

Byways



Central Texas College
Journal of Art & Letters
Spring 2001

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Acknowledgements

We chose to name the first CTC literary journal *Byways* because this name evokes a journey of both imagination and education. *Byways* has made us appreciate the artistic potential of CTC students. It is uplifting to be surrounded by such artistically inclined individuals and to be able to expose their creations to sundry readers. We hope you enjoy reading and admiring the following works of art as much as we did while putting the pages together.

Gina Buchanan, Denson Flowers, Clint Fluharty and Justin Uphill

If there is one thing I have learned while working on the first annual production run of *Byways*, it is the value of planning and communication. As *Byways* moved from inception to execution and finally completion, there were a great many individuals who gave freely of their time and creativity to help the fledging journal evolve to fruition. Being one of those individuals, I believe that what is contained within its pages represents the literary and artistic best that this college has to offer. May *Byways* be recognized as a credit to this institution and continue to offer a creative voice in the years to come.

Andrew J. Smiley

There are a number of people to thank for making *Byways* a reality. Warm thanks go to the student editorial board for their passion and determination. Andrew Smiley and Dr. Alexander, Chair of the Fine Arts Department, dedicated themselves to collecting and photographing artwork. Donna Duran of Desktop Publishing gave her time to design the journal. Anna Holston, Chair of the Communications Department, supported the journal since its inception. Finally, Don Mikles, Dean of Central Campus, enthusiastically supported the journal, knowing that the CTC student body's creativity is an asset to our college community.

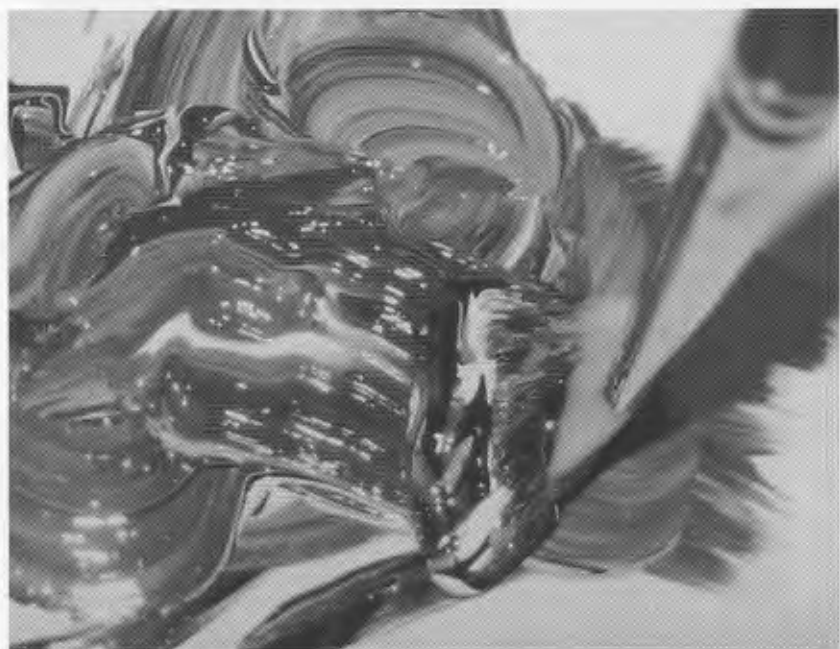
Anne Sexton once gave advice to young poets: "Put your ear down to your soul and listen hard." The work published here proves that the artists and writers of CTC are doing this already.

Melissa Richardson

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My Love For You

By Clint Fluharty

I'm writing so you know what I think about.
I'm writing, to you, to let my feelings out.
Sorry if I'm too sincere,
But my heart swells when you are near.
My heart's imprisoned by the cage of my ribs.
It cries when you are gone, like a baby in its crib.
It hurts me more as it grows and grows.
My heart is crushing my lungs as it goes.
As it deflates my lungs, it pushes out a breath or two
That squeezes through my throat in the sound of "I love you."

Sorry if my words sound like mere chatter.
They mean more to me than a mere flatter.
As I watch you read the words I write,
My soul lifts with graceful delight.
My spirit rises as your eyes caress my words.
My spirit rises from my flesh, above the peaceful birds.

I feel as though I burden you with love, or sin.
I know you're no goddess, yet simply a human.
The others I liked ran from me, or I ran from them,
But I stuck with you, my love, like a leaf to a stem.

If my praising makes you queasy, let me know;
I'll be sure to praise in a whisper, or at least keep it low.
I'll try, as I hold you tight, not to portray you with a Holy name.
I will only believe that we are both truly the same.

Nevertheless, the thought of your love sets me free.
I love the way it feels when I feel you feel me.
As your head rests on my shoulder, your lips pluck my throat,
And you read my pulse as a rhythm, like the rocking of a boat,
I can't help not dreaming of my endeavor
To make our bond of love last forever and ever.
I love you.

While I sit alone unknown to no one why I'm here boldly holding a cold, bitter beer, I whither and wander through life's daily splendors whisking and whispering away into a feuding brew of voodoo hip hoppers skipping, tripping off acid from seas of placid like a disease that keeps them at ease from past ghastly memories that bleed into fantasies like sap seeping from a tree in winter.

I quietly sit staring into her eyes glaring back at me in surprise. Surprise! Surprised, she rises from her neat seat to her feet and walks to a soothing beat that I abhorred and adored making my heart pound heartily like the sound of a slamming door, a door hording the most priceless jewels in the world. She made me drool; she made me sweat heaping loads of liquid leaping from my forehead to my clothes seeping to the floor until the entire room was wet. Heart pounding; body shaking; eyes swirling and twirling like a hurricane spinning and grinning getting louder and louder like a stampede of bulls in Spain; sweat porously pouring like rain to the floor; veins pulsating, popping up and hopping down, jumping and pumping blood like a flood flowing down a mountain side to a river side leading to a land of milk and honey.

Like a blast from a past forever felt, she knelt to her knees shouting please spouting jive fast like bees spurting from a burning hive. She cried and pled until her eyes turned red as fire. Staring at her in desire as if her breasts rested aside a juicy steak, my mouth began to water like the filling of a lake, spilling into a deep ocean, pouring into a dark potion of hate.

Hidden beneath a black cloak, hollowly, I do bequeath the following: my love for the woman who brings me hope and gives pleasure to a whole new measure kneeling, squealing before me, praying, saying things I never dreamed I would hear, crying tears rushing from her eyes, gushing to all sides, spewing all over luring me closer, closer to the mere exposure of her beauty. Placing a name with her face sets a flame flaming in a horrid, morbid place deep within a window through time, a spindle dwindling rapid like a rabid wolverine way down in a submarine drowning in a motionless ocean less harsh than a ripple in time ripping a rhyme to shreds instead mending it to an easier structure to defend . . . My heart.

Despite the sight of her beauty urging me to bend her, sending my brain into a strain of wonder whirling around sounding like rocks in a blender, it is my job to stand tall. But I couldn't stand at all. I sat still thrilling myself with a groovy movie in my head, moving to a happy ending instead. I lean forward toward her to get as much as a little touch of her skin, a grace of her face, a sip of her lips. Fate was in effect once our lips connected in a lack of affection that showed no reflection of her love for me. A few, one or two, minutes elapsed before her body collapsed into my lap.

I stood up and her body fell down. No more crying. No more pleading for forgiveness. Just an abyss of sadness. I walk to the door as every person in the gloomy little room exhales a relieving breath. As life stands still, I leave to fulfill my duties; for, alas, I am him. I am Death.

Tragedy Strikes

By Clint Fluharty

'Tis a tragic day here in Aggie land, November 18, 1999.

Classes are still going.

Some students seem not to notice, or care, or mind.

They've scheduled ministries, prayer sessions, and group gatherings for today.

Flyers are posted all over campus: "Call your parents and tell them you're okay."

When tragedy first fell, I was still sound asleep in my bed.

Little did I know that already three of my fellow classmates were dead.

Only thirty minutes later, 3:00 a.m., I darted from my room to the scene.

Pure Shock. Pure Terror. Pure Anger at what I had seen.

I'm sick to my stomach. I need some fresh air, but am already outside.

Should I call home? Should I stay and help? I don't know what to decide.

I don't know what to say. I don't know what to think.

I need a cigarette. I need a beer, but wait . . . I don't smoke or drink.

We're all standing together, side by side, heel to toe;

Just standing here, waiting to be told what to do, where to go.

Three at first . . . no, four . . . then six . . . now twelve are gone.

Hope may have slipped a little, but spirit and brotherhood still hold strong.

I'm standing here, whole body shaking while I watch in sheer horror,

Just thinking that I was here at the same place, same time, just two days before.

Just a pile of wood; never to be torched; never to be flame kissed.

Never again in this century will we endure an event such as this.

So many dead, so many wounded, so much time has elapsed

And still the bugler plays on and on, the day that Bonfire collapsed.

A Warm Blooded Killer

By Clint Fluharty

As I meditate, I pronounce,
the words of a warm blooded killer.
The sounds, under full or half moons, seeping from open wounds
are the cries of a dying drug dealer.

I take a look down the street at a boy packing heat
when I stroll down the memory paths.
Standing aside the Golden Gate, I would never hesitate
to turn blood pools into blood baths.

Something is proven by the web that's been woven,
by the terror screams in the air.
Quickly you stumble, to your knees to be humble,
but God doesn't forgive, nor care.

No I haven't regretted, the things I've embedded
by the sins I have not told.
What else can I say, but that's why I lay
dead on the street, in the cold.

Hear Me Roar

By Holly Pritchard

I feel the burning deep down inside me, churning and rumbling.
The yell that has been silenced for years is fighting to escape.
Killing my conscience, it struggles to be heard, to finally be known.
It strokes my mind - always reassures, always calms,
always yearns to be free.

I struggle to quiet the scream, to remain docile as I should;
I have to hold back what others say will make me weak.
The smile I radiate is but a mere shield to my real soul -
It masks my emotions, my feelings, my beliefs, my thoughts.

I can't stop the screaming deep down; it somehow continues to get
louder.
No matter what I do to silence it, I grow weaker by it; I sense its
emergence:
It leaks surreptitiously from every pore of my being, until I can hide
it no longer.
From the inner abyss of my soul, a piercing, bloodcurdling cry
surfaces -

The yell that I fought so hard, so long to retain, has finally escaped.
I am Woman.

The image on my mind is the gentle cry of a frustrated child,
Longing to be accepted in this giant world that seems to be wild.
I often think of all the things that I, indeed, do possess,
When all Geraldine wants most are socks and a new dress.

Pain came to my mind when she said, "Nothing lovely's been
happening in my life."

I felt as though I'd been wounded -stabbed -by an endless knife.
These are the days that I should always remember,
And when I think of this Geraldine, I'll respect her forever.

She showed me reality, the way things may actually be,
She helped me understand things that I never before could see.
Things are always greener on the other side of the fence,
Even though life will nag with its endless, minute torments.

Fear suddenly struck me in my "Take for Granted" head,
When I thought of all the scary things that Geraldine had said.
"The sun don't even shine on my side of the street..."
Everything seemed to work against her, spelling, to her, defeat.

I think deeply now, when I think of the meek and lowly child,
Who, not at all times, was so sweet and very mild.
Again and again, I cannot help but think of all I do possess,
When all Geraldine wanted were socks and a brand new dress.

The Beginning

By Holly Pritchard

The water feels my nakedness and smells my scent;
It shutters softly with a sore lament.
I regress beneath the cold, dark abyss,
And smile to myself in utter bliss.

I begin sinking, while gripping for air -
I'm being pulled down, grasp when I dare.
My eyes go black, my lungs won't breathe,
The light goes dim, I cry underneath.

My heart resists the beat of life,
My mind, my soul yell out in strife.
I rise to the surface, my body remote,
And facedown, I complete the dead man's float.





Missing Piece

By Victoria Nicholson

missing piece
missing peace

rainbow
...light ray
captured
...in water
.....a missing piece of the sun

a covenant
His Covenant
....his
.....missing
.....piece

a bullet strikes
the soldier
...flesh
.....like a jigsaw
.....a missing peace

As the rainbow is a missing piece of the sun
We are a missing peace of God.....

Total Eclipse

by Victoria Nicholson

Dangerously you enter
Night of youthful winter
Challenging my reign
Above western-city domain

Your eyes devour me in a daze
Becoming scorched in the sage's blaze
I consume silk artie moon-beams
While inventing the circle dreams

The spring of opium poppies will begin
The fool's cycle is starting again

the green flash sunset
is God's signal
urging pilots
and sailors
to hurry home

they should not tarry
in obscuring
darkness
too long

seconds slip through
skeletal systems
containing
our dust

we return
to final rest
the hourglass gone
from all

but memory

Among the chameleons
of the theater
I stand out
and blend in
with eyes that change
...a teal ocean
...an Indian stone
...the sun at zenith
...reflecting on the waters
...an unlit rainy day
...shamrocks
...aurora borealis

The creatures change
masks of emotion
It is the life
of the theater
Some feel alive
others numbly lost
in a dreamworld

As human lizards
we know no royalty
instead we are artists
reaching toward freedom
...exploring
...expressing
...dreaming
.....of freedom everywhere
...acted on a stage
...international





Friend?

by Kathie Cotter

Where were you when I needed a friend
For some warmth and some comfort
to help this pain end

You my friend just run and hide
You pull away
and escape inside

Haven't I been there for you?
Haven't I helped pull you thru?

I never wanted your
Body your
Soul or your
Mind
I just wanted a friend by my side.

Monarch flying as I'm trudging to class
I was alone, but now I have this friend
The wind is restless so he cannot pass
The royal flyer fights a valiant end.
Wings ablaze, Chantilly lace outlined black
Ruffle like a kite swooping in rough air
Intrepid artist glowing front and back
Faithful leader now struggles to get there.
Lofty kings boast wings of orange paraffin.
Autumn beckons—time to head south again
Annual migration—genetic desire
I greatly admire the majesty within
Butterfly alights, brandishing his fire.
The cycle repeats; new journeys begin
Autumn beckons; time to head south again.

Cries for Acceptance

by Vicki Johnson

Have you ever watched the
Laboring pace of human being's pain,
Where misery seems to live
And offers nothing much to gain—

Where the heart is closed to feeling
And there is nothing to feed the soul,
Endless roads of destruction
Trying to find peace as the ultimate goal

Survival is the only challenge
Nothing offered or expected in return
Maybe a day of food and sun
And something new on the streets to learn

Can't you hear the cries for acceptance
A part of society that is lost
Living on the streets of our country
With no idea of the human cost

Whisper of Love

by Vicki Johnson

Sometimes we can't imagine how
Our heart seems to captivate the presence of the soul
As we all search for the shelter of Love,
Not often do we find a space that has everlasting hope—
Until now, I have drifted inside my lonely existence,
But you have given light to my darkness—
I can see the hope for my tomorrows
And through you I have heard
The Whisper of Love—

Meant to Be

by Vicki Johnson

Picture all the promises
And the love you've given me
All the nights of tenderness
In a world called ecstasy—

Then find a way to reassure
It's coming from the heart
All the feelings we possess
I've felt them from the start—

Cause loving makes it easy
With a heart that is so true
For you have got the power
To keep me next to you—

For every time I look at you
I see a part of me
And all I do is dream
How wonderful it could be—

Cause I can't stop believing
This love was meant to be
As every time I lock the door
You always find the key—









It's amazing the damage that pride can have on a perfectly normal family, leaving a great divide that is often impossible to mend. Ralph was a typical southern democrat, just as his father and grandfather had been before him. He grew up in LA -Lower Alabama, known to outsiders as the Florida panhandle. Smack dab in the middle of the Bible belt! He was a stubborn man, who was deathly allergic to change -which caused the new family rift even harder to accept. He often told his children of how he received his first pimple (his mother called it a blemish, but Ralph knew that something that big could not be given such an unobtrusive name) the same day that the first Negro sat in his homeroom class. Bay Intermediate school was now an integrated institution and Ralph always associated that change with his first pimple. It wasn't the integration that haunted Ralph -it was the change.

Today, Ralph lay on the cold concrete floor of the county motor pool, checking the hydraulic line on a backhoe. He was a mechanic, and had been since old man Rueger gave him his first job loosening lug nuts back when he was twelve. Almost fifty years had passed since he first turned that wrench, but he was satisfied. Oh sure, he had once considered going back to school, back before the kids came along. After he became a father, there simply wasn't time. Besides, going back to school would have required a change -something Ralph could live without.

He crept from beneath the backhoe, and wiped his grease-covered hands on his blue work pants. He wore a white shirt that had been clean and crisp that morning, but now was the same light gray as his hair. He thought about his family: Two girls and a boy. The boy was his pride and joy. He always joked that if Junior had been born first, there would be a lot less perfume in the house. Junior was the baby, and always made an extra effort to keep his dad happy. Tara, the oldest, was the pretty one. Along with her many pageant titles, she had always worn the title of 'Daddy's Little Girl'. Like Junior, she also tried to appease her father, if only because he was a free sitter for her three children. Tara had a secret that only her mother and sister knew: she was a closet drunk. The weekends that her father babysat for her, she could be found at the local beer joint tossing back a few drinks. Of course, if her father did hear about Tara's drinking, he would have never believed it. Rachel was the one he couldn't figure out, and lately the bane of his existence. She was the middle child, the one who tended to get lost in the shuffle of family life. At an early age, Rachel became self-sufficient. She was a raven-

haired girl, trapped in a family of towheads. Growing up, she often felt like an outsider looking in on the perfect family of four. She was always the fifth wheel, which we all know as the spare.

Ralph thought of how Rachel had left home at seventeen, joining the military in an act of defiance. He blamed the military for the changes he saw in his daughter. He often wondered what they had done to her mind, and imagined his little girl strapped to a table, with a military doctor performing some sort of mind-control experiment on her. Whatever the cause, Rachel returned home last year very different from the girl she once was. Like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon as a different creature, Rachel had become a stranger to her father. The quiet, agreeable girl had given way to an outspoken, formidable woman. Her most recent confrontation was her new job as a local Republican Party spokesperson, which Ralph saw as a direct attack on everything he believed in.

Ralph reached for the grimy phone that hung on the dingy wall; he wanted to check in with his wife, Sarah, before heading home. Sarah worked as a seamstress in what used to be their dining room. They had recently converted the unused room into a sewing room for her, and she had been busy ever since. With the upcoming holidays, his wife was swamped with alterations and had little time to pick up the few necessities needed to sustain the two of them.

Ralph quickly punched the number on the keypad. He wasn't concerned with the accuracy of the number, they had had the same number since Jimmy Carter was president and he could probably dial it in is sleep. Sarah answered on the second ring, "Hello, Sarah's Alterations. May I help you?"

"Hi honey," Ralph loved his wife dearly and it showed in the gentle way he spoke to her. "I'm going to be leaving in a few minutes, do you need me to pick anything up on the way home?"

Sarah's voice softened at the familiar sound of her husband on the line, "No, Tara came by today and I had her pick up the milk on the way over."

"Umm," Ralph answered. "Has Rachel been over today?" Even though it was Election Day, and Ralph knew that his youngest daughter would be hard at work until the wee hours of the following morning, he hoped that she still considered her family a significant part of her life.

"She called around lunch time, she'll be coming by in about an hour to grab a bite to eat, and then she will have to be back at the office," Sarah said as she plucked an errant red thread from the white wedding dress she was working on.

"I saw her this morning when I went to vote," Ralph's voice had grown tense. "She was determined, even then to change my mind about Senator Mac." Rachel knew her father was a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat, and was never silent when the question of his favorite candidates arose.

"Don't worry about her honey," Sarah's soothing voice struggled to regain a sense of calm in the conversation. "Remember that you were young once, too."

"Yes, but I never publicly humiliated my dad the way that child has," Ralph said. "All my friends see her on the news and wonder about her upbringing'."

"Don't get yourself worked up before your drive home, it won't do any of us any good," Sarah said warningly.

"Love you Lou," Ralph had ended every phone call this same way since they were dating.

"Love you, too," came the familiar response.

It was a beautiful fall day, in a very Florida-sort of way. The sun shone brightly, adding warmth to the cool gulf breeze blowing in from the west. Ralph had clocked out, and was walking toward his mud-battered, once was blue Ford Ranger, when he met up with Junior. He had gotten Junior a job with the highway department when his wife, Rebecca, became pregnant with their first child. Looking at him now, Ralph wasn't sure which of them was actually carrying the baby. *The boy sure has put on quite a bit of weight since he's gotten married*, Ralph thought to himself, *must've gotten that from his mother's side of the family*.

"Hey old man," Junior said as he placed a chubby callused hand on his father's thin shoulder, "Did ya' see Rachel at the precinct this morning?" Junior, at times could be a tad dense -precisely why his father had to help get him his job - and today was one of those days. Junior had been so into the arrival of his new baby, that he hadn't sensed the growing desention between his father and sister.

Ralph's eyes glazed over, and his jawline began to twitch. He turned his hard, stern face toward his son; "You should be ashamed of the way your sister is carrying on in public, but here you are thrilled with her indiscretion. You both should be ashamed of yourselves." His voice was like a hammer, beating the clueless young man long after his father had driven off in a gray cloud of exhaust.

As he drove along the busy streets that led him home, Ralph listened to Pastor Fowler preaching on the radio. Pastor Fowler, who was Ralph's age, spoke of personal responsibility, and of how you will stand alone before God on judgment day. "All through this life", the pastor took a deep breath. "I said, all through this life we cast blame on those around us for our own shortcomings. But on that day, ooooh, on that day, when we stand before the throne of Gawd, there will be NO MORE EXCUSES!" Pastor Fowler had worked himself into a frenzy, in a very southern-preacher kind of way. "Because," the message continued, "only Gawd knows your heart."

"Amen," Ralph said hoping that Pastor Fowler could feel his agreement. He had been raised in the church, and now was a deacon in the local Pentecostal church, just as his father and grandfather had before him. The church had defined his very being since he was a young boy. Oh sure, when he was a teenager he had rebelled against everything and identified more with James Dean than with Jesus Christ. Once the kids came though, he knew he had to settle down and set the kind of example his father had set for his family.

As Ralph drove home primarily on autopilot, he was somewhat aware of the city passing by outside his windows with its many political yard signs littering the streets. To Ralph, each of those signs served as a reminder of Rachel's betrayal of her family's heritage. He thought about the tense situation with Rachel, *Where did I fail her?* Ralph questioned himself. It wasn't only her political affiliation that had Ralph rattled. Even through his most rebellious stages of his life, when agreeing with his father was like drowning his own spirit, Ralph had never publicly humiliated his father. He had lived in this town his whole life, hadn't even taken a vacation outside the county until after Reagan was shot. Everyone here knew him, some a little too well- as this latest scandal had proven. He had a reputation in this town. A reputation that was being destroyed every time his youngest daughter appeared on the 6 o'clock news.

From the radio, Ralph heard Elvis Presley singing, "...peace in the valley for me, someday. .." *Good for you*, Ralph thought, *you only get that peace in the valley because you offed yourself before Lisa Marie was old enough to talk back.* "...No more sadness, no sorrow. .." Elvis continued, as Ralph turned onto the unpaved, dusty dead-end street where he had lived since he was a boy. When he and Sarah first married, they built their house on the empty lot two houses away from where he was raised. His mother still lived in his childhood home, and it gave Ralph a sense of continuity having it close by. Ralph closed his eyes as he sang the last few lines along with Elvis, "... oh, Lord I pray..."

He opened his eyes to see the sun slipping slowly behind the massive Florida pines surrounding his home. They stood tall, rooted deep in the earth where they had been planted hundreds of years ago. *That's me, the old pine tree*, Ralph thought as he pulled in the drive. *Proud and unwavering firmly rooted in my beliefs.*

Closing the truck door, Ralph noted Rachel's shiny red sports car parked on the side of the house. It was a fancy car with lots of chrome, but the rear bumper had been distastefully decorated with a sticker, which read: *Honk if you love the GOP!* Ralph pulled himself up straight, mentally preparing himself for the battle that lay ahead.

The television was blaring continuous election coverage to an absent audience when Ralph entered the house. As he shut off the set, he complained to no one in particular about the high cost of electricity these days. His eyes scanned the room for someone real to complain to, but found it to be deserted. He listened for the familiar humming sound from Sarah's sewing room, only to overhear the faint traces of a conversation not meant for his ears. He stealthily moved through the house. The voices grew louder and louder. It was Rachel and her mother, and they were talking about him.

"I don't understand him mama," Rachel was saying. "Why is it that Tara can drink herself in a stupor on a weekly basis, but I am the family disgrace?"

Ralph heard an audible sigh come from his wife before she answered her daughter, "Look Rachel, daddy is a very proud man. He likes everyone to think that he has control of his family. When you go on television and contradict everything the man stands for, it hurts his pride."

"But Mama," Rachel's voice held a tinge of exhaustion, which caused him to feel a little sorry for her. "What about what I stand for? Do I not count?"

"Of course you do," Sarah's voice lowered so that Ralph could barely make out her words. "I haven't voted for a Democrat since I was your age, but you don't find me tellin' him and the whole country that. Do you?"

Ralph slumped to the cold tile floor outside the sewing room, his shaky hands cradled his head. The rest of the conversation didn't matter, he had heard enough. First his daughter, then his wife. Who next? Junior? Tara? Had he been deceiving himself, or had they been lying to him all along?

Ralph was unsure of how long he had been there on the floor, but eventually the door to the sewing room opened. His wife stood gaping at him as he sat hunched against the kitchen cabinets. Rachel rushed to him, kneeling before him. Her hand reached up to touch his wrinkled brow.

"Daddy," Rachel's voice showed her worry. "Are you all right? What happened here?"

Ralph raised his weary head to look his daughter in the face. "Do you love me?"

A surprised Rachel answered in a meek voice. "Of course I do Daddy. Are you okay?"

Ralph's eyes moved to Sarah standing in the doorway. A slender hand covered her mouth, "And you? Do you love me?"

A bleary-eyed Sarah could only nod her response, because she knew that he had overheard their conversation. Her mind replayed every syllable, hoping that neither of them had gone to any extremes.

On Ralph's command, Rachel helped her father to his feet. His cheeks were stained with the silent tears he had cried, and a few more wrinkles had appeared around his eyes. To both Rachel and Sarah, Ralph seemed to have aged ten years. This time when he spoke his voice did not falter when he said, "It has recently been brought to my attention that I am a very prideful man, and that at times I have been known to let that come between myself and my family. I am not a well-educated man, and have been known to make a few mistakes in my time. Often times, when a situation arises that I do not understand, I try to think of how my daddy, God rest his soul, would have reacted. But I am not my daddy, and this is not my daddy's life. As Pastor Fowler was preaching this afternoon, I alone will be responsible for my actions -not my daddy. Pride is a sin. The only pride that I have a right to is the pride I feel when I think of my family. Sarah, you were guided by your own conscience, even though you were afraid to speak the truth to me. Rachel, I now know that it wasn't rebellion that molded you, it was your firm beliefs. I owe you both an apology."

He looked at the two faces staring in disbelief at him. Yes, something had happened to him today. He learned that to love someone with your whole heart, you do not always have to agree with him or her. He also learned that everyone has to be true to their own convictions, because they will stand alone on judgment day.





Look Into the Mirror

by Andrea Bailey

My dear,...Look into the mirror and
remember me...Remember all the hopes,
dreams, and good times we shared for
the summers past, present, and future.

Please... Take another look into the mirror -
a deeper, much longer look...And
say, "Darling, I love you very, very much...I
adore you with all my heart and soul - I
am glad you are a part of my life."

Dear....Please do me one last favor - Take
one final look into that same
mirror...Remember me...Remember all of
the hopes and dreams we shared...Think of
not how far we have yet to go, but instead, how
much we have accomplished...Not by
ourselves...But together as one.

I am a winner in everything I do.

I do not let people put me down...I do not let people hurt me and discourage me and keep me from reaching my hopes, dreams and goals.

I go out and face the world in a blaze of glory. I smile a big, bright, shiny, confident smile and come out strong with a positive go get "em" attitude without once looking back on past mistakes.

I am a unique person...There is and can be only one me. Only I know in my heart and soul which path is right for me. Ultimately, I am responsible for who I am, what I make of myself, what I make of my journey and where it will lead me...For in the end, I will have no one but God and myself to answer to.

I am a winner in everything that I am.

I am a special person with honest and faithful qualities. I love who I am and I refuse to let people change me. I live my life the way I see fit - One day at a time. After all, God and I are my only friends. There is no one out there who is going to pick me up off the ground should I fall...Except my two friends - God and me.

I refuse to let people decide for me what to believe, who to believe in and how to believe. I am my own person...Andrea. I will decide how to react, when to react and what to do depending on the situation at hand for only I, Andrea, know how I feel, what I believe in, who I am, and what I want out of life.

I do not let my fears get in my way for I know that if I do, I will only be hurting myself I do not want to end up as my worst enemy, but my best friend instead for I know in my heart and soul that I hold the key to my destiny...All I have to do is seek and I shall find.

Chemistry

by Zakiyyah Danquah

I walked down the halls, towards my ride
And there he was (arms around me) right by my side.
As he comforts me, I felt chemistry.
Was it our love for each other or was it just me?

All Alone

by Zakiyyah Danquah

As thoughts filled my head,
He let go of me; what was said was said.
We separated, finding our own path home.
And finally I realized I was all alone.

A Lesson From the Moon

by Ramona Pearcey

I am jealous of the Moon:

Nobody questions her singleness in the sky.

Yet, I am quizzed constantly about my solitary status.

As if my life has not started at all.

The Moon spends her time as she chooses—

lounging with gray, cottony, clouds and kissing hot stars.

Full, reminding us of her power to pull the tides and eclipse the Sun.

We love her round cherub face and accept her blue moods

I want this unconditional acceptance.

I want my critics to see my smile is true, because of a lesson
learned from the moon.

She taught me to revel in my place in the sky,

to be bold in my Singleness, and to love

what life has granted.





I come as a shadow
Alone in the night,
Bearing but only a rose
The colour of White.

I seem like a stranger
Though you've known me forever
For our unity
This Curse, it hath severed.

I once was Master,
Of Goodness, and Light,
but now I am banished,
to walk alone in the night.

Banished to walk
From dusk till dawn,
I join the nightlife
in their slow sad song.

Haunted by memories of
Hatred and Grief,
Only from you
Could I have sought relief.

I give you the rose,
The colour of White
And then like I came,
I walk back into the night.

Upon the long stem,
You find a short note.
These are the words
I lovingly wrote.

"You could not have saved me
I sealed my own fate.
I was coming back home,
But I waited too late.

"Forever cursed to walk
'Side Death and Doom,
I give you this Rose
With Eternal Bloom.

What Know They?

by Joshua Reed

Tomorrow, Wait until then they say,
Then you will understand.
What do they know,
More than I?
It isn't like they,
Have ever come this way.
But in another light,
Perhaps they came this way,
And long ago, They,
More than less,
Knew not at the time,
But then finally understood,
Yesterday, when tomorrow came.

Freedom, Justice, Liberty

by Joshua Reed

The sky is crying for the lost
For those who died to pay the cost
Of Freedom, Justice, Liberty
They gave us sight so we can see
The way the world could be
with Freedom, Justice, Liberty.

The sky's tears fall 'pon the dying and dead.
The tears mingle with blood from those who bled.
They gave their lives willing
So they that live would be set free
with knowledge of what the world will be
Full of Freedom,
Justice,
Liberty.

Behind Tears

by Joshua Reed

I looked.
I loved.
I lost.
yet She may
never have seen
that I loved.

Never
She knew...
I think.
perhaps if
I had told Her,
She would have.

I know.
I am.
to Her.
a good friend
but She gave ME
cold shoulders.

I hurt.
strangely.
Not much.
Silent lips
That never said
I love you.

I looked.
I loved.
I lost.
to my Friend,
I never said
I love You.

Perdition

by Kyle Kellum

I want you to tell me how you feel about me
I won't let it hurt me, I'll hide it, you won't see
And if you don't want me, don't need me, don't love me
I would understand don't worry, won't feel bad

And when I take this plunge into the blood black sludge
You won't be on my mind, I'll leave regret behind

I don't think about you, I'm fine without you
The darkness surrounds me, I was scared now I'm free
Color fades, everything is in grays
Yet sharper and clearer, the old world is a blur

I'm never coming back, my once past is all black
I feel great, immortal, yet somehow it's all cruel

I wish you could see this, could feel this, could be this
I loved you, I blew it and now I have been bit
Forget you, just fuck you, I'll find you and suck you
I'm afraid that I'm still in love with, was it real

I guess I tried too hard, I played all the wrong cards
I'm not like your dream men, so I gave up, I gave in

I'll miss you forever, eternity, forget never
I warned you, now don't cry, I'm sorry, last goodbye
In my mind your cold tears will haunt me for all years
I'll go on drinking blood, only then can peace come

This torture I live in is pay for all my sins
The night's my only friend, no death can be my end

Ambition

by Kyle Kellum

Struggle, rumble
Claw, cringe, tumble
Against and for
To lessen and to more
Ride to the top and jump off, lunge off
Sink in your teeth
Till the world bleeds
Letting you feed in turn be freed
When you lead

Comet Tail

by Kyle Kellum

Curve that smile my direction
From your eyes I've no protection
I swallow deeply
Glance aside
Follow meekly
Wondering why
You so small, so soft, so slight
Can fill me up with such delight
Too bad for me you don't need anything
Yet I can't comply with the demands in your eyes
But I won't forget
And I can't regret
I will always feel that rush
Forever swell to a hush
Just the thought of you is enough





What's My Name

by Craig Watson

A black child was walking one day when a white said "Hey little nigger, What's your name?" The child replied "my name is RESPECT, the one thing you demand from me, but fail to give. My name is PRIDE, the one defense I have, for your words no scar will they leave. My name is FAITH, for it is my faith that carries me on. My name is PAIN, for the hardships my people encountered in the past and the transgressions they still suffer. My name is HOPE, for one day you shall see the error in your ways. You ask what's my name? My name is DREAM, that one day everyone will see the person before they see the color."

Emotions

by Craig Watson

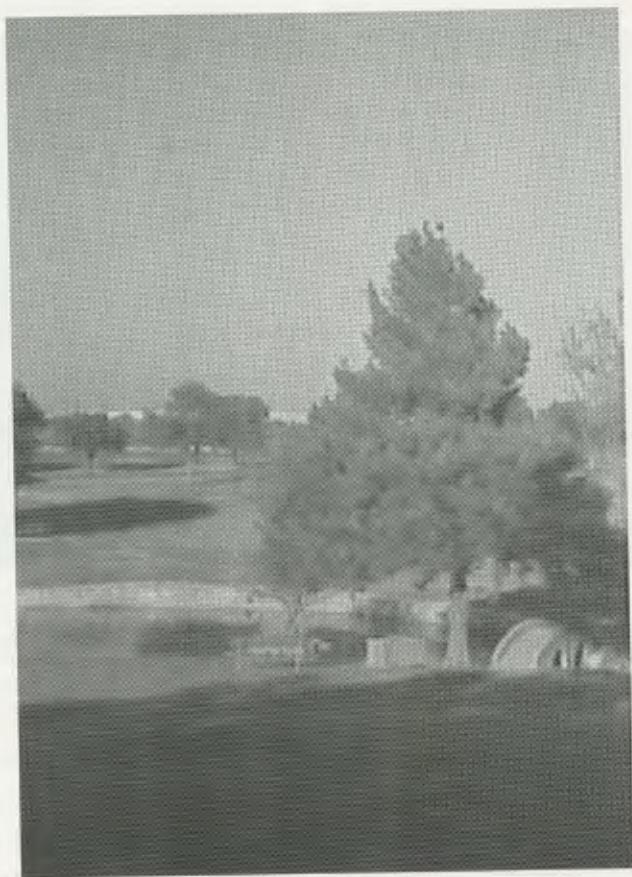
The rain is pouring/ drenching my soul/ soaking my heart/ the heavy downpour from my eyes stain my cheeks/ yet you fail to see me/ I'm on a journey eternal to pleasure your eyes and love your heart/ yet you fail to feel me/ I speak to you in eloquent tones/ the buttery, rhythmic words penetrate and seductively lick your ear lobes/ yet you fail to hear me/ I caress your face/ lick your lips/ leaving a sultry, sweet, elixir upon them/ yet you fail to taste me/ I'm near you/ I open my arms to embrace you/ yet you fail to touch me/ I give you all of me/ all the love, dreams, passion, intimacy/ I give to you/ yet you fail to love me/ you fail to love me!!

Walking Dead

by Craig Watson

Desolate is the wasteland I call my soul/ I'm sorry momma/ life has taken it's toll/ I'm a survivor, right?/ Nothing gets to me/ I'm dying slowly inside/ where no one can see/ an abused and battered heart crushes my spirit like a vise grip/ my heart is ice cold/ even the warmth of love's mighty glow can't melt it/ I scream a silent yell/ yet no one rushes to my rescue/ my conscience tries to whisper the answer/ yet my mind still has no clue/ I stop thinking/ stop feeling/ stop crying/ my soul takes its last breath/ my life/ what life/ everyday I live is death.





A Letter to My First Grade Teacher *by Felipe Acevedo*

October 23, 2000

Ms. Brunilda Vanderdys
Escuela Elemental Jose Julian Acosta
Isabela, PR 00662

Dear Ms. Vanderdys:

Almost forty years have passed since we last saw each other. In what we tend to call a small world, that is a prolonged period of time for any act or person to go unnoticed. I frequently reflect on all those events in my life that helped me become a productive member in our society, obtain the skills necessary to better my standards of living, and to provide my children with a positive role model to emulate. You must receive credit as one of the most influential contributor to those accomplishments.

As I took my first step into your classroom the fear to a strange environment took over, you rapidly erased it with your unquestionable and genuine care and concern. When teased by my classmates you were prompt to refrain unacceptable behavior as well as to explain the rationale for it. It may sound contradictory, but with your firmness you created fear, with your care you became overprotective, and with your concern you became unavoidable. However, you were an excellent listener, an impartial intermediary, and an honor to your profession. You happened to be no more or less, the best teacher in our small world.

I imagine you are probably near retirement from such an exceptional career. The attitudes that you changed, the personalities that you transformed, and the careers that you promoted speak for themselves. The life of each and everybody of the the students touched by you was only likely to become better, no matter what the socio-economic circumstances dictated at the time. My greatest honor to you on this day is to follow your footsteps and carry on with upmost pride and keen responsibility the same care and concern you provided me in my formative years. It is my resolve to compete for your title as the best teacher in the world in the near future.

Sincerely,

Felipe Acevedo
A first grade student

Unlike many other nine or ten year olds I did not feel the least bit embarrassed on taking off from school on this Friday afternoon with one objective in mind. I could not pass on my monthly opportunity to enjoy one of the most rewarding experiences in my lifetime. No, I was not rushing to go to the movies, or to play sports; or to watch television. It had a lot more significance, and nothing would get in my way that could dampen this event taking place the following morning! I had to meet only one condition for it to take place, make it to Papa Sico's house before darkness arrived that Friday evening. You see, Papa Sico and Mama Cola, Francisco and Nicolasa for the rest of the world, were my easier set of grandparents to access, the closest ones both geographically and sentimentally. They lived about a mile and a half away, but the neighbors and the community did not condone for any parent to have a youngster my age out on the street after dusk; much less if that kid was by himself. I needed to get there no matter what.

Mama Cola did look young for her age, even though she was short and full-bodied. She always wore a soft smile on her face and her shiny brown hair in a ponytail. The ponytail perhaps represented her unique, non-pretentious way to highlight her beautiful green eyes, and the soft smile showed her love and concern for everybody else. That smile also established her authority, without a hint of aggression or the use of harsh words. Both attributes also helped her counteract the effects of the backbreaking tasks carried out by the housewife of the time. She was the sweetest Grandma anybody could ever have and for any grandchildren to decline getting a hug or a kiss from her meant to commit one of the greatest sins on earth. Papa Sico on the other hand, offered a stoic type of affection. He usually expressed his love by showing others to work long and hard; a disciplinarian style sometimes feared. Nevertheless, he provided such a sense of security for those around him; a safety net that allowed those affected by him to have an active role within the family and the community as well. Papa Sico carried a big bundle of self-esteem. At five feet and five inches tall he matched the average height for most males at the time, and his slim figure excelled in proportion to it. He could not hide the wrinkly face of past hard labor and the silvery hair of a long life, but the crispy-ironed white shirt, firmly pressed dark pants, highly shined shoes, and sturdy white hat splendidly complemented his superb demeanor.

Finally Saturday morning arrived. The radiance of the moon and the stars against the darkness of the night forecast a beautiful day ahead. The neighborhood was completely dark and in absolute silence; a silence suitable for communion among the creatures of the night as they communicated with each other free of inhibitions. Inside the house only the distinctive sound of my urine stream as it gravitated into the steel piss pot broke silence. I would not dare to use the outside latrine in such darkness. Meanwhile, Papa Sico and I were getting ready of the initial stage of my big event. Papa Sico's rituals included brushing his teeth, washing and shaving his face, and combing his hair numerous times in front of the mirror ignoring the fact that soon after it was going to be covered by his hat. As for me, it only took a few strokes of the toothbrush and a splash of cold water in my face to get ready. I had no time to waste, so I went to bed already dressed, except for my socks and shoes.

I think I should tell you about my big event. Before we left the house Papa Sico grabbed from the kitchen corner a long, lightweight, bamboo cane, about four feet long and five to six inches thick. From another corner he retrieved two big, heavy-cotton sacks and a heavy weaved basket. Those were the tools of his trade; the ones he had carried for decades and that ~~made him so reliable and well respected~~ among his neighbors. We took off walking at a relaxed pace. The clock read about five thirty in the morning and nobody roamed the streets. After a three to four mile walk we finally reached our destination with the break of daylight. The beautiful sunset made us feel energized, and convinced at that particular instance, that we were really important to our community.

Our present location was at the only bakery in town, the second stage on my big event. Hidden behind the storefront housing the bakery, in a warm and sweaty room, existed this cavernous oven. The light provided by the flames used for heat showed its interior full of crispy, golden-browned loaves of bread and mouth-watering, sweet smelling cup cakes. The baker soon after, using a long handle, huge wooden spatula, started extracting out from the oven the product of his nightly effort. You could hear those freshly baked loaves crackle as they toppled each other, only as a confirmation of their freshness and quality. Around fifty pounds of those freshly baked loaves were set aside for Papa Sico and I to dress. Just to wrap them would have been offensive. A transparent, white, thin and silky textured paper represented the finest garment for such a desirable staple. Within a few hours, the elegant dressed loaves were to be adorning the kitchen tables of the most humble homes in the community.

We finished our task, and proceeded to the third and final stage of my big event; delivering to each any every one of the neighbors in our route. The two big cotton sacks looked bigger, the bamboo stick seemed heavier, but our enthusiasm had not dwindled. Our route took several miles and a few hours to complete. The profit from my big event was by today's standards, economically insignificant. However, the gratitude offered by those receiving the bread and the cup cakes, and our satisfaction from serving others that otherwise would have not enjoyed a fresh piece of bread on their tables topped it all. The last thing I would say is that all along I kept Papa Sico well accompanied, and I did not suffer any disappointments. My big event turned out to be as enjoyable and rewarding as I expected.

Today, I think that up in heaven Papa Sico is rejoicing himself meeting with all the colleagues that he failed to meet on earth. I also have a hunch he misses the opportunity to recreate my big event.



Covered Jar

By Roxanne Lee Kwai



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