The Hilda Simmons Levitt Poetry Contest is in its 30th year. The late Stanley Levitt established the contest in 1986 in memory of his wife, Hilda, who had taken many classes at Midland College. Mrs. Levitt graduated with honors from Louisiana State University with a degree in journalism. At LSU, she studied English with Poet Robert Penn Warren. From 1952 until she died in 1986, Mrs. Levitt lived in Midland where she took creative writing courses at Midland College.

After Mr. Levitt died in 1994, the Levitt’s children, Carol Levitt Schwartz, of Washington, D.C., and John Simmons Levitt, who died in 2004, pledged to continue to support the contest. Mrs. Schwartz continues to fund the yearly awards.

For 35 years, the Levitts owned and operated the General Clothing Store on East Florida Street. Mrs. Schwartz still owns her childhood home on Midland’s south side.

The judge this year was Loretta Diane Walker, a teacher of music at Reagan Elementary in Odessa, Texas. She graduated from Ector High School, received a Bachelor of Music Education degree from Texas Tech University and earned a Master’s of Elementary Education from the University of Texas at the Permian Basin.

Loretta is active in her community through membership in many organizations, including the Poetry Society of Texas and the Permian Basin Poetry Society. A two-time nominee for the Pushcart Prize for poetry, she has published two collections of her work.

Her poetry can also be found in the anthology of Texas women poets, Her Texas. Her manuscript Word Ghetto won the 2011 Bluelight Press Book Award. Her work has been honored many times and has appeared in numerous publications. Her most recent book, In This House, is published by Bluelight Press.
Editor’s Note: The following writers received awards in the Rebecca T. Watson Creative Writing Contest or the Hilda Simmons Levitt Contest. However, due to limited space, these pieces were not published.

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Tableau 2016
My Uncle’s Funeral

By Janeth Ruiz Garcia

As I opened the door to walk into my house, I noticed the atmosphere felt a little different, it felt heavy. I had seen my parents’ cars outside, so I knew they were home, but there was so much silence that I became aware of my own breathing. I could hear my feet hit the ground step by step fearing that I was about to receive some very bad news. The door of my parents’ room was closed, and I stood there just looking at it. The small spots that contrasted against the white color of the door became noticeable to me as I stopped to distract myself from the bad feeling I had. Before knocking on the door, I decided to press my ear against the door to see if I could hear something. There was a very low whisper that was shapeless, there were hardly any words in it. My method was not successful, so I opted for the most practical way, going inside.

I held my closed fist in front of the door for what to me seemed like hours, but it must have been just a few seconds. My heart was beating very fast, and it seemed to be the background music for the dramatic anticipation. I finally knocked, softly, maybe they were asleep, maybe this is all just my teenage drama fantasy that I lived in that was making me feel uneasy.

“Coming,” I heard. I heard the movement of feet walking toward the door and it did not give me enough time to prepare mentally. “Hi mija, I see you got home early,” my mother opened the door enough for me to see her face, but it looked like she was hiding something. Her face was a little dead, it did not show emotion like it usually does. “Is everything ok?” I said. “Come in,” my father’s voice sounded lower than normal. “We need to go to Santa Eulalia, pack your stuff.” Santa Eulalia was an old, small town that I grew up in. My parents decided to move to where my brother and I played in my grandma’s house. He did not have a door, he only had a lot of blankets hanging from a pole. It was one of the scariest places in the world. My father asked me to go and say hi to my uncle once, so I went in his room, it was the first time and also the last time I would be there.

The room was like a big cave, as I opened the blankets with my tiny hands, a very strong smell hit my little nostrils. It smelled like old milk on a hot day. It was hard to see anything because it was dark and dusty. The atmosphere was very dense and a giant, dark silhouette stood up, I looked up, opened my mouth and my eyebrows with surprise, and then fear started running through my veins, it was a monster, a horrible creature that could break the floor with his heavy steps, I ran to my dad’s arms and cried. In reality, my uncle was running away from his problems, to make it sound pretty.

My uncle lived with my grandma, he had a big room for himself. I remember being a very little girl and passing by his room when my brother and I played in my grandma’s house. He did not have a door, he only had a lot of blankets hanging from a pole. It was one of the scariest places in the world. My father asked me to go and say hi to my uncle once, so I went in his room, it was the first time and also the last time I would be there.

I was quiet, I did not know what to say to my dad, I never really knew my uncle Santos, I had not seen him in so many years, but he was still my dad’s brother. “Oh my God, Dad I am so sorry.” He could not really speak, he zoned out completely, so I decided to go to my room and start getting my stuff ready, it was going to be a long trip.

I was kneeling down with a pile of clothes on the floor of my room, folding every piece of clothing carefully, but at the same time I thought about my uncle Santos. Sometimes, when I think of something I think of it in colors, it might sound weird, but if something is happy and pretty it is pink or a very warm color, when I thought of my uncle, I could only see dark colors.

When I was a little girl, my uncle decided to go on an “adventure.” It sounded amazing in my eight year old mind, but it was only when I grew up that I realized that my parents called it an adventure just to make it sound pretty. In reality, my uncle was running away from his problems, I heard my father saying that he did not want to be present for my grandma’s death, that it would be too much pain for him. I heard that he was depressed and did not know what to do with his life, so he decided one day to just take his bike and leave. After that, we saw him two more times, and then never.

My uncle lived with my grandma, he had a big room for himself. I remember being a very little girl and passing by his room when my brother and I played in my grandma’s house. He did not have a door, he only had a lot of blankets hanging from a pole. It was one of the scariest places in the world. My father asked me to go and say hi to my uncle once, so I went in his room, it was the first time and also the last time I would be there.

I found myself staring out the window and thinking about my uncle once again. I tried to remember more things about him, but there were only stories and not actual encounters.

By Janeth Ruiz Garcia

My Uncle's Funeral
I once visited my childhood friend, Danna. We have known each other our whole lives, and her grandmother lived only two houses away from mine, so our families were very close. I went into her kitchen looking for her and I found her with her father talking and laughing. Her father was a quiet man, but every time he opened his mouth it was to make us laugh with a witty comment. “Have you seen your uncle Santos?” he asked, “No, he hasn’t even called like he used to,” he looked up and his expression softened, “Ah Santos, he was crazy” then he told me one of his stories. He told me that when my father and he were teenagers, there was this guy who they called “Piolo” and he liked to mess with the younger boys of the neighborhood. They were all hanging out like a typical summer day playing with a hose trying to battle the heat, when Piolo appeared and started punching their arms and taking the hose away from them. He was laughing and enjoying himself, torturing the kids.

My uncle was tired of seeing him bullying everybody, but he was not scared of him, because his craziness was better than Piolo’s strength. My dad and Danna’s dad were on the floor getting punched and hosed by Piolo when they saw my uncle holding a sock in his hand. The sock seemed to be wet, and my uncle started swinging it around and running toward Piolo, when he reached him he started slapping him with the sock. The bully lost his balance and fell, he was staring at my uncle and then he started sniffing. He opened his eyes as if he had just figured something out and then he screamed “Ewww! This is fucking piss!” He ran away with anger, but he was never seen bullying my dad or his friends. Danna’s father got lost in his memories after the story, one of the only memories I would have of my father’s brother.

I could tell we were getting close to Santa Eulalia by the way the houses looked. Little houses that were all clumped together painted with bright colors that had gotten opaque with the years. The air was fresh and there was grass everywhere. The sky was starting to look orange announcing the arrival of the sunset. We got to my brother’s house which was spacious and very warm. My brother opened his arms and I ran to him, but the hug was very small since his duty was now to give a long comforting hug to my dad.

It had been a long day, so I fell asleep on the couch as soon as I sat down. I was deeply asleep when a desperate shake woke me up and startled me. I opened my eyes and my heart was beating very fast, it was my mom who had been trying to wake me up in a softer way. When my heart finally settled, I realized that the environment was even heavier than the day before, it was the day of the funeral. We met my family at the funeral home and they prayed and cried, but then when everything was calmer, there were normal conversations like in a normal day.

My dad disappeared all of a sudden, so I went looking for him. The room where my uncle’s coffin was had been full of people with prayers all day, but now everyone was outside taking a break to eat and catch up with the family, that is when my dad went in to have some time with his brother. I found him with his chest pressed against the edge of the coffin, he was like a little one who wanted comfort, his tears started coming out little by little, only sounds of pain came out of his mouth. His hands were touching the coffin as if he was trying to heal my uncle’s suffering. I had never seen him cry before. After a few minutes, he stood up and touched the coffin for the last time, then he smiled and said “thank you for everything, buddy.” I got away from the scene before he could see me, then it was my turn to go in.

In that intimate moment of looking at my uncle, I realized how fragile he looked, which was weird because he once was the monster of my nightmares, but now he was there, laying, no more depression, no more suffering. And at last my uncle stopped being just a ghost or a dark color in my head, he was a crazy stranger who was frail like everybody else, and I finally let the tears of empathy run down my cheeks.
Skillful Treason
By Natasha Coker

A great foe to the waking world you are,
A ghastly inevitability.
Surrounded by darkness so black like tar,
Ripping away all of reality.

Stealing certainty but supplying dreams,
You are the commander of distraction.
You find a blank mind where potential gleams,
And will swoop down before a reaction.

We help you rule, swathed in our wool sheets,
Accepting your reign without resistance.
Your embrace, a place that comfort greets.
Our sanity due to your existence.

We hate to depart the realm of reason,
Yet readily receive sleep’s skillful treason.

She is
By Brittney McPherson

She is beaten and bruised
She wonders about tomorrow while still worrying about today
She hears her mother’s cry
She sees the hope hidden in the lines
She is beaten and bruised

She pretends to be happy when she’s hurt
She feels forgotten by the angels
She touches the sun on days with most clouds
She worries about the hours while panicking over the minutes
She cries for her missing love
She is beaten and bruised

She understands life is hard
She says Jesus loves her
She dreams of happiness
She tries to smile
She hopes for the pain to go away
She is beaten and bruised
The Institution
By Marisol Mendoza

Childhood is over
What shall come next?
The institution declares that adulthood must follow
What once used to be, can no longer be
Imagination, creativeness and wonder cease
Everything of color becomes dark and coarse.
Humanity is an act of self-contradiction
We are told we can be anything, but under the governed rules of the institution
Yet the institution sequesters and ostracizes us all, when we disapprove
The only genuine power we have is to become who we are meant to be.
We live in a wounded intuitive.
Sadly, the night intervenes
Halting who we are meant to be.

Revival
By Madeline Campbell

The empty whispers of the barren land
Withhold the wings from soaring and bold dreams.
The scorching winds break the grip of two hands.
A lost, suffocating silhouette screams.
In search of the horizon, feathers fall
With the burning honesty of defeat.
Struggled love is a thorn in the last brawl.
Death is destined without a somber fleet.
But, the drip of freedom revives the wings.
The desperate desire for fire expires.
Like an oasis, euphoria sings
With chirps of pure laughter the heart aspires.
The dry and deserted nights of the past
Are drowned by the finding of love at last.
During the times of the Native Revolts, the greatest Apache warrior walked the earth. His name was Dalaa Ba’cho. He was nearly 7 feet tall and the strongest out of all the other natives. When the Apache people first entered the war for their land, his wife, daughter and son were slaughtered by the Cherokee natives along with the eldest Chief, Nana. His loss left him devastated, but also stronger and motivated to avenge his family and tribe. He sought out for revenge the day of his family’s slaughter, and eventually beheaded the Cherokee Chief, Dustu. This victory made the people admire him greatly for their greatest foes were his family’s slaughter, and eventually beheaded the Cherokee Chief, Dustu. This victory made the people adore him greatly for their greatest foes were completely defeated. The people happily and swiftly promoted him to Chief.

Dalaa Ba’cho was loved by his people for he was a great leader, especially in his judgment. The tribe, when conflicted would come to him and seek his wisdom, and Dalaa Ba’cho would humbly assist, and he never did anything but baffle the people who came to seek his advice. As children were growing into adults, their parents would tell them of the wise Chief. The story that was most popular was how Dalaa Ba’cho was able to see past a rich man disguised as a poor beggar by looking at his shoes.

The Apache tribe would support anyone who came and asked the chief for help. Dalaa Ba’cho claimed he could look at a person and know their heart. His judgement along with the integrity of the tribe made his charity a success. One day, a beggar came dressed in rags and with dirt on his face. Dalaa Ba’cho noticed something odd about him. He looked over the beggar many times. He saw torn rags, dirt, cuts, and nice, expensive shoes with only the rarest jewels that only a wealthy man would be able to afford and keep clean. The Chief banished the man from the tribe for trying to take the money intended to support the less privileged.

After that dispute, the Apache tribe lived on in harmony; however, one day, a young man came to the Apache tribe and requested to see the Chief right away. Dalaa Ba’cho immediately came out to greet the man because he refused to turn down a troubled soul. He stared at the man and knew he was not from his tribe, but he found something familiar about his appearance. The Chief’s kind heart refused to send the boy away. So, he asked what the problem was. The young man was quiet for a long time, but finally he talked. He claimed to be the Chief’s son, Maska. Dalaa Ba’cho did not know what to believe. He thought his son had died fighting the Cherokee natives in the last war. He needed time to think about such a large claim, so he sent the boy away. The boy did as he was told; he oddly went into the forest, and the Chief pondered upon whether the man was telling the truth or not. The man was about how old the Chief’s son would’ve been hadn’t he been murdered, and there was something familiar about the man’s features. Dalaa Ba’cho felt guilty: if the man was who he claims to be, he sent away his own son.

The next day Dalaa Ba’cho sent warriors into the forest to search for the claimed son. Cochise, a great warrior, was the leader of the army. He and his men wandered upon a strange part of the forest where the trees appeared to move and the wind whistled names. Cochise wandered away from the rest of the warriors for some time; until, eventually he finally found the boy the Chief described. Cochise, also wise, did not confront the boy right away, but waited to ensure there was no danger in such a strange part of the forest. Cochise hid behind a bush and watched carefully as an odd black smoke arose and three figures appeared and began to talk to the young man. Frightened, Cochise sprang into action screaming like a warrior and started swinging his spear and stabbing the odd figures. Cochise saved the Chief’s son. He was proud of himself and took the young man by the hand. They both ran away from the scene. On their journey home Cochise questioned the man about the strange occurrence, but he ignored the warrior and walked on. Cochise figured the Chief’s son was too terrified to talk about the disturbing figures.

When Cochise and the young man returned to the village, Cochise took him to Dalaa Ba’cho. The Chief believed that the boy was the long lost Maska. In honor of his return, Dalaa Ba’cho threw a big party and had a feast. Maska enjoyed himself unless he was around Cochise. He would laugh, drink and talk to the women, but when Cochise would creep nearer to him, he would suspiciously walk the other direction. Cochise immediately knew something was wrong, but he didn’t want to ruin the party and upset the Chief. Finally, the party was over and he pulled the Chief to the side and began to tell the story of the events in the forest. Dalaa Ba’cho, surprisingly foolishly in denial, suggested that Cochise was crazy and must have been hallucinating. Cochise became upset with his accusations and told the Chief that Maska was not to be trusted. Dalaa Ba’cho’s face grew red with anger. He
screamed at Cochise and threw him out of his home. Cochise kicked the ground and screamed at the top of his lungs. He began to walk away, but as he was walking, he saw Maska sneaking into the forest.

Cochise knew he needed to protect the Chief even though he was still upset with Dalaa Ba’cho. He followed Maska into the middle of the strange forest where the first occurrence of the dark presence was. Cochise knew Maska was up to no good, so he found shelter in a tree. He hid and listened to the conversation between Maska and three old hags--witches. Cochise gasped and the trees began to shake. The imposter Maska looked towards the trees, but they stopped trembling. Maska continued on with his conversation. The witches ignored the sound as well and told the man their plan to kill a great chief. They reminded the man that if he did this, they would resurrect his father from the dead. Cochise scratched his head and wondered who the man’s father was if it wasn’t Dalaa Ba’cho. They explained how at that moment the chief of the Apache’s was taking a bath in the creek and his shoes and clothes were by a bush nearby. They put sharp, edgy rocks everywhere to cover the path to his clothes. The Chief would then step on the rocks and cut his feet. In pain, he was to put on his shoes that would hold poison that would then infect the cuts on the Chief’s feet.

Cochise, in fear, nearly fell out of the tree. The rattling of the leaves surprised Maska, and he turned around to see again. The light perfectly hit the boy to reveal the scar under his left eye. Cochise knew that he was Bimis, the son of the Cherokee Chief Dalaa Ba’cho had slain, not Maska. Cochise had given him the scar while fighting the Cherokee natives long ago. Cochise jumped from the tree and began to run. Bimis followed shooting arrows trying to stop the Apache Warrior. Finally, they came to the creek where Dalaa Ba’cho was bathing. Cochise saw the shattered rocks and jumped over them, leaving Bimis trailing.

When Bimis finally caught up he ran through the rocks and cut his feet. He dropped to the ground, but he was determined to catch Cochise before he could warn Dalaa Ba’cho, so in pain, he put on the shoes: the shoes of the Chief. He screamed in agony as the poison began to enter his body, but he kept running after Cochise. He decided that if he was going to die, he was going to take the greatest warrior Cochise and Chief Dalaa Ba’cho with him. The pressure on the cuts from running and the poison entered his body increasing the rate to of his painful death. Bimis fell to the ground and screamed once more, but this time he did not get up. Instead, he grabbed his arrow and hurled it at Dalaa Ba’cho with all his might.

Cochise ran straight into the creek and turned around just in time to catch the arrow Bimis hurled right in front of the face of Dalaa Ba’cho. The Chief’s eyes widened, and he fell to his knees. For once, he felt so foolish, but he was also thankful for his brave Apache Warrior. He jumped out of the creek and got dressed. He hugged Cochise and kissed him on the cheek. Dalaa Ba’cho slowly walked over to Bimis and looked him in the eye. He knelt down beside him and patted his head as he whispered to the man that he was now going to die as his father did: to the hands of an Apache Warrior. Dalaa Ba’cho didn’t let him suffer any more after his last remark to Bimis.
O Captain, Dear Captain the waves are coming
Out from the dark, with thundering march,
The waters wage war with drumming.
The crackled sky with lightning bright,
Forewarn the men with humming.
In stricken state, the men await
The absolute final forthcoming.
O Captain, Sir Captain
The bow is running under
Our men all shake With violent quake
Against the rocking plunder
The clouds forewarn A virulent storm
Before our ship sees sunder.
Sir, the sea is upon us now, how could we have not known?
Blinking boards seized first, the waves still thirst
Broken masts all shriek and groan
If I shall die, my wrongful plight
Will carry longer than the tides have blown
Captain! My Captain!
Help for now the sea has won
Take my hand, you foolish man
What is it that we have done?
We saw the signs with knowing eyes
We loaded the very gun
Now we look to God, with lungs now flawed
For the rest of the race to run
Illa est Diabolus
By Anthony Brito
Photo illustration by Maleigha Barber

In a sheet of red satin,
The devil walked before me.
I did not run,
Nor did I scream.
I stared into the abyss of red,
   Satisfied.

The feeling ran up my spine,
The beauty of it all.
How something so
Evil, and vile
Could make me feel
   Attracted.

The devil spoke to me,
In a soft and soothing voice.
The words that were spoken
Left me in a trance.
The devil had left me there.
   Thrilled.

I could no longer wait,
And upon the floors of Hell
I followed the devil through the fire,
   Expecting love to be there.
For the devil was the only thing that I
   Admired.

But the devil could not love,
And my love was thrown away.
The devil had tricked me,
And my heart was not in place.
So I set off for new love,
   Neglected.

And on the sixth line of every speech
My love’s name lies in shadows...

But the devil could not love,
And my love was thrown away.
The devil had tricked me,
And my heart was not in place.
So I set off for new love,
   Neglected.

ILLAESTDIABOLUS
BYANTHONYBRITO
The prisoner sat alone
Condemned to a life of violence
A life of debt
A life of shame
A life he didn’t recognize
He drifted down a lonely road
To somewhere far away
A place no one could take from him
The deepest part of his being
The place within
He came across the instrument
Worn from years of love
A glimmer of hope
The sound vibrated through his core
The piano
It called his name
Beckoning his fingers to its slick keys.
Reminding him of a life once lived
With innocence
With purpose
He awoke
Alone
Solemn
Silent
But with wonder
He went to work
Folding
Tearing
Rigging
Creating
He would play
He would play
He would play
There was no reward
No clapping audience
A melody
Pleasing
Only to him
He played into the night
Softly thumbing the paper
The music grew loud
Loud in his heart
Loud in his soul
He imagined the keys,
Imagined the chords
Bach’s keys
Beethoven’s chords
A plethora of keys and chords
For years he played
A silent lullaby
Crafted from cardboard scraps
Of this and that
The music resounded
He played on
If only to remind himself
Of the beauty that existed
Somewhere far away
His silent companion
His paper piano
Solving the standard 3x3 Rubik’s Cube might seem like one of the hardest things to do; however, this is a very simple process anyone can do. Many beginning cubers are put off by what seems like a difficult task. Solving can be broken into five simple steps: examining and scrambling, aligning edges and corners on the first face, aligning edges corresponding to the first face, and aligning corners and edges on the last face, and finally, solving the cube. It is important for aspiring cubers to understand the process of solving a 3x3 Rubik’s Cube in order to move on to larger cubes and to become master cubers.

The first step is to examine and scramble the cube; it makes sense seeing as it is not possible to solve a solved cube. After this, pick a face (red, blue, white, green, orange, or yellow) and start solving. Assuming white is picked, start by aligning the adjacent edges to the white. After one gets all four edges aligned, next will come the corners. Pick a corner and start from there. Pull the corner to the three centers that match its color; for example, the America corner (red, white, and blue), then put that corner by the corresponding colors. Algorithms with certain notations will be used: Right (R), Left (L), Face (F), Down (D), and Up (U). When these have the symbol ‘ following it this means to invert the notation. Next, use the algorithm R D R’ D’ and repeat till the corners are aligned. After this, cubers will continue to the edges on the next face.

After the first face is completed, move on to the edges adjacent to the first face solved. First, determine which edges need to be put into place. For white, there will be red to blue, red to green, orange to blue, and orange to green. These will not have any white if the first face has been solved by this point. Place an edge above the color it corresponds to; i.e., red to blue with red over red. The algorithm used will be one of two depending on if it falls to the right or left of the face that has the edge on top. If it falls to the right, the algorithm used will be U R’ U’ R U’ F’ U F. If it falls to the left it will be U’ L U’ L’ U F’ U’ F. After this step, the cube should only have the top part unsolved. When this is done, the penultimate step is where cubers will be.

This process includes aligning corners and edges on the final face. The top will take on four forms with the edge; this will determine the number of uses for the algorithm. It will either be a dot, a 90 degree angle, a straight line, or a cross. If it is a cross, no algorithms are needed. For all other cases, the algorithm F U R’ U’ F will be needed. Repeat until the cross occurs with the edges. Next, make sure the colors are corresponding and matching each other. When they do not, use R’ U R U R’ 2U (turn this side twice) R. Next, aligning the corners is what will be focused on. Most of the time, there will be a corner where it needs to be. When there is, keep it to the left of the face the algorithm will be performed on. If there are none that are aligned, there is no need to panic; just use the algorithm an extra time. The algorithm to match corners is as follows: U R’ U’ L U R U’ R’. Repeat this until all four of the corners are aligned.

Finally, for this step, comes solving the corners. It is important to note for this step: stay on the same face for all corners, meaning move the corners to the face; never go to the corners. This algorithm is the same as the one used to solve the corners on the first face. The algorithm again is R D R’ D’; this algorithm will be repeated to solve it.

Finally, after doing the final process, the reward for all the hard work put in will be a solved 3x3 Rubik’s Cube. In the grand scheme of things, this is not too hard of a task to do. All it takes is the proper motivation and desire to complete the 3x3 Rubik’s Cube. It is a vital building block to catapult beginning cubers into the larger world of cubes. Learning this will also help memory, helping to excel in real world applications and subjects.

Photo illustration by Brittany Kelley

CREative writing contest | Second Place | Non-fiction
As an adolescent, you need to have a talent or place that you can call your own. Until my six grade year I was a timid, bashful, and insecure adolescent. That year I was introduced to PTA skate nights through Franklin Middle School. I remember the first night arriving to the SKATE PLACE located on the corner of 14th and South Clack Street in Abilene, Texas; a bright sapphire blue and lime green building sat directly in front of me. I began to wonder what I got myself into. I hardly knew anyone, and I hated to be social or the center of attention. My mom could tell I was nervous and worried as I stepped out of the car. She just patted my leg, gave me her big contagious smile, and told me “go break a leg and have fun while doing it.”

The moment she pulled away, I immediately noticed how long the building was. It was a large colorful rectangular shaped building that seems to never end. Already at six-thirty, there was a long line of kids waiting anxiously even though skate night didn’t start until seven o’clock. As I walked up cautiously, I felt every single person staring and judging me. Then after a few moments I heard a familiar voice. Bethany was calling my name from the Diary Queen, which was
located to the left of the Skating rink. While waiting together outside, you could hear the music and feel the vibration under your feet coming from inside the building. The only thing blocking everyone from going in is the huge double door entry. The moment I stepped in, I was hooked. I found my place that I could call my own every Friday night.

Once you step inside those big double doors a cashier sits directly to left. There you would pay for your skate tickets and turn in your ticket winnings from the games and contests. The concession booth was directly to right of the entry way. That is where the smell of warm buttery popcorn would take over senses. Then, directly to the right of the concession, was the DJ booth, he would play the top 40 songs of the year or any special request made. Further to the left was the game area that had a pool table, claw machine, ski ball game, and a few other games. Right behind the game area, was the skate rental booth where you turn your ticket in with the size of your foot. Afterwards they would hand over these ugly tan leather four wheel skates that had long dark brown laces, you would have to lace up very tight. Right before you stepped onto the rink, a sign hung by two rusted chains would catch your eye; “Skate at your own risk.” The first time I read that sign I was frightened and terrified of what it could mean.

I remember the first time I stepped onto the rink! A large crystal ball hung from the ceiling; displaying mesmerizing ray of colors on the waxed wooden floor beneath my skates. A gust of wind hits your face as experienced skaters race past you with gracefulness and elegance, all at the same time. After a few rough falls, bruises, and embarrassing moments, Bethany came to my rescue and taught me how to skate. I swear the DJ would change the music up and announce, “now time to skate backwards” to challenge clumsy, uncoordinated skaters like me. Also through out the night you would have the all-so-famous couple’s dance, in which a slow song would be played and the lights dimmed down to cast a romantic vibe. Then there would be a fast paced racing, limbo, or a dance off contest, where the played music was played extra loud, with backlighting and strobe lights that got everyone involved. Every Friday I would go and improve my skills so I could participate and compete. Over time I became associated with the entire staff and all the skaters and I was now a social butterfly that developed her wings and could fly. One of the biggest accomplishments I achieved was becoming of the elite skaters, in return I got invited to holiday themed parties and overnight lock-in events at the skating rink.

My first lock-in was one of the most memorable moments of my youth; I was fourteen when I was invited to my first one. Lock-ins are where you arrive at seven o’clock in the evening and stay until seven the next morning the best way I can describe those twelve hours is like a giant, electric, crazy sleepover. During my first lock-in a boy named David Kiser, an extremely tall boy with the most amazing crystal blue eyes ask me to skate with him. Our first experience skating together was not graceful; it was more like a major collision course. We tripped over each other’s feet causing ourselves to fall extremely hard onto the wooden floor. We were all tangled up like a pretzel on the ground but couldn’t help but laugh at each other. While other couples skated past, he helped me up and brushed my hair out of my face, he leaned in and gave me my first kiss. Everything changed that night when David asked me to date him. We dated for several months and became one of the best couple skaters at the rink. Even after we broke up I went loyally every Friday to the rink until I was eighteen and graduated. As an adult I still go back to that rink with my two kids.

I remember taking my kids to their first PTA skate night about 12 years ago to that same rink I went to faithfully growing up. Now, there are security guards outside while the kids wait. Inside they have added a full concession area where they sell pizza, nachos, and any soda you can imagine. Also, a full table and seating area exists so you can enjoy your food and beverages while watching everyone else skate. Now it’s rollerblades that most of the kids rent instead of the old traditional roller skates. There are at least five big screen televisions for kids and parents to watch along with a large projector screen that displays the music videos as the DJ plays them. My daughter loves to show me new dance moves that seem so much more complicated than the ones I learned. My son loves to get out there and race and compete with all his heart and determination like his mother did. I’m grateful for the moments I had as an adolescent and now even more as a mother with my children.

SKATE PLACE changed my life in so many ways. Looking back as an adult, it was the building blocks that created the confidence and social skills I need. At work I am a self driven, hardworking and competitive employee in any of my positions. In relationships, I’ve learned to skate with no fear at all, have trust, take leaps into the deep end, and not fear rejection. I Know it is from the experiences and moments at the rink that helped mold me into the outgoing, fun loving, optimistic person I am today. As a mother, it has made me very open-minded, light hearted, and understanding. Every time I go to “PTA Friday Skate Night” with my kids, I get to be a kid again, and that is an amazing experience I get to share with my children. I suggest you go skating whether alone or with someone. If a sign states, “Skate at Your Own Risk”, just laugh and go skate with no fear at all while enjoying every moment on that old graceful floor.
“Now,” spoke the faux father,  
As if the odd orphan was none but a bother.  
The lad handed his warden the lighter,  
Nearly brushing an unsteady ale.  
Reclining, the man sat slightly sicker,  
Authenticated by the garrote’s bright flicker.  
The chemical blend met the monster’s foul titer,  
His humanity beginning to fail.  

The man was more than a menace when unveiled by these vices.  
No mild manner, no tolerable tone, no subversion known suffices  
To evade his beatings, belay his mistreatings, or bypass his greetings.  
The waif would know; he contained competence regarding this course.  
Since his keeper’s arrival,  
All he sought was survival.  
From their first meeting, the cruel man repeated horrendous proceedings.  
The boy had yet to grow; his overseer was an unstoppable force.  

For these reasons, the boy obeyed his malicious master.  
Defiance did nothing but end in disaster.  
The monster maintained his inebriation  
As the foundling fulfilled his servile function.  
Drowsiness inflicted the beast’s sensory restriction,  
Acquiring the ad interim climax of his aimless addiction.  
Chemicals completed his mental vacation.  
The cocktail succeeded in causing malfunction.  

Feebly, the former son gently retired.  
Delightful dreams of missing mother transpired,  
But this fantasy which escaped him from feelings forlorn  
Shifted instead to despondent despair.  
His thoughts were replaced by a cancerous construction:  
Nightmarish stepfather, dismal destruction.  
Then, the firm fabric was extrinsically torn;  
Aromas aroused him to smoke-filled air.  

The boy bounced up at the macabre miasma,  
Coughing chronically akin to prior bouts of his asthma.  
He deserted his dorm and issued all divine beings a prayer.  
“Lords, please arrest this place from performing as my pro tempore pyre.”  
The formerly functioning home was supported by twin pillars.  
At once they were butchered. The flames’ tongues were their killers.  
The boy’s eyes explored the remains of the father’s charred chair:  
The cigarette, the tipped liquor, the source of the fire.  

Strangely, the location’s leader was apparently absent.  
The inferno’s ashen odor overtook the home’s customary drab scent.  
In this instant, the boy begot that which resembled relief.  
For if he expired, he would find freedom from his caretaker’s clutches.  
The stray struggled to see the value of vitality;  
His demise would discontinue life’s baseless brutality.  
The lad neglected that his mother would be ashamed of this belief;  
He fixated on the fact that his guardian galvanized all which he touches.
Just then, a terrible cry corrected the boy’s anti-zealous Zen. The sound signified his landlord yet lived, anomic amen. Around him, his house was burning down to the ground, Yet his demanding duty was to manumit his malice. The lad paused for awhile, contemplating his choices. No advice was offered besides the vehement voice’s. He thought, Do I follow a trail of sorrow to the source of the sound? Or do I commit a crime so inconceivably callous?

Ultimately, the orphan abstained from decision, Understanding the circumstances had clouded his vision. Determining only to reach a resolve when he rendezvoused with his rescue, The stripling set off into the home set aflame. Heckled by howls, he traveled through a hallway so far left unscathed. Would the foul father’s blood be that in which he bathed? Or would the boy be a shepherd among threatened fescue? Could this would-be culprit even be the one to blame?

The hunter arrived at his wounded quarry’s position. The time had come for his options’ attrition. If he saved the sinful soul, his righteousness would remain. If he let the man perish, his extended epoch would enhance. The boy’s master moaned helplessly from under a fallen beam: A warden turned prisoner, mouth mired in a scream. Until now, the boy had been only a bane. This evil entity did not deserve a second chance.

“The extinguisher,” the drunken fool breathed. On the wall, the sword to cut into the fire stayed sheathed. The orphan obeyed the command out of consequence; He would not be retarding the fire. Instead, the lad left his oppressor to reap his red-hot reward. The boy saw no sense in saving the man he abhorred. In time, this prison would resemble foregone incense. Correspondingly, the construction’s keeper would excruciatingly expire. The act of abandonment was met with an expletive-filled exclamation, But the boy was deafened by elation throughout the duration. He swiftly departed the smoke-filled dwelling. But loaded his lungs with the putrid poison in his exit. The betrayer limped from his lair, collapsing on his back en route to the promising black. The demise-devoted son’s ash-coated lungs inflicted upon him an asthma attack. His lungs restricted his airflow, quintessentially quelling. He thought, My asthma is relentless; only one cure affects it.

The traitor attempted to retrieve his inhaler, But his endeavor was ended by his yet breathing jailer. The drunken oaf uttered, “You tried to kill me.” The mutineer had failed to drown his captain in a cardinal ocean. Gazing back, the boy saw his home consumed by tongues reaching higher. In the end, it was an affair chiefly of fate; These forces of nature were not up for debate. No matter the sap’s suffering, the monster remained immune to emotion. Blazing heat in his tracts, the wretch suffocated with lungs set aflame.

Print by Delores Soleto

hsl poetry contest | fourth Place
I sat in the cold metal chair, shifting uncomfortably. The guard who had led me to the room now stood in the back corner of the small interview room, next to a mirror that was very obviously a two-way. I lifted up my hands to scratch my nose, the silver handcuffs weighing heavy on my thin wrists. “You don’t have to keep these on me, you know? She just wants to ask me questions.” The guard, whose nametag read MORALEZ ignored me. I sighed and returned my gaze to the blank wall in front of me. The room was a dull and fading grey color, with no windows and fluorescent light that made a soft buzzing noise. The only furniture in the room was the metal table and chairs. The door behind me opened and I heard heels clicking on the concrete floor. The reporter, a Missus Miranda Scott, hurried into the room, saying a quick “thank you” to whoever let her in. She sat down in the chair across from mine, laying a yellow legal pad and a pen on the table. She was a small woman, with curly brown hair that was pulled up into a messy bun that couldn’t quite contain all the stray curls. She was dressed in a dark grey pants suit with a pink undershirt. I could see her hands slightly shaking as she pulled out a voice recorder and set that on the table next to the legal pad. She took a deep breath and looked up at me from her supplies, her dark green eyes meeting mine. She gave me a small smile, “Hello Daisy. I’m Miranda Scott, from the Grand Gazette, we spoke earlier this week.” She also had an obnoxiously fake thick southern accent. She stuck her hand out for me to shake, and frowned slightly when she saw the cuffs on my wrists as I shook her hand. She let out a small, uncomfortable laugh. “Well, let’s get started.” She pressed record on the voice recorder and cleared her throat. “Interview with Daisy Sparrow, Friday, May 25th 1956”. I gave her an odd stare and she weakly smiled, “Why don’t you begin by telling me about Owen?”

After everything that had happened, I was tired of hearing his name. I was tired of talking about him, and about us, and I knew that this interview was one of many more to follow. I took a deep inhale and looked down at the table top. “Owen…Well, there’s a lot to tell you.” I began by telling her about the early stages of our relationship. How we had grown up together in our then small town, gone to school together and lived just blocks from one another. We began dating in high school, “He was my high school sweetheart” I explained with a small, weak smile. “We dated throughout high school and college, and got married as soon as Owen graduated from the police academy. It was perfect. Everything was perfect. We knew each other like the backs of our hands, and we were so happy”. Miranda nodded, jotting a few notes down on her legal pad. I wanted to know what she was writing, I wanted to see what sort of information she would be using to slander my name even more. The news had done a segment on me, but never contacted me. More false information being spouted out to the public. She looked back up at me with a smile, “How many years had you two been married?” I told her three, we were barely done with being newlyweds. She asked me to outline the details of our marriage and its downfall. Recalling the events again, after what felt like was the hundredth time, I could still feel the betrayal boiling beneath my surface. “How did you know something was wrong?” She had an intrigued look on her face. I sighed, “It all went wrong once we decided to start trying to have children. Owen wanted a child, he came from a big family. I had never been a fan of the idea of having children, but I was willing to try for him. I wanted to see him happy, I wanted him to have what he wanted–“I stopped myself midsentence and realized I was rambling. I knew Ms. Scott didn’t care about our relationship. She only cared about why I was here. She then proceeded to ask me questions about Owen’s infidelity, asking about even more when I didn’t answer, and I could feel myself getting increasingly angry the more I was forced to discuss it. “I couldn’t have children” I finally stated with a harsh and blunt tone. “I finally got pregnant, after months of trying, and then I miscarried. I was depressed for a really long time, and that made him depressed. I couldn’t even look at him. I couldn’t handle seeing the disappointment he felt knowing he would never be a father.” I knew that I was letting the anger affect me as I could see her whole body tense up due to my tone of voice. At this point, however, I couldn’t find the energy to care or to try and fight the anger. I had already had this discussion with the police, and the man in charge of interrogations, and my lawyer. I was tired of masking.
how enraged I was that I was in this situation. “Oh, I didn’t know. I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to—“ I raised a cuffed hand and shook my head, “Don’t worry about it. Next question.” “Oh, uh okay” she fumbled with her words, and that made me happy. I shouldn’t be the only one that has to suffer through this interview. She continued prodding me for more information I knew she didn’t really care about. I can’t tell if it was the constant questions, or her accent, but I could feel myself fuming with more agitation and rage. She was in the middle of asking me about my relationship with Owen right before the incident when I cut her off again. Like I said, I was tired of fighting back the anger and hurt. I leaned forward and put my hands on the table. I could hear the guard behind me shift slightly in anticipation. I looked her dead in the eyes as she fidgeted uncomfortably. “Look, Miranda, you and I both know why you’re here. You might as well cut to the point and ask me what you’re really here to talk about. I know you don’t care about our history.”

A surprised expression came across her face, and I leaned back in my chair. “I, er, well. I didn’t— I just wanted to get your perspective. I wanted to tell the readers what really happened” I laughed and shook my head, “By “my perspective” you mean more juicy gos-

sip to add in the paper.” She pleaded, “No, no, Daisy that’s not what I mean.” However, I knew in a few short days my face would be all over the front page, containing my “perspective” and in reality completely tarnishing my name, making people hate me even more. It was just another opportunity for my voice to go completely unheard, and I was not ready for that to happen again. “If you want me to get to the point, then fine.” It seemed like it took her awhile to gather herself up enough to finally ask. “How does it feel to be the first woman in Midland County to be on trial for murder?” I let the question hang in the air for a few moments, and I’m sure to Ms. Scott it felt like ages before I finally answered. I let out a deep sigh and met Miranda’s eyes. “My husband cheated on me. He had four different affairs, and when he wasn’t with other women he was getting drunk. Owen was an angry drunk, and he was mad that I was depressed and not taking care of myself or him like a wife should, so he would get drunk and come home and find reasons beat me.” I watched her quickly jotting notes down on her legal pad, almost as if my words didn’t faze her. While she was writing she asked, “Why didn’t you go to the authorities?” I scoffed, “Oh, I went to the police, but they didn’t believe me considering Owen was one of
She patiently waited, her hand hovering above the paper, but stopped when I didn’t answer immediately. “blatant unfaithfulness.” “What were you planning to do then?” “Well, after he shoved me out of the bedroom, and slammed the door in my face.” I scoffed, “It didn’t even matter and knocked me into the wall, he slammed the door shut behind him. He kept yelling at me and asking what the hell was wrong with me, and mocking me because I was hysterical at that point. Then he pinned me against the wall. He looked like he was about to hit me and I freaked, and I did it.” “You did what, exactly?” I stared at her, dumbfounded. She should have known what happened, she had the police report. She just wanted to hear me say it. Her ignorance pushed me over the edge. “I shot the bastard”. My voice was louder and had a cynical tinge to it. She stopped writing and looked at me, speechless. I stood up, shaking from the rush of adrenaline caused by the memories flooding back. I didn’t have anything else to say. The guard near the door quickly walked over and grabbed my arm. “I think we’re done here”, he nodded towards Miranda. “Yes, I think we’re done here” she responded with a shaking voice. I could tell my words had flustered her as she struggled to fit everything back in her bag. “Thank you for your time Daisy.” She wouldn’t look me in the eyes as she stood to leave. As she exited the small interview room I stuck a foot out to stop her. She looked down at my foot and up at me, a look of concern and fright slowly spreading across her face. “This was my first and only interview, Ms. Scott” I said, mimicking her thick accent as I said her name, “Be sure to tell your friends that.” She gave me a small nod and rushed out of the room. The guard led me out of the interview room and back down a long, white, windowless hallway to my tiny cell.

I was muttering under my voice about how unfair everything was, and how full of crap Ms. Scott was. “You might as well get used to this view” Officer Moralez very smugly added, tightening his grip on my arm, “That interview won’t do you any good now.” I bit my lip as the anger quickly faded away, replaced by anguish, and tears threatened to spill over. A few days later Officer Moralez tossed a copy of the paper into my cell, a disgusted look was on his face. I grabbed the paper and read the front page headline. “First woman in the city accused of murder innocent?”

The article was a detailed description of everything I explained to Miranda Scott, including her opinion of my predicament and begging the courts and police force to rethink their decisions before potentially convicting me of a murder that was “rightfully justified self-defense”.

I held the paper close to my chest and felt tears slowly making their way down my cheeks. For the first time in weeks, I breathed a sigh of relief and smiled. Two weeks after that was my trial date, and I was found guilty for third-degree murder. I lucked out, only having to serve the minimum sentence of 10 years. The newspaper article Ms. Scott wrote about our interview is still taped to my cell wall, and I intend to frame it the day I’m released.
I had a dream where I was blue and you were green,
I had a dream where we could fly,
We could breathe under water,
But then you went away,
And it did not matter.

There was an elephant,
There was a lamp,
And my grandma ran without her pants.

I had a dream where I was tall,
There was a bearded man,
Who I did not know at all.

In my dream my arms were spaghetti,
And I had ice cream with my friend Betty.
My brother was there and a hamster too,
And a blonde girl who liked voodoo.

I rode a bike through the Sahara,
While wearing a cape, a coat and a tiara.

My dream was weird,
And forget it I might,
But there will always be another night.

I had a dream and it was wild,
It had the craziest things,
And none of them were true,
But waking up was the hardest thing to do.
Eating Disorders and Negative Body Images among Teens: Who is To Blame?

By Ashley Hearn

The definition of the phrase “body image”, according to Merriam-Webster, is “a subjective picture of one’s own physical appearance established both by self-observation and by noting the reactions of others”. However, what does one’s body image become when someone is constantly surrounded by TV shows, movies, billboards and photos that skew their view of their own body? What happens when someone becomes so aware of their “self-observation” and “the reactions of others” that they cause themselves physical and emotional harm to achieve the so called “beauty” of society? Many people, namely women, will go to great lengths to attain the flawless skin and tiny waist of their favorite celebrities. In fact, according to an article in Huffington Post, 65 percent of people surpass the weight the want to be and continue to become thinner. A lot of the women affected by this are young teenage girls, ranging from pre-teen 11 year olds to 20 something college students, and more often times “becoming thinner” means becoming dangerously underweight and skinny.

These young women are turning to unhealthy weight loss tricks, harmful dieting, and in many cases eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. Anorexia Nervosa is “a serious eating disorder…characterized especially by a pathological fear of weight gain leading to faulty eating patterns, malnutrition, and usually excessive weight loss.” Bulimia is “a serious eating disorder…characterize by compulsive overeating usually followed by self-induced vomiting or laxative of diuretic abuse, and is often accompanied by guilt and depression.”. Both of these deadly eating disorders are heavily common among young women, those most affected by these falsehoods of “beauty” put forth by the media. Is the media partially to blame for these unhealthy body images and incidents of eating disorders among young women?

The “falsehoods of beauty” is referring to the altered images that surround women daily. The actresses in movies and TV are rarely the size of an average woman, and if they are they are usually larger and overweight. The models in magazine ads, photos, and commercials are far from the size of an average woman. According to beautyrefined. net, “The average model is 5’11” and 117 lbs.”. When in reality, a woman at 5’11” should actually weigh around 155 lbs, 38 pounds more than the average model weights. Clearly these models that are so idolized are severely underweight, but the media makes this unhealthy, underweight size a norm for young women. “Research has shown that media exposure to unattainable physical perfection is detrimental to people, especially women...”. If surrounding young women with these images is so detrimental, then why do companies continue to use thin models for their advertisements? In fact, Emma Halliwell, et al. refer to these models as “artificial”.

Young women do not even realize that these images are affecting them, and if they do the results could be deadly. “…women engage in unconscious processing and may be more susceptible to accepting these ideals images as an appropriate point of comparison.”. The thin models and actresses have become accepted as norms. In fact, in the last few decades, the weight of celebrities and models have changed drastically. Actresses with bodies such as Marilyn Monroe, women of a healthy weight with natural curves, are a thing of the past.

How much are these changes affecting young women? According to a study conducted by DiAnne Neumark-Sztainer, “Weight-related issues are shown to be influenced by individual characteristics, familial influences, peer influences school and other institutional factors, community factors, and societal factors”. So many factors can cause a young woman to think twice about her weight and appearance, and it is severely damaging to surround them with unrealistic images of what it means to look normal or beautiful. It is also detrimental that the media places such a heavy importance on looking good. Many of the successful celebrities are tiny wasted, large busted women who almost always appear to be picture perfect. Even the characters these women play are often successful and look good. This puts forth the message to young women that to be successful and noticed, one must look that way (skinny and underweight). It is this that is most harmful to young women, “awareness of the importance of the thin ideal in society; internalization of that ideal; and perceived pressure from the media to be thin.”

Another issue at hand is the lack of support young women get from their peers and other external factors. Many young women’s weight are the topic of jokes amongst peers, and countless sit coms (situation comedies) on television often make references to the weight or appearance of an actress. It is these variables that play into the false idea of beauty that society that “makes it far too easy to have an unhealthy weight and a negative body image”. It is often easier for young women to starve themselves or purge themselves than practice healthy weight management and eating habits.

One opinion against this argument is that rather than ostracizing the media for the low body esteem of young women, perhaps society should teach young women about what a healthy body weight is, and supplement more positive body images onto teens, providing them with positive comments and ideals. While this argument is partially true, the media will continue to portray women as thin and flawless. One of the most individual factors that plays into body-image and weight management for women are media.
use and attitudes. Could interventions counteract these effects? In one study, after young girls were given a presentation on healthy body images and weight management, their body esteem got higher as did their attitudes on healthy eating habits.

However, even if parents, schools, and peers “do everything right,” their children may still develop weight related problems because of the multitude of influencing factors…” If programs were to go into effect for young women, programs such as the “Media Truth Presentation” used by Hass, et al., perhaps less and less young women will engage in risky eating habits and weight management. These presentations reveal the truth behind the airbrushed, photoshopped images and the starving, unhealthy models used by the media. In addition to enlightening young women’s minds to the media, the presentations also provide the young women with information on healthy weight management, and “…statistics about the average female body and appearance.” With such success rates, why are these programs not in schools and readily available for teens? Young women need more of these “interventions” in order to prevent further cases of eating disorders or a negative body image.

With how vulnerable young women are, why does the media push such unrealistic body images onto them? The media may not even realizing what they are doing and how their thin models are affecting the young women in our society. However, there are glimmers of hope on the horizons of the healthy body image movement. Many actresses are receiving positive attention for losing weight, but not dropping down to almost double digits. Many famous actresses such as Jennifer Hudson are promoting weight loss, but in a healthy manner and using healthy eating habits. Athletes are also making an attempt to help via campaigns aimed at getting young children physically active and practicing healthy and safe weight management skills. The attempts are being made, but even more need to be done.

According to Neumark-Sztainer, families who promote healthy body images and filter out the negative influences of the media generally have healthier children. Many variables play into a teen’s idea of their body image, and many factors can affect their eating habits and weight management. But parents should not have to fight against the media to teach their children about healthy and normal body images. The media should also be making attempt. Companies should abandon the idea of using skeleton like models to sell their clothing and products, and fat jokes on television shows should be a thing of the past. Celebrities should feel content with weighing more than 115 pounds and the whole ideal of thin and flawless equaling beautiful should be abandoned.

No one is perfect, and people come in all shapes in sizes. Trying to portray someone as perfect will have very negative and detrimental effects on the young people in our society, as the studies have shown. The media and companies needs to embrace this and realize that no one is perfect, and then take the length to emphasize positive body images and healthy weights.

Dear Society
By Rebekka Wollaston

You told me to fit in, so I didn’t eat.
You made a mold and told me to sit.
You said that I still didn’t fit.
So I cut a little here and there.

I told you I was sad, you didn’t care.
You said to just ‘get over it’.
I told you I missed my happiness.
You said, here take these pills.

Two wasn’t enough, so I take four.
I’m still not better, you say take more.

But society, why did you make me this way?
All I wanted to do was fit in.

Now as I lay here on this cold hard floor,
I question if trying to fit in was worth it.
Because as I draw my last breaths,
and cut one last time,
I mouth the words ‘do I fit in yet?’

Drawing by Miracle Ramirez

Dear Society

By Rebekka Wollaston

Tableau 2016
Oblivious to
The art of conversation
We just talk to screens

It's a Generational Problem
By Abigail Thacher

There is no Gratification without Digital Stimulation

Stimulation (Acrylic Painting) by Fabian Molinar
fabianmolinar.com/
One by one I filled my balloons
Heaved and huffed into these tickets
Put my whole being and hope into these wings
Filling them until my lungs could do no more
Tying them until my fingers were blue
Trapping myself into these balloons
Keeping them bound to my dreams of now
With threads as fragile as my reasons to stay
The string of because so easy to break
Slowly the balloons would greet the sky
As old friends separated by the years
And slowly my feet would leave the ground
Happy to say goodbye to the grayness of here
My balloons are helping me
Lifting me into the clouds
Smiling with hope for now I have a reason to go
To never turn back
To finally meet the pinks of the sky around
To join the birds in the song of freedom
And I am so happy to have gone
To have gone with my balloons

Oil Painting by Cindy Lanning
Into Thin Air
By Cade Michael

When I’m far above the tree line,
And the tarmac,
And the typical,

When I’m far above the city,
And the streetlights,
And the cynical,

When I’m far above the clouds,
And the crowds,
And the conventional,

When I’m far above the pollution,
And the people,
And the predictable,

I’m free.
A butterfly flaps its wings.
Dandelion seeds are blown loose.
A seed hits a cricket.
The cricket flies.
Other crickets follow.
A startled bird flies from them.
The bird flies past a cat.
The cat yowls.
A nearby chicken jumps.
The other chickens cause a ruckus.
An excited dog runs into the coop.
A squirrel runs from the dog.
A child sees the squirrel and squeals.
His mother hears and whisks around.
Her apron knocks over a jug of milk.
Her husband investigates the noise.
He knocks over an armchair.
Rats scurry out from the wall.
Passing neighbors scream at the rats.
A mule with a cart runs from the screams.
The cart spills pots onto the road.
Horses trip over the pots.
A rider falls and breaks his legs.
He shouts with anger.
His shouts make birds take flight.
The birds fly to the sea.
They fly low over the ocean.
Their wings cause ripples.
The ripples become waves.
A tanker goes up and down on the waves.
The tanker capsizes.
Barrels of oil fall overboard.
Electrical wires ignite the oil.
Fire on the ocean warms the air.
Warm air rises to form clouds.
Wind spins the clouds round and round.

A hurricane begins.
When I played volleyball in high school, I was on the worst team in the league. In fact, “worst” does not even begin to describe them. The nicest way to describe that team is that they were garbage at everything, even the basics: setting, passing and serving. However, my horrible team never lost a game. It may seem impossible, but it wasn’t. We were constantly victorious because the team was held together by three players: Rebecca, Mia, and me. We knew we were the elites in the league—so did everyone else. We were so good that we were cheered on every single game and patted on the back by parents of the other team after our never-ending victories. Our teammates, however, were only given applause by the three of us and their families, but we never tried to put them down about it or make ourselves seem superior to the others because we were a team. Our humble nature and dedication to our horrid, unstoppable team made us stand out from the gloaters who simply played average, maybe worse. All being considered, someone who is cocky in a sport but has no actions to support their excessive pride is a pet peeve of mine because they make those who play well all look arrogant, and they embarrass their team.

Someone who is all bark and no bite is a pet peeve of mine because they make those who play well all look snobbish. During my best volleyball season, I found staying humble and modest difficult because I basically could’ve been signing autographs after the matches (I even signed a few volleyballs for a couple kids). However, I stayed leveled and would only brag to my mother and family when I got home. I knew that not everyone was good at everything, so I kept quiet. On the other hand, at the gym an excessive amount of loud mouths that didn’t care about their team lingered and refused to leave my good vibes alone; they only cared about hearing their name being cheered by the crowd. Other players’ desire to be admired didn’t bother me; I know how good I felt hearing my name, so if those athletes craving the spotlight played volleyball well enough, then their names were screamed and admired, too. However, one incident during warm-ups happened where a girl continually taunted me. 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and it would be a great victory, not a disgraceful one. I nodded and began to walk away; as I was stomping my feet towards the court, my mom called me back just to ensure I received the message she gave me; she glared at me with the stare that gives babies nightmares, and she told me that she was watching me. I took a big gulp and went back to my position quite begrudgingly and played as I normally would with any other team.

Before this day, I was fine with cocky people and with untalented volleyball players; they gave me a motivation to be better. They pushed me to reach what I wanted to be: the best player with the best attitude. But this big monster broke me. She made me hate conceited people, and worse, conceited people who couldn’t play volleyball. She had such a big mouth for someone who had nothing to support her arrogance. For a moment, she even made me hate myself for losing my composure in a stressful situation. She made me realize that there was more than one of her type as well. Everywhere there was a court, there was a Bratty McBrat Brat. So many boastful players were in the league that I began to think of them all as egotistical and shameful. Given this knowledge of jerks like her, I began to associate and even stereotype people who were smug with horrid athletic abilities.

In addition to making herself look bad, boastful players embarrass their own team, no matter how humble they may be. Had the insults happened just once, no one might have noticed, and I know I would’ve been able to forget and move on, but the insults continued. The taunts continued to the point that the brat made my squad, her squad, and both audiences stare and groan at her repulsive actions and words the entire game. Her team was completely quiet the entire match, more than likely from embarrassment. I could tell in the audience’s faces that they were completely disappointed with this girl’s sportsmanship—or lack of it. Thankfully, the match was over rather quick; the score was 25-10 and 25-8, and of course, my team was victorious. My blood boiled, but I glanced at my mother and I saw her staring in my direction, so I had to contain all of my emotions; otherwise, I would’ve got in her face and tell her what I really thought of her little stunt, but if I did, I would be just like her, a boastful, big-headed, self-centered witch.

After our win, my team went along the bottom of the net, high-fiving the other team, saying our good game chant, but the other team was still quiet. I couldn’t tell if they were upset about losing, but after we finished our high-fives my team gave me a pep talk and told me I was one of the best players they’ve ever seen and not to get mad about one jealous kid. I was excited we beat that brute especially because she had no reason to talk to me like as she did, and her team saw her bad sportsmanship, too. From that one player I mistakenly stereotyped her entire team to be monstrosities just like her—they knew it, too.

I tried to avoid making more conflict with the opposing team, so I was surprised when they approached me as a whole. I expected another round of insults, but surprisingly, I didn’t get defensive when the other girls came to me. The captain of their team looked me in the eye and apologized for the brat’s behavior. The girls hugged me and told me I played great. However, the brat kept her distance and never apologized for her behavior. She only stared at me and gave ugly smirks, but the enormous red bump on her head from my spike made us even in my book. After all her drama, I thought her team’s demonstration of sportsmanship to comfort me (even though they should be comforted for having that monster on their team) was satisfying. All being considered, her entire team was looked down on because of one individual’s actions.

I may have a temper, but I’ve always been great at controlling my outbreaks because that’s just the person I am, but I met a big brat that only wanted to tear a good person down. She was arrogant and even worse she couldn’t prove her arrogance on the volleyball court: enter Bratty McBrat Brat.

Today, I am not as tolerant towards glory hogs as I was before my freshman year; now, I hate them, especially if they can’t play well. As far as I’m concerned, when playing volleyball, exit all Bratty McBrat Brats.
What Color? - A dirge
By Lyric Jones

What color shall my coffin be?
The roses all around?
What fin’ry shall you dress me in?
What hymns your voices sound?

What color shall my coffin be?
How white the lilies pale?
For now the flames consume my skin,
I pass behind the veil.

What color should my coffin be?
Had this not been my fate?
The fire burns brighter, hotter still,
Reduce to ashen state.

What color shall my coffin be?
How many ravens cry?
Shall I ascend on phoenix wings,
And take into the sky?
It is only within Twilight,
Where the birds of darkness take Flight.
Shadowy figures soar through the Night,
Only to take on relentless Fight.

Birds of darkness take on great Height,
They soar blissfully ever so Right.
Falling from above in Spite,
Inevitably to burst into holy White.

As the holy white Alight,
The creatures of night relinquish their Might.
Within the depths with their Foresight,
The night shall end Forthright.

At the crack at dawn the sun shines Bright,
The Shadowy figures out of Sight.
The reckoning comes with vast Delight,
War is won with holy Smite.