to his wife.
"Can you believe it?"
As they drove to Sal's Family Restaurant
for the $6.99 Tuesday meatloaf special.

He drove slowly in the right lane,
ten miles under the speed limit.
People tailgated furiously,
but he did not notice
because Glen Miller was on the radio.

"Do you remember when we used to dance
in the old armory to this song?"
his wife asked him wistfully as
she tapped her foot in rhythm and
turned her wedding band around and around.

They drove past their favorite bakery
and their friends Harold and Rose
walking home from the church
where they went every night to pray
for their son who was killed in Vietnam.

"That Frankie was such a good boy,"
she murmured in a voice he couldn't hear.
"Such a shame for our dear friends."
At times like these she believed it was a blessing
that God never gave them any children to bury.

He turned right into the parking lot
and slowly parked their Oldsmobile
next to a 97 Cadillac with Florida plates.
The clock on the car blinked 4:15 and the
man on the radio talked of an early spring.

"Almost 60 degrees in February,"
the old man said to wife.
"Can you believe it?"
As they walked into Sal's Family Restaurant
for the $6.99 Tuesday meatloaf special.

-Stacy Wittmeyer *
Third Prize Winner

Vacation

I guess I can’t remember the time when the sands of earth and the sands of sky met, toppling over one another. Landwaves undulated before me, rolling out humps for me to bounce on, speckled in green and yellow, and green again. I heard the music of the hills laud my name awaiting my triumphant return. I heard bumblebees like windmills, never wanting any less than to come to my hand and lead me off. Most of all, the sky weighed me down. It weighed on me like a magnet sucking and pushing me at the same time. I guess I do remember the first time the weight of the world destroyed a little May field all in the name of progress. I remember it well.

It was in Kans... no... Dakota something or other, when a crushing blow of steel teeth and metal jaws devoured its prey. I was seven, seven-young-bastard-years before I had any idea of what “innovation” meant, and how it can change things for good Mother Nature. It may have been a sight more recognizable to people like my father, as tanks of black steamy death moved in to pave the way for progress. He saw the future hills--barren, cold, covered in machine oil. People scurrying about as they work to bring older things away, trees and grass giving way to street lamps and gravel. That’s how he saw it.

I saw it in the moment, as the sky hugged me and entered my nostrils. I saw it as they did 500 or so years ago, minus the buffalo. I saw opportunity, a bright shine on the horizon, and shadows of clouds moving in from nearby cities that my father and his father had already raped. I saw it as it was made, and jagged lines of mountains created pages, moonbeams were my lamplights.

I know what my father did, as do many that live there now. He spread corruption through the past and let it spill into the present, so now my future resides in explaining this to my children. It was all for them, I’ll tell them. It was all for the best. It was worth making cream from cloudbursts, coffee from tar. Bumblebees lit off and beyond my grasp, and never returned to the symphony of the hills.

-Bryan Mahoney *
The dancer

Twirling in the rain
tongue out,
arms stretched high,
face to the gray sky--
she laughs,
smiles--
brown curls flying,
blue polka dot dress
spilling out
into the water droplets--
feet floating through puddles.

-Melissa Slocum *
Morphine Dreams

On his back struggling like a
Ladybug, yet he will stay on his
crooked back for awhile--unable to
regain control over the involuntary
motions of life.

I realize that the roles are going to be
reversed--he will be learning how to
walk for the second time, but
it will be the first for me. I've begun
to doubt my Father's immortality.

The weak smile of his suffering--
The masquerade he paints for me.
Our glassy green eyes meet--both awakening.

I breathe in deep, holding his limp
hands as he aches. I sit and he humbly
lays his heavy head back and
surrenders to his morphine dreams.

-Katy D'Arduini
Six Realizations
A tribute to my father
In Loving Memory of the six firemen who lost their lives in Worcester, MA

Silence. The black cloud of deadly smoke reached further and further into the sky in Worcester, MA, as I sat feeling helpless on my bed in Rochester NY. I heard, "Six men missing . . . extreme temperatures . . . little hope . . ."

Dead. Six brave firemen lost their lives in the line of duty that day. I woke at 6:30 a.m. and watched the Today Show as firemen from around the world gathered to mourn the loss of their brothers. I mourned, too.

Pictures. They placed a photo of each of the men on the screen, along with a description of their accomplishments and who they left behind. Children, parents, friends, lives.

Father. Tears streamed down my face as I thought about my Daddy and all of the times he risked his life the same way they did. All firemen tend to look the same, especially through misty eyes. I cried for him and the years I might have missed out on if the flames had swallowed him, too.

In Appreciation. Of all of those who took their last breath in the midst of the endless black air. Of having my Daddy's face there to kiss and his love and support for all of these years.

Realization. I have been lucky. I love you, Daddy.

-Sarah Crimmins
For My Father

One night in the dark,
with streetlight sunshine
you asked about the
illusory images of my mind.
My freedom of thought enveloped me,
in the streetlight that reflected off your glasses,
that hid ice blue eyes;
they are like my ice blue eyes.

I'd forgotten how I got here,
caught in spider web mistakes,
all legs just spinning,
forgotten you'd told me
trees cry.

Their skin is bark. Rough leather
I pick off beneath the maroon cocoon
that I wait to shed,
emerging oranges and blacks,
Don't touch their wings.
Their magic will stick to oily fingertips.
It fluttered only to be caught in the polished coal
of a crow’s beak.
I watched beauty taken away,
fiery salamander I crushed under a sandaled foot,
your turtle that fell to similar fate beneath
Grandpa’s thick soled work boot.
I couldn’t make it live again and
you couldn’t make it live again.

I’d forgotten Lucky Strikes, bottled soda,
backyard jungles, green Tic-Tacs,
Godzilla, Mothra, the Smog-monster,
Kung-Fu movies with improvised soundtracks,
skunk skin on the neighbor’s back porch;
it’s visible through the gap left from ill-fitting plywood,
the burn on your arm from the film projector,
ticking, stuttering pictures, cigarette ashes.
(I’d tried to steal memories that weren’t mine.)

I remember withered apple witches;
their pencil bodies danced in my playground.
You used to chase me around the house
in chestnut dreams,
hide in beige corners in moccasins
and red plaid.
You painted my canvas of emerald city trees,
swimming skylines, and solid dreams.
Now I watch easy chair battles.

The colors fade to gray in winter.
You put on snowshoes,
and I with ski pole burdens
shout for you.

-Leslie Karla *
The Rose Bowl Queen

We as human beings have all experienced this sensation at one point or another in our lives. You know the one that speeds up your heart rate, ties your stomach in knots, and reduces your vocal ability to that of an epileptic during a seizure. What else but love could possibly have such an effect on you, other than chemical stimulants? It’s more sudden than a heart attack for some, and as gradual as a snail for others, but in the end, the results are all alike. Sweaty palms, constant second-guessing and the overwhelming feeling that your breath either smells bad or you have something dripping from your nose. Nothing compares to the feeling love projects upon one’s self and the first time you feel this sensation undoubtedly should be memorable.

The love bug struck when I was nine-years-old. Her name was Laurie Merrill. She was an angel. Black hair, blue eyes and a voice as soft as the clouds. To this day I consider her one the most stunning and beautiful women I have ever laid eyes on. Shy, timid and absolutely afraid to speak to this girl, I was a pathetic sight. What made my feelings for Laurie even more difficult to profess was that I knew that she did not have mutual feelings toward me. This slight bump in the road, however, did not stop me from telling her exactly how I felt. For my situation, it was a matter of timing. I wasn’t going to turn this into a recess romance; I wanted my declaration of how I felt about her to be special. With the assistance of my father, that is exactly what I did.

It was spring, and the flowers were in bloom. Stepping down from the bus one afternoon, I saw my father working in the yard. He already knew how I felt about Laurie, but he had no idea what I was about to ask of him. It was very simple; I wanted to be as romantic as possible, and what can be more romantic than flowers? With very little persuasion my father agreed to buy flowers for Laurie. I then proceeded to try on ten different outfits before I found one that felt right. A brown and black sweater, black slacks and black shoes; I looked sharp. My father, after waiting 45 minutes for me to try on clothes, drove me to a florist with whom he was friends. After deliberating on the type of flowers to buy, we decided on roses. Roses it certainly was, one dozen long stem red ones, wrapped in babies breath. Now that the easy part was finished, it was all up hill from here.

Once my father and I arrived outside Laurie’s house my nerves were shot. I couldn’t go through with it.

“Dad, drive away, drive away!” I yelled. I chickened out. My father didn’t say a word, only smiled and drove me around Laurie’s block about ten times before I calmed down enough to go through with it. We pulled up once again and this time I was ready. I got out of the car, checked my attire and walked nervously to her front door. My hands shook as I rang her doorbell, praying that she answered the door rather than her parents. My wish came true. Once she had opened the door entirely, the light from her lamppost shined on her face, giving her a portrait gleam.

“Laurie, these are for you, I hope you like them, because I really like you,” I said.

“Thanks Joe,” she replied, and shut her door. I did it; I couldn’t believe it. But what now? How do I approach this girl in school tomorrow?

The next day in school was not all that different. I did, however, receive
a smile from Laurie when we first saw each other in class. I asked her a few weeks down the road what she had done with the flowers.

"I put them in a vase and put them on my mantel," she replied. What else do you do with flowers? I wasn’t exactly sure what to expect from all of this. I had hoped she would have realized how much I cared for her, but perhaps it just wasn’t meant to be.

I still think about Laurie every now and then. She moved away a few years later, when we were in middle school. Occasionally she does come back to visit her friends, never to see me, though. I actually saw her two summers ago, still looking as radiant as ever. We didn’t speak but that old feeling came back, not as strong as it used to be but still there. It was more like a rush, not an adrenaline rush but the feeling that someone important was in my midst. Kind of like the feeling you’d get if you met the Rose Bowl queen.

-Joe D'Angelo
Family Ties

My sister, Jesse, filled my wineglass again, spilling some on the table. Then she filled her own. It was almost two in the morning, and the flea bites on my legs itched.

"You should spray for those fleas," I told her.
"I've been meaning to, but I haven't gotten around to it." She slurred some of her words.

Why did I come to visit her? We were talking on the phone a couple weeks before. She had just moved to Washington and wanted me to see her apartment. I promised I would come and then, I couldn't get out of it.

"Are you coming?" my sister asked. The last call came ten minutes before I left.
"I'm packing my car now."
"I was worried you would change your mind. I'll see you soon."

"It's a seven hour drive. I won't get there until noon. Unless I get lost, which I always do. Then I'll get there later.

I forgot the thermos of coffee in the house. The phone was ringing again. I didn't answer it. It was probably Jesse again; it had been the last twelve times. Who else would call at five a.m.?

Now I was here in her kitchen. We were both drunk. The kitchen walls were dirty, littered with fingerprints and food. The carpet smelled of animal urine.

"I'm painting soon. The landlord gave me paint. The last tenant had cats."
"You should spray first," I said still itching.

Then she started to cry. She always did. Every visit was the same. We would drink, then she would cry.

"I'm not in therapy anymore," I told her as I handed her a roll of toilet paper. Her nose was running. "But," I went on, "it helped. My doctor got me through the brick walls. He said I could tell him anything because Mama wouldn't find out. You should try therapy."

We had this conversation before.

"I've tried. It doesn't help." Finally, as she talked, she wiped her nose, and then blew hard, causing it to bleed a little.

"Why don't you try a woman therapist this time? Maybe a man can't break through the brick walls."

"I will," she says. "But first I'll spray for the fleas."
"I loved him," she tells me, still crying.

I let her cry as I drink my wine and light a cigarette. It was probably good for her.

Her wrists are scarred with large welts. The holes from the stitches still show in some areas.

"I wear long sleeve shirts," she says as I stare at the scars.
"Have you tried again?"

"A couple of months ago," she says nonchalantly. We have both accepted that she wants to die. It's been going on for ten years. "This time I took pills. It seemed easier."

She was thirteen but looked eighteen when she tried the first time. Sometimes I wonder if it would have been better if she had bled to death. Nothing had changed; she was still trying.

We grew up with a crazy mother. We didn't know it then but she was looney. She used to give me enemas when she was angry. She would just beat Jesse. She always liked my sister more than me. Sometimes we would go for ice cream at night—Jesse, Mama and me. I would get a one scoop ice cream cone. Jesse would scream and carry on until she got a banana split. She would make Mama eat her cone. I talked about that in therapy and got rid of my anger.
"Did you hear what I said?" Jesse asks. "I said I really loved him. I've never loved anyone else."

He was Alex.

"I think he loved me too," she says. "He was just afraid. It was the day of my birthday he told me I was beautiful. Then he kissed me on the mouth."

I had been there and watched. In the kitchen was Alex kissing my sister while my mother was in the living room dancing alone to Tammy Wynette.

Birthdays were usually a time for a case of Genny Cream. They were both drunk that day. They even let Jesse and me have a beer.

Alex was lying. She wasn't actually beautiful. She was tall and thin with round breasts. Her teeth were crooked and her hair was straight, almost brown. Her face was too plain to be beautiful.

"I knew he meant it," she says as she fills our glasses again.

"That you were beautiful?"

"No, that he loved me. He snuck in my room that night and said it over and over again. He said it for two years until Mama found out.

"Well, Mama said he was a good lover and she should know," I said. "She had enough of them."

Jesse was crazy like Mama. She was just younger.

The day Mama found them together, she dragged me in the room. We stood there watching them sleep together. Then Mama got a wild look in her eye and started slamming the bedroom door shut, over and over again, until the wood cracked. The whole time she kept screaming, "He's mine."

Every year Mama changed her hair color. At that time it was a deep black, almost blue. It was wild like her eyes as she looked at Jesse. Alex had put his pants on and now stood against the wall. Mama never looked at him. She jumped on the bed and bloodied Jesse's mouth, but she never looked at him.

"I heard their bed squeaking," Jesse says, spilling her wine as her hand leaps up. "I heard their bed squeaking that night and slit my wrist. I couldn't think what else to do."

We were put in a foster home after that. I was almost eighteen and Jesse was fifteen.

We went to separate homes.

"I'm tired," I tell her. I go lay down on the couch, covering myself with the red and black afghan.

An hour later, I wake to vomit. She always buys cheap wine that gives me a headache and makes me sick.

She's sleeping on the edge of the couch, sitting up with her legs drawn up under her. I watch her breathe and wonder when she stopped sucking her thumb. Her teeth are all crooked because she did it for so long. Maybe she still does sometimes.

I try to wake her so she'll go upstairs. "No," she says, "I want to sleep here."

She has a son. The next day we go to visit him at a special school. They took him away from her after he found her nude covered with blood. The blood made him freak.

When he sees me, he throws toys at me to get my attention. Then he quiets down and colors a picture with me in the coloring book I brought him. He uses lots of reds and blacks. The picture of the family picnic is grotesque when he gets done, but I don't say anything to him. I don't want him to throw any more toys at me. Alex will be seven next month.

After we leave the school, I decide to go back home. I still have a headache and she still has the fleas.

The phone is ringing when I walk in the house. I take three pain killers and ignore it.
"I let the phone ring five hundred and ten times," she tells me when I finally answer it. "I wanted to make sure you got home all right."
"I got lost twice."
"Did you have a good time?" she asks. I know she's crying. "Next time, I promise I'll spray the fleas."

-Linda DeMaso
11:33pm

for Noelle

The night is sad tonight.

The rain is pouring so ferociously, that
it sounds like a million black
marbles shattering against my car,
throbbing in my head... 

I am crying 4 U.

"LITTLE GIRL, I AM CRYING FOR YOU!"

I am thinking about you... laying so fragile
in that metal-raised bed, in room 218.
I know that you are hardly moving, so the noise
will not remind you—
that You are Alive.

You are existing as a body under a hard,
uncomfortable white sheet; with scars on
Your heart,
Your fate and
Your wrists.

I am driving past your house little girl—
and it is lit up against the darkness and
the rain. The family inside cannot
sleep, for they are up all night wondering
why you want to?

As I drive by slowly,
my memory remembers you, and I, and your brothers
running around your yellow house in the
summer sun... 
the sprinklers were crying upward tears,
before they fell. The iridescent bubbles we
blew, floated up towards the sky,
until they couldn't resist bursting... 
my embrace on you cousin is eternal,
why are trying to let go?

-Katy D'Arduini
Our Times

Why do I like being here so much?

I am relaxed, yet I feel an empty sadness.
I am warm and calm like the time of day.

It is not loud,
It is not cold,
It is beautiful,
The colors fading to gray, yet precise with pink.

The evening dusk brings no storm tonight
Only the trickling waves and the tired birds.

It is not ugly,
It is an amazing deep blue violet
That expresses the power
Of life in the Ocean.

It is not busy,
It is not crowded,
Just me and my Mom.

We feel the sand at our feet,
And the smell of White Linen fades slowly
To the heavenly-white light.

I remember our times at Cape Cod.

-Amy Trendell
The Visit

On my first visit
run my fingers over the letters of your name
The sharp edge of the K
The symmetry of the T
the curve of the R
It's so beautiful
Yet so cold to touch
The canyons engraved in stone
Overlooked so many times
As people step over you
Yet you say nothing

Some people pray and kneel
    Lost in memory
Others stand and remember
    Lost in the years when
We were together
Now they flick their cigarettes
And wish you could go to the party tonight

Me, I visit you still
    But only in my poems
I run my fingers over the letters of your life
    I write to you
And climb into the branches of memory
Looking for your blue eyes
    And freckles

-Kate McNamara *
He Left the Same as He Entered

Greg walked into the office as he did everyday, setting his lunch down on the shiny metal table that sat adjacent to the door. Calling this place an office was an obvious stretch, but it was better than referring to it as the "Dead Drop-off," as the other coroner Bruce always refers to it. Every time the cops stopped by, they would remark about how absurd it was to call it the Coroner’s office. They always mused at Bruce’s not-so-subtle nickname.

It wasn’t easy being a coroner, God knows not everyone had the stomach for it, but Greg had grown quite used to it, almost indifferent. The sight of dead bodies, no matter how grotesque, no longer bothered him. It was very rare that Greg saw a corpse that could even remotely disturb his lunch. It took something special, something new and exotic to do that. Greg figured that was to be expected after twenty-eight years of looking at death firsthand.

When he first got the job as a city coroner, Greg realized that he would need to do something to keep from losing his while he was surrounded by these unmoving people, so he began to formulate stories about the person in his mind while he performed their autopsies. He once truly believed that he had the real Elvis on his table back in 1996, but he took a lot of abuse from Bruce for it, so now he only privately told the stories of these dead men and women.

The previous evening must have been pretty slow in the city, as there was only one new body before him this morning. The write-up on the corpse indicated that it was a homeless man who had been brutally beaten to death. The name was an all too familiar one, John Doe. Greg saw at least one John Doe a week, and often times wondered what it would be like to really be named John Doe. It always brought a smile to his face when he pictured some guy walking around who had died fifty times last year.

The man had been badly beaten, and Greg was able to deduce almost immediately that he had died from massive head trauma. Honestly, anyone could have figured that out for themselves, the guy had two gashes in the back of his head that were deep enough to expose two large cracks in his skull. His body was covered in blood from head to toe. There was one streak of red that started at the base of his neck and extended halfway down his legs. His chest had been speckled with the blood that had leaked from the corpse’s mouth and nose, along with the open wound that was open just below his neck.

Noticing that there weren’t any belongings logged for the body, Greg realized that this man truly had nothing in this life. As was customary, he began to think about what this man’s life had been, and how it had ended. Greg wondered if he had ever passed him on the street, begging for some loose change for food, huddled in a corner to get away from the bitter cold or the decimating heat. Maybe he had been a victim of circumstance, a leftover of corporate downsizing, which led to his divorce, and consequent bankruptcy, which pushed him to the streets. So many possibilities came to mind, every one plausible.

Greg finished the paperwork, noting the probable cause and time of death. He pulled the pasty-blue sheet over the motionless form in front of him. Greg always felt sad for these bodies, as the last light they saw was the pale, artificial light of this room. It had become customary for Greg to write a little anecdote, quote, or thought at the bottom of each report he filed. This one was no different, although it left Greg with a strong sense of remorse for the dead man in front of him. He pushed the body into its metal holding box and filed his findings in the cabinet.

The cops came to pick up the report on the homeless man later that day while Greg was on his lunch break. They would never admit it, but each officer that picked up the files on the recently deceased always looked forward to reading what Greg wrote at the bottom of the page.
This particular policeman was no different. The officer grabbed the file and skipped to the bottom.

“This man was brought to me with no worldly belongings, nothing to show for his time on this earthly plane. It’s quite sad, actually. He left this world much like he entered it, alone, naked, covered in blood.”

-Shawn Carter
The Angle, Vol. 2000, Iss. 4 [2000], Art. 30

Inferno

Bury it deep my child; hide it well.
Suppress, dig down, lock it inside.
It'll fester there; bore into your soul,
Eat away at your insides until you can't take it.
Don't let them know; they cannot see. It's all over if they do.

The eyes are the windows to the soul, my child.
So pull the shades; draw the blinds; keep them out.
I don't want them to see in.
It'll reveal too much, let them feel too much of your soul.
Close the curtains; turn off the lights; no one is there to greet them,

as it should be.

Play the game well, my child, wear your mask.
Bottle it up; save face; play the role.
It's okay to hurt, just do it alone.
Build up a wall; lock the door; hermit inside yourself.

Be careful, my child, be aware.
If you don't, you'll implode like lightning in a bottle.
Just use a fake name for the papers.

-Jen Enright
Cease-fire

We gave the kids guns,
And the kids killed,
And we cried and asked,
Why did this happen?

We said it was important,
We needed to be armed,
But in the end the only thing we were armed with now
Are our own excuses.

Those bullets not only pierced
The hearts of the children,
They pierced the hearts of America,
The red, white and blue bullets.

The shots rang out from sea to shining sea,
Screaming this is the future of America.
Is this what we have taught the future?
Is this what it means to be free?

The killers are not the children,
And the media didn't pull the triggers,
Through the rockets red glare I realized
That this land was made by you and me.

-Kelly Ambrose
Russians

Once, I found out that if you save an entire semester's worth of work for the last day, you'll have to stay up till 4 A.M. to finish it all. In that moment you will realize something else, that there really is a 4 A.M. I thought that it had been made up until that day. I thought that the Russians made that up to make Americans feel lazy. It worked, too. I felt lazy because I was never up at 4 A.M. to do any work. Then, when I turned fifteen and I started learning about Russians in history class, I realized that they were sneaky enough to invent a 4 A.M. I realized that they do things like that all the time, making up things to make Americans feel lazy and bad about themselves. I was so irritated with them about the whole 4 A.M. thing that I didn't speak to a Russian for years.

Then, at the end of my sophomore year in college, I realized that they didn't make up the 4 A.M. thing at all. I wasn't sure how to react, my whole belief system had taken a vital blow. I then decided to stop my anti-Russian propaganda in its tracks. I had a whole speech prepared about how Russians work too hard and all sorts of things that would make them feel lousy about themselves, but I can't bring myself to do anything about that now. At the moment, I am on the fence about Russians. I want to embrace their culture, but I was up at 4 A.M. once, I am not sure if I can do it on a routine basis.

-David Silpe *
Forgetting the Diet Pepsi

As I pushed my cart into checkout 4, I realized I had forgotten to pick up my wife’s Diet Pepsi. I almost said “the hell with it,” but then a picture of her realizing I had forgotten flashed before my eyes.

It wasn’t that she would get mad. Sharon rarely got mad; it was more the look in her eyes. Then the sigh. Then the “No, honey, it’s no big deal. I wanted to start drinking more water anyway.”

I pulled the cart out of the checkout aisle, left it next to a rack of magazines, and started in on a slow jog to get the soda. In less than a minute I was back, again pushing the cart into checkout 4, this time with a 12 pack of Diet Pepsi in hand.

As I contemplated whether to add an Almond Joy to my grocery pile, I reached into the cart and began unloading. As I set a can of Star-Kist tuna on the checkout, I glanced into the cart, blinked, and glanced again, and discovered that the cart I was unloading was not filled with my groceries.

At first, I thought I may have just been confused. Maybe the steel reflection of the cart under the florescent grocery lights was making me see things. But the initial moment of confusion passed and I realized that I had in fact grabbed the wrong cart somehow.

“Paper or plastic?”

“Sir?”

I slowly moved my head in the direction of the cashier, just noticing that she was speaking to me. “Huh?”

“Paper or plastic?”

“Oh, plastic will be fine.”

I know I should have again backed the cart out of the checkout and looked for my missing groceries. The ones on my wife’s neatly written alphabetized list. But I didn’t. Thinking back on it, I don’t know if it was because my face was already red with the embarrassment of knowing I had done something this stupid, or because the cashier was already scanning the mystery groceries at top speed, or because I just didn’t care. Whatever the reason, I continued unloading the groceries that a few minutes ago belonged to someone else, but now belonged to me.

As I piled the counter with tuna fish, strawberries, spinach, two kinds of mushrooms, a lime, bottled water, whole-wheat bread, and a six pack of Corona, I thought about, with the exception of the Star-Kist, how different the contents of my original cart were from this fluke cart. The majority of the items in my cart were of the canned or boxed variety.

Spaghetti-Os for my son Mike, canned corn, beans, and peas, mixed fruit in heavy syrup. On the boxed side: instant potatoes, Frosted Flakes, Robitussin, granola bars, a couple of frozen pizzas, Cheez-its, and a box of dog treats.

Since Mike started playing football and Sharon went back to school, we either ate out or had what Sharon referred to as “quickie meals.” As I continued unloading peaches, shrimp, a box of brie, onions, two steaks, a carton of Ben & Jerry’s Chunky Monkey, I wondered whether the person now pissed off and wandering the store in search of their cart was a man or a woman.
By the bottom of the cart, I had deduced that these items belonged to a man, a single man (due to the fact that the cart held nothing labeled "family style") with a life. A man I wish I could be. A life I wish I could have. My whole basis for the man thing came from the fact that lying in the far right corner of the cart, wedged between the Corona and the steak, was a box of condoms. I realize that women buy condoms (my wife, an exception) but they seem more honest about it and so much less likely to sandwich them between beer and steak.

I pushed the condoms on the counter, so they remained comfortably hidden, and pushed the cart forward so the cashier could start putting my newfound groceries in the cart. I looked at her for the first time and noticed, thanks to her plastic laminated nametag, that she was Becky and had been happily serving me for 1 year. She looked to be about 15, Mike's age. She was a pretty girl, athletic-looking with long brown hair that she kept pushing out of her eyes. She was the type of girl who would have not even known my name in high school, but would have my son's scrawled in a heart on her math folder.

"How are you today sir?"
"Fine, thank you."

"Will this be cash or charge?" I had brought enough cash to pay for my Betty Crocker/Red Baron groceries, but this new gourmet set would cost more than the two twenties I had in my wallet. These were the groceries of engineers or architects, not of middle managers at Builder's Square.

"Charge."

I felt good just taking these groceries out of the cart. To be the man putting these groceries in the cart would be like watching a football game with no interruptions. Choosing the fresh fruit, buying beer in bottles, nonchalantly tossing steak in your cart when it’s not on sale. Unloading them into your non-minivan and then unloading them again into your one bedroom, boxer shorts on the floor, childless, wifeless apartment.

"Sir, did you want that soda?" I looked up at her and then at the Diet Pepsi still in my hands.
"Yeah, I guess so."
"Okay, that will be $58.62. Just sign on the X."

As I shoved the receipt in my back pocket, I pushed the cart out of checkout 4, said "Have a nice day" to Becky the cashier, looking at the familiar Diet Pepsi crushing my other groceries, and heading for my minivan.

-Stacy Wittmeyer
The Narrow Minded Monkey

A monkey, who wanted to stop or derail a large freight train near his habitat in the forest, was very determined. He was motivated by many factors; among them were his popularity, prestige and recognition with the other monkeys in the forest. This monkey thought he had all the advantages on his side. It wasn't far to the tracks from his home and there was a clear view from the mountain top where he could see the on-coming train. The daring monkey was going to stop the train at whatever cost or pain was involved. The monkey knew the train was very heavy and over-packed, but that did not deter him.

Monkeys are usually good-sized animals, depending on their breed and kind. They are long-tailed primate creatures with lots of strength in their tails. I know this from personal experience. Many years ago I was at the Seneca Park Zoo, feeding Jimmy, a long-time resident of the zoo. All of a sudden he grabbed my hand with his tail and began to pull with all of his strength. The strength of Jimmy's tail surprised me and caught me off guard. Monkeys are known to use their tails to achieve just about every task imaginable, or at least every task they attempt.

Now this monkey who wanted to stop or derail the train had a great deal of strength in his tail. He knew it would be helpful with his plan that he had carefully formulated. He waited quietly on the mountaintop. After waiting for hours, he finally saw the train coming through the valley, moving full speed ahead. The monkey knew it was time to go and meet the train, so he immediately left the mountaintop and descended towards the tracks. He arrived with plenty of time. The determined monkey took his tail and positioned it across the tracks. The train was still about two minutes away. This gave the monkey a great deal of time to think. To him, the two minutes felt like two years. The train was getting closer and the monkey was getting excited.

The train finally reached the monkey, and to his surprise, the train cut off part of his tail. He got up in a state of shock and dismay. But the monkey remained determined. He was going to let his tail heal and try again to stop or derail the train.

The monkey waited three months before trying again. By then his wounds and pride had healed. The monkey perched himself at the top of the mountain once again and waited to see the train. Soon, he saw the train coming through the valley. He rushed down towards the track. He laid his tail across the track and waited in anticipation. He was sure this time that it would work. He was feeling like King Kong and there was no doubt in his mind that his plan would work this time. Once again, the train ran over his tail and cut off an even bigger part. The monkey was left with very little tail.

By this time the monkey was really disgusted, not to mention disappointed and angry that he could not stop or derail the train. But he refused to give up. He was even more determined now that the train made a fool of him twice. The monkey came up with what he thought to be an even better plan than before. He figured, since his tail was not as powerful as he originally thought, he was going to use something else. He decided to use a part of his body that was much thicker, wider and harder. He decided to use
his head. In his mind he imagined the train stopping or better yet, flipping over. The monkey was more excited than he had ever been.

The determined monkey waited at the mountaintop for the train. He saw the train moving through the valley at full speed. When he got to the tracks, he laid his head across them and excitedly waited for the train. Unfortunately, after all the good feelings that the monkey had about stopping the train, the plan failed. The train took every possession that the monkey had: his life, his head, and every other valuable part of his body.

The determined monkey was laid to rest without a head and almost without a tail. However, the monkey left behind a very valuable and important lesson to be learned by future monkey generations or anybody that gets as disoriented as this monkey was. The lesson goes like this, "Never lose your head over a piece of tail."

-Eulojio Rivera
She Undresses Fear

"Rowing in Eden--/ Ah, the Sea! /Might I but moor--Tonight--In Thee!"
-Emily Dickinson #249

You and I--the first time together, your clothes unfolding, your nakedness I watch like the full moon brightly revealed through opening drapes--
My skin is warm, yet I'm chilled by the blowing wind of fear.
What if I should fail leaving you wanting more?

-Robert Ruehl *
Unopened

I remember those days where kisses were cinnamon and his hands crept over my body. He would bring me yellow and white daffodils in February and chocolate in July.

The snow globe that sits cold in my cupped hands he brought to me when I had measles in May. The skaters in the glass smile when it snows, just like he and I did in the parking lot of Harvard under starlight.

One day while walking down crowded streets in Brooklyn, I caught him giving daffodils to a laughing woman. A men at work sign blinked red lights in my face. It was May.

A week passed full of silent lies he left on answering machines and those cards that come attached to flowers. The last thing he gave, the letter, still sits, unopened, screaming for me to break the seal. But it will stay -unopened-

I won't risk more daffodils falling out onto my feet.

-Melissa Slocum *
Between You and Me

The states that lie between us
stretch across my mind,
endless open road
too vast to comprehend

On the map these states
span only inches,
my fingers walk over them
covering miles with only a few
small steps.
On that scale,
only inches lie
between you and me.
But on the map where
a mile equals a mile
we are not so close

Thirteen hours by car
cutting through those states that
separate us –
too long a journey to ask you
to make

One hundred-ninety dollars
for plane fare
could get me to you–
too much for you to ask me
to pay

But in my state of mind
you are by my side
where we surpass
those states
and hours
and dollars
together

In my state of mind
nothing lies
between you and me.

-Monica Hopkins
To Jeremy

You always wanted a Jetta—
Not new, warn in enough
To keep you occupied
On a Saturday afternoon
With tinkering and tightening
Up the bolts of some faulty piece of
Foreign-made machinery.

You used to be my companion.
We'd take late night rides
Out to the diner for coffee and cigarettes
And I would feel safe driving
In a blizzard with you—
Always knowing just how fast
To take a corner before the ice
Made casualties of us.

You were my chassy,
My infrastructure,
My support system,
But in one moment
My circuit shorted and
You would not try to trip that
Breaker or reconnect my wires
Like you always did before
So I cut you off and pulled out the
Tool box on my own.

Now I miss you and your fucked-up life.
I bent my rules to
Accept you and your differences,
Overlooking stories of loveless sex with
People I knew or didn’t want to,
Or the drugs that left you
Burnt out and coughing like a
beat up old junk car no one wants.

Now when I pass a Jetta parked in
Some lot, I see your reflection
In the glass
The VW emblem on its hood
Matching the one tattooed on
The middle of your back, unfinished,
Missing the fire.

-Monica Hopkins

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Smoke and Mirrors

I.
Looking to the sky I see a majestic mountain still at the bottom
I see clouds, possible stormy sky
It never has made sense, my feet dragging skid marks across
A thundercloud horizon
My head lost in the crumble of eroding mountains
Yet it its my picture
That you took for me
A constant reminder of what confused landscapes lie ahead
A constant reminder of who froze me smiling.  Silent.
False since its creation

II.
Cold black nights
  Startle.  Seduce.
Mild punishment for the
  Rigid Nothing Man
Dark humor writhes
  The stiff faces
Seduction of cigarettes
  Gentle mists
Candles and rain

Time falls silent
  On the doorstep
Resentment.  Anger.
  Past folds into present

As truth is confused to
Deceit
And tomorrow is disregarded
To the yesterday’s

III.
Mere traces.  Smears on a blackboard.  Eraser shards.
Salmon pink little wrinkles, waiting to be swept away with a
casual thrust of the hand.  Fingers groping for beams of light.
Invisible.  Unable to grasp.  Yet I can still feel your warmth on my skin.

Spirals of smoke, slithering and bending.  Escaping my needy palms.
Unable to hold a tangible form—a thick vaporeous ring, the sexy curve of an S—Here for a blink.  A gust in the blue afternoon sky, and all is lost.
Pictures snapped into memory.  Meant to be stored in my trunk of waspish
thoughts.  You—dancing with the gypsies in the dazzling tangerine horizon.
Thanking them for teaching you the games with smoke and mirrors.

-Sarah Beales *
Life After What Seemed To Be Death

"Alone in the Company of the Father" comes to mind as I stand, right now, gazing down towards my end. Only have my fears been presented in poetry before, but never in reality. I suppose reality had something to do with me writing such a poem, but never have I attempted this. I stand here in the presence of God and his company, deciding my fate. Do I jump? I begin to ask myself agonizing questions as I try and reach the Lord, looking for help. I wonder if He is really listening. I wonder if He cares. Does anyone? God's creations are supposed to be perfection, flawless, and yet I am the exact opposite. All these mountains, flowers, the sunrise, they are the twinkle in His eye. His proud masterpieces, they are, but why aren't I? Mistakes have collaborated my life, consumed my being, convincing me that I am not worthy of living, not worthy of love. How can God love something that he intended to create differently? My outcome, I know, was not His intention. Forgiveness is something that I have repeatedly asked for, but what is the sense when all I need to do is ask for the ultimate, to ask for complete purity. I even feel dirty, dirty as the brown rocky sand my feet lay upon now. My weight, heavy against my conscience, heavy on my feet, I am tired of walking. One more step is all that it takes, all it will take to end my misery.

Alone in the company of the Father, I stand
Above all the world, beneath ultimate creations
Blossoming blush, crystal blue, bright white
I want to fall into, forgetting the dull golden tan
Of reality, edging myself out of misery.
Is it my time to die?

I didn't mean to ask for it. I really wish it never happened. He wanted it, wanted me; it should've been enough. I should've been thankful he was even aroused. I should've enjoyed it; it was happening whether I wanted it to or not, I should've made the best of the situation. But now, I suffer the consequences, suffer the pain of loneliness and ultimate rejection. He took what he wanted, why doesn't he want me anymore? Why doesn't God just take me out of my misery? Let me take just one more step... one more step.

Close to You, white stark light shine upon me
With warm sensations passing through my black hair
I feel the coming of my end. Beauty is now known
Finality shown at the meeting of the beyond
If I were to fall and descend, would You
Reach down and carry me home? I look back
And see my footprints, not being held then,
Is it my time to die now?

Leaning over the edge, looking down at the decision, what am I going to do? I could be strong and just inch up and drop, or I could be even stronger and walk away: take those steps and keep walking right into the future. But how can I face him, that terrible man who did this to me? Me. I am worthy of something. As I span my surroundings, I realize who I am. All this time I had
been blaming myself and questioning God of my existence. Now, I have to exist to be.

Still standing on this ugly, desolate island of dry sand
Floating in a sea of Your magnificent clouds
Ban me from here. I need to be taken and swallowed
Into my dream. Whole and in Your hands
Do what You will, but I am aching and begging,
Is it my time to die still?

Still dizzy from looking thousands of feet down, I lay here on my back, submerged in the dirt. I am not that dirt he made me feel I was, I am God's imagination. God, You have created me and knew what You were doing. I am who I am and my rapist can't take that away from me. Zoning into the sky, I wonder why I was going to destroy myself--why was I struggling with something terrible and ugly and completely out of my control? The beautiful clouds are always changing, always moving. I need to move on, I need the sun to shine upon me after my storm. I need to come into me and along the way, thank God for his presence and guidance. As I look back, again, to see my footprints, I realize that they have disappeared. All along God has carried me; He has walked me through my almost defining end.

-Jessica Reed *
Somewhere Over the Rainbow

I see you as I did when we were in the seventh grade
The fondest of friends, before training bras, before auntie flow
You were the miniature girl with the dorky glasses,
Too hefty for your dainty face

Growing up, life spun around like a tornado
You, the comic relief of every situation

My life, the lollipop guild, iridescent
Yours, Kansas, black and white

Dorothy's foot
Fits the ruby slipper

Kelly was a wicked witch, never your way
Now she has three extra munchkins scattered in this Land of Oz

Pam's mom, multiple sclerosis
A house fell on her, took her life

You, always with me, like Toto in Dorothy's picnic basket
We continue to follow the yellow brick road

Heather, the name of the story is life
Our worlds together will be in color
We will make it to the Emerald City
Our heels will never stop clicking

-Jennie Raymond
A Semi Autobiographical Approach to Being Broke in Kensington

I spent my last pound on the jukebox. Funny little coins that they are, I never actually thought I was spending anything. I'm built like that. Full of good ideas. Suppose that is why I decided to become a poet and move to London. Of course it is also how I ended up getting stuck here broke in Kensington.

"You can hear it in my accent when I talk, I'm an Englishman in New York." But I still can't argue with the jukebox. Change the words around a little bit and I claim the song to be about me. A New Yorker in England. At least as far as anyone here is concerned. Syracuse is right next to Queens, sure it is. Better than saying where I really am from since Liverpool throws their geography further off balance.

"Oh, so you're English then?" Eyebrows raised since I don't have a trace of a Liverpudlian accent. Other than the one of the Central New York variety of course.

"No, I'm from New York." And the Queens question usually follows shortly after.

"If you buy me a drink, I'll give you a geography lesson." You have to attempt these things when broke. More usual than not a rude rebuff follows. Still, it doesn't change my situation. Nothing more than I had before, nothing.

After this most recent conversation, I find myself at a table somewhere near the back of the pub that I have been at for a while now. Clearing smoke, I arise and begin my trek to the opposite side of the tiny building to ask a stranger for 20p. I pick up the phone, fumbling through the digits until I have reached my friend Sweeney.

"Sweeney!"
"Yeah?"
"What you doing?"
"Well I was thinking about going to work. I'll be there in ten minutes."

So after a fleeting few words, I again find myself alone among the masses. No longer than ten minutes later Sweeney walks through the door. This less than striking man dressed as though he belongs in the 20's glances around the room and noting the seemingly infinite amount of ethnicity in the room mouths the words, "How cosmopolitan! " to me and strides over to my all too empty table.

As a job Sweeney writes down our conversations and sells them. Unfortunately, since my half of the lines are not the interesting half, I get no share of the money. Still, we have plenty of conversations and I tend to be more in control of the ones where he is not involved.

"So Sweeney, how's the job?"
"I think you're the one who should be telling me that. Any news in your life?"

"Why don't you buy me a drink?"
The man smiles as he stands, and in motions not similar to walking, he glides over to the bar and returns with two pints of beer.
"Words now John. I want to hear words from you."
"Are you crazy? You can't possibly expect me to come up with a decent story when I have a deadline for it?" Sweeney sighs, obviously annoyed. "So you're not going to tell me anything?"

"I don't see why I should." Sweeney stands to leave, but I grab his coat and plead with him not to leave, as I look frantically around the room for something to say. The news is on the bar TV. "Says here to expect some moisture in the air tonight, Sweeney. Mist is rising off our new Island in the north. Funny thing it is since two things cannot occupy the same space at the same time, but this mist is both water and air at once." Sweeney sits back down.

"Yes, strange thing indeed." He takes out his pen and paper and starts writing down what we say. I start working on my beer. Casually, I attempt to see what he is writing, but to no avail.

"Umm, yeah so Sweeney, did I ever tell you about my desire to be a chain-smoking Buddhist monk?"

"No, John, as a matter of fact, you never have. Why don't you tell me about that?" He continues writing and never looks up from the paper.

"Yeah so, I wanted to be a Buddhist monk and a chain smoker. Get it? Buddhist monk. Chain smoker. Come on man that's classic."

"Do you have anything of meaning to say, John?" Sweeney continues writing despite the fact that there are little words being spoken. Every now and then he takes a large gulp of his beer. Minutes pass, and in silence I look around the room struggling for something to say.

"Umm, I'm broke and my Visa runs out in two months. I have no plane ticket home, so I was considering various methods of deportation." Sweeney finally looks up disgustedly and begins to drink more rapidly. In an attempt to avoid his stare, I place my eyes intently on my beer.

In years past, I would sit at night, pretending to play him in chess so that I would have a chance at beating him in something since my words were not his equal. His presence is near mine now, jotting down what I say, but still leaving out my words. I want to ask him for order. What word goes where, what should I say? I look up from my beer and at Sweeney. He has finished his pint and motions towards the door. I see him crumple our conversation and shove it deep into his coat.

"Finish this pint and we'll be off." I say and turn back to the glass. Our words occupy the same space. I have not spoken of me, but him; the mine underneath stuck somewhere that is not its own, gathering below the mist sheltering the north. By the time I am done, Sweeney has already walked outside and I follow his trail towards the door.

Outside the air has grown dark and Sweeney's skin glows through its thickness. For a second I forget he is here and think that if I concentrate hard enough he would disappear. He lights a cigarette and turns toward me, his body one with the smoke.

"Why don't you ask me how it is done?" The heat escaping his body adds warmth to the air around him, steadily getting cooler as it radiates away. I stare into his eyes and try to make him disappear, but don't say anything.

"Well, I think it is time for me to leave then." But I feel that will never happen. His presence was already here. It cannot be escaped. He finishes his cigarette, walks across the street and turns around. Sweeney eyes me from across the street. His glare will not escape me. I cannot even whisper the words I know he wants to hear from me. If I could scream, I would shout.
across the ocean and hear my words echo over the water and reverberate against all shores that it comes into contact with. But my words fall just outside, caught on Sweeney's paper crumpled somewhere in his ancient coat. With a vengeance my eyes lock onto his figure. This time the conversation will be mine.

-Mark Bowers *
I Remember the Days Were Long in the Summer,

but the break from school seemed short in its entirety. The trust of our parents, who both worked at Eastman Kodak, left my older brother, Chad, and me at home without supervision. Although our obedience and contentment, or most likely our timidity usually kept us close to home, our days were typically filled with activities that help capture the moments and memories of youth and growing up. At the ages of eleven and fourteen it was not difficult to entertain ourselves, especially with the new addition of a swimming pool. Our cousin Rob, who was fifteen, would often journey to our house on his BMX bike to enjoy our company, and of course, a swim.

Our home was set in the country, about three miles from the small town where we attended school. With few neighbors and surrounding fields of corn, we were out of reach of any watchful eyes. This rural setting also made it somewhat of an adventure to reach new, exciting stimuli. The three of us relied heavily on our bicycles for transportation to the awaiting experiences that might shape our memories of childhood and our emergence into adolescence and adulthood.

On a day like most others, after hearing the resounding dial tone of yet another irritated subject of a prank call, we were once again forced to look outside our immediate environment for entertainment. We decided that Rob and I would ride to town to rent a video. I was excited by this possibility because I adored my cousin and felt I could do anything by his side.

The trip was relatively void of conversation or occurrence, perhaps Rob was anxious. Over what, I could not fathom. The heat and humidity both hovered around ninety, and after a half-hour of laborious pedaling we arrived at Viele's. Viele's was an old general store that was the first in our town to advance into the new age of video rentals. Outside, the sun blistered and peeled the old blue paint from the store walls. Opening the door gave way to the whirl and comfort of the air-conditioning inside. Freezers and fridges made up the walls; aisles with candy, chips, and cat food lined the store like the ribs of man, holding everything in place. The videos were kept in a room at the back of the store. The place was deserted besides the cashier reading that week's edition of TV Guide, which adorned the faces of my current favorite, the A-Team. Without hesitation Rob moved through to the doorway. Dehydrated and boyish, I was distracted by the three-foot plastic dog holding a cup of Slush Puppy in the corner. I found myself longing for its sweet, icy nectar, but upon Rob's beckoning I hurried along.

The room was small, empty video boxes lined the walls and an old man was seated in a chair behind the counter with a 15-inch black and white TV, busily working on a crossword puzzle. Glancing up briefly, he greeted us with, "hello men," to which we both responded simply with a nod. Paying no attention to Rob, I began browsing. I was interested in many, but was unfamiliar with most of the titles. Upon seeing a copy of Star Wars I began reminiscing with Rob about our viewing of it atop his parents station wagon at a drive-in theater, which I, of course being four at the time, fell asleep during, when he interrupted me by motioning me to his side. I could tell by his demeanor that I should be prepared to take a risk that I normally wouldn't. When I reached him I noticed that he was holding in his hands a box covered with women wearing nothing but bikini bottoms, the title of which was blurred by my sudden loss of homeostasis. I was flooded by a storm of emotions. I did not recall ever seeing an unclothed bosom until this day and did not know how to react. I fell silent.

My daring cousin approached the counter and I, braving the challenge, followed. The old man was contentedly seated in his tattered green recliner chair. He had been paying us no attention until we arrived at the counter. Laboriously rising from his weathered perch the old
man asked, "All set?" We nodded our heads. "You guys know that you have to be eighteen to rent this, don't you?" He said peering over his glasses, without the familiar, heightened tone of doubt.

I swallowed hard, but Rob responded with confidence, "Yes sir. We certainly do." He paid the old man and we rushed out of the store completely passing by the Slush Puppies and through the exit. We laughed and joked about the old man's lack of intelligence all the way to my house. I was elated. We had, so we thought, fooled him and made off with something we were years from being able to obtain.

When we arrived home I was shocked to learn that Chad was surprised, not by our choice, but that we actually pulled it off. Brimming with anticipation, he immediately popped the tape into the VCR. Those feelings that I swallowed down at Viele's instantaneously began to flow back like an acidic belch. I was terrified of what I was about to see. I had given no thoughts to sexuality before now.

Music, pouty lips, and moans. I was disgusted by the perversity that seemed to linger in the room like the cheap perfume that I imagined was worn, but the unmasked, flesh of these women strangely aroused me. Not blinking, nor thinking, I was neither here nor there.

Trapped between my burning ears, blood was boiling and synapses were flashing. Chad and Rob's approvals, which were increasingly audible, but failing to ever penetrate the confused, heart-poundingly deafened consciousness of the child who struggled to be, formed at first sight of each successive lady's seductive dancing. I was captivated by stomach-turning desire as my mind flashed pictures of the women in my life. Mom, Grandma, and even Aunt Linda. Could they be like this? No! I suddenly hated the men in my life, especially the two who were rushing to become, now sitting here before me drenched in lusty smiles. I was being uprooted from a solid Lego foundation where G.I. Joes and Matchbox Cars captivated their captor. The innocence of childhood was being replaced with the fuzzy desire of something foreign, unknown, and not understood. My daydreams and nightmares would never be the same.

Although horrified by the larger picture of life I had seen painted and splashed across that small screen, I could not quell my dizzying curiosity. The guilt of it all still caused tumult in my tummy. I couldn't help but wonder if, and hope that, this was what Adam felt at his first sighting of Eve, but I still, for a long time, strongly doubted that someone in the Bible could be capable of that sort of perversity. However, I eventually came to terms with my discovery and realized that my behavior and reaction was normal. And from this I had an increased interest in girls; I had realized my strong attraction to the female shape.

That fall I continued on into puberty. Everything moved quickly. Days felt shortened. My changing body was seething with hormones and slowly affirming an undeniable journey into manhood. I timidly, clumsily achieved the adoration of young ladies, surging me into a whole other state of confusion. Relationships! Everything began to seem even more complicated than what I had felt during and after that movie. Summers felt brief and were filled with quests of unrequited puppy love. The days since then have gone by with an even more unrelenting quickness. Now, I am married, and through my journeys I have learned to cope with the opposite sex, and marvel in what she has to offer. I only hope that our days together in autumn are as long as those were once my summer.

-Brett Furguson *
The Last Bonfire

Gather dry wood, make some stacks. Kindling crackles as we feed the starving flames. Need more, need more! Larger, I say. Place it in slowly as to not smother the young inferno. The heat grows thicker as the August air crisps and darkens. Orange light beckons to my friends, running across the field. "Watch out for the groundhog holes!" I warn. They approach with sweet hugs, six-packs of Honey Brown and bottles of Woodchuck Cider.

Stars above watch our fire grow. The flames reach their fiery arms toward Heaven's gate as Dave plays his acoustic guitar, and we sing along. My brother drives the jeep around and lifts the back mechanically. He sits there, and swigs some Woodchuck. Pop, pop, sparkle, and flash—the hymns of the fire. Just lay silently, listen to the crickets, watch the fireflies make love in the air.

"Are there many leeches in the pond?" Asks Geremie as he begins shedding his outer layers. With the fire as a spotlight on his bare bottom, he runs into the stagnant pool as a line of bullfrogs applause this courageous act with kerplunking back into their home. "Hey! Someone come in with me! It feels good!" He laughs and splashes Sarika, who is wrapped up in a red, flannel blanket. Three other people join him, then four, then six! The water feels warm against the chilled air. Spongy mud squishes between our toes while sunfish nibble our ankles.

"Someone feed the fire! It's getting kind of dim!" My brother throws on a branch from the old apple tree, and then there was light. Since Dave is now floating on his back in the middle of the pond, Brian turns on the jeep radio and The Allman Brothers sing their song to me.

Jesse breaks out the marshmallows and chocolate, enough to bribe me back to shore. S'mores begin toasting on freshly whittled sticks. I like to make mine torches burning violently in the air. Dave sits and goldens his with precision. My brother holds them right above the flame so the shell of the marshmallow remains white, but the insides slide down the stick when you try to pull it off.

The hours tick by and we let our blaze die down to reddened coals—just enough to light up individual faces. Pink Floyd softly echoes from the jeep, placing us in a trance. Everyone is lying on their bellies wrapped in blankets, enjoying the moment we created.

Phil will be the first to leave next week. North Carolina is his destination, his wrestling scholarship, his ticket out. Then Dave and Jesse are off to Rochester—where I will join them two weeks later. Sarika's family is moving to Buffalo and she will go to school there to become a nurse. Geremie will live down the street at the State College to study Biology. Nate is remaining home with Mama to be a constant reminder of our high school days.

All is still now, except for the simmer of the cooling coals, Dave's snoring, and the song of morning birds awakening the world. The sun peeks over the wooded hills, and then gathers up the courage to start a new day. The air is fresh. Steam is hovering over the still pond. I snuggle deeper into my Navy sweatshirt, observe my sleeping chums, and allow crystal tears to creep down my cheeks. I will miss this. I will miss them.

-Melissa Japp