Harbinger

2012

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n. har•bin•ger [här•bən•jər]

a person or thing that comes before to announce
or to give indication of what will follow

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Contents

Foreword

Full Disclosure:

It's no secret to my family, friends, and teachers that I am interested in Irish literature and culture. This fascination led to a trip abroad during the summer of 2011. While I was on the Emerald Isle studying at University College Dublin, my class focused on the Irish Literary Renaissance; authors included James Joyce, J.M. Synge, W.B. Yeats, and Lady Gregory. I had never been out of the United States before, so this experience forced me to leave my comfort zone. The other students in the group were mostly from the University of Missouri, so I was one of the few students from another college or university. I had always known that if I were to study abroad, I would choose Ireland, and I grabbed the opportunity as soon as I could. I did not expect that this experience would inspire my senior essay, which analyzes these authors' portrayals of Irish identity. Taking that small risk led to my own personal growth as a student and as a person.

My professor not only taught us the successes of these Irish authors, but also the failures they had to face as they struggled with their art. Each writer took risks by submitting to journals controversial literary pieces during a period where many subjects were taboo. James Joyce struggled with finding a publisher that would distribute *Dubliners*, a collection of short stories that forced the city of his birth to look in the mirror. Joyce faced multiple rejections, but continued to fight for his work.

J.M. Synge was a famous playwright during the early 20th century and traveled to the Aran Islands where he lived with Irish peasants to better understand the rural side of Ireland. Through this journey westward, he became inspired by the villagers he met and wrote the infamous play *The Playboy of the Western World*. During the debut of this production at the Abbey Theatre, Nationalists became infuriated with Synge's portrayal of the villagers as violent,

uncivilized people. These Dubliners were outraged by the nerve of this outsider, but the playwright continued to defend his work. As writers, we must continually push the limits of our talents and submit our work to a larger audience, even if it may be considered controversial or strange. Joyce and Synge encountered criticism from publishers and then their own communities, but continued to defend their art throughout their careers.

This year, the *Harbinger* staff decided on the theme "Full Disclosure" because many of the pieces, both poetry and prose, are about being vulnerable and open as they discuss difficult subjects and events that are sometimes kept hidden. Each piece describes a person's struggle with an obstacle in her life. In "Pennies," Grace Pittman depicts a woman who is uncomfortable in her marriage and feels restricted by living in her husband's Southern hometown. Taylor Grant's "Weight" is about a young woman who has an unlikely encounter with a strange man in a church. "Spaced," by Arianne Kobler, provides a look at a young woman's love/hate relationship with her hometown.

The poetry also touches on heavy subjects and demonstrates these authors' inner thoughts. In "I Will Bare My Heart to You," Jennie Runk describes a compelling, yet gruesome, relationship between two people. "Pollen and Petals," by Paige Kesner, shows an individual's struggle with drug addiction.

Great authors have always taken risks and bared their hearts and innermost thoughts to their readers. James Joyce may have had difficulty finding someone to have faith in *Dubliners*, but now he is regarded as one of the greatest writers of all time. The authors whose pieces are published in *Harbinger* 2012 have also taken risks, and are now reaping the benefits. They have offered full disclosure to our readers in hopes of speaking to the challenges and struggles that we all face. Enjoy!

O.A.

Nobody Knows It But

By Jennie Runk

On the top of my head and hidden
by my thick hair
resides a spout.

Under that spout
is a costume,
elaborately folded within my skull,
of a heart-wrenchingly beautiful butterfly.

At times, it unfurls
so suddenly, so startlingly,
it's like a sneeze – automatic,
fumbling, stupid.

It covers all of me:
my arms, legs, face.
It hangs on my body the way
pond mucus
hangs on a low branch.

I don't like the costume,
in fact I hate it.
The rubber smells moist
and fleshy
against my face and
it makes my nose itch.

The black
mesh eyes cloud my vision and
makes me feel
awkward.

I never know
what to do with my arms
once they become
flashy queer wings.

And the damn thing,
like a sneeze,
interrupts
at the most inappropriate of times:
when anyone
looks at me or
when I try to speak or
when I try to get to know you, and
especially when I want you
to get to know me.
It erupts with a whooshing noise
like a curtain, so quiet
that only I hear it,
and the mask
muffles
my voice.

And, like a sneeze,
there's nothing I can do but
let it come, closing my eyes
into squints
to bear it.

So I wiggle my wings and
my antennae and
I'm beautiful,
    and people stare
    and say "ooh" or sometimes "ahh,"

but I'm a secret in the
dark, underneath
the colorful curtain.

Nobody
knows it, but I have a sneezing spout
on the top of my head.

And I wish,
    how I wish,
you could hear me
through this rubber.

Can you at least spot
a sparkle of my eye
behind the black mesh?

Discarded

By Jennie Runk

On the corner of 23rd and 8th,
a man sits propped
against a building high as a mountain,

nothing but a few blankets for company,
a beard for warmth,
and dirt
for interest.

He is still,
and silent,
watching the days drag past his corner
as the people ignore him.

You know what they say,
and he knows what they say:

One man's trash
is another man.

I Will Bare My Heart to You

By Jennie Runk

I will sit on your lap
and face you with
my legs on either side of your body.

I will take a knife
to my chest
and drag it down the middle of me
and make an incision
like an "I" across me.

I will peel back the skin
and any muscle that clings to it,
and I will open myself like a window
with meat-red shutters.

I will break my ribs with my fist
and move the pieces away like twigs.

Beating and wet,
my heart will look at you,
exposed,
vulnerable
to your hands and eyes.

When you look back
at her pulsating gaze,
neither she nor I will be afraid.

I will not flinch or shy away;
she will not shriek or recoil.
I will sit boldly on your legs
with my self wide open,
and
    I will not be afraid.

One in Each of Your Shoes

By Jennie Runk

I did not expect my
100 piece pride-of-lions jigsaw puzzle
    bought at a garage sale in mid-Missouri
to contain all 100 pieces.
So I counted them
on your coffee table one night while
you were out with friends.
I found 101.

100 pieces were browns, tans, and greens –
    the lions and their savannah.
One
    piece was black, blue, and white,
a semi-circle
like part of a shark's glassy eye.

The half-eye watched me
find the corners, construct the edges,
build a frame and fill in the middle.

100 pieces found
their places among one another
in happy puzzle-piece embraces
that lovers sing about
and the lonely imagine.

Together
they create an illusion
of four lions lounging in a desert
under a wide tree
looking,
at something only they could see.

The shark's eye gazed at me from the dusty box,
amused and
encouraging
while I took
the lions
apart
piece
by
piece
and scattered them into 100 places
around the house.

Jennie Runk is a graduate from Stephens College with a BFA in Creative Writing. She enjoys living in New York where she can read and listen to poems at various poetry clubs. She continues writing poetry, and is beginning to explore fiction a lot more now that she doesn't have to do homework anymore.

Empty Spaces

By Paige Kesner

My best friend disappeared on March 14, 2001. I was eleven—turning twelve soon—and proud that my hair finally reached my butt. I remember I was wearing overalls that day. All my classes were extra boring without him, so I spent that time fidgeting with my overalls straps and clasps instead of passing him notes and doodles.

Monroe Gale was already twelve when he fell out of my life. His birthday always came before mine, and he loved rubbing that fact in my face. The week he disappeared he was still tacking "kid" on the end of everything he said to me.

"Don't forget we have math homework, kid," he'd say, standing over me with his dark skin, hair, and eyes.

"Want to share some of my juice, kid?"

For a twelve-year-old he had a deep, vibrating voice.

The first day he was gone was no big deal. He could be sick, or playing sick, but he would be back tomorrow. When tomorrow rolled around and he was still missing, I tried calling him. When I heard the tone on the other end of the line, Mom said his phone was disconnected.

The next day I went by his house. I didn't see any cars in the driveway, and when I crawled around the side of the house and peeked into the wide windows of the living room, I saw it was empty. Even the furniture imprints were gone, probably vacuumed

away, leaving the impression that no one had lived there for months. I knew better.

When Monroe was absent a full week, I decided to snoop some more. I went to his house, but little blond girls now frolicked in the front yard under their mother's watchful eyes. They rolled pink plastic convertibles stuffed with Barbies across the sidewalk and talked in high-pitched voices.

I walked home and stood in my yard for a long time.

What happened to Monroe? My almost-twelve-year-old mind ran rampant. I saw him being snatched in the middle of the night. I saw his whole family dead. I saw his family as criminals, running to the next town because they were about to be caught by the law. These thoughts rolled around my head, growing and breaking off into new ideas and spreading until the horrific possibilities were all I could think about.

"The Gales got arrested," I heard a boy boast during lunch the next month. "They were murderers, the whole family, and the police got 'em."

"Oh yeah, well I heard they were in the Mafia, and the leader guy got all mad and killed 'em."

"My mom said they just moved in with Monroe's gramma," a quiet girl nearby said.

"Shut up! What do you know?" One of the boys grinned wickedly and tipped over her milk. She cried and ran away.

I found her sniffling in the bathroom with a paper towel clasped to her front.

"Is that really where Monroe is?" She looked up at me, puffy-eyed and red-nosed. With a shrug she resumed pressing the paper towel against her soaked clothes.

"Well, what did your mom say to you?"

"She didn't say anything to me." The girl frowned. "I heard her telling Daddy that must be where they went. That's where my cousins were when they went away."

I was thirteen by the time I found out the truth. About that time, I started having strange dreams.

"I was thirteen by the time I found out the truth. About that time, I started having strange dreams."

In the dreams I could hear Monroe's voice following me through a school day or a day at home. He would chat with me like always, but I could never see him. This relationship was how I'd figured an imaginary friend would function—invisible outside the creator—but solid within. I felt him in my dreams, and I heard him, and I never once asked where he had gone. When I realized I hadn't asked in my dreams, I would go to bed chanting, "Where'd you go? Where'd you go?" I hoped that once I fell asleep the words would slip out of my subconscious mouth as well.

When I found out what happened, the dreams only got stranger.

Monroe's family had been hidden away by the Witness Protection Program. Monroe's grandparents lived in town and had been notified within the week of Monroe's depature. I had seen his grandparents often enough; I called them Grandma and Grandpa Gale and delivered Christmas cards to them on holidays. I had not considered them keeping this knowledge to themselves, though. I found out the truth after I happened to wander by their house on the way to a friend's when Grandpa Gale stepped out for his walk. I suppose it never occurred to him that I was out there waiting for Monroe to return with no clue where he had gone. We waved at each other and went on our ways.

The next afternoon I found the Gale Grandparents sitting on my porch after school. Grandma Gale opened her arms, and Grandpa Gale smiled his sweet grin. Everyone greeted one another, and then they got quiet. I sat squashed beside Grandpa Gale in a chair and stared at them, clueless.

"Do you miss Monroe, sweetie?" Grandma Gale asked.

I nodded, then she nodded and smiled sadly.

"He's gone," Grandpa Gale said. His voice was quiet and breathy like he could barely squeeze it past his lips.

"Where'd he go?" I asked. I realized that these smart old people might know what I didn't. Adults were always privy to more information.

Grandpa Gale blinked a lot and said, "He's gone where he will be safe."

It took the Gale Grandparents and my parents about an hour to get the information to make sense to me. It still hadn't quite clicked, but it was beginning to soak in. Monroe Gale, my best friend, was never coming back.

We had been best friends before he left. And once he was gone I found myself focusing my attention more and more on the empty space he left behind. I saw him more now than when he had been physically beside me. I saw him next to me as I walked home from school. I heard him help me through my homework and call me "kid." I saw him in every space in my room: the place he had once sat on my bed, outside my closet helping me organize my shoes, hiding under a chair to pop out and scare me.

"Monroe Gale, my best friend, was never coming back."

I was seventeen when my weird dreams got even more messed up. After finding out Monroe was gone, my mind invented terrible

reasons why he was a protected witness. I would lie in bed and cry and enter a world where he watched a man kill an innocent woman.

"Once with my boyfriend Jean's hand up my shirt, his breath in my ear, Monroe's voice was all I heard."

But at seventeen I had a boyfriend, and I had hormones, and I had Monroe's deep voice vibrating between my ears.

Once with my boyfriend Jean's hand up my shirt, his breath in my ear, Monroe's voice was all I heard. In my dreams his voice had a physical form. It slid across my skin and wrapped around my body, and I woke up with an itch between my legs.

Monroe's abscence had become more physical than his body had ever been. I often found myself wondering how he would look at eighteen. His shoulders would be wide, his muscles lean and his face smooth. His voice would be the only thing that remained of the little boy I had befriended.

At eighteen I had a new boyfriend. He was dark like Monroe, but his voice was too deep. When he tried to seduce me, I shut up his dirty words with a kiss. His shoulders were wide and his muscles were big and his jaw was square. He only lasted a month. Over the next year I plucked up a few more dark men with smooth skin, but they never stayed long. It wasn't until I was twenty that I finally decided to fix myself. I picked up the whitest, blondest boy I could find at a frat party. I took him back to my room and as we lay naked under the covers at three in the morning, we talked.

He gave me his life story.

"I can't imagine you smoking or rocking a Mohawk," I said.

I told him some of mine.

"You don't seem like the type of girl to mess around. I bet you

never took shit from anybody," he said.

We discussed family, cars, friends, books, and pets.

"I can't handle the attitude cats give off."

He agreed. "I think the attitude of people is more than enough for me. I'll stick with puppies."

Charlie had the softest hair, the roughest voice, and he wrapped his arms around me in a way that reminded me of my dreams. But a voice couldn't keep you warm in the real world, and a voice couldn't keep me warm anymore.

The dreams didn't go away yet, but with Charlie I began to calm down. I stopped seeing Monroe in every dark man, and I stopped hearing his voice in the midst of sex. My mind found less time to ponder where he was and why he'd been taken away.

Charlie and I moved to California where we adopted a Basset Hound, got small jobs, and went out on the town every weekend.

One of those weekends, not long after I turned twenty-one, I saw him. I was at a club. I had left Charlie at a table with our friends to get drinks when something caught my attention. At first I didn't see it. Then I felt it. A dark face turned my way, eyes wide and mouth pulled into a smile. I suddenly hated the bass in the music that shook the club. My heart was trying to speed up but kept catching on the beat. And that voice that I had begun to forget was somewhere under all that thumping. I still don't know how long I stood near the bar staring him down. He never once looked my way. Eventually, Charlie came to get me, and we rejoined our friends.

I craned for a view of the dance floor, the exit, the seating.

"Honey?" Charlie looked concerned. He leaned toward my ear. "You all right?" He had to yell over the bass. I nodded numbly.

I tried to talk. I looked at Charlie and our friends. I sipped my beer, and I danced. But in my periphery I caught every dark face.

The club closed at two, and people shuffled, danced, and

bounded out the doors. A few limp drunks were deposited outside the entrance. I surveyed the crowd, analyzing every face. I didn't see him. I looked to the people who had already started down the sidewalks to another bar or the subway.

Was that him? The shoulders were wide, the skin dark, the muscles bigger than I had imagined. His back was to me as I was ushered toward the curb. As we piled into a taxi he turned a corner, but I never got to see his face.

That night I heard a deep voice vibrate my soul as Charlie moved over me. I dreamt of my hands on those wide shoulders, that smile right before my face, and that voice slipping across my skin and into my soul.

The next weekend I told Charlie I was going for a walk to the corner grocery. I'd be back soon. Instead I stood outside the entrance to the club debating if I should enter. If I went in, I wasn't sure that I would leave before closing. If I went in I would be home late from "the grocery store" and what would Charlie do? If I went in I might see Monroe.

I flashed my ID and slipped into the dark club, searching for a voice, and a face, and a dream.

Paige Kesner is a senior creative writing major from Liberty, Missouri. Her poem "Falling Asleep" appeared in the 2011 edition of *Harbinger*. She is vice president of Sigma Tau Delta, an international English Honor Society.

Spaced

By Arianne Kobler

"Hey, want to go to Mars?" I ask my friend, my lover, my girlfriend, my crush. We are lying on blankets on a dock in Nevada, Missouri, which is about 54.6 million kilometers from Mars and 596 miles from Huntsville, Alabama. It is late spring, and the air is weighing us down. The lake gives way to the moon.

She laughs her little laugh. Is it cliché to say that it sounds like chimes? But that's what comes to mind. Chimes. "All right, let's go to Mars," she says.

"I'm serious," I say, shooting up like a rocket, suddenly excited. "Let's go to Mars. I can take you to Mars."

She laughs again and looks at me. Her eyes are two different colors, one green and one blue, and they sparkle like galaxies at war with each other.

What I'm really trying to say is "don't go home over the summer. Come stay with me in Huntsville. You'll like Huntsville. It's quaint, and the people are cute. Let's agree not to be separated for three months while we wait for a new school year. Come to Huntsville." But I've only been with this girl for a month, and I don't want to scare her away. So, I ask her, "Let's go to Mars?"

It's my junior year of high school, and this slow speaking ex-alcoholic named Mr. Moon is my American History teacher. Most

days we just listen to him drone on about the Civil War and then we snicker and make jokes about how it's not water that fills his bottle. The man says "right" a lot. We once counted. In a 50-minute period, he said it 97 times.

"Huntsville was just a sleepy ol' mill town at this point, right?" Mr. Moon reminds us, even though most Huntsville natives know the city's history.

"It wasn't until Senator Sparkman came along that we really started blooming."

Senator Sparkman is a big deal in my town. In the late 1940s and 50s he convinced President Truman to hide Warner Von Braun in a small town in Northern Alabama. And the rest, as they say, is history. The space race began, and so did NASA, one of Huntsville's top employers.

Of course, we all know this already. Everyone does. It's one of those facts that you wake up with in the morning. Albany is the capitol of New York, Jupiter has the largest moon, and NASA and the Arsenal are the heart of Huntsville. Between the two of them, nearly everybody has a government job. Mr. Moon is just rehashing boring universal truths.

"Arianne, are you paying attention?" Mr. Moon says to me, "Arianne?"

My grandfather drives an old Buick that smells of leather and black licorice. There is candy in every nook and cranny of his house as well. When I was young, I thought Willy Wonka lived there.

My grandparents live in a rich section of Huntsville known as Jones Valley Gardens. It's not a gated community, though it could be. The houses are nice, and the people are privileged. And old. Lots of old people. Jones Valley Gardens is separate from Huntsville Proper but still part of the city. Sometimes at night, my grandfather

would take us for rides in his Buick. My favorite place to drive was over Airport Road. Not a large hill, though steeper than some of the others. It opens up wider at the bottom and ladles passengers into Huntsville's nightlife. Airport is a traffic nightmare, so cars back up to the Parkway and at the height of Airport, you can see a strip of lights. I never wear my seatbelt. I sit in the middle of the backseat and when we reach the zenith I lean forward, eyes wide and scan the lights below. My vision begins to blur, but still all the lamplights, car lights and the gas station and grocery store lights look like stars. From the back seat of my grandfather's car, I can see red giants and white dwarfs. From the Publix, Sirius waves at me, and I'm not in Huntsville anymore.

"Where do you think you're going after this?" I ask my friend Hughston.

"After this?" he says, looking up from his magazine and around Barnes and Noble, then back to me. "Probably home. Maybe to Cameron's." Cameron is a mutual friend of ours. He's brilliant and studies engineering at University of Alabama in Huntsville, or as some people call it University at Home.

"Smartass," I say. "I meant after college."

"Oh." Hughston pauses. "Back here, I guess. To teach."

He wants to teach history at Hampton Cove Middle school, the rich kids' middle school. It's in the suburb of Hampton Cove, which has always been considered a little snotty.

"I figure I'll live in town for a while, until I can make enough money to move to Hampton Cove," he tells me.

Hughston has never been farther away than Atlanta, a four-hour trip. He goes to school at Troy University in Southern Alabama, and while that part of Alabama does indeed feel like a different world, it's still Alabama. He just doesn't care to go anywhere else.

"Why do you like it here so much?" I ask.

"Why do you hate it?"

"I don't hate it. I'm just bored with it. I don't want to live here anymore."

Periodically, someone comments that Huntsville is like a blackhole. People move there, they say they won't be there for the rest of their lives, and then 30 years have passed and their kids are checking them into Stonybrook Residency Home.

"And it can happen to you," they warn with a pointed finger, the other hand occupied with Starbucks.

"No, it won't," I say stubbornly.

"That's what my cousin said," they say. "She still lives up on Randolph, teaching at Huntsville High."

I think about how beautiful Huntsville is with its rolling hills dotted with lights like stars blinking out a message. "Stay," they seem to say. "It's not so bad here." Those hills get you with a wink and a smile.

"All I'm saying," they say, "is that it can happen to you."

This is what Huntsville is like: It's miles of city, cars honking, busy folks traveling Parkway at rush hour, and then soft gentle country with tall grass and heavy air that keeps us earthbound. It is soft limestone and clay and hills that blink to you at night and welcome you during the day. There is greenness everywhere and on the outskirts of town there are rows of dilapidated houses, homes without hearts. The yards are bare except for patches of grass and weeds. But the ditches that surround these houses? Those are covered in poppies.

The summer after my freshman year of college, I work two jobs. One is at Jason's Deli. The second is at a law firm. For three days a week I put on my nicest clothes and am the law librarian's assistant

for eight hours. The work is boring and monotonous. And every day I stare out the window and wish to be back at Cottey. Cottey is where my life is. My girlfriend is there and my work. At home I am just miserable. I am excited to get back to life again. I am wasting it in Huntsville.

She breaks up with me in July. I don't remember why. I don't think she ever told me, but sometime in July the girl with the gorgeous galaxy eyes breaks up with me and I feel like a kicked-aside rag doll.

Unable to sleep, one day, several hours before work, I drive around town. Downtown has the ugliest courthouse I have ever seen. It was built in the seventies when Huntsville was obsessed with being modern. We were the rocket city; it just made sense that our court house look like it was put together with chewed-up Lincoln Logs. Running out of gas and afraid I won't be able to make it to work at the law firm, I stop by the Wild Rose Café.

Wild Rose Café is downtown Huntsville. It has everything a true Southern café needs: sweet tea, biscuits and gravy, and owners who don't give a shit about their customers' feelings. A patron asks for oyster crackers to go in his chili. The owner, a larger woman named Diane, gives him a cockeyed look.

"Oyster crackers? Why oyster crackers?" she wants to know.

The patron doesn't say anything. He looks at her like she has grown a third head.

"After a while, groveling gets boring. Bring on the bitch."

"What's wrong with Saltines?" she asks.

"Well, for the chili," he says.

Diane then takes out two packages of Saltines, places them on the counter and pounds them to crumbs with her fists. "There's your damn oyster crackers!"

Despite the abuse, people come back for more. Perhaps it's

because Wild Rose Café has the best breakfast and lunch in town. I think it's because the patrons like to be talked to like that. After a while, groveling gets boring. Bring on the bitch.

I go there because I know I am safe. The only real threat to Wild Rose Café took place when Diane's son came out of the closet. Diane did not waste a moment before joining Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. She faced criticism. A community figure supporting a gay and lesbian organization in Alabama? It's not looked upon fondly. When people accused her of trying to recruit children, she didn't even blink before responding, "That's right. I'm at two now. One more and I get a toaster."

When I enter the café looking a mess and crying, she doesn't ask why, she simply sits me down at the counter and sets a cup of coffee in front of me.

"And that'll be on the house," she says. "Don't even think about pulling out a single dime, missy."

Loneliness and anxiousness sit in my stomach like bread dough. It's a feeling I get every time there is a mass exodus from Huntsville. My other college-age friends are leaving for another school year. Just two more years and we will disperse for good. We'll stop coming home every summer and the only ties we will have are the families we leave behind. Not that all my friends are leaving forever. Some of my friends cannot imagine truer happiness than living in Huntsville for the rest of their lives.

As the summer comes to a close and the number of people my age trickles down, the feeling grows stronger.

I've known Devon Suns since I was eight and in all this time she has never left her house on Wingate. Even she is going to leave in a couple of months; this permanent fixture is moving to Nashville to become a bartender.

"But I hate Nashville, so it's only for six months at the most. And then, who knows?" Devon pauses to mess with a lock of her hair. Devon has a mane of hair that's pink, a color similar to the Whirlpool galaxy. "Not Huntsville," she says.

"Right," I say.

"But you know what we gotta do before that?" she says and produces a huge bag of Christmas ornaments. "Smash these."

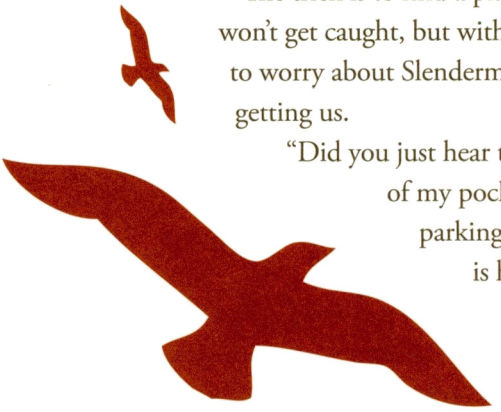
All through the summer we have been collecting cheap Christmas ornaments to destroy. Devon and I both share a general loathing of Christmas and our plan is to break them in slow motion while the Yeah Yeah Yeahs play in the background.

It's almost midnight the night before I'm driving to Columbia, and Devon and I are driving around Huntsville looking for a place to smash these ornaments.

She says that she called Justin's dad who is a cop to question him about the legality of our behavior.

"He said that we could go to jail because technically everything is illegal, but to go ahead and do it anyway. I figure if we get caught we can use the 'my bucket-list' excuse."

The trick is to find a place that is secluded enough that we won't get caught, but with enough light that we don't have to worry about Slenderman coming out of the darkness and getting us.



"Did you just hear that?" I ask and pull my keys out of my pocket. We're in the Randolph School parking lot discussing options. Randolph is hardly the most dangerous place in the world, but I wasn't going to be one of those girls you see in horror films who dies outside their cars because they can't

find their keys in time.

"Yeah, I did, dude. This place is hella creepy at night."

We decided that a ditch is the best place to smash ornaments. Ditches are big, secluded, and have enough light and activity around that we could both cover up the noise from smashing ornaments and avoid getting murdered. There's a big ditch near the school that wraps around a neighborhood and empties into a cow pasture. As a child I would walk up and down the ditch, making a game out of avoiding the wet parts. I had a bit of a lonely childhood.

"Dude, so did I," Devon says. "Why were we not friends?"

"It's because we lived in neighborhoods with no kids," I say. "I mean, this is before I lived in the house on Winthrop."

"True story. There are no kids in my neighborhood either," she says. "Where were the neighborhoods with kids?"

"Blossomwood, I think," I say as we get back in the car.

We decide that a ditch is the way to go and the one near our old middle school is best choice.

"If we get caught we can totally say that we were just looking for our cat," Devon says.

"Our friend's cat."

"My grandfather's cat?"

"Taylor's cat," I say. Taylor Payne, or Tay-Tay as he's known to friends and relatives, is a skinny punk rocker studying to be an anthropologist at Universiy of Alabama. He has a legendary fondness for cats.

"Why Taylor?"

"Because Taylor will back up our story no matter what," I say. "Not sure if your grandad will."

"Good point," she says. "And the ornaments?" she asks as I hand her the bag.

"Let's just not get caught."

I climb down the steps to the ditch, which is large and empty. A lone car makes its way to California Street, but that's it.

The ditch is split into sections by tunnels. A series of four tunnels funnel water where it needs to go. The tunnels are under California Street and as we become more comfortable with the dark we travel farther back and can hear the cars whizzing over us.

"Well, let's not dally," I say.

"Agreed."

We laugh as we break the bulbs. Brilliant blues, reds, and golds crack into shards as our destruction continues. Constellations form on the ground and in the dark sewers while the night sky blinks back at us.

"Well this is satisfying," I say.

The ritual is primal, animalistic.

"Ha!" Devon says as she smashes a bulb with her boot.

For the finale we gather the bulbs into a pile on the ground and step on them with our shoes.

"Leave it," Devon says as I go to pick up broken shards. "It's raining tomorrow. It'll get washed away."

"The ritual is primal, animalistic."

We exit the tunnels, back into the soggy air. Orion's belt shines over us.

"Oh, we missed one," I say, spotting a blue ornament in the plastic garbage bag.

"You can have the honors," Devon says.

I let the ornament fall from the bag, and it breaks when it hits the ground. I break a larger piece with my boot.

"Well, that's one more thing crossed off the bucket list," she says.

"And I've gotten in my activity of questionable legality for the week."

It's nearing 1 a.m. now. I yawn.

"Let's go," Devon says. "Don't you have a ten-hour drive tomorrow?"

"I'm not looking forward to it. Some days Missouri isn't much better than here."

"Still, it's not Huntsville," she says.

"True."

Devon climbs up the steps out of the ditch with me following close behind. Shards of ornaments fall from the soles of her boots like stardust.

"Shards of ornaments fall from the soles of her boots like stardust."

Arianne Kobler, a creative writing major at Stephens, was a former writer for the *Huntsville Times* and Notrequiredreading.com. She is a member of the Warehouse Theater and recently wrote skits for Women in Comedy and the Twenty-four Hour Play Festival.

St. Brigid's Well Liscannor, County Clare, Ireland

By Olivia Aguilar

Baubles and medals
hang from Christ's hands
while the ancient water
pours into the basin to baptize
those who feel the pressure
of death's grip.

Brigid's eyes settle on
drifters who
ignite candles for
someone whose flame
has stopped burning. Her
somber face
cries for those
buried in the bog.

Old widows linger by her
and light a candle
for places they once knew.

The sea roars outside
the ancient well,
a reminder of
Ireland's
immortality.

Railway Reverie

By Olivia Aguilar

On the train, derailment is on my mind.
Stars shower the metal roof and
soothe the passengers who
do not prefer the nomadic life.
Semis stream by on the highway
while the locomotive glides on
without urgency. The man next
to me sleeps with his pea coat draped over his
sinewy frame. He dozes with his mouth gaping,
but I know better —
I don't want to miss the night sky racing by my window.

Senior Olivia Aguilar is an English major from Columbia, Missouri, and is a member of Sigma Tau Delta and Mortar Board. She won the 2011 Clark/Dillingham Critical Essay Award.

Weight

By Taylor Grant

Climbing cliffs in Monterey County was turning out to be a beautiful, if increasingly treacherous, experience. I searched for handholds among walls of rock and moss slick from sea spray. My hair was damp and my ears had stopped recognizing sound a long time ago. The cyclical crash of waves against the rock below me had blurred into a bedlam, one constant roar between water and land.

I had descended the bluff early to watch the sailors at dawn, before the sun could find its way down from the top of the Santa Lucias. But now, as I returned to the top, the gleam off the dripping rocks was blinding. I kept climbing, drinking in the sea air, exhilarated by the height and by how much the froth at the bottom seemed to want me there. It swirled, enticed. I smiled to myself as I moved; the power I had in that moment over my own fate was intoxicating. I could just let go. I could let go and fly for a second or two.

"I could let go and fly for a second or two."

Every wave's impact made my stomach flutter and burn. Then the burn spread to the rest of my body as fast as my heart could beat it there. As the sensation reached my fingertips, however, the gentle mist from the wave—the farthest reach of the ocean's own hand—rose to cool me. And so I pulled myself up like this, hold and step, hold and step,

completely absorbed in what I was doing. I felt like I had never known anything else; my arms and legs were simply tools, my body a machine of vibrant life.

The sound of the waves reminded me, as I methodically climbed, of the first time I ever sailed. My mother, tall and reserved and a stranger to me, smiled at no one in particular. It was the wind, I thought, as she lifted her face into the breeze and closed her eyes. She smiled so rarely when I saw her, and now she smiled at the wind. My father had always told me that she was busy living, very busy.

She knew the man steering the boat, though how well I neither knew nor cared. I was too young to care. To young, I realized as I circumnavigated a wide, smooth face of rock, to understand that I must have looked just like her. I was, in that moment, a complete wreck of captivated joy. As jubilant a seven-year-old girl as had ever walked. I knew nothing about sailing, nothing about the rigging that made us move over the water. It didn't matter.

"Bend your knees a little," she said in my ear.

"Why?" I called back over the wind. Just then we hit a rise, and I stumbled backward a few steps. She caught me, laughing.

"That's why. Pay attention and take care of yourself." She gently let me go, and I tiptoed to the very front. I was too short to peer over the edge, but I stood, knees bent a little, by myself. After a moment she came to stand behind me again, nodding approval at my stance.

"See how much fun you can have?" she called. I nodded, gleeful to be at the front, the first to reach air, light, water.

The top of the cliff neared. As I crawled over it, I collapsed, exhausted and deaf and happy. Through half closed eyes I saw the mountains in the distance and, nearer, the top of a steeple. It protruded from a space between two large pine and brush-covered

hills not a mile away. Highway 1 must be on the other side of them, I thought, along with the town this church belonged to. Central California tried to hide its establishments from the coast, a kind of atonement for building them at all in this otherworldly place. It was just as well; I hadn't come here to see people.

The church was all light, made of white and gold. The two colors embellished the walls in mysterious patterns designed to make humans feel small, and beams of sunlight streamed through towering stained-glass windows. The enormous ceiling depicted an evening sky. An invisible sun's pink rays stretched over it, beginning, almost white, over the crucifix in the front and deepening to purple toward the back doors. Occasional soft, unobtrusive clouds framed the painted sunset, giving shape to its radiance. Heaven, presumably, or our best guess.

The church was completely deserted. I walked toward the front, past rows of deep mahogany pews, past the greens and golds and purples in the windows. I was too modest to sit in the very front; I hadn't come here to brawl with God. A polite telepathic conversation would do. Mostly I wanted the stillness.

"I hadn't come here to brawl with God."

I sidled into a seat on the left side of the aisle, about a dozen rows back. Not very far, considering the actual expanse of the place. I closed my eyes, breathing deeply, and relaxed the tender muscles in my neck, arms and back. All was quiet in the overpowering way of churches. I felt my hair slide forward and brush my face and felt my mind slide into the silence.

No noise came with the memory. It was a silent film playing in my mind, and I was thankful; the real experience had been full of screams, curses and howls of anger. Anger of loss and of change.

I had lain the phone down by the kitchen sink, feeling nothing at all, and stood there for a long time just breathing. Hoping, maybe, that I hadn't heard correctly, that the phone call hadn't really happened. I hoped that the frantic, unwelcome news that had forced its way into the room might miss me, if I stood still enough and closed my eyes. It felt like it buzzed, so I hoped it would fly out the window. But the buzzing was in me, not the room, shaking my brain and driving me mad. I ran up the hill behind my cabin. I ran up that hill and the next one, resolving to keep going. There were always more hills in coastal Oregon. It would be me who gave up first.

I threw rocks at every tree I could see. I wanted to see the bark chip off, to make the forest cry if I could. The trees' silence only made me cry louder in return, and when I found no satisfaction in abusing earthly things to soothe the burning in my chest, I looked up through a patchwork of branches and shouted at the one who had decided this should be and had decided it long ago.

I sent no coherent words, no oaths of hatred or abandonment skyward. I couldn't. I couldn't think of any, and it seemed childish, anyway. Childish and false, but that didn't help my violent grief. I climbed one of the pines, and when I reached the point where the trunk was too small to support my weight I climbed higher. I climbed until the top bent a little from my weight. I sat, swaying with the breeze, until the sun went down. There were things that still needed doing, even without my father in the world.

A squelching, sucking sound jerked me awake. It was an abrupt noise, rude and foreign in such a place. A man was sitting in the next row, off to the right. It struck me as bizarre that two so vastly different people could occupy the same church, which was perhaps small-minded of me. He wore expensive clothing. His shirt and

pants were pressed and tailored a little tight in the way young, rich men tend to prefer—in movies, anyway—except he couldn't be younger than forty. His left hand, thrown on the back of the seat beside him, was already lined and hard. It had that thickness that comes with middle age. His hair was dark and cut short. Clean, streamlined.

By contrast, I wore only shorts and a long, fitted plain T-shirt. My red hair tumbled over my shoulders, and I wore thick-soled boots. I was lean, muscular; he had been once, I could see, but the same thickness that was in his hands had spread to his shoulders and back. He looked solid now. In ten years, he would be fat.

He slipped in through the front, probably from behind the altar. He was not a priest. That much was obvious. He reclined in his seat, his feet crossed and resting on top of the pew in front of him. The squelching noise was explained when he lifted a peach, half-eaten and dripping, to his mouth. Again the sound seemed to echo off the walls, unwanted and obtrusive. I wanted to apologize to someone for the sound, and then slap the fruit from his hand. He looked bored, sighing in between bites. When it was gone, he held the pit in his hand for a moment. His eyes scanned the floor. It was obvious he was contemplating throwing it on the ground.

Finally he turned to look at me. He smiled; a short, tense gesture characteristic of someone with very little time, all the time. He slipped the pit into his shirt pocket.

"Hi, there," he said, business-like, condescending. His lips were taut, and one of his feet tapped the air above the chair where it rested.

"Hi."

"And who are you?"

The way he asked made me feel like I'd been standing in a line, with dozens of other hopefuls, for hours waiting to see him.

I wanted to snarl.

"Zooey. Who are you?"

"Zooey…?"

I gave no response. He shrugged, as if to say "It doesn't matter, anyway," and resumed studying me. His eyes lingered, shamelessly, over my hair, face, shoulders, breasts, arms, and legs. He wasn't predatory. He examined me like a puzzling, fascinating little phenomenon. I tried to guess what he was thinking.

"What do you do, Zooey?"

I hesitated but answered: "I take care of boat docks. Maintenance and cleaning. I build them, too."

In less than a second he looked bored again. He sighed and scratched at the back of his neck. Send the next one in, the motion seemed to say.

"Do you do anything else? What about hobbies? Interests?" he asked, motioning with his hands as if trying to help me along. I suddenly felt like a child being scolded.

"Long-distance sailing," I said and rose to leave. I had a fantasy of spitting in his face as I passed him. As I stalked from the pew, I felt his hand close on my forearm, not painfully, but firmly in the way of someone sure of getting what he wants. He looked up and met my eyes. There was no condescension now.

"Come walk with me," he said.

I walked, watchful, slightly behind him up through the vineyard behind the church. He made no move to turn around. His hands, I could tell, were fisted deep in the pockets of his pants. The heat of the day was fading now, and the intense light from the sun had softened a little. The rows of grape vines held sour, immature fruit. We were completely alone.

"I'd like to ask you some things," he said. "I need you to focus."

"Is that so?"

He betrayed his annoyance with a twitch of the left corner of his mouth. I imagined him a king, sitting on a throne of velvet and gold as servants brought him platters of food, drink, powders and pills. Others held miniature houses, cars, women with children and wedding rings. Occasionally he nodded and a platter was set before him. Most he dismissed with that same twitch of his mouth.

"I imagined him a king, sitting on a throne of velvet and gold."

We walked halfway down another row before I heard an intake of breath that suggested he was going to speak. "So this sailing—you do it because it's enjoyable?"

I wrinkled my nose at the scent of a trick question. He, however, was locking eyes with me as a parent does with a young child—to prevent distraction.

"I just mean you're not obligated to do it, correct? It's a purely a recreational thing."

"Yes."

He struggled for words, opening his mouth and closing it again.

"And you feel fulfilled, content on the inside when you do this? Happy?"

This had to be planned. I glanced around frantically for silhouettes through the rows of vines. For someone waiting to rob me, take my camera. Or worse.

"Stop. There's no one else here," he said with the force of impatience. I turned back to him.

"What kind of a question is that?"

"An extremely simple one."

"Yes, I feel fulfilled, content. Happy."

"Why? Do you know why?"

I searched the rows again and finally turned to him, eyebrows

raised. His expression morphed from the stony façade of masculine embarrassment to drooping resignation.

"I don't feel anything." He sighed.

I paused, unsure of whether or not making fun of him would be cruel. He turned away and in the midsummer light he looked so tired, so completely drained that I suppressed my urge to call him a melodramatic fool.

"Really—anything," he said.

"I don't understand. Like…numb?"

"Like numb. Like I don't care. Like I could set this vineyard and that church on fire and not care. Maybe it would even be entertaining. That would be something."

I didn't care to stay any longer.

"Look, you might want to talk to someone else about this kind of thing. A psychiatrist or an artist or someone."

He drew a deep breath.

"Zooey, I have seen psychiatrists. I have seen artists, painters, musicians and dancers and blah, blah, blah."

I could feel whatever it was about him that he had been keeping at a trickle turning into a flood. His voice rose and he gestured forcefully, talking with his hands and arms.

"I've seen prostitutes, alcoholics. A priest. For fuck's sake, I've seen an

existentialist," he said and stomped a foot. "I've seen murderers."

The vineyard was silent except for the distant crash of waves. He looked angry now and paced the row we stood in. His curt footsteps kicked dust and stray rocks away from him, toward the vines. After a good while, I stated, lamely: "That's a lot of people."

His back was turned, and he spoke: "There was a teacher, a welder, a custodian from Yuma."

Maybe he was crazy. "How did you find all of them?" I asked, incredulous.

He flung his arm wildly at the church. *Are you stupid?* the gesture seemed to say. He still had not turned around. "Why?" I asked.

"Can you tell me anything that they couldn't?"

"No."

"Think before you speak."

"I just told you. No."

He fidgeted, uncomfortable. He fisted his hands in his pockets again. I backed away, slowly. Help wouldn't help him.

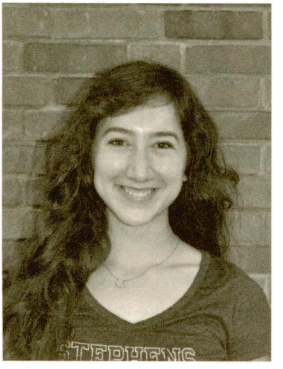
"Zooey," he said, softly.

I walked to him and reached, gingerly, into those pockets he'd been so occupied with this whole time. He didn't move, didn't even look at my hands. I pulled out keys belonging to some foreign automaker I didn't recognize. Italian, probably. Next I pulled out a heavy leather wallet, a sleek black phone and finally a gleaming wristwatch. No wonder he hadn't been wearing it. It weighed at least two pounds.

He finally lowered his eyes to watch as, one by one, I dropped the contents of his pockets in the dirt. He didn't seem surprised, not nearly as surprised as I was at myself. He stared at the objects on the ground—keys, wallet, phone and watch—for a moment. Then he stepped away and walked, softly, toward the town I knew rested

on the other side of the mountain. I held my breath. He walked, stopped, turned, slowly, and then slunk back. He did not look at me but picked up his things and replaced them, firmly, where they had been. His eyes were still on the ground as he turned and walked away.

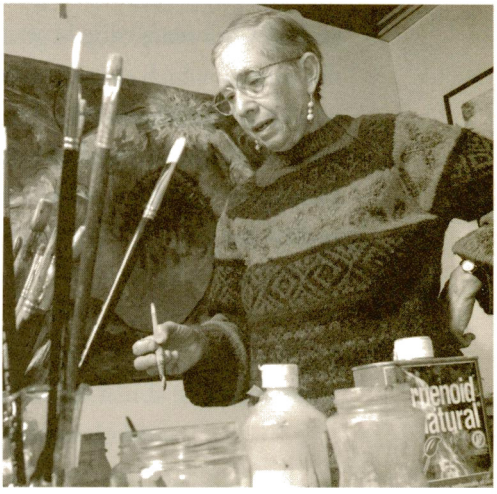
I looked back for the first time and studied the scene behind me. The vineyard, rows of green surrounded by an arena wall of even greener pines, sloped gradually down to the yard in front of the church, which stood out, beautiful and alien, against its natural surroundings. Maybe fifty feet of ground was visible behind the building before it dropped completely out of sight. After that, all I could see was the sunlit sea, scarcely distinguishable from the endless sky.



Taylor Grant is a junior from Van Buren, Missouri, majoring in creative, marketing, and media writing. Her short story, "Seventeen," was published in *Harbinger* 2011. She is the president of Sigma Tau Delta.

A Conversation with Author and Painter Gladys Swan

By Rachel Henderson



Gladys Swan is an author and artist living in Columbia, Missouri. She has published two novels, *Carnival for the Gods* in the Vintage Contemporaries Series, and *Ghost Dance: A Play of Voices*, nominated by LSU Press for the PEN Faulkner and PEN West awards. *News from the Volcano*, a novella and stories, set mostly in New Mexico, was nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award and the National Book Critics' Circle Award. *The Tiger's Eye: New & Selected Stories* is the most recent of her seven collections of short fiction. Her stories have been selected for various anthologies, including *Best of the West*. Her fiction has appeared in the *Sewanee Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Chelsea*, *Shenandoah*, *Ohio Review*, *New Letters*, *Southwest Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Hotel Amerika*, and others.

I was unfamiliar with Gladys' work until I was commissioned to write this interview. So, I picked up a copy of her latest collection of short stories, *The Tiger's Eye*, and plopped down on my couch to

familiarize myself with the works of a fascinating woman. A few weeks later, Gladys was gracious enough to sit down with me at Teller's, a local lunch spot, where she greeted me kindly, answered my questions, and even offered a little advice and encouragement for my own creative journey into the world of writing.

Rachel Henderson: When did you first start writing and was writing your first mode of creative expression?
Gladys Swan: Like most kids, I liked to draw. I always had an interest in the visual arts, but at age thirteen, I decided I wanted to be a writer. In high school, I was really terrible at P.E., so a kindly doctor that I went to for sinus trouble gave me an excuse to get out of it. I took a class in painting instead. Later, I turned my attention to writing until it seemed my work would never get published. Then I decided I would do ceramics.

While teaching in Indiana, I had a wonderful fellowship from the Lily Endowment. My project looked at mythology in Inuit art. During that time, I took art classes at Purdue and traveled up to the Arctic to look at Inuit art and then to museums in Montreal. It was about this time that my stories began to get published. I realized that my art project was going to take more than a year's work so I put the artwork aside for a while and concentrated on my writing. Eventually, a time came when I decided I needed to do both.

Henderson: It sounds like you never had a time where you only wrote or only painted. Both were always present, just in varying capacities.
Swan: Yes. Even when I wasn't really applying myself to painting, I continued drawing or making sketches. Likewise, I would go to art museums when I traveled. I think that was one of the things that did it. I went to too many art museums, and I just couldn't take it any longer. Art never really left my life.

Henderson: What is the relationship between your painting and writing? Do they inspire one another?

Swan: Oh yes! I've written stories and poems that have to do with art and artists. Doing the artwork has taught me how to see both paintings and the world around me in terms of light and color. This has had a strong influence on the way I see and describe things in my fiction.

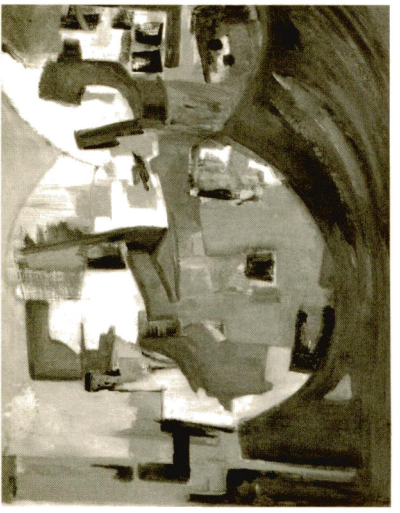
Henderson: I noticed your characters are very real at an emotional level. Has that been a development throughout your writing career? It would seem that you can't have characters of that depth early on in your life because you don't know people that well, and you don't know yourself that well either.

Swan: I think that's a very sound observation. Over time you get a better sense of how you relate to people and the world. You also acquire a more mature perception of people's motives. So yes, those things are developed over time.

The artwork I do is very much about color and feeling and that is also reflected in my fiction. And I'm not a realist. I thought I was, but my first novel is a kind of comic fantasy. I never expected to write such a thing, and I never expected to turn to abstract work in my painting either.

Henderson: From my perspective, fanciful stories suggest something more is going on inside of us. Fantasy points to a human desire to be a part of something grand. Do you think you turned to fantasy because life experience has made you more aware of this desire?

Swan: Yes, I think that's true. A painter named Charles Burchfield once said that he likes to gravitate between reality and the fantastic because it brings one closer to a kind of truth. I agree with him.



"Creation" - oil on paper

There is a level of what you might call "the real world" that many artists and writers are describing. However, it is a creation, and not a permanent one. The natural is much more permanent, but even that too is subject to change.

While you do need a kind of literal level to what you are doing in order for others to understand, I also think the fantastic takes you into a realm where you can explore what can't otherwise be stated.

Henderson: How long did it take you to get your first stories published?

Swan: It took me about seventeen years. My first book was published when I was 45. I had published about five stories at that time and had sent them to around 100 magazines. So, it took me a very long time.

Henderson: Was it discouraging? Or did you just kind of keep truckin' along?

Swan: Oh yeah. It was very discouraging. That's what really sent me in the direction of the visual arts. I thought, "Nothing is more useless than a drawer full of typescript, so I'll make bowls and pots and things. That's more useful."

Henderson: What advice would you give young writers who are in a similar position now?

Swan: I would say, if you have a passion for writing, stick with it. I was under the illusion, at the beginning, that I was writing for the sake of fame and fortune, which has not exactly come my

way. [she laughs] But then I realized the real reason I was writing was because it was so important to me. The process of creating was really the basis of my writing. If you have such a passion, stick to it. Otherwise you should do something else.

Henderson: In previous interviews you've talked a lot about silencing the critic. Do you think the critic is fueled when we create solely for fame and fortune?

Swan: Yes. If you look around, you could say that most of the great work has already been written or painted, and most of us are not going to be Rembrandt or Shakespeare. However, that doesn't mean we don't have something significant to reveal about our time or our way of looking at things, and this needs to be refreshed. So there's always a place for art, to refresh our sense of the world and the human condition. I also think there's a tendency in almost every culture to punish failure, and we get hooked into that. Creating requires failure. If you can't fail, then you're always working within these narrow limits. Failure allows a person to expand.

It's very destructive to always compare yourself to people who have done it better. A lot of what I did as a teacher was try to save people from themselves. Creativity has a rational side.

You need the critic to help you decide what sounds better and to evaluate another person's comments, but you need to first let go and dive in and just do it without having the critic there to say, "Oh I shouldn't

"Sky Horses" - oil on paper

do this, and this is terrible." That type of critic really gets in the way.

Henderson: Do you have any practical ways of silencing the critic?
Swan: I think putting your mind into the task, concentrating, and letting it flow is the main thing. Also, give yourself permission to do anything. You know you can always come back and change it. It's not written in stone.

I was very critical for a long time. I don't think I knew what I'm telling you, and at some point I realized that surrendering to the process was really what I needed to do.

Henderson: Do you see yourself taking up a new form of expression?
Swan: I think I'm going to have to acknowledge that there is not going to be time for me to do everything. If I had more time, I would love to compose music.

Henderson: Do you play an instrument?
Swan: No. I did take piano when I was younger. But I can't really say I play anything. What about you? What are you interested in?

Henderson: As an undergrad I really latched onto creative non-fiction and still enjoy it. But my passion is for film. My senior year at Stephens, I had to take scriptwriting in order to graduate. I thought I would hate it, but I ended up loving it. Now, I want to do it all—writing, directing, editing.

Swan: I think if I were starting out all over again, I would be very much interested in film.
Henderson: Yes! Now is a great time to be interested in film. I get

scared sometimes because I'm so new, which is why I like to hear about silencing the critic. I can very much fall into comparing myself with other people.

Swan: I think that's very important for anyone starting out. You're starting from a position where most people know more and have more experience.

"Lanscape" - oil on linen

The more you do something the better you get. Everybody starts out making a whole series of mistakes, no matter what the art is.

Like many writers, I started out writing stories about myself. This created a kind of hole at the center of the story because I couldn't disconnect myself from the character I was trying to create. When I finally got around that, I could finally see the character, whereas before, I couldn't.

When I first started painting for real, I could see lack of proportion in my paintings. The human body has a series of proportions, and I would often find my figure drawings to be out of proportion. I began looking at other artists and noticed they had the same problems.

Whether you're writing fiction or creating a film, there's always a certain amount of information that the viewer needs. Determining that is a series of choices. The longer you do it, the better you get at making those choices. When you're better at painting, you're better at drawing things in the right proportion. These are just basic problems in the arts. You have to not only give yourself permission

to do lots of drawings that aren't any good or write stories that aren't any good, you also have to accept that as part of the apprenticeship. The arts require this kind of apprenticeship and some people take longer than others. For me, it took a very long time.

Henderson: Do you find it difficult to let go of the stories and paintings that aren't very good? Or do you find yourself returning to them to try to fix or improve them?
Swan: Well, I just leave them alone and sometimes they call me back. Many of the stories I did early in my career have been now published because I had the distance from them, which allowed me to see what needed to be done to them.

At this point, Gladys was finishing up her black bean wrap and the waiter was removing my empty salad plate from the table. I thanked Gladys for her time and insight, complimented her work, and we exited the restaurant discussing our favorite films from the previous weekend's True/False Film Festival.

Rachel Henderson graduated from Stephens College in 2009 with a BFA in Creative Writing. She was the editor of *Harbinger* 2009. She enjoys film and hates cats (sorry, cat lovers).

Seeing Light

By Grace Pittman

No more of that silly living.
No more hoping that the toast won't burn,
that your lipstick is not too dark,
that your oil change is not two thousand miles late.

No more of those body bombs,
sewage leaking into the streets,
or concerns that there is too much fluoride in the water.
The dentists say it's okay.

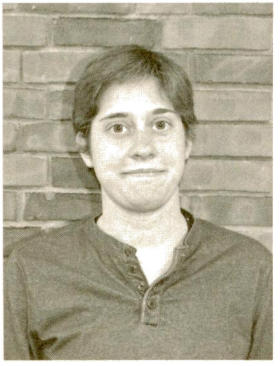
You can feel the brain tumor growing in your head
each night you try to sleep.
You knew Smartphones had to be a mistake.
They look too high tech, deadly.

The earth calls to you like an omen.
You dread the metal box and the stone marker that reads RIP.

You want a mat of hay and the warm dirt as a bedspread.
You want to wear your growing hair as clothes.
You want dirt in all your pores,
those god-given breathing devices
clogged up, stupid, and petrified.
The crickets will chime above,
the worms will curl around you for warmth,
and the biters will have full bellies.

It's worth the trade.
When the earth is cleansed,
you will really feel it.
When the floods come

the soil will shift
and the water will push you
underground.
When the twisters rip across the surface,
you will not see the terrible gash,
but hear its distant hum and beating footsteps—
humans running.
You see that it is not chaos.
You see the roots growing upward to heal.
You see the light before it comes.



Grace Pittman is a junior creative writing major and a member of Sigma Tau Delta. Her work has appeared in *Catfish Creek*, and she participated in the University of Missouri's Women's Poetry Night.

What's in a Home?

By Janice Clawson

"I thought if I could touch this place or feel it. This brokenness inside me might start healing. Out here it's like I'm someone else, I thought that maybe I could find myself."

- Miranda Lambert, "House That Built Me"

It's not a grand place. It's a brick ranch-style house sitting on the cusp of a neighborhood. It is shy of two miles outside the city limits of Columbia, Missouri. The house I've lived in from birth to junior year of college isn't much. Yet its walls could tell more stories than anyone would care to hear; some it wishes it could forget while others it begs to tell. My house, the gossip.

Baking season, my favorite time of year, starts the day after Thanksgiving. My mom begins with a batch of fudge. Then come the sugar cookies, Martha Washingtons, and any cookie she can find in her Christmas issue of *Good Housekeeping*. The house always smells warm with the scent of sugar and spice.

"The house always smells warm with the scent of sugar and spice."

Five bowls of frosting sit in front of me: light blue, white, yellow, green, and a pinkish red. Sprinkles are nearby. Many

different shapes of sugar cookies cover the table: Santas, Christmas trees, bells, angels, and gingerbread men. I pick out a Christmas tree and the bowl of green frosting. With my tongue sticking out the side of my month in concentration, I frost it with a butter knife. I learn quickly that holding the knife parallel with the table makes the frosting go on the smoothest.

Layer one done. Red, green, or multi-colored sprinkles sit off to the side. Tough choices for a seven year old. I can make it very Christmasy with the red. Or natural with the green. I choose the multi-colored to make it more realistic.

"What about a star?" my mom asks.

I pick up the knife in the yellow frosting and dab on a bit at the point of the tree. I clear a spot among the blank cookies and smile as I put it down. Next, I select a bell and start again, but this time I frost it light blue.

Our new dog, Lucky, has black fur with a white blotch on his chest. My dad surprises everyone, including my mom, with his arrival. Instantly, we become friends. Lucky lives in my dad's truck until his own camper shell is found for him and placed in our backyard. All I want to do is baby him and his one-year-old ways.

I sneak his bowl into the house and pull out the jug of milk. I have to use both hands to lift it. I am ten and the two-gallon jug is still a little much for me. I half fill the bowl with the white liquid. It is just enough that Mom will not notice its disappearance but still plenty to make Lucky happy, I think. I've never given him milk before, but that's what you give babies. Besides, everyone likes milk. I'm far from being in a stroller, and I can't get enough of the stuff.

I bring it out to Lucky, and he licks it up. My sister, and accomplice, has a smile on her face that says we need more. I walk to the kitchen and take out the jug. I pour the liquid into the bowl.

When I look up, there stands Mom.

"What are you doing?"

"Lucky got thirsty."

My mom smiles at my response.

"The milk drips off his tongue and down his lip."

"This is the last. No more," and she means it. She takes the jug, and I make my way outside.

"Mom says no more," I tell Jen. We watch Lucky lick this batch up faster than the first. The milk drips off his tongue and down his lip. He is home.

I pull the rusted reclining lawn chair to the back of the house where there is a cement patio. My sister follows as I unfold my chair and sit it facing away from the house. This way the sun can light up the book I am reading. I drag my blanket and stuffed dog with me on the chair and snuggle in. It is summer, and I have just graduated from kindergarten. I can do it all. Any book in front of me I can read: *Cat and the Hat, Are You My Mother?* and, my favorite, *Amelia Bedelia*.

I can even read the patio. Right by the sliding glass door, the cement is inscribed with a name. I want to know what those figures mean. I squat next to them and read "Kelley." My mom explains to my sister and me that there is a family in the neighborhood that has the name "Kelley" who used to live here.

"When you're safe at home you wish you were having an adventure; when you're having an adventure you wish you were safe at home."

- Thornton Wilder

Stairs are pesky creatures. They can never stay silent. It is a task to walk on them without a single creak. Very few people in the

house know the trick. Nine years old and living in the basement is nice. I can always tell who is descending the stairs into my domain because I live under them.

Tonight, an elephant is going down them. My dad has heavy footsteps, but they sound louder.

"Janice. Are you up?" my dad says not waiting for my response. "Your sister is staying with you tonight."

I have a full-size bed I can pretty much swim in. My sister comes in my room. She looks shaken. I give her one of my stuffed dogs to cuddle. My dad returns upstairs. The floor above is as talkative as the stairs. Always creaking. I count two people in my brother's room; my mom and dad. The front door opens and more footsteps enter.

"I heard Dad on the phone," my sister says to the stuffed animal. I look at her. "Patrick wasn't breathing. Dad said he was turning blue."

I laugh. When something bad happens, I smile to make the pain disappear.

My parents knew this was coming. They just thought it would be later. Muscular Dystrophy is genetic on my mom's side of the family, but only the men can inherit the disease that weakens muscles over time. First the person loses the ability to walk, then his arm movements. This progresses until…

My uncle died at 17 from suffocation, and now my brother is the same age. The ambulance comes. My brother gets a tube put in to act as his trachea, allowing air into his lungs. The tube is attached to a ventilator, which imitates the lungs' muscle movements. Nine years later, he is still cheering for every sports team in the world and creating floor plans for future houses.

My door slams open. I twist in the direction of the sound. My

dad takes up the entrance of my bedroom.

"Get up now!" There is no arguing with that statement. My dad's heavy footsteps make the house shake.

I leap from beneath the covers and begin my beauty regiment. It is 9 a.m. on Saturday. My dad is a pretty laid-back guy, but when his voice grows hot with frustration, you don't mess around.

I close my door, but it is stuck on something. I pull a bit more, and I hear wood scraping metal. The stopper went through the door when Dad pounded on it.

I walk up the stairs and into the '70s-style kitchen with a green exhaust fan and red-and-yellow wallpaper. My dad is nowhere to be found, but my sister Jennifer is at the kitchen table eating a bowl of Cocoa Puffs. She wears her tomboy clothes: baggy shorts and oversized T-shirt. This means yard work.

"Lucky tore up the tent," she says.

I look out the window. A pile of fabric sits in the middle of the yard. The night before we put up our dad's tent. We played in it and practiced our Brownie Girl Scout skills. Apparently the posts weren't in the ground far enough. It blew into Lucky's area. The tent didn't stand a chance.

My brother Patrick receives his brand new electric wheelchair today. Bye to the old blue cruiser of grade school and hello to a new red one for high school.

He eases the joystick forward, and the chair inches forward. He moves it to the right; the chair moves to the right and the same for the left. Then he moves the joystick backwards and the chair follows.

Everyone comes out for this event; Mom, Jen, Dad, the tech guy who brought it over, and me.

Now to introduce obstacles into the equation. My brother spins

the chair around to face the opening into the kitchen. He moves from the center of the living room, around the sofa and into the kitchen area. He bumps the wall. Today there is still a dent in the drywall.

Next test, can he get into his bedroom? Most door openings made in the '70s didn't have wheelchairs in mind, especially not electric wheelchairs with protruding wheels. My dad widened Patrick's door when he got the blue cruiser, but it was time to see if the red is a good fit.

Patrick inches right. His foot plates scratch the door. He stops, readjusts, and then tries the turn again. His arm rest hits. Patrick moves the chair back into position, but a little more forward this time. He slides in.

"He's in!" I yell to the crowd of people in the kitchen. They are watching from the outside while I got to experience it from the front row because I have claimed his bed as my viewing spot. My brother spins around to face me.

"The doors a bit dinged up," he says.

"You have a big nose."

"You're ugly."

"You could lose some weight."

Middle school is rough. Jennifer comes home every day with a new insult for me. I just let her attack, but when she tries to control my actions the fight is on.

"This show is stupid. Change the channel," she says, lounging on the sofa. I prefer the love seat; it is cozier.

"It's off in ten minutes."

"Change the channel!" she yells. I play opossum. "I said change the channel!"

I don't move. She gets up. I put the remote under me. She

pushes and pulls at me. I won't move. Her nails scratch my skin. I stand my ground. Jen stands on the love seat and then sits on me. She starts with my torso then bounces down to my head as she asks for the remote. She finally rips it out of my clenched hand. The television changes to a new channel as my fingers run across the buttons. My sister smacks my face. "You should have just changed it." She sits on the couch and watches the show she wants.

"MOM! MOM! MOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!" explodes from my lips.

"What is it now?" my mom asks. She is as used to this event as I am. My sister doesn't pay any attention.

"Jennifer took the remote from me," I say, pouting.

"Jennifer, why did you do that?"

Jen doesn't respond.

"I never get to watch what I want," I reply.

"How about Jennifer watches what she wants for an hour, and then Janice gets to watch what she wants?" my mom tries to reason.

Jen stays silent. I stomp from the room.

Drip, drip, drip. I know that sound too well. It's one in the morning and raining outside. I live in the basement bedroom with leaking cement walls. I roll over until I reach the edge of my bed. I drop my hand down, and the cool lick of water touches my fingers. Damn it! I get out of bed and walk to my door. With a flick, the light comes on. My room is a swimming pool.

I enter the dark recesses of the laundry room to get my best friend, the wet-and-dry vacuum. We have pulled quite a few all nighters together, I can say. The three-day rain of mid-March. The melting snowfall of January. Or my favorite, the hurricane that came through mid-Missouri in April.

I roll the vacuum to the entrance of my room and get to work,

sucking until the vacuum makes a putt-putt noise and regurgitates all the water in the hose. I wheel it to the family room where there is the sliding glass door. I dump the contents on the lawn. I love spring.

The drywall is later removed, revealing a crack snaking its way down the middle of the wall. To make things worse, in the corner of the room there is another crack. Surprisingly it doesn't let in water, but it lets in light. On sunny days the sun shines in through the opening. Nature follows me into the house.

"Home is a name, a word, it is a strong one; stronger than magician ever spoke, or spirit ever answered to, in the strongest conjuration."

- Charles Dickens

I sit in my new dorm room. Lilac paint covers the walls. Four little stars are on the ceiling with white paint covering them. I lay belly down on my green-and-blue bed cover. My computer sits in front of me. This is my first year at college. I'm living in the same town I grew up in, but it is somehow different. The town feels completely new. My parents left. My roommate disappeared into one of the other girl's rooms.

I'm alone.

The house always had people in it, and Lucky was outside. I could visit him when I was bored. This is different. I'm to call this place "home." Tears run down my face. Can I really do this? I pull up pictures of my family on my computer. I smile at the memories. I take a deep breath.

"Two and a half years later, I'm still calling the house where I grew up home."

Two and a half years later, I'm still calling the house where I grew up home. On all the forms asking for residence, I put the address I memorized before heading to school. I visit every couple of weeks not because I'm forced to, but I want to. Any longer and I become homesick. The reminder of my family is all around me. That ranch-brick house is where I return.

Janice Clawson is a Columbia, Missouri native. She won the Midwestern Scholastic Golden Key award for her short story "Hidden" and read her short story "Snow" at the 2012 Sigma Tau Delta Convention in New Orleans. For Sigma Tau Delta, she coordinates E-pals, a project that connects children in Columbia, Missouri, with children in Uganda.

Pennies

By Grace Pittman

"Do you want to head down to the train tracks?" Phil asked, engulfed by stacks of unpacked boxes.

"I suppose so. It's not getting any cooler in the house."

Sarah nodded to the now broken air conditioner. The first night in their new house it had worked even though it clanked and rattled so loudly that Phil would not stop complaining. At least it drowned out the incessant chirping of cicadas outside. Now that it was broken, Sarah had to endure not only the cicadas, but the overbearing heat—not the dry heat that she was used to. Whenever she opened a window, waves of waterlogged air rushed in to suffocate her. She shut tight all windows and doors, but the heat still crept in.

"Yeah, I'll figure that out soon. Tomorrow I'll call the repairman, but let's get out of here. I'm cooped up." Phil wiped the sweat off his face with his T-shirt.

"A snorkel and mask could help her breathe but also provide a defense against the neighbors."

The last thing Sarah wanted to do was go outside, but she pulled on her shoes anyway and imagined walking out her front door in scuba gear. A snorkel and mask could help her breathe but also provide a

defense against the neighbors. They were drawn to her front door carrying sweet-potato casseroles, hello dollies, and baskets of peaches like moths to a porch light.

The train track ran parallel to Main Street only half a mile down the road. Phil walked a few paces in front of her, eagerly pointing out various plants and telling her the major differences between long-leaf and short-leaf pines. She didn't listen, but when he looked at her she smiled regardless and pretended to pay attention.

"We're almost there," Phil said. "Look. You can see the wiregrass growing up all around the depot."

Sarah followed his finger and saw a pitiful whitewashed train station that appeared to have reached the end of its days long before she was born. Around it the plant Phil called wiregrass grew in tufts, its green needlelike leaves pointing menacingly upward.

"It's a very interesting plant," she said.

"It does best in a sandy, loose soil. That's why it grows here because this used to all be under water. That's why it's called the coastal plain, but…"

"So, what do you want to do?"

"Oh, well I brought these pennies for us to put on the tracks." Phil pulled two new bright copper pennies from his pocket.

"Why?"

"Well, when the train comes in the morning, it'll run over them."

"Why would we do that?"

"I used to do it with my brothers when we were kids." Phil's sweating palm clutched the pennies in a fleshy oven.

"Okay then."

Still confused, Sarah held out her hand. She followed him the few paces to the iron tracks, wading through a thick cluster of wiregrass that nipped at her knees with their needle points.

Phil stopped at the tracks. "Okay, so let's put them down here, and I'll get them in the morning and drop them by for you at lunch."

What was she going to do with two flattened pennies that could no longer be counted as currency once the Lincoln Memorial and the word "Liberty" were flattened into the surface? Nevertheless, she knelt beside Phil and placed her penny onto the rail.

The next morning, on her way to the laundry room, propping a hamper of dirty clothes against her hip, Sarah tried hard not to think about the promise Phil had broken. When they married three years ago, Phil promised that they would never move to the country, or the "backwoods," as Sarah liked to call it. But now, Phil wanted to start his own law firm. Sarah knew he needed to be his own boss in a less competitive atmosphere to be happy. She remembered how he would stay up for hours each night, eyes red and puffy, hair in disarray, in nothing but the same boxers he wore the night before. He was happier now, in the country, in his element. But Sarah wished for skyscrapers and hot dog stands.

Right when she was imagining yellow taxi cabs and packed subway cars, Sarah heard a knock at the door. Her mother-in-law, Evelyn, called, "Yoo-hoo? Sarah, are you there?"

Sarah resumed her course to the washer. Please let her think I'm not home, she pleaded to no one in particular. Maybe I can call her back later and say I was on a walk or doing the dishes. The water was running so I couldn't hear her.

Then the knocks grew louder. She knew that she couldn't avoid her any longer. She felt ashamed. How would Phil look at her if he saw what she was doing and knew what she was thinking? He would give her that disapproving contraction of the eyebrows and tightened lips. She dumped the hamper into the laundry room,

poured her glass of wine down the bathroom sink, and hurried to the front door. Before opening it, she ran her fingers through her hair and looked down to her bare feet. She gave up.

"There you are!" Evelyn shouted. "I thought that you might be out."

"No…ma'am." Sarah's politeness was forced; she was not raised using ma'ams and sirs. "I was just doing some laundry. It took me a while to hear you." Sarah chuckled weakly.

"Oh, don't worry about that. I just came by to help you unpack. Figured you might want an extra pair of hands."

"That's so nice of you to think of me. Actually, I've already sorted out the kitchen. I'm working on the guest bedroom right now. Come on in. Do you want a drink?"

Taking off her hat and setting it on the wicker table next to the door, Evelyn walked into the house and looked around. "Do you have any sweet tea? You know, with my health condition I can only have decaf."

"Well, I think that I might have some in the kitchen. I can make it for you. It shouldn't take too long."

"That would be so nice of you. Why don't I go help you? I know just how I like it." As she spoke, Evelyn found her way to the kitchen.

"Yes ma'am, I would appreciate that," Sarah said as she kept heel.

Turning abruptly Evelyn asked, "You didn't grow up drinking sweet tea, did you? I hear that in New York it isn't common."

"No, ma'am. I never had it until Phil and I moved down here. Phil introduced me to it."

"My son does love sweet tea. When he was a child, he would drink glasses and glasses of it. I had to make a quart a day for only him." Her mother-in-law let out a belt of laughter as if this story was one that amused her day and night. Sarah would not have been

surprised if it did, having heard it so often. But she made herself laugh along as if the story were the funniest thing she had ever heard about Phil.

"The kitchen still isn't completely unpacked, so please excuse the mess."

"That's all right. When Phil's father and I bought our first house, I had boxes littered around in every room. It took me weeks to get the place completely unpacked and in order."

Sarah smiled and looked at all of the boxes. She couldn't believe that it took her mother-in-law weeks to unpack and organize a house. The woman had probably gotten it done in less than three days.

"I can't tell you how happy I am that you and Phil decided to move back home. I haven't seen him this happy in a while. He sure does love his family." Evelyn opened and closed cabinets searching for the tea.

"It's right here." Sarah offered her the tea from the cupboard next to the sink.

"You know, he came over for lunch yesterday and told me all about a client that has been paying him in peas. I suppose the poor man didn't have enough money to actually pay him, but Phil said that peas would be a great form of payment. Isn't he just so kind?"

Sarah wasn't sure what to say. So Phil had gone to his mother's house for lunch yesterday instead and hadn't told her. She had made homemade bread for him because she thought he would be coming home. She had even made a batch of those peas.

"Yes, he is a very kind man. That's why I married him." Sarah tried to shrug off her annoyance.

"Now dear, why don't you sit down, and I'll unpack a few of these boxes for you? I know just how things should be organized in a kitchen. I've been living a bit longer and have done this so many times."

"No, don't trouble yourself with it. I can handle it. I've already organized most of it anyway."

"Don't be silly. Here I think that the cutlery should go over here rather than next to the sink and really your plates should never go next to the stove. See you should…"

"No, really. I can do it myself."

"Like a puppet, Sarah sat."

Waving her hand, Evelyn said, "Just sit down, and I'll show you what to do."

Like a puppet, Sarah sat. She watched as Evelyn moved the cutlery to its new drawer, as she reorganized the spices, and as she refolded all the dingy cleaning rags. Sarah watched and tried to get herself to pay attention, but all she could think about were those two pennies that Phil was determined to bring home.

Sarah stood in the hallway after her mother-in-law had left. She looked at the wallpaper of azaleas and the dark gray carpet that stretched before her like a revolting soup. The carpet came with the house, and Phil didn't want to spend the money to replace it. She wanted light lavender or a sandy beach cream.

He would be coming home soon, unless he chose to eat with his mother again. She wasn't going to prepare lunch this time. If he came, she would heat up the leftovers from yesterday. Sarah wished that she was comfortable in the South. She wished she liked the gnats that swarmed around her head and made her feel like a piece of rotten fruit. She wished she moved slowly like Phil, like everyone else, but she walked fast as if she were about to miss a subway. She was a whirlwind of motion in a slow town. She was already running out of places to go and things to do, but she was not losing steam. Instead of doing laundry, she poured another glass of wine and looked out the living-room window. When he came home he would

talk about pine trees or the neighbors. Phil constantly worried about memorizing names and faces, but this worry was a happy one and he could point out with ease the differences between Mrs. Whitson and Mrs. White. He might even be able to tell her where they went to college, who their children married and if and where their grandfathers owned a farm. Once, over dinner, Sarah asked him if he could tell her the birthday of each of Mrs. Whitson's children so she could mark it on the calendar. Phil didn't get the joke, and she watched with a sense of foreboding when he recited each birthday—month, day, and year.

Looking around the room, she took inventory of what else needed to be unpacked and put in its proper place. Something was missing in the living room. Sarah could feel it but couldn't pinpoint it until she looked at the gaping hole next to the window.

"Where is my art easel?" Sarah thought. She had been so busy unpacking that she had forgotten its existence. A flame of hot panic erupted in her stomach. "Please let it still be here. Please don't let him have thrown it away."

The basement was the only place she thought it could be. She needed to see the wooden frame of her easel, to see the blots of stained paint ossified on its surface. Thoughts used to come to her when she was painting, creative thoughts, thoughts that made her feel her heart beat, that made her want to turn on the radio and stand still. When she had painted, they were living in the city and renting a worn-down studio apartment. Sarah chose the apartment because of the large windows and wooden floors. The floor did have a slight slant that reminded her of a fun house, but she liked it. It made her feel as if she were in a painting, as if flat edges could become soft curves.

"A flame of hot panic erupted in her stomach."

When she reached the door to the basement, Sarah stopped and took a moment. She knew that if she saw her easel she would be back in the city, and once she saw the city, the temptation to run from her suburban lawn would be too strong to ignore. She opened the door and walked into the basement, her pace brisk. Her foot scrapped against the cement, and she heard a crackling like the breaking of insect armor. Looking down she saw the body of a cicada, its long legs twitching around its crushed form. Satisfied, she thought, "Something to clean up, but he should have been outside." She spotted the easel in a far off corner of the back wall, covered with a white bed sheet. Stuffed in front of it, as if barring her way, was Phil's putrid green sofa.

She pushed the sofa aside and whipped off the white bed sheet. Purple and yellow paint still plastered the easel's surface. She could feel the city beating inside its wood, the dizzy heat of possibilities, the rumbling of cars on the streets, the people with so many places to go.

Once she had the easel in its proper place in the living room, she rummaged through some boxes and found her paints and a blank canvas. She looked at the wallpaper in the hallway and imagined what she wanted it to be and found herself smearing shades of a sandy beach on the canvas' white surface. She was so absorbed in her work that she didn't hear Phil walk into the room.

"Hey, I came by for lunch. I went by earlier to get the pennies, but I could only find one. Seems like the other must have fallen off the track somewhere. I searched for a while, but couldn't find it."

Sarah didn't answer, instead she continued painting. She heard the city and neon lights buzzing atop store fronts.

Phil took a few steps closer to her. "Sarah, did you hear me? I'm starving." He held out the flattened penny and waited for her to

take it. "Here, I brought this for you."

She didn't stop painting. She slammed her brush onto her palette and smeared a thick line of lavender through the center of the canvas.

"Sarah? I have this for you. Where is the food?"

Sarah continued to paint. She didn't want to stop. She didn't want to think of the train tracks or the pennies or the wiregrass or the red clay or the pines. She didn't want to think of the farms or the neighbors, the laundry or the unpacking. Certainly not the cooking. Trying to hold back those thoughts, she brought a thick line across first, this time yellow.

"Sarah, God damn it, why aren't you talking to me?" He clenched his fists and took a couple of quick steps forward.

Sarah turned and looked at him, paint brush in hand.

"Thank you. Now please take this." He held out the penny. "I don't understand. Is something wrong?"

With another forced smile she took the penny. "No, of course not, but I didn't cook. You can heat up the leftovers or go to your mother's. I'm busy imagining what the wallpaper could look like."

"So you pulled out your easel again, huh?" Phil edged closer to look at her work.

Turning to face him, Sarah said, "Yes, I found it in the basement. Did you put it there?"

"Yeah, I figured you wouldn't have time to paint with all that needs to be done around the house."

Sarah looked at Phil and took a moment before she spoke. "I hate the cicadas, Phil."

"They are pretty loud aren't they?" Phil laughed.

"I hate the neighbors and the food they bring over. I hate the gnats, Phil."

"Ah, honey, this will only be for a little while. Things'll get

better. You'll get used to this place. It isn't so bad, you know. I'm sorry your penny fell off the track," he said as he pulled her into a hug and rubbed her back. Sarah noticed she was still holding her brush and had blotted his shirt with yellow paint.

"How do you know it was my penny that fell off?" she asked, choosing not to tell him about his shirt.

"My penny would never have fallen off. I've done that so many times. You must have just put yours in a bad spot."

"I'm sorry your penny fell off the track."

Phil smiled.

Sarah pulled out of his hug, happy that she did not tell him about his stained shirt, and turned back to her easel to look at her painting. What captivated her the most were the two thick smears that now swept through the center of the beach cream background. She heard people coming out of the canvas. She remembered the sloping floor of their old apartment. She remembered the chilly nights and the café they went to that stayed open until two in the morning. And for a moment, she remembered the cicada dying in the basement.

Dreamer

By Paige Kesner

Rain dives into the open doorway of the café.
You enter, dewy
like a fresh morning.

Bits of life are stuck
in your hair.
Your head has been above the world,
in the clouds,
collecting moisture.

Here you've come
to shake off the drops of dreams and
tell me what you've seen up there.

Pollen and Petals

By Paige Kesner

Petals block out the world,
keeping you inside.
They shield you from reality.
Inside your cocoon the pollen is sweet.
It swells inside you,
drifts you into
the throes of fantasy.

Throws your body into
delicious visions.

Lose your mind.
Lose your self.

When you awake,
alone and swollen,
your mind bleeds from your eyes and ears.
The pollen gone.
The petals open.
You are alone,
a delicate puff of dandelion
carried by wind.

Mom, Tom, Bo-Bomb

By Alexi Scharbach

"Around this time nineteen years ago, I was asking your dad to take me to the hospital," Mom says out of the blue. Every year on my birthday she tells me the story of the day I was born—after all, it is the event we're celebrating.

Now, she sits on the leather couch reading a cooking magazine. Her messy red hair is tied back in a brightly colored scarf. I look up at her and laugh. I've heard this story many times, but it still makes me smile when she randomly starts telling it.

"Hours and hours of labor," she says and laughs; she likes to remind me of how much pain I put her through. She continues, "They handed you to me. I loved you from that moment on."

I'm sure I've forgotten some of the details of the pushing and contractions, but the importance of her love is what I remember.

"I'm sure I've forgotten some of the details of the pushing and contractions, but the importance of her love is what I remember."

When I was five, we moved to a farmhouse in Wisconsin. Eighty acres of green farmland, rolling hills and valleys, forests, and cow pastures were the backdrops of five years of my childhood. I don't

remember these images as well as I remember the trials my family went through, and I vividly recall that my biggest challenge was something every kid learns—how to read.

Mom is usually a patient person, but with an older brother who taught himself to read at three and an older sister who hadn't put down books since she learned at five, it is hard for her to understand why I just didn't get it.

"Come on, Lex! You know this one," Mom says.

As I stare at the letters, tears fill my eyes. Mom just looks at me as I begin to bawl.

"I can't do it. I don't know how," I say. I run to my room.

At this point I'm almost nine. Mom tells me every day that she knows I'm smart, and she knows I can get it if I'll just try. But I don't get it, and I feel stupid. I am stupid.

Later, Mom grades my math homework and glances at me. I can tell by her expression she's disappointed. She keeps staring at the worksheet. How could I have gotten all of them wrong on yet another day?

"Lex, come here and show me what you did."

"This is 29 and I added 10 to it. That's what you said to do."

"What?" She stares at me, and her eyes light up.

"Baby, if that was 29 you would have gotten it right. That's 92, though."

On our farm we have a large pond.

I walk across the stones carefully, following my mother's heels. A mother duck trailed by her ducklings runs across in front of me. I watch them follow closely every step their mother takes as she moves across the rocks and then jumps into the pond on the other side. As my mother reaches the other side of the rocks, I stare at the ducks, distracted.

I wave to Mom and the next moment I'm looking up through the water. Everything is clear; the sun shines down through the surface of the water. The sky has nice fluffy clouds, separated by patches of clear blue. I'm suspended here. I don't panic. My mind is void of thought as I stare through the water at the sky. My mother's face looks panicked. She snatches me from the water and holds me to her chest.

Mom hates ticks.

It doesn't seem like a tick bite is the worst thing that can happen to a person. But every time she pulls one off a family member, or even one of the animals, she finds a match and burns it until it sizzles and eventually pops. She gets a strange satisfaction from this.

Mom may seem a little sadistic, but in her defense she spent nearly three years too tired to stand because of the effects of a tick bite.

Lyme disease is caused by bacteria called *Borrelia burgdorferi* as carried by blacklegged ticks, which pick it up from infected mice or deer. People can get the disease if an infected tick bites them.

Mom just happened to be one of the lucky people who got bitten by an infected tick, resulting in body-wide itching, chills, fever, headache, muscle pain, and neck stiffness. Eventually, as the disease went undiagnosed, it resulted in muscle pain, pain and swelling in her joints, and heart palpitations. It also resulted in short-term memory loss.

Mom eventually got treated with IV antibiotics. A needle remained in her arm at all times and twice a day she would inject a syringe of medicine into it. She slowly started feeling better but still has joint pain, memory loss, and, of course, her hatred for ticks.

After five years living on the farm, Dad decides he is sick of

snow, and Mom decides it's time for a change. Dad wants to move to Florida, but Mom has an intense hatred for the state. They both decide they want warmth as well as four seasons. So they pick Missouri and tell my brother, sisters, and me that we are moving.

I'm sick again.

I've been sick so long I don't know the difference anymore, and Mom has the doctor's phone number memorized. I crawl out of bed and put my hair into a ponytail.

"I have strep," I say with a crunchy throated voice.

"That's what I told her, Honey, but she always needs to do a strep test."

This test consists of her dragging the hardest cotton swab on the planet across my already burning throat. I cry every time. I'm not a wimp. I can fall and tear up my knees while roller blading, bike riding, or three wheeling, but this simple test gets me.

I load myself into Mom's car, and she jumps in the driver's side. As she drives, I am trying not to throw up, so we don't talk much. But it's not awkward. We're comfortable in our silence.

We arrive at the doctor's office and wait forever, laughing and joking about how they shouldn't make appointments so close together if everyone has to wait so long. It's always like this, but if we're late they get mad.

Mom holds my hand as the doctor drags her cotton swab across my throat and tears fill my eyes.

"I'm sure it's not strep anyway," the doctor says, sealing the mucus-covered swab in a little bag.

Mom and I look at her, and I wonder if she's kidding.

"I guess we'll check it since you insisted. But vomiting is not a sign of strep. It's often a sign of other illnesses," she continues.

As she walks out of the room, we watch her. After she closes the door, Mom finally says, "You always throw up with strep." We

giggle.

Two days later, it comes back positive.

Mom and Dad come home with a trampoline.

We never asked for one, but now that we have it, we are excited. My brother, Andrew, and sister, Allison, jump on it, and then give my younger sister, Abbie, and me a chance.

Abbie and I jump everyday, and when we can get Andrew and Allison on it we are overjoyed. One day we talk them into jumping with us for a while. We are playing "Crack the Egg" and Allison is "the Egg."

Andrew is jumping, trying to get her to crack when he loses his balance and lands on her arm. All I remember is the sickening sound of snapping bone before Allison starts screaming.

I run up to the house yelling, "Mom, Mom! Allison's arm is broken!"

Mom comes running out the front door, a blur of messy red hair and jeans. She runs to Allison and helps her get up and into the house. She gives her some cayenne pepper to keep her from going into shock, gets some shoes on, and they head out the door for the emergency room.

"Mom comes running out the front door, a blur of messy red hair and jeans."

I walk to the car and get in; I'm excited because today is one of the days I dance. Mom and I are leaving the church and heading to the dance studio. We drive down the road, both of us singing at the tops of our lungs. Lights are flashing at a distance. As we round the curve we see a maroon car smashed against a tree on the front driver's side.

"Does that look like Andrew's car to you?" Mom says, panicking.

"It couldn't be his car; he's such a good driver, Mom," I say.

I really believe my brother is invincible, and Mom's suggestion that something could have happened to him blows my eleven-year-old mind.

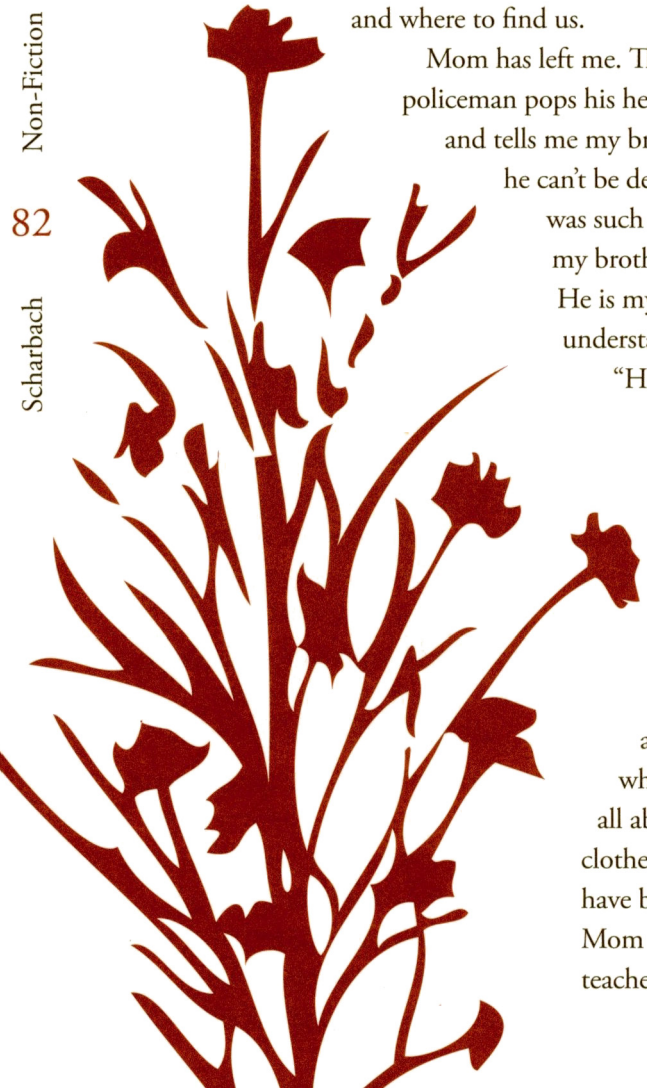
Mom pulls to the side of the road and jumps out of the car.

"Call Dad!" she says and throws her phone at me.

I call and tell him my brother has been in an accident and where to find us.

Mom has left me. This sinks in as a policeman pops his head in her side of the car and tells me my brother is dead. No. No, he can't be dead. It's not possible. He was such a good driver. He was my brother, and he was my hero. He is my hero. I simply cannot understand what I'm being told.

"How could she leave me?"



I walk through the three-story mall, unhappy and definitely not wanting to shop, let alone attend my first year of public school as a freshman. This is what the shopping trip is all about, after all; school clothes. Up until this time I have been home-schooled; Mom has been my primary teacher and I have been happy

with this arrangement. My anti-social self has no interest in going to learn with a bunch of people I don't know.

Mom and my sister, Allison, keep picking out girlie outfits. Looking back, I think I would have loved them, but I wasn't ready at that point to wear them. I wasn't confident enough in myself. I wanted to blend in, to go unnoticed. I was sure I'd be singled out as the new girl, the different girl, the homeschooled girl.

Up until this point Mom and I understood each other perfectly. She knew what was wrong at all times and told me what was bothering her. I didn't think she'd understand now; I had always been so confident and strong. But I am scared, and I am even more afraid to let her know that.

The day I leave for college, Mom sits at the edge of my bed while I pack.

"I'm proud of you baby," she says. Her voice quivers.

I walk over and hug her, a hug that seems to last forever.

"I'm going to miss you so much, Mom," I say as tears fill my eyes.

We've always been there for each other, and I get homesick for her when I'm away for a weekend at my grandparents. I can't imagine a day without her.

"I can't imagine a day without her."

I flip channels trying to find something worthwhile to watch. Mom reads her book and without looking up says, "Daddy and I loved you, even when you came out all covered in hair." Then she laughs. Her "making fun of me" laugh.

"Mom, I did not!"

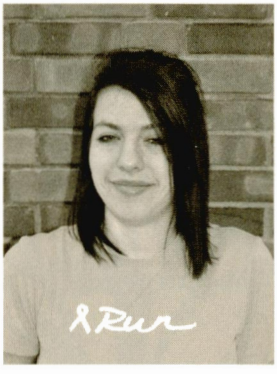
"We crooned, 'our little monkey baby.'" She starts giggling halfway through saying this, and I do, too.

"Mom, did I really?" I ask, concerned.

Now she looks up at me. Her eyes light up, and she laughs so hard she's shaking.

"No, Lex," she manages to squeak.

I wonder, will she tell me this story again next year? Is there a cutoff date? Twenty must be too old to hear Mom's silly story. But every part of me wants to hear her tell it again.



Alexi Scharbach is a sophomore English major from Mount Vernon, Missouri. Her play, "After Class" was selected for the New Play Showcase. This is her first publication in *Harbinger*.

A Conversation with Filmmaker Chad Freidrichs

By Emma Deutsch

Chad Freidrichs has been working in the film and television industry for over a decade. He previously worked as the senior creative services producer at KMIZ-TV in Columbia, where he was an Addy Award-winning commercial producer. Freidrichs has produced three feature-length documentary films. His first, *Jandek on Corwood*, was self-distributed to festivals and commercial venues in more than 70 cities worldwide and received national critical attention. In 2004, *Jandek on Corwood* was awarded Best Documentary by the Raindance Film Festival in London and was broadcast nationally in Canada on Independent Film Channel. *First Impersonator*, completed in 2007, received the Best Feature-Length Film prize at the 2008 Kansas City Jubilee Film Festival. His most recent project, a documentary feature about Pruitt-Igoe, the ill-fated St. Louis public-housing complex, was released on the film festival circuit in 2010.

Emma Deutsch: Let's begin at the beginning. When did you become interested in filmmaking?

Chad Freidrichs: Well, back in high school, about sophomore year or so, I watched *JFK* by Oliver Stone. It's a very stylized film. It was the first time that I watched a film and actually thought about somebody making it. Before I assumed that movies kind of came down from on high. I never actually thought of somebody doing that as a career. Movies just came from wherever movies came from. So after watching Stone's film, I seriously considered that there have to be people who make movies and that could I be one of them. It seemed like it could be a great job. That's how I got into it initially. The catalyst was sophomore year in high school seeing *JFK*, becoming aware that people made movies, and then just wanting to do it myself. Since then, I've dreamed of being a filmmaker.

Deutsch: Will you talk a little bit about your inspiration for the films that you make? How do you find your subject matter?

Freidrichs: It is all over the map. There is no one inspiration. My first film was called *Jandek on Corwood*, which I started producing in 2002. When I was in high school, I made a bet with myself. I said that by the time I'm 25 I want to have produced a feature-length film. The rationale behind my goal was that Orson Welles made *Citizen Kane* when he was 25. So I figured, I may not be able to make *Citizen Kane* by the time I'm 25, but at least I'll have made a feature-length film.

At 24 years old, I hadn't made a feature film yet. In fact, I hadn't even started one. That's when I started really looking around for a subject. My friend knew that I was looking around. He approached me with this idea of making a documentary about a guy named Jandek. I'd never thought of making a documentary before. I always thought I'd be making narrative film. But I looked into it, and he was essentially this kind of weird, mysterious musician. His story

had a great kind of mystery to it. So we started producing it. But how I got into that project wasn't so much about the fact that I had to make a film because of the subject, it was because I had made a bet with myself in high school that I was going to do this. I was going to stick to that bet that the high school Chad said was gonna happen. So that's the first film.

Deutsch: Where did you go from there?
Freidrichs: For my second film, I wanted to make a comedy because Jandek is a very melancholy film. Politics were very popular at the time so we decided to follow around a George W. Bush and a John Kerry lookalike through the 2004 elections. It sounds really funny, right? Well it turns out it's a very depressing movie. That may be why it didn't do very well, I don't know. But that film came out of the fact that politics interested me at the time. I also wanted to go away from the style or the tone that I had established in Jandek.

My most recent documentary came from actually decorating my house. My wife and I bought a home for the first time in 2007, a little 1950s mid-century ranch. We wanted to decorate it in 1950s style. We went around to various antique malls, collecting all these furniture pieces and decorating it as if it were a museum piece. In the process, I started reading about modern design and architecture. The ranch home comes out of the modernist ideal of architecture. In my reading, I came across a housing project in St. Louis called "Pruitt-Igoe" that was renowned for being a failure of modern architecture. I had gone to high school in the St. Louis area and this was something that interested me right now. It's also something that hasn't been told before in a way that I felt was appropriate, so we just decided to make a documentary about that.

Inspiration never comes from one place. It's just whatever comes up. For me, it's not about liking the subject. It's more about

feeling compelled to make a movie because the high school Chad told me to. Who knows why you start it, but once you start a film project you're in for one year, two years. In *Pruitt-Igoe's* case, it took four to five years to make.

Deutsch: I am a creative writer so naturally I am curious about the differences between literature and film. What can film do more effectively than literature, in your opinion?

Freidrichs: They're very different art forms. I studied English in college, so I'm a literature buff. I think there are advantages and disadvantages to working in film. The disadvantage that I always like to point out is there's a kind of natural ambiguity to imagery that isn't as present in language, and by that I mean if you write a sentence that says, "The dog is hungry," well, that means the dog is hungry. But how do you illustrate the concept "the dog is hungry?" You can show a dog eating, but what that means is the dog is eating. You can show a dog kind of sitting there sniffing, but that means the dog is sniffing. So you really have to work hard to articulate something that's relatively easy when using language. Language is much more precise, I would say, than image.

The thing that an image gives you is a representation of reality that you can completely immerse yourself in. The literary world conjures up the imagination, whereas the cinematic world conjures up a reality. It's very easy to get sucked in it emotionally. It's very present. That's really the main difference for me. It's a lived, experienced world as opposed to an imagined world. I don't know if there's a pro or con there, but it's different.

The other thing that film gives you is sound. It gives you image and sound. What's most often overlooked is how an audience responds to music. It's very emotional. You get involved in it. There's no sound in literature. We tap our toe whenever we're listening to

music. It physically invites us to engage with it in a way that can't be achieved with words on a page. So that's another advantage: it just gets you involved.

Deutsch: What does it take to put a movie together? How much time, funding, emotional energy does it take?

Freidrichs: My first film was entirely self-funded. We made that thing for $3,500 over the course of a year and a half, so it wasn't too much of a financial commitment. *Pruitt-Igoe* took $80,000. For that one we had to find direct grant funding, though we self-financed some of it. It was a much larger-scale film.

In terms of time and resources, it depends on the kind of film you're making. My friend Robert Green is on the festival circuit. He makes documentaries where he follows around a person or a group of people for a week and basically shows the world through their vantage point and has them talk. Then he goes and edits it together. He shoots for about a week and then he edits it for a couple of months. He has a completed film in three months time. I'm super jealous of that. *Pruitt-Igoe* took four years. When you're working with archival footage, you have to go out and find little pieces of film everywhere. They're not just there waiting for you; you have to go find them. Next you have to think about how to construct a narrative out of those pieces. You also have interviews that need to be edited. It's a big, long, time-consuming process. So, things like time and money depend on the kind of film you're making.

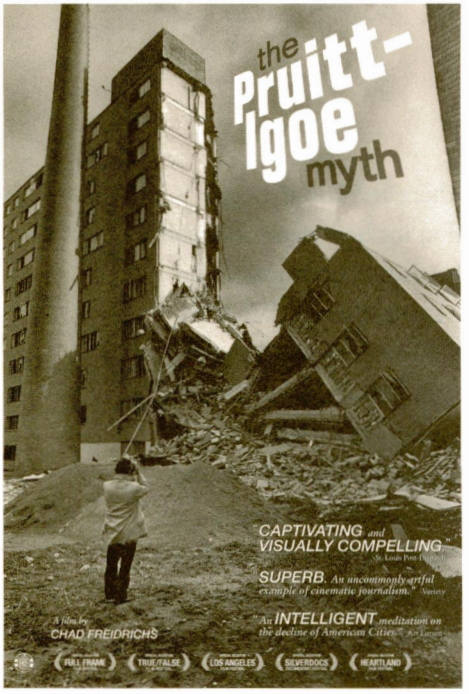
A narrative film, like a fiction film with actors, is heavy on the front-end pre-production side, whereas a documentary requires a lot of time in post-production—editing it, constructing the story. When you start a narrative film, you already have a script written, and a lot of effort went into that script. A lot of casting was involved too, as well as getting the set ready so that everything

runs efficiently in that month or two that you're actually shooting. With a documentary you're just following people around for a long time. It's a very open-ended process. Then you have to find a way to construct an entertaining, moving story from the mess of material that you're left with.

A lot about filmmaking depends on the format that you choose, but it's not easy. It's not easy at all, it's very difficult. Sometimes I'm very jealous of people who get to write for a living. For example, in news reporting if you want to say that something happened, you write down this happened at so-and-so time or whatever. For me, if it's not on screen then it didn't happen. I have to find creative ways to visually convey a story. If you have a gap in your film, you have to find a way to creatively visualize that and add sound to it. I'm jealous of what I call the "b-roll problem." The b-roll is cutaway footage. Instead of showing someone talking the whole time for an interview, you cut away to various shots. Well, what do you show there? That's always a very difficult thing to figure out, whereas writers can just write it down.

Deutsch: What can you tell me about your current or future projects? Do you have another film in the works?

Freidrichs: Absolutely. So *Pruitt-Igoe* is about 80% archival. By that I mean that it's all footage that I didn't shoot. We've got interviews that are taking place, but then over those interviews we put in all these clips from old films –old documentaries, old educational films, old news clips about Pruitt-Igoe. We kind of mixed all that together. I really enjoyed that process. It's a very creative process because while you're watching all of those old films you are coming up with new ideas. You start to notice ideas that you would've never thought of before had you not seen that footage. You would've never thought to put this image in to



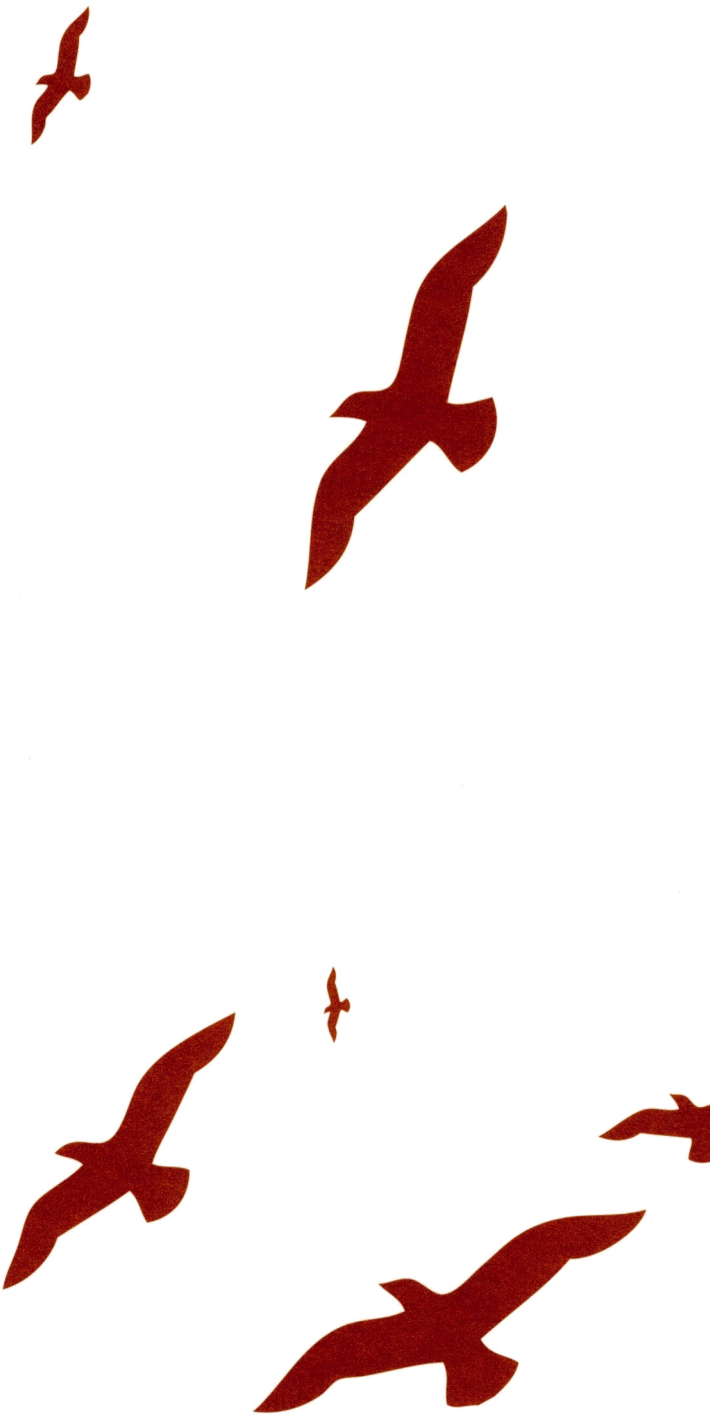
represent this idea. But by seeing that image, by making it concrete, all of a sudden you think "oh, that would go perfect here." You make a connection that you would've made creatively without seeing that footage.

I love using all this old archival footage. I'm an editor at heart rather than a writer, where I would have to generate something from scratch. I like to take things that already exist and to polish them – to refine them, to structure them. So I'm really into archival footage, and I have this cost-effective technique of acquiring and transferring old 16mm films to high-definition video. I can do all this in my office, so it basically allows me to purchase old films and then to cut them all together in one room.

I've been acquiring old science films from the 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, things that perhaps your parents or grandparents watched in classrooms instead of videos. Most of them are in great shape. They're beautiful. They have more resolution than high-definition does, all these old 16mm films. So my current project involves taking old science films and constructing a story about one particular scientific theory that is now viewed as false. It's the idea of spontaneous generation. The idea was that if you had decaying matter, if the matter was given the right kind of stimulus – whether it's coming from sunlight or air or whatever – then you would eventually have living things emerge out of this decaying matter. The idea was that you would see maggots in decaying meat and think that those maggots were actually formed by the same meat

but not realizing that the fly had gone in there and laid the eggs. This was the prevailing scientific explanation for how many kinds of life forms arose, going all the way back to Aristotle up through the 19th century. It was ultimately refuted by Louis Pasteur. What I'd like to do is to trace this one scientific theory to show how science and scientific ideas have changed and were influenced by society and religious ideas. All these things mix together to allow a theory like spontaneous generation to be accepted during one age and rejected during another. This sounds very serious, but actually I'd like to make it into a comedy because there is something very absurd about many of these ideas. But they're also kind of beautiful once you understand the context out of which they arose, because it's not like people were being completely irrational. They were taking what they understood was real and then taking the evidence and applying it—applying other preconceptions to that evidence. It's going to be a history of science that shows the complexity of what people in the field did in the past. I want to complexify the issue a little bit while keeping it funny.

Emma Deutsch, a junior creative writing major from Jefferson City, Missouri, aspires to become an elementary art teacher and write her own children's books. This is her first publication.



Artist's Statement

"Full Disclosure's" cameo cover was inspired by the very fine stories and poems that come to life within the pages of *Harbinger* 2012. The silhouette represents the magazine's varied writers who have disclosed themselves in these pages. It also symbolizes the readers who we hope will identify with the candid words published here. The cameo is set against a crumbling brick backdrop, which suggests the trials and tribulations that we all endure and our ability to remain steadfast. From the silhouette flowers and weeds unfurl and birds take flight, details that convey the belief that we all are alike under one sun and, as they say, hope springs eternal. It was a pleasure and a professional challenge to give visual expression to such interesting ideas.

L.I.

Senior graphic design major, Lindsay Iverson, from Elgin, Illinois, is the director of Creative Ink, a student-run marketing firm. Her design work has won two Addy Awards. Her work has also appeared in *Stephens Life*.

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