



Verbal Equinox

Coordinator's Corner

Sylvia Newman, Writing Center coordinator



In this issue of the Verbal Equinox, the Writing Center honors the winners of the annual Writing Center writing contest. Although it may not seem to be, the contest is an important part of our mission. Most people think of us as, well, a tutoring service and, heaven forbid, a proofreading/editing service. However, our implied and written mission statement is to make better writers, not just better papers.

What better way to fulfill that mission than to give budding writers not only a chance but an incentive to write? Our winners receive a small cash award and, perhaps more important, possible publication. In this issue, we're trying something new: giving commentary about each piece and discussing the qualities that made it a winning entry. As writers and readers, this helps us hone our own skills as we consider these "winning" characteristics.

Our mission to help writers took a gigantic leap this semester from the campus to the community. On October 28, 2002, Weber State University and the Ogden-Weber Community Action Partnership, Inc. officially forged a unique partnership creating the Community Writing Center. Last spring, Carl Porter, Academic Support Services and Programs director, joined us in attending the Rocky Mt. Peer Tutoring Conference at Salt Lake Community College. The tutors were inspired by SLCC's Community Writing Center, housed in Salt Lake's Artspace Bridge Project, and presented the information about it to Carl.

Over the summer, Carl worked with Dr. Anand Dyal-Chand, vice president of Student Affairs, to find a space and funding for the center. When space was offered at the Community Action Center, excitement for the project grew. Dr. Dyal-Chand came through with funding for the staff, and the Center was ready for its October 28th opening.

As a university writing center, we recognize that writing well is essential to success in the academic world. The community writing center recognizes that writing well is essential to success in many areas of everyday life such as gaining and improving employment possibilities, and participating in public affairs. In addition to such practical purposes, however, is the recognition of writing as a creative outlet and venue for personal growth and exploration. The CWC will provide expertise, support and encouragement, as well as writing resources such as grammar handbooks, style books, dictionaries, etc., to writers with a variety of goals and purposes. The Center will also sponsor writing groups and workshops on topics such as resume writing, civic writing, and poetry and fiction writing.

We express gratitude to those who brought the Center into existence and to those volunteers who are providing their time and expertise to bring the Center's mission to fruition. ♦



The Writing Center is located in the Student Services Building **Room #261**.

Monday- Friday 9:00 a.m. to 4:00p.m.

Monday-Thursday 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Saturdays 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

You may reach us during these hours at **626-6463**.

Jello and Mud

D. Louise Brown

1st Place, Fiction

The sound of running water immediately captures my attention. Experience tells me it's a sound I should not ignore. I dash to my son's bedroom, where I can see out the window that faces the back yard.

I wish I couldn't.

My children are engaged in a grim water fight. What started out as washing dirt off their feet (so I'm told later) has erupted into a full-fledged fight, with the hose thrown in for good measure. Shocked, I survey my mob of four squealing kids, watching as they wildly dash bucketfuls of water and spray one another unmercifully with the hose.

All four are covered not only with water, but also with mud. The instructions I'd given them to stay off the area of the lawn newly sown with grass seed have gone unheeded; the furor of their combat has erased all boundaries. Their water war has turned the new lawn into a boggy mire. Not about to let any armament go to waste, they scoop up the gooey ground with great abandon, slinging handfuls of it at one another. Sometimes it hits them with a great, plopping sound. Sometimes it misses them altogether, sailing past to hit the swing set, the picnic table, and the house.

I am mad. No, furious.

Turning, I dash through the house, intent on meting out the justice surely demanded by this appalling mischief. Fortunately, that stalk through the house gives me time to think. I begin by plotting all the ways I will punish them. But after the first few seconds of disciplinary plans tumble through my mind, a soft little memory appears, unsolicited. Instead of stomping through my house on an errand of anger, I'm sitting at my mother's dinner table, an absolutely frozen eight-year-old, staring wide-eyed, petrified with fear ...

It had been a long, day for Mother, one of many in a lifetime of trying to raise a large family on less-than-large means. That day I had watched as she wearily lifted yet another basketful of steaming bottled tomatoes from the large

pot of boiling water on the stove and staggered to the counter to set it on a cloth-covered breadboard.

She had stood at the sink for hours, slipping the pulpy red orbs from their scalded skins, squashing them into quart jars, and tightly screwing on the lids she'd plucked bare-handed from a steaming pan. Rows of tomato-filled quart jars in various stages of cooling lined the cabinet, attesting to her hard work. Bushels of tomatoes hunched nearby, waiting their turn for interment, work that would likely take her into the wee hours of the morning, long after the rest of us lumbered off to sleep.

The newly deposited basket of tomatoes wobbled on the breadboard as she turned away. Then, the unthinkable happened. They slipped from their perch and, tumbling off the slippery breadboard, fell to the floor, exploding in a sea of juice, pulp and glass. Mother's face was set like iron as she silently surveyed the disaster. I watched for a tear. It never came.

Instead, she silently retrieved the broom and dustpan from behind the cupboard and began the filthy task of cleaning up the mess. Down on her knees, she eventually traded the broom for wet rags as she worked to clear the mucky floor.

My brother, two sisters and I had retreated from the scene, mostly in horror, with some sadness trailing us. I wondered if I should try to help, but fear of her sudden anger kept me at bay. We played outside the kitchen door, far enough away to be safe, close enough to be near. Our father came into the house at that moment. We heard the front door slam, heard him walk through the house, heard him enter the kitchen. His words, barely audible, were not kind to Mother. Her responding words were laden with severity. We crouched in our places out on the grass, caught up in the confusing child's dilemma of hearing two beloved people fighting and not knowing what to do. Indecision rooted us where we were. Their voices droned like angry hornets trapped in a small room. No words—just the rise and fall of angrily pitched tones that said nothing and everything.

Like children do, we each retreated into our own thoughts, silenced by the battle. From my crouched position I studied a potato bug before me, watching as he responded to my gentle prodding by rolling into a hard-shelled ball to shelter him from

his perceived hostile world. How could he know I would never hurt him?

The most important element of a good story is a solid plot that includes good characters, conflict and one or more themes. Without these key elements, even the most well written story is doomed to fail. This short story is told simply but succeeds because it tells a compelling and plausible story about the relationship between mothers and their children.

The author then uses many other techniques to highlight the most important parts of the story. The story completes a full circle, beginning at one point, going back in time and coming back the present for the conclusion. The story feels complete and gives the reader a certain sense of satisfaction.

Symbolism makes an obscure idea such as an emotion more readily understandable. The potato bug rolling itself into a ball to shut out the hostile world even though the speaker wasn't really a threat represents the young child's confusion about her parents' arguments. Because of the easily recognized symbol, the reader can visualize a scared child, rolling up inside into a protective ball to protect herself.

Repetition of a concept, event or word accentuates a point. Twice the author mentions tears that should have come but didn't. The event has that much more impact when they finally do.

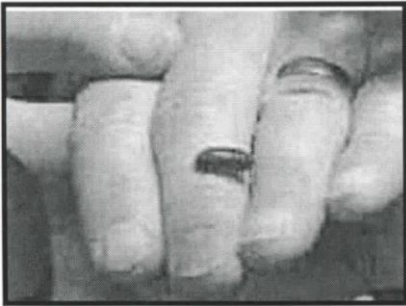
Prose is not as visual as poetry, but form still matters. Sentences only a few words long set off as an entire paragraph accentuate the words and give them more importance, more meaning. Imagery is not restricted to only visual images. A good writer will touch every one of the five senses to let the reader see, hear, taste, smell and touch the story.

The sun beat down on my head. I felt its hot rays on my back, felt the sting slowly enter my cramped, crouching legs,

felt the color rise in my flushed cheeks. But I did not move, believing that if I endured my own self-imposed pain, it *would* somehow take away from the pain being flung around in the kitchen.

The angry exchange eventually crescendoed to a loud pitch, marked with abrupt statements. Perhaps by then we could actually hear the words, but didn't listen. A final explosion, then Father's footsteps back through the house and out the front door that slammed behind him. I waited to hear tears. They didn't come.

Eventually I arose, stumbling as the blood flowed back into my numbed legs. I stepped closer to the screen door, hesitated, then put my hand on the rusty handle and pulled it open, listening to the accompanying shriek of the old spring. I stepped inside, careful to spare Mother from listening to it bang shut by holding my body in its way until it closed softly. The tomatoes and glass on the floor were gone. Mother was screwing the lids on another basketful of tomatoes. I stood silently, watching as she lifted them up into the boiling kettle, then grasped the large, flat lid and settled it on top.



Anger still reigned her every move. She turned to dinner preparations, and though her mouth was set tightly against speaking, her body spoke eloquently of her emotions. She slapped plates down on the table, flung out silverware as though she were pitching horseshoes, and plunked cups down with great vigor. At the stove, she stirred the food with quick, arrested motions, as though every movement came at great expense.

A slow murmur finally escaped her as, under her breath, she began muttering out her frustrations. I do not remember what she said, only that she verbalized in random order all the wrongs of her day, her week, her life. The low, persistent

hum of thought flowed from her like a tiny stream from a swollen dam-small, yet constant, building slowly in form and strength.

Her actions became more abrupt, her words more forceful as she continued her supper preparations. My siblings and I responded immediately to her curt command to get up to the table, cowed by the rising fury we could feel in the room. Helplessly we sat there, a captive audience, watching her movements, listening to her rising voice, and wondering when and if it would all end.

She had worked herself almost to a full yell by the time she opened the refrigerator door and grabbed out the jello salad she'd prepared for supper. She turned and, with a thrust, set it on the table; at least that was her intention. Instead, the bottom of the bowl caught the edge of the table, while the momentum of her thrust kept the top of the bowl in motion. We watched in silent horror as the jello, in a slow-motion movement, spilled out of the bowl. I can still picture the sight of orange jello with whipped cream stirred through it, slithering across the table, surrounding plates and cups and silverware—a surreal, living mass. We four children sat frozen, staring wide-eyed at our mother. Silence reigned for an eternal, breathless moment.

Matchbox In Durance

Malcolm Rasmussen

1st Place, Poetry

Matches whisper words to me
– secrets, on a stick that burns –
a drop of flame that quivers,
shakes,
contorts and shivers in duress.
I force it down the grain,
hold it, drag it down the wood,
in pain, in vain, for answers
that I strain to hear, but left
to search in smoke and embers;
sins and secrets, last confessions,
from one dead tear of flame.

I snatch the next and strike it up
to tell me what the last would not.

(Review on page 5).

And then my mother began to giggle. Just as her angry voice had worked to a pitch, now her helpless giggle worked up to a roar of laughter. We watched in great astonishment as her rigid body slowly folded into a heap and slid to the floor while torrents of laughter escaped her, filling the air with a music we hadn't thought possible.

She gasped for air, tried to stifle the giggles, and then helplessly lost control again as she glanced at the still-spreading mass on the table. She finally allowed herself to totally succumb and simply laid back on the worn linoleum, letting the laughter overtake her completely, giggling herself to an exultant exhaustion. The tears I had awaited all day finally appeared, springing not from anger but from hilarity.

Her abandoned mirth was contagious. After the initial shock, we slid from our chairs to join her on the floor. With our mother's sweet laughter goading us on, we found ourselves as lost in the moment as she. For a long time we prompted one another to round after round of laughter simply by rising to our knees to look at the orange, mottled mass. Tears rolled down our faces and our breath came in gasps.

We loved our mother that day, possibly more than ever before.

...I have reached the back yard.
My water-flinging, mud-covered children suddenly spot me; their delighted screams abruptly die. They freeze in their places, wide-eyed, breathless, waiting.

I know that look in their eyes. I know that fear.

I reach down and pick up a handful of mud. ❖

Write Away, Ben!

Ben Simons

3rd Place, Nonfiction

"That's a very nice picture Ben. What's the story behind it?" Ms. Herlin had a sneaky, but effective way of making a learning experience become an adventure for me. My mind instantly kicked into overdrive and before I could open my mouth to answer her question, she stated, "Why don't you write it down, that way you'll remember it longer."

After lunch on Friday of every week, everyone in class received a white sheet of paper with a picture on top and ten perfectly straight lines underneath. The boys were given cool pictures of cars, planes, and robots. The girls received pictures of princesses, flowers, and ponies. Our weekly "activity," as Ms. Herlin called it, was to make up any story that we desired: as long as the story could in some way be connected to the picture.

"Writing for fun is the only way to write," Ms. Hedin would proclaim. She was right. Writing had instantly become my favorite activity, following recess, of course. I wrote freely and easily about anything I wanted to, freely and easily without any worry of whether my paper would be returned with a red "star" or a black "moon." Friday afternoon was now the opening day for a blockbuster movie in which I was simultaneously the producer, director, and star.

What does she mean I only have ten lines to write my story!?! That was simply not enough. I was a quick study, however, and learned to write swiftly in the time allotted, so swiftly that I "accidentally" had to fill up the empty space on the other side of the paper with my adventure. Ms. Herlin didn't seem to mind too much. I could always tell she was reading my story; she would flip over the paper and smile.

There was a clever little girl named Shannon Easley who always wanted to write her story with the picture assigned to the boys. My fellow brethren found this to be quite irritating, much like that child at every birthday party who had to open the gift that he or she had brought with them. I, on the other hand, thought Shannon was cool and, much to the dismay of my male cohorts, she and I exchanged letters weekly.

That which began so sweetly in the first grade would be utterly destroyed the year after. Mrs. Ord was some unfortunate child's grandmother, I'm sure. She was the kind of grandmother who almost certainly gave you a piece of fruit, or those itchy wool socks as Christmas presents. Everything that happy Ms. Hedin encouraged, mean old Mrs. Ord condemned. "You are not to sketch pictures on your assignment, Ben. This is writing time, not art!" That short sentence would immediately block my creative activities for the next seven years. As a result, for the next seven years, I hated to write about anything that had to do with school. It was seven years of famine; the creative river of "fun" had abruptly ceased to flow.

The first day of high school brought with it an exceptional nervousness. Mrs. Bedell, my second period English teacher, could sense my nervousness ten miles away. After class I approached her and inquired if there were any possible way I could be removed from "college prep" and placed in "basic" English. "I think there has been a mistake," I stated with concern.

"I don't think I belong in this class." Mrs. Bedell answered
"You seem to know what you

Every writer suffers from an obstacle that prevents his or her writing from flourishing. For some, writing mechanics like grammar and organization stand between writers and the success they are chasing. Generating ideas that provide support for a thesis give other writers trouble. With practice and help, writers will conquer these hindrances, but there is one hurdle in particular that even veteran writers constantly encounter-anxiety. Ben Simons' paper "Write Away Ben" faces that obstacle, looks it square in the eyes, and steps over it.

Ask any writer if he or she has moments when the task of writing seems impossible and the answer will always be yes. Any writer who says otherwise probably does not write often enough to experience the anxiety attributed to writing. For some writers-and I sense this in Ben's writing-facing the anxiety and overcoming it is part of what makes writing satisfying. Ask the athlete if winning the big game leaves him or her with a sense of accomplishment, of triumph, of satisfaction, and even the humblest athlete will have something to say about the thrill of winning. It is the same way for a writer.

For the English 1010 student who may be encountering serious writing assignments for the first time, overcoming anxiety may be easier said than done. Deadlines are more stringent in college than high school, so beginning immediately is very important. Many Intro to Writing professors assign a personal essay during the semester. Ben's essay is a good example of what will be expected for that assignment. The personal essay provides the ideal opportunities for young writers to not only discover their writing styles but to explore themselves. Discovering self and style through writing reveals to writers what they know and how best to express what they know. With the honing of these skills, writing becomes second nature and anxiety diminishes. When writing becomes more natural, the task no longer seems tedious and difficult, but fun and effortless.

In Ben's case, his writing anxiety stemmed from a past teacher who discouraged his philosophy that all writing should be a fun activity. Granted not everyone's writing anxiety shares a similar origin, but anxiety is anxiety. As Ben's experiences show, sometimes the best cure for anxiety is encouragement. Ms. Herlin said it best: "Writing for fun is the only way to write." Viewing writing anxiety as a challenge to overcome rather than an obstacle to stumble over is the first step toward successful writing experiences. It is inevitable that every writer will stumble at least once expect it, but learning experiences are not meant to be 'discouraging. Writing anxiety will be a writer's constant companion, but as Ben describes, writing without fear is like having wings.

need for your grade level, but if you are really unsure ...why don't you come in after school? There is a test that will determine exactly where you should be." Two days later the test results were in. "Ben, will you see me after class, please?" Finally! Now I can get out of here! I could not wait to see what the test results were.

"You're right," Mrs. Bedell affirmed. "You don't belong in this class. You should be in honors." You know, it's quite an incredible feeling when things don't turn out as planned. "Ben...Ben...did you hear what I just said?" My mind was totally blank. "Yes, Mrs. Bedell. I heard ...what you ...just said." It was right there in black and white, three little numbers that instantly removed seven years of traumatic feelings. Seven years of believing I was the "dumb kid" in class. Seven years of writing so poorly that no teacher would ever think about sharing my paper with anyone. Seven years of creative writing misery had finally come to an end.

I continued in "college prep" classes for the remainder of my high school years. It would take another two years of writing to completely recover. Two years of "therapy" to regain what Mrs. Ord had so ignorantly stolen from me so many years ago. Our final writing assignment for Mrs. Johnson's senior English class would become the crowning achievement in all of my writing activities up to that point. The final assignment: To compare and contrast a movie with someone in your life. It became immediately clear that the supreme powers of "writing for fun" had been restored. It was now time to make known my arrival with utter delight.

The movie *Christmas Vacation*, starring Chevy Chase, was chosen as the vehicle to deliver my bittersweet return from retirement. I watched and I laughed and I studied, then laughed some more. My final paper would be absolutely and positively perfect in every way, shape, and form. That familiar and reassuring feeling of writing without worry had finally come back. No longer was I under the influence of Mrs. Ord's evil spell. I was amazed and astonished at the speed with which I wrote. Ten pages were completed almost overnight. My literary work of art was finished one week before it was due. The feelings of excited anticipation made it nearly impossible for me to sleep. Three days after I turned in the assignment, I arrived in class, and sat down at my desk.

"Why is Mrs. Johnson writing my name on the chalkboard!?! Great, she probably thinks that my final paper is the work of another," I thought with despair. "Ben, will you stand up please," Mrs. Johnson asked. My heart sank to the floor; my vision began to fade. I had difficulty breathing: how can this be happening again? I was completely filled with terror. Should I pretend to be sick? That's it, I'll just run out of the classroom and act as though I didn't hear what she said. I had been hovering above cloud nine since completing the paper. My wings had been clipped, and in an instant I was mentally transported back to that day in Mrs. Ord's class, still reeling from her words of abhorrence so long ago.

"Class," Mrs. Johnson announced with seriousness, "I want you to join me in a round of applause. Ben has been selected for the Honor Roll." I was smiling so wide that it was impossible for anyone but Mrs. Johnson to see that my eyes were watering. All I could do was smile. Those 15 seconds of fame were exquisite. "Are you all right?" Mrs. Johnson inquired.

"I'm fine," I replied, "I'm fine."

"I'd like to see you after class. There is something I would like to ask you in regards to your paper," she confided. "I knew this was too good to be true," I mumbled to myself, "Perhaps Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Ord are related? They've probably been in contact with each other the entire year!"

The final bell rang and everything turned to slow motion. I walked to Mrs. Johnson's desk with the excitement of man about to be read his last rites. "Ben, I have read your paper several times," she revealed. "I would like to keep it, if you don't mind, and use it as an example of an 'A' paper."

"What did you just say? Would you repeat that please?" I half-jokingly replied.

"I have been teaching for many years, I have kept two examples of great papers. I would like to have yours as a third if it's all right with you." I left school that day feeling absolutely invincible. How did I get home? I don't even remember. Perhaps it was my wings that got me there. I have but one regret: I never thanked my teachers for how happy they made me, but somehow, I think they already knew. ❖

Review: Matchbox in Durance

(from page 3)

I am grabbed right away by the poem's clever title. It draws the reader in and makes me, personally, want to continue reading. It is also linked directly to the text of the poem, which helps. I liked this also because the images are so vivid. I have a very clear picture of the matches and the flames they produce: "a drop of flame that quivers, shakes/contorts and shivers in duress." We are also told, very clearly, the relationship the speaker has with the matches: "matches whisper words to me."

Beyond that, it is not just a poem about a book of matches but is full of emotion and feeling. I sense a search for answers, which we can all relate to on some level, as well as a certain amount of pain. For some reason, there is something intensely appealing in reading of another's struggle.

My favorite part of the poem is the structure. The break in between the stanzas makes the last lines powerful. The first stanza seems to carry the reader along with it in the same search for answers. But the last stanza makes a statement that would not be as striking if it were connected to the other stanza.

This poem is personal without being invasive, emotional without clutter, and just distant enough to allow the reader to relate and draw personal conclusions.

Heat Wave

Jennifer L. Ryujiin

Honorable Mention, Fiction

The truth was that Charlotte Carver was angry. Angry that her daughter tripped, angry that the ambulance couldn't get there fast enough, angry that it wasn't someone else's kid. She knew it was wrong, but nevertheless, it was the truth.

It happened on the last day of school. Her daughter was on the playground, running around with her friends. She had just started taking cello lessons. Her teacher said she was very gifted. Had a knack for it, could probably go through high school with it. So Charlotte Carver, being the responsible and doting mother she had always been, chose for her daughter, Lynn, the most expensive cello in the music store. "Top of the line," the salesman gushed, straightening his monochromatic tie. "It will last a lifetime!"

And then she tripped. The grass had just been watered for the second time that day. The town had been going through what was known as a "heat wave." Two semi-pro football players had collapsed and died during practice. Animals were found in the fields of tall grass, mouths open and facing the sun. "Some hearts just can't take this heat!" people said. "But these children, they have good hearts, good temperament!" Children without swamp coolers ran to houses that hummed. The heat dripped with desperation off everything it came in contact with.

*

The day after the accident, the city called a meeting for all of the fifth grade children. The principal, Mr. Forrester, had dark, faded circles around his eyes and his knuckles. He sat all the children down in plastic fold-out chairs. The teachers stood at the ends of each row with boxes of tissue.

"Boys and girls," Mr. Forrester began, "Yesterday, your friend Lynn Carver had an accident." He paused and glanced over their faces and then continued. "She fell, and well, she hit her head awful hard, and well, they tried to save her at the hospital. They did the best they could, but nothing could be done."

He blinked and felt nothing in his eyes. He had cried all he could yesterday. The reality: the blood stained hair, the awkward breathing, the pungent smell of wet grass as he knelt beside her. It would not leave him.

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"I need to return this cello please." Charlotte Carver stood quietly over the glass counter. Her eyes and her mouth felt swollen. She touched the case gently and handed it to the man behind the counter.

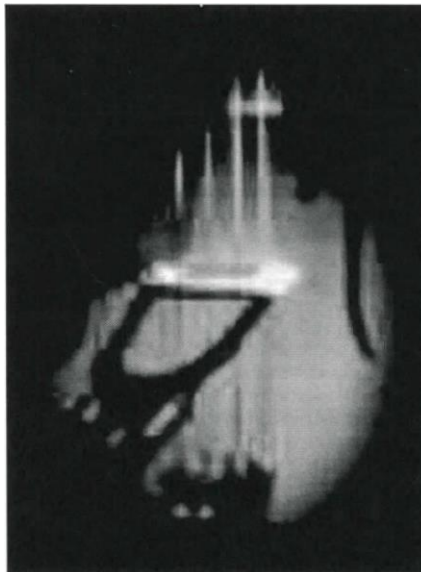
"You are a month behind on your payment," a prim looking man with a large, slender nose stated simply. He grabbed at his solid yellow tie, straightening it slightly.

"I'm very sorry about that," she apologized, "some things happened and..." "Do you know store policy?" "Excuse me?"

"Have you read the policy that came with the cello upon purchase?"

"No, I haven't really had time to..." "Well, it clearly states that if you miss a single payment, you are legally bound to the cello. Is that understood, Mrs. Carver? Inducing that, in this case, a return is not applicable." He handed the case back across the counter.

"Sir, if you would just listen to me..." "Ma'am, how do you expect me to run a business when you don't stick to the agreement? When you refuse to think that any set of morals or regulations apply to you? Do you think I can keep this building by giving mothers free cellos? Now I really must say that I don't think I can help you, beyond this point. If you will just step away from the glass..." As he spun around toward



the back room, she grabbed onto his sleeve.

"You listen to me! This is my daughter's cello... She died a month ago-" she yanked his sleeve harder. "She was running around the school yard with her friends on the last day of school. She tripped over a sprinkler, and hit her head on the sidewalk! Do you hear me, you weasel, you thoughtless f---! She's dead. She'll never come home to me again. She'll never play this cello again. I don't want it! Don't you see, without my daughter, it's useless?" she said this last part with calmness.

She set the cello on the glass counter, which was now smudged, and left the store. The bell connected to the door let out an alarming shriek as she pushed it open.

She walked downtown for several blocks. She inhaled the scent of freshly baked bread from the bakery. She watched the endless stream of taxis, buses, and cars traveling down the boulevard. She felt the steam rising off the melting asphalt, which was lined with bits of broken rock and glass.

And although she tried, she could not think of anything as small birds flew from tree to tree, landing awkwardly on each branch, staying a short while on each.

*

The following day, a large package arrived. Charlotte Carver signed for it and carried it into the house. She removed the small card. *To the mother of Lynn Carver. We are sorry for your loss. Please keep her cello as a condolence from us.* She slammed the front door quickly, shutting out all remaining light. She unwrapped the package and removed the instrument.

She held onto the handle tightly as she carried it up the flight of stairs. It was heavy and knocked against the banisters as she continued to climb. She listened to the creaking until she reached the top. She walked into her daughter's empty room, empty except for brown cardboard boxes that lined the walls, filled with her things.

She sat down on the hardwood floor, bringing the cello down with her. She set the case across the floor. She opened it up, pushing the lid over the top. The case resembled an open casket. She got out

the cello and put her arms around it. She cradled it between her legs and rested the side of her face beside its neck. It was smooth. It smelled of pine, of oil. It smelled of her daughter. Her fingers sat motionless on the strings. She sat there for a while like that, listening to herself breathe. She leaned against the wall which was across from her daughter's spacious window. The sun had started moving downward, beginning to disappear. She shifted against the wall, feeling the coldness push against her back. It had been a month since that day, the last day of school. And it seemed as if the heat wave was finally ending. ❖

This is a beautifully crafted story with enough pathos to strike a chord. The author was able to relate the heat wave in the town to the feelings of the mother and successfully drew the story to a conclusion. The sense of irony prevalent in the line, "It will last a lifetime!" is immediately apparent. The second section of the story shares the feelings of Mr. Forrester, the principal, in a way that allows for a different level of emotion. It indicates that others were affected by the death of this little girl and leaves the reader feeling that these vignettes could be expanded to include any and all who knew Lynn. The short, terse sentences used to describe Charlotte's feelings after she returns Lynn's cello work much better than a large paragraph. The reader can experience the feelings with Charlotte. The craft, and the amazing imagery, are what make this story extremely readable.

Antidepressant: The Emotionless Drug

April Starr Harkness
2nd Place, Nonfiction

We were headed to Ben's House of Bonsai, a beautiful yet eccentric shop in Salt Lake City that has a Japanese garden leading to the actual store. We wanted to take a tour of the garden and possibly buy a bonsai. Joel had picked me up because my car was in the shop being repaired. We were headed southbound on Interstate 15, just past Sugar House,

when a pickup truck zipped into the lane we were in, pushing us into the cement barrier to the left of the highway. Joel pressed on his brakes, but it didn't help much because he was going almost 85 miles per hour, and it was hard to stop the momentum. I could almost hear the paint of Joel's white Honda Civic being scraped off by the sandpaper-like barrier. I felt myself slowly black out and quickly awaken to a confused state. Smoke unfurled its way from the hood of the car, horns honked, traffic slowed, and people everywhere stared at the sight. When I realized what had happened, I jerked my head as far as I could toward the driver's seat. Joel was sitting with his hands clenched to the stirring wheel. He wasn't bleeding and he looked like he was all right, but was he? He was staring straightforward with an emotionless expression on his face, reminding me of a manikin or a doll. I was crying and felt like I was going to lose my stomach. Through a quivering voice, I asked, "Joel, are you okay?" He turned his head toward my voice without releasing his hands from the wheel, and in an almost eerie monotone voice said, "Yes."

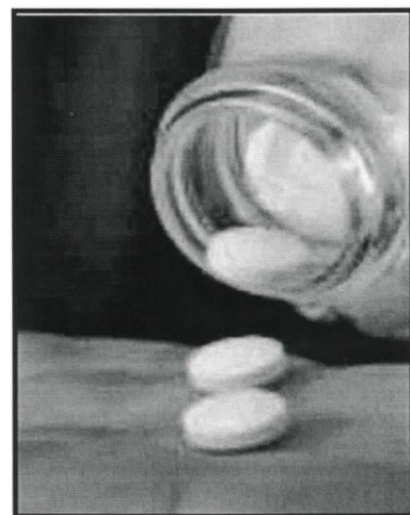
Nearly 20 million Americans suffer from some type of depression. According to *WebMD Medical News*, one in four women and one in ten men will be diagnosed with depression within their lifetime. There are many different types of antidepressant medications available, but there is little to determine which medicine will work best for you (also found in *WebMD Medical News*). Joel has been diagnosed with a chemical imbalance of serotonin in his brain which doctors believe causes depression.

Depression is a common medical condition that can hinder a person functioning in their work, family, and social life. The exact cause of depression is not clear. No one is sure why some people get depressed and others do not. Sometimes, depression seems to happen because of a stressful event. Sometimes it seems to happen for no reason at all. Today, it is widely recognized that depression is a medical condition that may be associated with an imbalance in the delicate chemistry of the brain. If this imbalance occurs, it might affect the way people feel and the way they see the world.

The symptoms of depression, as with any other illness, may differ from person to person. Not everyone will have the same symptoms. Some symptoms include a

persistent sad mood, loss of interest or pleasure in most activities, change in appetite or weight, and trouble sleeping.

Joel has been my friend for years now. I have seen him in his darkest moments of depression. I have seen him face all of the symptoms that are listed above, plus some. I have also seen Joel when he takes the antidepressant medication that his doctor prescribes to him, and, to be honest, I don't know whether taking the medication or being depressed would be better for him. I question this because when Joel takes his medication, it causes him to become emotionally numb. He isn't sad, but he isn't happy. He has said to me many times, "I feel like a zombie. I have no emotion. Everything is gray. Nothing is horrible and nothing can be wonderful. When I take my medication, the only way I know that I am still alive is that I am breathing."



How harmful could taking antidepressants be? In "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream," Lucille Miller is convicted of murdering her husband. Lucille and her husband were driving in their 1964 Volkswagen when it came to a stop, caught fire, and began to burn. Somehow, Lucille got out of the burning car, but her husband did not even have the chance because he was drugged-up with medication prescribed by his doctors. "...He had enough Nembutal and Sandoptal in his blood to put the average person to sleep." Nembutal and Sandoptal are drugs known for being prescribed for depression. Whether or not Lucille Miller (*continued on page 8*)

(continued from page 7)

murdered her husband-he did not even have the chance to escape from the burning car he died in. *New Statesman* came out with a warning that patients being offered antidepressants were often "not told about issues such as withdrawal problems or ... a possible risk of increased suicidal behavior." Infact, all this came in the wake of a court case, brought by the family of a man who, a few days after being put on a antidepressant for sleeping problems, shot his daughter, his grandchildren, and then himself. The court agreed with the family's claim that the SSRIs, (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors), which are antidepressants, had contributed to his behavior, and awarded them \$6.4 million. This was the second case linking SSRIs with suicide to be settled in court, but more than 200 have been settled out of court. This is a drastic example of the possible negative effects taking antidepressants can create. Some other common side effects are stomach cramps, diarrhea, hair loss, indigestion, nausea, weight loss or gain, blurred vision, irregular pulse, extremely fast or slow heartbeat, difficulty breathing, confusion, dizziness, trembling, and others.

How successful are antidepressants to those who take them? *The British Medical Journal* printed an article about a randomized double blind study that was conducted in May 1999. Randomized double blind is the most accurate kind of study because it involves a variety of different groups of people such as those with different genders, cultures, and backgrounds. The study also does not inform the people involved in the study of others that may be involved. This study evaluated the efficacy of emotional support and counseling combined with a placebo or an antidepressant in the treatment of depression. The study was conducted in several locations in Norway for 24 weeks among 372 patients with depression (none were aware of the possibility of a placebo). After 24 weeks, the study showed that 47 percent of the patients who were taking the placebo claimed to be dealing with their depression much better than before, and 61 percent of the patients who were taking the real antidepressant claimed to be dealing with their depression much better than before. Just a little more than half of the patients were "much improved" after

taking the antidepressants, which is only a little better than the placebo. Perhaps antidepressants are not as helpful as some assume them to be; maybe there are other more efficient and safer ways of dealing with depression. Forty-seven percent of the patients seemed to be doing better after taking what they thought to be an antidepressant, which indicates that the only thing that was helping with their condition was the emotional support and counseling provided by the study. Could counseling and other alternative therapies be as or more effective than drugs for depression?

April's paper is a wonderful example of how personal experience can combine with scholarly research to create a well-developed paper.

Her introduction stands out because it captures the reader's attention through a compelling narration. She clearly discusses depression and its symptoms, providing the reader with a background in depression before discussing antidepressants.

Her examples within the body of her paper clearly reinforce her claim that antidepressants may not always be the best way to deal with depression. The simple double space provides an effective transition between her narrative of Joel in paragraph one and the factual information in the second paragraph.

The introduction implies that he suffers from depression, but the author does not state this information until later. Saving the rest of the narrative and the revelations about Joel's depression for the conclusion is a cogent way emphasize Joel's emotionless state and to "bookend" the research with the narrative that shows the relevance of the research to her own life.

According to *The Cleveland Clinic*, a health treatment that is not classified as standard medical practice is referred to as "alternative." Alternative therapies include everything from altering diet and exercise to mental conditioning and making lifestyle changes. Examples of alternative therapies include acupuncture, guided imagery,

chiropractic treatments, yoga, hypnosis, biofeedback, relaxation, herbal remedies, massage, and many others. For example, guided imagery is a form of focused relaxation that helps create harmony between the mind and body. Guided imagery coaches you in creating calm, peaceful images in your mind-a "mental escape" for therapeutic purposes. It can be a powerful psychological strategy to enhance a person's coping skills. Charlotte E. Grayson, MD, of *The Cleveland Clinic*, states, "It can help people cope with-and possibly overcome-stress, anger, pain, depression, insomnia, and other problems."

About two years ago, Joel decided to try other ways to help lessen his depression. He did not want to feel numb from medication for the rest of his life. I was skeptical when he first decided to do it on his own, but since then, I have seen him learn how to deal with his depression even though it is a chemical imbalance in his brain that he supposedly should not be able to fix on his own. It took him a long time to find what he could do to prevent his depression without medication. It was a process of a lot of trial and error. Now, when he becomes depressed, he will read, write, listen to music, pray, exercise, go on a walk, or call a friend (like me) to talk with, and he can and does begin to feel better.

"Joel, aren't you started?" I asked, still seated in the damaged car.

"I know that something bad just happened, but I don't feel it," he answered with a blank look on his face. I looked with amazement and wonder at my friend whose body was calm yet melancholy, then I looked at my own body-it was trembling with fright and high emotions. How would it be to not be able to feel any emotion? No joy, no sorrow. To live in a world painted gray, with constant hovering clouds-no sunshine, no rain.

It has been a long time since I have seen Joel really depressed. He seems to be a lot happier now-more than he could be before. I never realized the emptiness Joel must have felt while taking antidepressants until I saw his emotionless face that day after the car crash when we were going to Ben's House of Bonsai. ❖

The Bleating

Matthew Bass

3rd Place, Poetry

We watched the goat in the ravine bottom,
Obscured from view as she pressed her side
Firmly and heavily against the steep wall,
The only solid hand around
To help push and bleat out of pain, the discomfort
That comes with new life. The kid's legs and head
Dangle and sway to his mother's breathing movements,
Waiting for the pressure applied by a steady wall
Of persistent that will bring the bulk of the body
Like inflated bellows exhaling all the air out
The ravine stands by his mother during his birthing.
When the sound of release came, the entire mass
Flowed into a pile of bag and reeds
Dark with moisture and blood.

Like that day, after crossing the street,
Sonia told us that Juvenia, the husbandless
14-year-old I had met my first day in town,
with bulging belly had lost it during the night.
We found her at a friend's, under covers, not
Wanting to speak. We settled near by for a time
Waiting with the heaviness of the room for
Her to bleat out the pain and discomfort
And the loss that was hers.

"The Bleating" is a poem that deals with the universal themes of birth and death. However, these themes are made new and interesting because of the connections this poem makes and because of the beautiful imagery within the poem that reinforces those connections.

One central connection this poem makes is between the isolation of birthing and isolation of death. This poem "shows" rather than "tells" because we as readers are able to discern this sense of isolation from the images; note that the poem does not contain the words "isolation" or "lonely" nor does it come out and spell out exactly how the reader should feel.

This poem begins with an image of a goat who is being observed but seems alone in its pain and discomfort because it is "obscured" and only has a "steep wall" to support it.

The reader can sympathize with the goat's isolation and pain because the animal is a mother; and though the imagery of the birth is vivid, it is not grotesque enough to distract us from the goat's plight.

The second part, or stanza, of the poem, also uses images to express the isolation of a mother, but this time the isolation and pain is coming from the infant's death.

Despite the images of death, isolation, and pain, I did not find this to be a depressing poem. The ending lines speak of waiting for the "bleating out" of pain, which suggests that this pain can be released. Also, at the end of this poem, the young mother does have others with her who are waiting supposedly to offer what help they can. In the young mother's isolation, others are willing, and in fact "waiting" to connect with her.

Changing Winds

Kent Rounkles

1st Place, Nonfiction

It was in late June, and the hot part of the summer months was beginning. The job that I had held for four years had been eliminated when a friend asked if I would be interested in re-varnishing the logs on his cabin at Powder Mountain before the winter set in.

The day I began working was June 21, 1999, which will forever be etched on my memory. It was windy and cloudy when I started up the canyon in the early morning hours. It also was my son's birthday. I had told him that we would do something to celebrate when I returned from work that night. I stopped to get a soft drink and chips to go with the sandwich that I had made at home that morning. The wind was howling down the canyon, but as soon as I

got past the mouth of the canyon, it wasn't as bad. I continued up the canyon and passed the dam. The sun was trying to peak from behind the clouds, which led me to believe that the weather would be better on top of the mountain.

I arrived at the cabin, got out and stretched my legs. I opened the back of the truck to let out my dog, Angel, who can be a bit of Satan when she wants to be. Here in the mountains she could run and chase whatever she wanted, never catching anything but having lots of fun trying. After I got my tools out of the back of the truck, I walked up to the cabin. All my ladders were already at the job site as I had taken them up previously to get an early start that Monday morning.

The wind was blowing about ten to 20 miles per hour up on the ridges. The T-shirt and cut-offs that I had worn made me look like a California beach burn ready for hot

weather, except this day was cold. Lucky for me I had a pair of coveralls in the back of the truck to help stop the wind from going through me. I started setting up my large ladders at the back of the cabin, which was very tall—probably 30 feet to the top of the gable. I set up walking planks between two ladders so I could stand while I brushed the sealer on the logs. All the time the wind was still blowing up the ridge, nearly blowing me off the planks. I got down to decide if I should stay off the high ladders and instead work on the lower portion of the cabin.

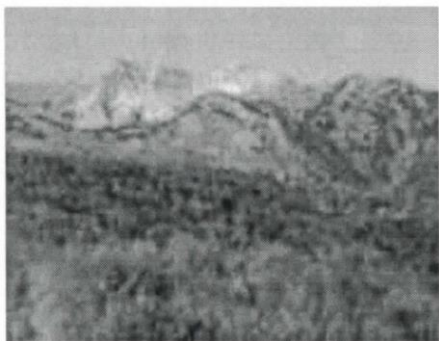
I saw my faithful dog, Angel, running towards me in the horizon. As she sat down beside me, we shared peanuts that I always have with me. This gave me a chance to assess the situation at hand.

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Another gust of wind come up about the time I took a drink of my soda. I told myself that I had better stay off the high work until the winds died down for safety reasons. The dog went off to terrorize the squirrels. For the end of June, this was a cold day. The east side had the least amount of wind, but it was still blowing pretty hard. I would have left for the day except that it was so far to travel to work up on the top of the mountain. That was a mistake I will live with for the rest of my life.

I usually start at the top of a building and work down, but today I decided to start at the bottom and work up. After I finished all the areas within my reach, I needed to change positions. I grabbed an aluminum-folding ladder that was close by instead of setting up the extension ladder, which was all the way toward the end of the cabin. I set the ladder up on the sharply angled slope and started to ascend. I reached the fourth rung of the ladder when it buckled beneath me. As I fell, my left foot wedged down between two rocks; the rest of my body landed down the slope. POP! I heard the most eerie sound I had ever heard in my life—it seemed to echo through the winds. A sharp pain ran through my leg, a pain like I had never experienced before. It was definitely a bad new feeling.



The pain was excruciating; I looked at my ankle. Two ivory white bones stuck out of my leg just above the ankle. My foot was like rubber and was going numb. The blood was turning the dirt around my leg into a crimson mud puddle. I started to turn about as white as a newly cleaned sheet hanging on the clothesline. I had the presence of mind to know that it was not a good time to take a little nap, which was sounding very

appealing. I knew if I did, I would not have awakened from it. So I said to myself, "Don't lose your cool as there is no one around to help you. First thing to do is to get the bleeding under control."

I ripped my shirt into a strip to wrap around my leg. The pain was almost unbearable as I stretched towards a branch that was barely out of my reach. I managed to break off just enough to finish making a tourniquet. As I started to twist it tightly, I noticed that it was working—the bleeding was beginning to slow down.

There were not many options as I pondered my situation; I could either try to slide down to my truck to drive myself to the hospital or yell for help and hope that someone would hear me. The first option was not a good one because if I did make it to my truck, I would either pass out from the pain or cut another main artery and bleed to death.

I choose the second option and yelled for help in ten-minute intervals. Time seemed endless as I waited between yells for someone to come. Meanwhile the wind was still blowing up the hill taking my screams away from the possibility of any human ear hearing them. About that time Angel gave me a big lick on the face as if to show her concern. I wished that she was like Lassie on TV and would go fetch help. Unfortunately, that was not going to happen.

I thought of a third option at that time; it was time to ask the One who is always watching over us for His divine help. He, must have had his ears open that day, or it just wasn't my time to see him. After I had said a prayer to Him, the wind changed directions blowing my screams down the hill toward a maintenance shop at the ski resort. Two men heard and ran to my aid. The first one to reach me happened to be a member of the ski patrol and was adept in trauma injuries. He told me he had seen a lot of broken legs but nothing like this one.

As he started to apply pressure on the leg to further slow the bleeding, the other medic called for help on his radio. I said, "Do the best that you can. I feel that I'm probably going to go out for awhile." He cautioned me to stay alert if possible to give vital information to the medical team, which was on the way. I don't understand why they didn't call send for a helicopter, but at that point, I didn't care. I just wanted to get to a hospital where they could give me something for the pain. About the time that

they inserted an IV and put on a splint, I went unconscious. I woke up going down the canyon in an ambulance. Even though the doctor could not be reached by radio, the medic gave me something to ease the unbearable pain.

Meanwhile someone at the hospital had called my wife to tell her that I had broken my leg. She thought she would pick me up and drive me home, but found out differently when she realized how seriously I was injured. Dr. Franklin Stuart, who is one of the best orthopedic surgeons, arrived to set the leg and instead insisted on getting an operating room ready as soon as possible. He would try to save the leg but made no promises. I went into surgery at 7:00p.m. and was finished at 2:00a.m.

When I woke in my hospital bed that morning, the first thing that I did was check my leg to see if it was still there. Thank the Lord, it was. I know that the Lord answers prayers because that day He made the winds to change. ❖

After reading "Changing Winds" I feel like I know who Kent Rounkles is. His voice comes through loud and clear in every line of his essay. He's the man next door who always helps us when our cars are stuck, or he's my husband's buddy at work. I think we all know him.

One of the strengths of this piece is that it clearly lays out a picture of what is happening. Being familiar with Powder Mountain, I was with him as he drove up the canyon and started working on the cabin. I could feel the wind tugging at him as he tried to paint and feel his isolation after he was injured.

The major strength of the piece is its honesty and purpose. It demonstrates the author's view of the world and he openly shares that with the reader. Not only was it entertaining but inspiring.

Beyond The Veil

Malcolm Rasmussen
2nd Place, Fiction

And now, at last, a voice-many voices-seemed to echo from afar, voices from beyond the veil perhaps.

"Remember," they said, "and beware. This is the Great Test!"

I've always thought that the notion of angels having wings was a bit sentimental, or at least a misconception. However, having been one to have crossed that great divide, I can tell you from experience...well, you still don't.

But there is a certain freedom, almost a weightless flight, as if you're aloft on wings of something you've been denied for so very long, or maybe just a moment. Either way, it was missed. Funny; no feathers.

Perhaps

metaphorical ironies are Death's joke on Life.

"You have a pencil, right?"

"A...pencil?" The angelic face of an old man peered at me in mock contempt. He might have been handsome, even for his age, if he weren't forcing his own wrinkles with scrutiny. His gold plated nametag read, "Proctor".

"Are you daft, boy? A pencil!" I stared at him blankly for a minute-or eternity-before he started away in a huff, throwing up his white robed arms in exasperation. "Countless thousands, crowds upon multitudes and masses of mortal souls come back from that rock everyday. They bring their 'holier than thou' attitudes, their earth muddied shoes," he began counting his fingers, "and damnit, they even bring their pets!" He turned to me with this, looking wide-eyed and dangerous as if I might dare drag the statement into controversy. "But," his voice leering closer, "how many of them think to bring a pencil?"

I felt as though he had some

invisible finger projected from a distance staring me down between the eyes.

"Ummm...", I hesitated, understandably, wondering if the question was rhetorical, "...none?"

Pause. I think the universe skipped beats in that moment. His gaze locked with mine for decades before he pivoted flamboyantly on his heels, scuffing tufts of metaphorical cloud puff in his wake, and walking away. "No, Chaucer did. Wouldn't leave the damn thing on Earth, amusingly enough, considering where it got him here..."

He blinked off the meandering thought. "Well, are you coming, or does eternity in that very spot bide well with you?"

"Oh, no, sorry sir. I'm coming ...wait! What did I need a pencil for?"

"Don't be daft, boy! The written, of course..."

I caught up with him near two large, awkward looking gates, both infinitely vast. We stopped before the mahogany desk of a thin, middle aged-yet strangely youthful-librarian looking woman. She was leaning back in a rickety old chair with a copy of *Death Is A Lonely Business*.

"Bradbury?" I asked.

"You were expecting what, the nine commandments?" she answered in monotone sarcasm and without disturbing her pace.

"Nine?"

"Nine!" Proctor spat. "He was kidding about that whole 'six days you shall labor and do all your work' thing." The geezerly angel crooned mockingly. "He himself likes long weekends, you know. That's why Mondays always suck...there's no one watching." He stopped to interject something. "And *don't* get me started on Bradbury! That ol' git and his typewriter! Wouldn't leave the damn thing back on Earth. Click, clack, click, friggin' click, clack, clack..." He sputtered onomatopoeias across the heavens, each wavering into damnation with the displeasure of his voice. "If we had wanted noise, we wouldn't have kept that damn Hemingway out! Now Pearl, open that gate of yours, would you? We have a regular Einstein waiting here, if ya know what I mean."

"Wait. So these are *her* gates? Pearl? The *Pearly* Gates?" I stifled a chuckle, wishing I had choked on my breath instead. She looked at me with eyes wet with apathy from across the ages. "Yeah, 'The Pearly

Gates,'" she said wryly. "Death has a dry sense of humor."

She took two jingling keys from a drawer in the desk, handed them to the old man, and then pushed a big red button that sat plainly on the desk's surface. The gates opened, and we went in. There were rows upon rows, thousands upon thousands of elementary school desks, as far as the eye could see-an ocean of table tops. He led me down one row, and then another, walking until all that I could see in every direction was a boundless landscape of wooden chairs and flats. When we stopped suddenly, he motioned me into one of the seats. I squeezed in, just a bit too big for the youth intentioned frame. With that, he pulled a single piece of paper from within his colorless, flowing robes and put that and a pencil down in front of me. I thought I saw him twitch with this last one. And then he began to walk away.

"Wait!" I cried in uncertainty, "What am I supposed to do!" He brought both hands to the sides of his temples in frustration, and then appeared to work himself down from some unfathomable height of annoyance.

"It's simple. This is the Final Test. You know...the last one. We didn't let you go down there so you could goof off in the park all Life long. This is where you'll be examined and your fate decided."

"My fate?"

"Whether you go up or down, Einstein," he said, spinning two keys on his finger. "Take the pencil, answer the question, and you'll be sent one way or the other. Simple as that."

I gazed at the bleached parchment and found a single small

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paragraph centered plainly on the page. "One train leaves New York at 9:00am Another leaves Dallas at 5:00pm. If the first train is traveling at a speed of...of..."

"...yes?"

"You've got to be kidding?"

"So you forfeit your answer? No problem. Some people actually take well to eternal torment for the first..." he said reaching for my paper.

"No! I mean...I don't...this is crazy!" Maybe I had already been sent to hell? "This can't be the last test!? I was *never* good at this stuff. It's useless! That's why I never bothered!"

"Exactly, my daft little friend. You're being tested on your ignorance."

"What?"

He sighed heavily, almost mournfully. "You all go down there believing that you're supposed to find some secret treasure, some ancient truth to unmask or discover, always thinking there is something you haven't learned there yet. And maybe you're right. But that's not just it. You're not just there to *find* something new, you're there to nurture and perfect what you have already been given. To prove that you can surpass your own limits. To prove that you can push yourself in all the difficult places you don't want to go. To prove, well, *yourself*"

"With a petty little math question!?! This proves my worth? How? How was I supposed to know that I'd need this?"

"It's not the thing you thought you'd need the least; it's the thing you wanted to do the least. And you refused to do it. Not so petty now, is it?" His voice was laced with an almost amused irony. I could hear the laughter of my sixth grade math teacher, Mrs. Bhoreham, from beyond. She had outlived me in Life. Now her words would mock me in Death.

"But wait! I didn't learn how to do this. I don't know how! I just, I didn't think I'd need it."

"Wrong! You didn't want to think you'd need it. It was hard. It took work. It took effort and change. The more you thought you didn't need it, the less you had to do, and that's why you didn't succeed. That's why you're about to fail your final test."

I put my head into my hands as he began to leave, too befuddled with anxiety and frustration to cry. "There must be a way. Must be something I can do. If I could just give it another... Hold on. Proctor! Is it possible? Could I try it again? I mean, I know I didn't get it the first time, but I'm willing to give it another try. That is, if you'll let me." He paused a moment, and then began walking back to me, his face unchanging. "No, I mean, yes...I know I should have gotten it the first time but...well, has anyone ever done it before? Had to go back I mean?"

His ageless eyes settled down on mine—some infinite jest twinkling within them—and I might have believed I saw a grin pull at the side of his lip. "Oh, you might say one or two...one or two." He laughed, suddenly, but the joke escaped me.

"Oh, please, Proctor? Give me another chance, and I promise, I promise, this time I'll do better..."

"Are you certain?"

I nodded hopefully, fearfully.

He sighed again, a gentle whisper commanding, "All right then. Back you go."

And then I was gone. The lingering voice—many voices—seeming to echo from afar, voices from beyond the veil I was

crossing yet again. "Remember," they said, "and beware. This is the Great Test!"

The time-aged Proctor closed the gate behind him, putting two keys—one black and one white—down upon the woman's desk, hesitating on the tiny two pieces of metal before walking away. Pearl called to him, putting the keys back into the desk drawer. "Did he make it?" She saw the back of the man's head shake from side to side, like that of a lonely father as he sauntered away. She understood.

"Again?" she said exasperated. "Well hey, can you at least tell me what it's like in there?"

He shrugged. "Doesn't matter... nobody's ever passed the written." ♦

Malcolm's short story is a powerful piece of interpretive literature because it encourages readers to think about their place in the world. It causes the reader to contemplate larger issues in life, adding to the enjoyment of the story. The text argues that self-improvement is more important than searching for "some secret treasure, some ancient truth."

Even if a reader doesn't agree with the theme of the story, it's still an entertaining read because of solid characterization and a contrast in what happens and what is expected. The dialogue is engaging and helps create the crusty character of the Proctor.

The wry humor of the piece humor juxtaposed with a rather serious subject, makes the story memorable and enjoyable. The author's use of imaginative storytelling earned his work second place in the Writing Center Contest.

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Feeling Strangely Fine

Nicholas M. Shellabarger
2nd Place, Poetry

Somewhere there's a goose running naked,
wanting for the feathers in my pillow
to wrap its goose-bumped body,
or to lay its tired head.

My arm long since fallen asleep
under the weight of your softly snoring head,
but I wouldn't think of moving.
Everyone dreams of that.

Clothes on the floor blend
like corn and mashed potatoes at dinner.
The gravy of a brown wool s it
running into your favorite yellow dress.

Your prayer to a loving God
still echos through the halls.
The freshly painted halls still smell,
that addictive odor of new.

The alarm clock ticks each minute closer
to going to that job that I love, not like.
That job where I'll walk in and be greeted,
and reply, simply, that I'm doing "fine."

"Feeling Strangely Fine" is a poem rich with images. The opening image is explicit in its meaning and provides a mental picture sure to bring a smile. The idea of a "naked goose" is fresh and interesting, and gives more depth to the poem than if the author had chosen to say, "I have a down pillow."

One of the most vivid images in this poem is the picture of the clothing in the third stanza. The clothes mesh together on the floor like a well prepared meal, alluding to a relationship that is equally meshed. We have already received a picture of our speaker content to lie, numb arm and all, watching the loved one snore. The images throughout the poem are meant to show a relationship that is obviously treasured-the more obvious images provided in the first three stanzas.

The ending image of our speaker responding to greetings with "I'm doing 'fine,'" is more powerful because of the fantastic picture that has been painted in the other lines; we know the speaker really means it. How many times a day do we respond to queries with the standard, "I'm fine," whether we really are or not? The speaker in this poem has taken a mundane phrase and made it work.

The story of this poem of a successful, happy relationship told through the imagery gives the reader the idea that our speaker really is doing "fine." This is the art of poetry: to create beauty out of the everyday, and to make it matter once it is on paper.

Anticipation in the Corner Pocket

Allyson H. Tarr
3rd Place, Fiction

"The Monticello is a remarkable pool table. The premium slate provides supreme engineering and performance. If you buy today, I'll throw in free chalk." Big Bob finished his yellowed-tooth sales pitch by pulling a crumpled handkerchief from his back pocket and mopping his brow. Maeve and Sam Daire's eyes shifted to the Monticello. It was a beautiful, stately pool table.

"Well, Bob," Sam carefully responded, "we'll go home and discuss this."

With brochures in their hands and figures in their heads, Maeve and Sam left Big Bob's Billiards. Safely in their car, the excitement exploded. "The Monticello is stunning," Maeve breathlessly exclaimed. "The carved oak will match the fireplace mantel perfectly. It's only \$3299.99. We'll have that by Christmas."

"We'll be the envy of everyone." Sam boasted.

Fifteen minutes later Maeve and Sam walked in their front door, still excitedly discussing the Monticello. "Hey," Maeve said, "let's move furniture to see where the Monticello should go."

"I'll get the tape measure." responded Sam.

As Maeve headed towards the family room, she passed the telephone and noticed the blinking light on the answering machine. Pushing 'Play' she heard George Kramer, their adoption caseworker echoing, "Hello. George Kramer here. A birth-mother is looking at your file. She wants to know if..."

George's voice stopped. The brochures Maeve still carried fluttered to the floor. She heard a small gasp and turned

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to see Sam standing behind her with the tape measure, jaw dropped.

"Wants to know what?" gasped Sam.

"There's a birth-mother looking at our file?" questioned Maeve.

"She wants to know what?"

"Did a birth-mother pick US?"

"She wants to know WHAT?"

"ARE WE GETTING A BABY?"

"Wait, play the message again."

Maeve pushed rewind and, after an eternity, the tape played, "Hello. George Kramer here. A birth-mother is looking at your file. She wants to know if..."

"It stopped!" Sam wailed.

Glancing at the Caller ID, Maeve noticed George had called ten minutes earlier. She grabbed the phone and quickly dialed his number. His voice mail answered after three rings. Frustrated, Maeve left an urgent message, "George, call the minute you get in."

Sam turned and walked into the dining room. He sank into a chair and dropped his head into his hands. "Oh, no," he softly moaned. "We could be getting a child tomorrow, and we haven't saved the money."

Maeve followed him into the dining room and pulled up a chair next to him. Taking his hand in hers, she announced, "We're finally getting a child after five years of trying. No more temperature charting, mucus testing, pillows under the hips, "relaxing and not thinking about it," legs in the air, scheduled sex, different positions, doctor visits, fertility pills, background checks, home inspections, or follow-up interviews. No more waiting."

"We're not prepared!"

"We'll prepare tonight. I'll grab the Sears and JCPenney catalogs. We need baby stuff."

They spent the next two hours rifling through catalogs, highlighting



nursery necessities. Sam retrieved the adding machine and punched the prices Maeve rattled off. "I like this crib. It's \$299.99. Here's a play pen for \$99.99. We need a car seat. This one is \$95.00. Ooooo. A matching stroller for \$75.69. How cute. Also, my mom says we'll need blankets galore. These fleece ones are \$6.95. We'll need a lot, so say...25? Bottles. Since we aren't breast-feeding, we'll need lots of bottles."

Sam hit the "Total" button.

"\$5,398.65 and that isn't including adoption or attorney fees."

"We'll get a loan or borrow money from my parents," Maeve said briskly. "Also, our insurance will cover part of the fees. Now, what about the nursery?"

Maeve pulled Sam to his feet and dragged him to their "nursery." Their skis stood propped in the corner by the window. Sam's flight manuals, charts, and graphs lay in a heap by the door. A bed sat smothered with winter coats, mittens, and scarves. The closet was stashed full of Maeve's old dresses and Sam's old Army uniforms.

Maeve's heart sunk as she looked around the room. "There's no way we'll organize this tonight."

Sam walked over to the closet and started tossing clothes onto the floor. "We'd better get started." Six hours later their old clothes were piled in the den closet behind the filing drawers. The skis were under their bed, and Sam's flight things were in the trunk of the 1972 Dodge Charger Sam drove. They stuffed their winter gear between the mattress and boxspring and pushed the bed up against the wall. Maeve and

Sam opened the window to air out the room, washed down the walls, and vacuumed the floor. When finished, they assessed their handiwork. The walls and floor were bare and the only furniture in the room was the bed, but it was clean and ready for their planned purchases.

Wearily Sam turned to Maeve, "Let's try to sleep."

Maeve yawned and nodded.

As Maeve lay in bed, she heard her bedside clock ticking. An hour had passed since she had gone to bed, but she couldn't sleep. Finally, Maeve rolled over and asked, "Sam, are you asleep?"

"No."

"What will we name our baby?"

"I don't know."

"We should decide."

"Okay."

"What do you like for a girl?"

"I don't know."

"What about a boy?"

"I don't know."

"We'll be up all night at this rate."

"We've been up all night."

"What about Jane for a girl?"

"Mmmmm. Plain Jane."

"Okay, how about Vivian?"

"No way! Her initials will be V.D."

"You suggest something."

"What about Sharice?"

"You want to name her after your ex-girlfriend?"

"Hey, I just like the name."

"Right. Let's do boys' names instead. I have a feeling it will be a boy."

"Okay, what about Sam Jr.?"

"Aren't we arrogant?"

"We could name him after my grandfather, La Verle."

"Uh, LaVerle won't work."

He'll be teased."

"Well, you pick one."

The conversation volleyed back and forth. This name was too long

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That name was after a perverted politician. His suggestion sound like "alien." Her suggestion was too "girly" for a boy.

Exasperated, Maeve cried, "Okay enough! Let's sleep on it. Maybe something will come to us when we see our baby. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

At 7:30a.m. the alarm clock buzzed. Maeve and Sam flew out of bed and ran to the phone. Maeve dialed George's number, hoping George came in early.

His voice mail answered.

Hanging up, Maeve said, "We should call in sick. We'll need the entire day to pick up the baby and supplies."

"Good idea." said Sam.

They called in sick.

7:38a.m. "Do you think George is in yet?" asked Maeve.

"Let's try."

Sam dialed.

Still a voice mail.

7:39a.m.

"We need to do something else." suggested Sam.

"Right. Let's eat breakfast."

8:05a.m.

The phone rang.

Maeve and Sam raced to the phone. Breathless, Sam answered, "Hello?" Maeve leaned in to hear.

"Sam, George Kramer returning your call. I tried last night, but you were out."

"Yes, but your message cut off before you finished your sentence."

"Oh," said George. "the birth-mother wants to know-do either of you speak Spanish?"

Sam sighed, "No, neither of us speaks Spanish."

"Okay. I'll tell her. That's all. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Sam dropped the phone. Maeve lowered her head. She reached for a brochure that had fallen there the night before. "The Monticello will match the fireplace mantel perfectly." ❖

"Anticipation in the Corner Pocket " has many elements of a good narrative. It contains irony-within its whimsical language and style is a tragic tale of disappointment and loss. There is also a point in the narrative where the reader is exposed to foreshadowing. When the adoption worker's message is cut short, the reader is left with that "don't open the door!" feeling.

The narrative also effectively uses dialogue to show the reader rather than simply tell the reader what is happening. The reader can feel the tension building as the couple anticipates the arrival of their new baby.

This tension reaches a climax when they are informed that the missing segment of the message was asking if they spoke Spanish, not if they wanted a baby.

This story uses all of these tools-irony, dialogue, foreshadowing, tension, climax-effectively, and it speaks to something all readers can empathize with: disappointment.

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The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug

—Mark Twain