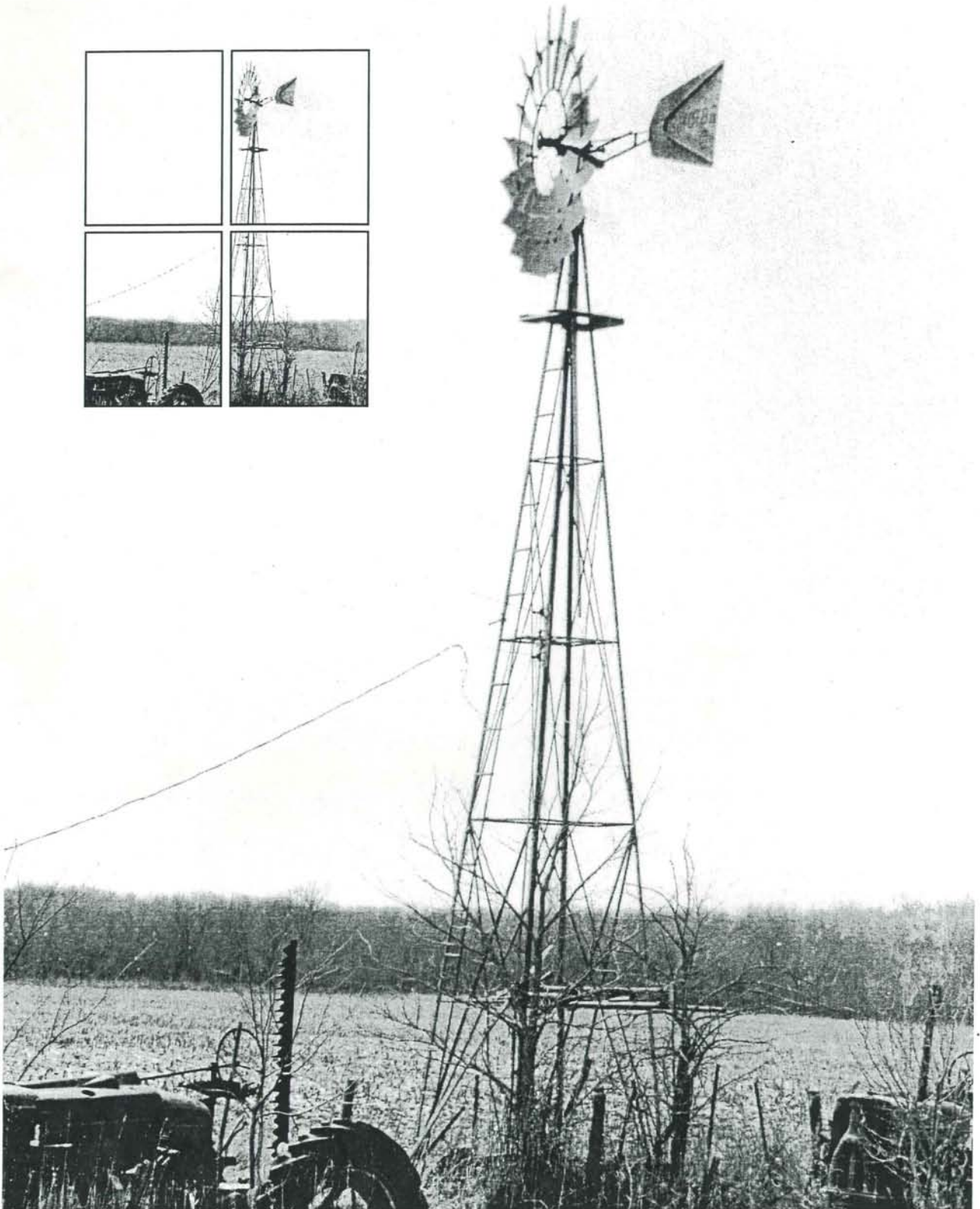
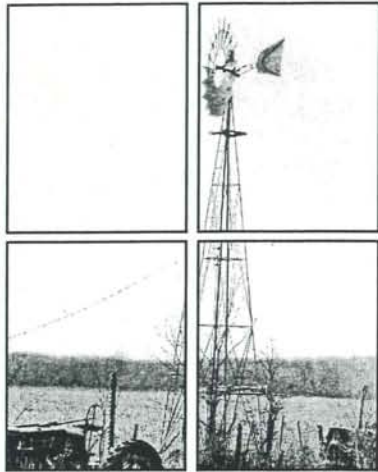


# The Kiosk





# *The Kiosk*

Spring  
2003

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Morningside College



# Kiosk Staff

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# Creative Writing Award Winners

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FIRST PLACE	<i>The Day They Buried Grandpa</i> Rick Rector
SECOND PLACE	<i>Bride-Be-Damned</i> Megan Cook
THIRD PLACE	<i>An Unlikely Hero</i> Dustin Cooper
HONORABLE MENTION	<i>I know Now</i> Kay Goldsmith
COVER ART	Kristin Bierbaum

## About This Year's Judge

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Barrie Jean Borich writes creative nonfiction and is the author of *My Lesbian Husband*, winner of an American Library Association GLBT book award. She lives with her beloved, Linnea Stenson, their cat Nastasya Filippovna and their dog, Dusty Springfield, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Visit her Web site at [www.barriejeanborich.net](http://www.barriejeanborich.net).

All entries are judged blindly by the editors, and no entry receives special consideration. Staff members are eligible for contest placement, but are not eligible for prize money.



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# Editor's Foreword

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CATHIE STANGL

Readers of *The Kiosk* will note that in our Table of Contents this issue there is a label by some pieces that says "Nonfiction." Avid readers of *The Kiosk* will note that this label, short for a genre titled "creative nonfiction," has never appeared in this magazine before. So what is this stuff we call creative nonfiction? I like to define it as nonfiction that isn't boring. But I'm told this is not the proper definition. A more appropriate definition is nonfiction in the form of a story. Well, okay, I'll go with the flow: it's true stories.

What every definition seems to leave out is the part about bravery. It is daring and inconceivably difficult to tell the truth—particularly in memoir-type pieces which we have printed here. To lay the whole story—the whole truth—out there in print is bold. Once it's down in black and white you can't take it back. If Megan Cook's mother calls her up in a fit and says, "I never said you needed to lose weight, I can't believe you said that," Megan is stuck. She can't take it back, and she can't say that's not what she meant by it. She wrote it that way because it happened

that way. It was and is the truth. There's no "autobiographical fiction" term to hide behind. So I'd like to thank all of the contributing creative nonfiction authors. It was one thing to be brave enough to write it down in the first place, but quite another to say you'd put it in print. Thank you for your stories, and thank you for your honesty.

While we're on this topic of thank yous, I must put in mine, which are semi-brief. Thank you to Steve, who said, "There's no need to freak out yet . . . wait 'till Friday." Thank you to Marcie, the English department queen and fairy. Thank you to all my editors—Michelle, Jenny, Crista, Jessi, and Kay—for all the reading and hours drinking bad coffee and discussing submissions and sappy love poems. Thank you to Jan Dehner, Katie Harder, and Steve for copyediting, which is one of the worst jobs in the world. Thank you to Megan and Marcie for helping with layout and design ideas. A special thank you to our judge Barie Jean Borich, whose writing I adore and everyone should read. And finally, a thank you to Sheila, who is a marvelous cover art director, and even more



marvelous “best good friend,” who kept—and always keeps—me sane from start to finish, and who seems to be able to put up with more sides of me than even I can.

So now I must say that the truth about this year’s *Kiosk* is that it is a leap. It is a risk I am throwing out into the world and taking full responsibility for. If it takes off and flies, I will take credit for it. If it plummets to the ground and its gruesome death I suppose I will also take credit for this. I see this *Kiosk* as the second in a series of transitions. Last year’s *Kiosk*, like its slogan, was a little “outside the box.” I took the innovations of that issue and ran with them. I had so many ideas and changes I wanted to try, but if we’d done them all *The Kiosk* would have

run so far it couldn’t even see the box anymore. This, like running too far away from home when you’re only ten, was probably not the best idea for step two in a transition. We can run a little further with each transition, but we can’t leap the entire distance in one go (as much as I hate to admit this).

I tried to focus this issue on one thing: space. What I see in past *Kiosks* is cramped creativity. *The Kiosk* needs room to breathe. It needs room to be expressive, liberal, and big. So this *Kiosk* is big. It’s magazine-size, has a bigger staff, and includes a new genre. I just hope it is, as they say, “Bigger and better,” because I must admit I feel like slapping a big sticker across the cover that says, “Under Construction.” But I will contain myself, so I give you the Spring 2003 issue of *The Kiosk*. ♦



# An Unlikely Hero

DUSTIN COOPER

**M**y father walks up to the still car in the church parking lot not knowing if his son is alive. As he approaches the white Mazda he cannot see clearly into the window because of the lack of lighting in this dark lot. When he arrives at the car he sees his son lying in the backseat, motionless. Tears start to well up in his eyes as he tries to open the door. The door is locked and he now notices that there is a piece of paper resembling a note of some kind on the dashboard of the car.

**M**y little (only by age) brother, Brock, has been somewhat of an inspiration

to me for the last year. Brock is 6'4 with an athletic build, dark hair and a dark complexion. I like to say that he got his good looks from me even though he doesn't really look like me. Even though Brock and I do not share the same appearance, we do share a lot of the same interests. Brock, like me, is a huge basketball nut. He has been playing the game since he was just a boy. We used to play into the night in our driveway just for the love of the game, and for each other.

Like most siblings, my brother and I have had our disagreements about little things. I always teased him that Magic Johnson was better than Michael Jordan. Jordan was Brock's favorite professional basketball

player and Magic was mine. I always wore the number 32 to represent Magic and Brock always wore 23 to represent Jordan. Wearing the numbers of our heroes on our chests gave us a sense of pride. It almost made us those people in some magical kind of way.

I have not been the epitome of a great older brother. We have even come to blows a few times. I would usually come out on top. However, now I might want to be more careful. Brock and I have been through some stages where we were each other's worst enemies. However, the majority of the time I consider him one of my best friends. The only thing that I ever wanted to be to Brock was the "hero" every older brother was sup-



posed to be to his little brother. I wanted Brock to wear my number on his chest to represent me (even though my number is 32).

When Brock entered high school I knew that he was going to be an even better athlete than I ever was. He was already ahead of me at his age in many aspects of his life. He was already a three-sport, star athlete and had a wide variety of friends. Brock was the type of kid who, with his laid back attitude, was hard not to like. It seemed as though Brock had the perfect high school life ahead of him. What lay beneath Brock's outer shell was a whirlpool of negative emotions that, in time, would cause my bother to crack.

It all started when the family noticed some differences in Brock's carefree attitude. Things started to bother him a lot more and he started to verbally snap on people for little or no reason. His grades started to fall and there were many days when he would not go to school because he just wanted to

stay home and sleep. The time he spent in bed had started to far out-weigh the time he spent awake doing something productive. It was as if he was trying to avoid people. The times that he did make it to school he would get into fights with others. He claimed that all of these people were making fun of him. Maybe this was true, but the old Brock would not have let it bother him. He even quit football. On top of all of this, my parents had found out from the school's principal that Brock had told one of the other students that he was thinking of committing suicide. The student, scared of what would happen, told the principal. My parents talked to Brock about the comment, and Brock blew it off like it was a joke. Somehow my parents and I weren't too sure about his explanation.

One day Brock had gotten in trouble for one thing or another and my father decided that it would be best to take his car privileges away. Brock did not re-

spond well to this punishment and finally went over the top. He claimed that he did not want to be a part of our family anymore and that he hated all of us. He told us that he would be better off on his own. After a little more arguing, my dad, not knowing what to do, gave Brock his keys back. He told him that he could go with his friends but he had to be home at 11:30 PM. My brother responded by saying "whatever" and left the house. That night Brock's curfew came and went. At 4:00 AM I was sitting in the living room of my house with my mom. Her puffy eyes and emotionally drained look made me angry with my brother for doing this to us. However, at the same time, I was as sad and worried as I had ever been in my life. With my dad out looking for my brother, all I could do was sit there with my mom and think about the possibility of having to play basketball in the driveway by myself.

After seeing the note on the dashboard of the car my father starts to panic. He starts frantically shaking the car yelling for my brother to unlock the door. There is still no movement from the inside of the car. With tears in his eyes and a helpless tone of voice my dad tries to bang on the glass of the window. After shaking, banging, and wishing that the movement of the car would wake him up, the reality of the situation starts to set in. Just when all hope is almost gone, Brock moves. My dad cries for him to wake up and open the door. Brock slowly sits up, unlocks the door and steps out of the car. My father grabs Brock from the car and embraces him in his arms. Emotionally torn between happiness and sadness, he can only get three words out of his mouth: "I love you."

After this incident with my brother, I thought the worst was over. I imagined that after we admitted him into the psychiatric ward of Mercy Medical he would get

some professional help, and things would go back to the way they were before all of this. The doctor found my brother was suffering from a type of depression. My brother was really sick and was not happy with any aspect of his life.

When it was time for me to go visit Brock in the hospital, I did not know how he would react to seeing me. He would not talk to my parents when they went to see him because he blamed them for putting him there. I was almost scared to go to see him because I did not know if he blamed me, too.

When I walked into the room that he was staying in I saw my brother lying on the bed face down. My mom was sitting in a chair with tears in her eyes. I said, "Hey what's up buddy, how are ya?"

He replied by saying, "Hey," as if someone had forced him to say something.

After a while he would talk to me a little but nothing close to a conversation. Brock looked like he had given up on life. He talked

like he did not care about anything. It broke my heart to see my little brother like that.

Until that point I did not realize how much I loved this kid. It was the hardest thing in the world for me to see my brother like that. How could this happen to a kid with so much potential? How could this kid's life be so bad that he would rather be dead? It seemed as though Brock was ending it all. He was quitting his once-bright basketball dreams and he was quitting life.

The other day I went to one of my high school's basketball games with a smile on my face. I sat in the front row. I stood up and cheered when my old team did something good. I was even happy because I got to talk to people that used to come and watch me play. I was even more pleased when my team won the game. However, the best part of the game was when my old number 32 checked



into the game. With a proud smile and tears, I listened to the announcer say, "Now checking into the game for the Raiders, number 32, Brock Walker."

I now have a new hero. Brock survived his depression and I thank God every day for helping my brother

through. Life is funny sometimes. At first I wanted to be Brock's hero, and I wanted Brock to wear my number on his chest to represent me. I wanted him to take pride in being my little brother. In the end it seemed as though I had gotten to be the hero I always

wanted to be. But what I came to discover is that now I wore the number on my chest for a new reason. I was representing my brother. I took pride in being Brock's older brother. Brock has become my unlikely hero. ♦

# Scrambled

---

JESSI PLUEGER

scrambled  
runny  
runningtogether  
i'm scrambled  
funny  
howthesewordsallruntogether  
let's run  
together  
hold hands  
sunny  
running  
our faces are running  
d  
o  
w  
n  
our bodies  
our brains  
fry well  
scrambled

# Don't We All

---

JESSI PLUEGER

I want a fat intelligence and a thin body  
an open mind and closed thoughts  
a happy personality and a sad hypocriticality  
a light impression but a heavy likability  
little embarrassment – a lot of courage  
more have and less want

# I Know Now

KAY GOLDSMITH

I can hear voices and a lot of commotion in the background as my parents' neighbor, Leo, recounts what happened. Leo speaks softly and calmly to me as he explains that my dad stood up from his chair to get ready for a church meeting and died of a heart attack. As Leo tells me what happened, I envision his neatly cropped yard, blooming flowers, and his little white dog. Then I remember my mom and dad's manicured lawn. My dad and Leo used to do their lawn work at the same time. They conversed over the fence and shared gossip, church news, and so on. My parents live in Rapid City, South Dakota, and we live in Los Gatos, California (near San Jose).

Suddenly, I feel so homesick and scared. I cannot believe what is happening and I am afraid to ask too many questions. Perhaps I am afraid to make it awkward for Leo, I am not sure. It is all a blur.

After Leo and I finish our conversation, I worry about the cost of flying back home for the funeral. After all, rent is due in a week. My three preschool-age children, my husband, and I fly to South Dakota and as I climb out of the car in Mom's driveway, I know I will never forget how she looks. She is tired, her eyes are red, and her hair is uncharacteristically uncombed. My brother, Mark, and my sister, Jane, have flown in the same day. I am nervous to see my mom. Do I cry?

Do I say, "I'm sorry"? I get a warm, safe feeling as we unite and exchange hugs. I am glad to be home.

Mom says we need to go to the funeral home, see Dad, order flowers, and decide on the obituary announcement. All I want to do is stay in Mom's house surrounded by loved ones, drink coffee, and get my children and husband settled in.

When I see my dad for the first time since he died, I am afraid to get near him. Mom encourages me to walk up and touch him and I feel like a child instead of an adult. We order flowers and I get nervous that they cost so much. My brother, sister, and I decide to pay for the flowers ourselves. As if making up for lost time we



could have spent with Dad, we each spend eighty dollars on flowers. My thoughts go back to the bills at home.

Later, my brother, sister, mom, and family are alone in the house. The silence is awkward and we are at a loss for words. I do not feel sad that Dad died and I wonder why I have not cried. I thought the grieving would automatically come without thought. In fact, I imagined we would behave the way people do in movies and soap operas. They appear to cry, mourn, and grieve without any forethought. I do not feel like crying. In fact, I feel somewhat relieved that my dad died. I feel very guilty and bad for these emotions. I am afraid to admit them to anyone.

Then my brother says, "I am kind of glad Dad is dead."

I look at him in shock and ask why.

He says, "Because Dad was mean and cruel, and if I have children someday, I

don't have to worry that he will hurt them the way he hurt us."

I am so relieved to hear him say this that I admit the same feeling. Luckily, my mom and sister are in the bedroom sorting out Dad's clothes to take to Goodwill. I continue to look at my brother with shocked disbelief as I recall the times Dad beat us both with a belt. It did not matter if we had done anything wrong. Jane did not get hit nearly as often. She was the eldest and favored one. Mom and Dad encouraged her to go to college while they told me I was too stupid to go. I remember the times Mark and I formed an alliance. We both felt Dad favored Jane because she was not adopted, and we were.

My sister comes into the living room and my brother says, "You do know that if Mom died instead of Dad, he would paint the walls black." We all start giggling and try not to laugh because we worry that Mom will catch us being silly at such an inappropriate time.

I settle down into Mom's velvet green- and orange-flowered loveseat. My brother walks around the living room and glances at the photo albums, condolence cards, and whatever is within his reach. I sense he is leading up to doing something silly, but what bad timing. My sister and I watch him as he glances around the room and we look at one another in anticipation. My brother is notorious for being silly and making people laugh.

It was a surprise for me to see him yesterday. I did not recognize him as he stepped off the airplane at the Rapid City Regional Airport. It is hard to believe the last time we were together was five years ago. He looks considerably older than the last time I saw him. Somehow I never imagined we would get old. Mark used to exercise and had a physique other men would die for. Even his shiny blonde hair used to be impeccably styled. Now his youthful physique is replaced with a beer belly and

hunched posture. He looks as if he has not slept for days and his unruly hair is dull and lifeless. But somehow he kept the same bright smile and pleasant demeanor that makes everyone around him feel happy and carefree. I remember he used to try to get customers in restaurants to gawk out the window by staring out for a long time. Finally, the customers would realize there was nothing to stare at and they would resume eating their meals while furtively glancing at my brother. With this in mind, I know he is capable of just about anything, barring injuring anyone.

He sits in my dad's favorite brown recliner and leans way back. Up pops the foot rest and he browses through a magazine and looks as if he could fall asleep. Then he sneezes about six times in a row and flip flops around in the chair. Dad's chair makes a horrible rattling noise and starts to squeak as my brother continues to make a fool of himself. Mom comes running into the room and looks ab-

solutely livid. My sister and I do not know what to do so we sit there.

My brother says, "I'm okay, I just sneezed."

My mom says, "Stop rattling Dad's chair, it makes the same sound as when he fell back in it during his heart attack." She runs into the other room and my brother sits there stunned.

All of a sudden I see the whole event as hilarious and run out of the room laughing. My brother and sister follow me and think I am crying. Then they see me laughing and start to laugh too. We all feel guilty for laughing at such a thing and we hope Mom will not find us giggling. Later, Mom comes into the living room and we carry on as if nothing happened.

A car pulls up outside in the driveway. My favorite aunt, Bertha, and uncle, Jim, are here. Mark jumps up and walks towards the foyer to open the door and let them in. Mom, Jane, and I

follow him to help Aunt Bertha and Uncle Jim with their luggage. We are all happy to see one another and we begin to reminisce about old times. Aunt Bertha and I have always been close. Mark and Uncle Jim are close because they both like to fish. Uncle Jim and Mark stand together and converse over old times.

Aunt Bertha sits next to me and tells me their German shepherd they had for many years finally died. I remember the fun times I had with their dog, Spike, when I went to stay with them over summer vacations. Mark and I used to run through the meadows with him. I feel close to tears from the closeness and warmth that radiates from Aunt Bertha.

Aunt Bertha puts her arms around my shoulders and says, "You know, Honey, your dad was really proud of both of you. In fact, I know everything you and Mark accomplished from the time you moved out of this house. He wrote and talked about you all the



time.”

I’m shocked as I glance over at Mark. He has a look of disbelief on his face. I

say, “How can that be? Dad used to tell us he wished he never adopted us whenever he beat us. He always yelled

at us and never told us he was proud.”

Aunt Bertha hugs me as I begin to cry. ♦

# The Sax

---

JAN DEHNER

Screaming across the darkness,  
reaching into deep, dark chambers,  
pulling out arrows and sealing up wounds,  
courting, consuming, joy, ecstasy.

Perplexed, raising its voice and crying out.  
It embraces,  
lingering a while to breath and to soothe,  
then melting, long and low,  
fading away.  
Complete.

# Looking Back

KAY GOLDSMITH

I recall gazing out the upstairs hotel room window. Rain drops trickle on the people below who walk and stand outside on the cobblestone streets. It has been raining for one week without any break. In fact, sometimes the sun does not shine for months on end. Everyone totes an umbrella. This cold, rainy, and dismal weather is typical for this small town in West Germany. Nestled against the shoreline of the Nordsee, lies the town of Gromitz. This is my birth place, and I am here to find my birth mother. Certainly, she would be happy and relieved to see me at the ripe age of nineteen?

The black umbrella-domed shoppers down in the streets, coupled with the church bells ringing across town, create a deep melancholy in me. People in the streets are busy, preoccupied with purchasing flowers and food from the outdoor market stands. I cannot see their faces, but they seem oblivious to the falling raindrops and the cold tidal winds. I, on the other hand, feel as if I cannot stop staring at the freshly cut bouquets of red, yellow, and pink tulips that are neatly arranged in window boxes outside bakeries and shops. From the

window, bright gold needle-point church steeples and ivy-covered red brick buildings protrude above the foggy horizon.

I slowly leave the safety of my hotel room and descend the long, winding stairwell. I approach the warm and brightly lit lobby. Big, crystal vases filled with red, white, and yellow roses adorn the gray marble countertops and windowsills in the lobby. Velvety, red carpet adds a touch of plushness and elegance. Shiny brass umbrella stands are placed near the door for wet umbrellas. A waiter in a black and white uniform welcomes visitors with a cup of coffee. I smell the nutty and bitter aroma of the coffee on the waiter's silver tray as he approaches me and says, "Guten Tag. Mochten Sie Kaffe?"

I am grateful to have taken German classes before coming to Gromitz. I welcome his offer of coffee and gratefully reply, "Bitte Schon."

I yearn to speak more German with him because somehow it feels natural for me to speak. He offers me a cup of the dark brew as I loiter around the lobby door and peer out onto the busy streets.



The door in the hotel lobby revolves as people come and go. The noises that were muted from the hotel window now blare out from all directions. I hear car horns, buses, and people yelling. The scene sprawled before me looks different than from the safety of my hotel window. A portly gentleman in a gray trench coat walks through the revolving door and enters the lobby. He looks at me as I stand dumbfounded and apprehensive. He has facial features similar to mine. Surely, his blonde hair, fair skin, blue eyes, high cheekbones, and the subtle overbite are purely coincidental. Could he be my father? The hair on my the back of my neck stands on end, and I feel hot and clammy as I walk through the door and out into the streets. The air smells musty and fishy. I open my black umbrella and huddle under its protective shell.

A peculiar smell creates a feeling of déjà vu. I recall the smell as a mixture of oats and wheat. Sometimes I used to smell the aroma in America, especially after my grandma cooked oatmeal for breakfast. But this aroma has a touch of something else. I ponder this phenomenon as I hear church bells chime twelve o'clock. I suspect there are many churches in this small town because the chimes resonate and echo from all directions. The church chimes bring more angst and melancholy as I wonder if my mother is sad that she gave me up for adoption.

I step cautiously onto the cobblestone streets and feel as if my heels will get caught in between the stones. The black umbrella-domed shoppers I spied on from the hotel win-

dow now have faces. They look preoccupied with their shopping. I can smell fresh bread baking in the bakery as I walk past. I glance towards some customers who are seated at a table. They sip their coffee and carry on with conversation. A few people have light, blonde hair and similar facial features. I decide not to look anymore and stroll on.

My thoughts wander back to my childhood. I used to watch people from my bedroom window and try to imagine their life stories. Sometimes I made up outrageous, extravagant stories about them. Perhaps they lived in mansions with dozens of servants who waited on them. Or they had affairs with neighbors who lived in nearby towns and their offspring became romantically involved.

Suddenly, I notice the rain falling heavier and go about the task of finding my birth mother. I wonder if she will be upset if I show up on her doorstep without any warning. I cannot fathom how life can go on as usual for everyone around me. I am on the verge of finding my birth mother and ponder the many questions that remain unanswered. Maybe I would have grown up to be someone significant. Perhaps I could have invented something and become famous. Life would have been different, had my mother kept me.

My birth mother gave me up when I was about one year old. It is unclear as to why she did not keep me. My birth certificate and adoption papers do not reveal the circumstances around my adoption. I lived in a children's shelter until I was adopted by an American family at the age of two. It is hard

to imagine what she went through when she gave me up.

I nervously walk to a nearby telephone booth outside a blue and white coffee shop. It feels good to get in out of the rain. I pick up the big phone book and thumb through the pages for my birth mother's last name. I am surprised and dismayed to see about twenty phone numbers with the same last name. More bad thoughts enter my mind. Perhaps she has a new family now and did not tell her husband about me. She might tell me to go away. I cannot bear the thought of ruining her life at this point. Or worse yet, maybe she is dead. I quickly close the phone book and leave the warmth of the phone booth. The rain showers down relentlessly on me as I open my umbrella.

I bite my lip. I decide to visit the Children's Shelter that is listed on my birth certificate. It is only one block away from here. I can see a tall brick building loom in front of me. I stand at the bottom of the steps as if frozen.

A familiar and pungent smell emanates from the front door as it suddenly swings open. A woman in a long, black coat quickly walks down the worn cement steps. I nervously glance up at the building and struggle to keep my knees from shaking. It smells like oatmeal, cream of wheat, and coffee, all mixed together. Why is this smell familiar?

The building is covered with crawling, green ivy. I walk up the steps, and enter the hallway. My shoes make an echo as I cau-

tiously walk to the front desk. I ask if they can help me locate information regarding my birth mother.

I carefully say, "Guten Tag, Ich mochte meine geburtstag papier." The woman behind the desk stares at me as I ask for my birth records in German.

She responds, "Es tuit mir leid Wir konnen es nicht tuin."

Suddenly, I feel intrusive, like I should not be here at all. Maybe she will help me since I speak her language. But she says they cannot give out any records of adoptions at all.

I reply, "Danke schon."

I slowly turn around to leave with a mix of hopelessness and relief. I may never know what happened to my birth mother, but then again she will not be put in an awkward position of facing a painful past that she would not want to deal with.

I decide to leave the quaint town of Gromitz and not pursue my mission.

I reflect on that momentous time in my life, as I watch my youngest daughter leave home. She packs up her belongings as I gaze at her blonde hair, fair skin, blue eyes, high cheekbones, and the subtle overbite. I hand her my black umbrella as she opens the front door. It is cold and has been raining for a week. She hesitantly walks down the cement steps and out into the cold and rain. ♦



# X i-iv

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JESSI PLUEGER

## I.

I must say I like to feel ecstatic.  
    lying in your lap looking up at you  
    you look down at me  
I'm unable to express how ~~gorgeous, beautiful, lovely~~  
    you are  
    so I only smile at you  
I like to feel you and just listen to you  
    talk in the conversation of the room  
    as everyone else's voice just fades out  
    (I'm not listening to them)  
    you know I'm thinking of you  
    you thinking of me  
    smile back  
    rub my hand  
everyone thinks they understand

## II.

kind of how all the people disappeared  
    is how I sometimes worry  
    kind of how visitors stopped  
    (that *I* never knew)  
    . . . out of the blue.  
and everyone brings their own atmosphere  
    and everyone knows what I fear  
    let us not talk about what I fear

III.

without inhibitions you can see  
the real obnoxious me  
you still don't get to hear all of those things

I think

yet

I talk quite a bit . . .

attempt to appeal to you

to appeal to the room

without inhibitions

I inhabit a new attitude

IV.

And out there you want only

to close your eyes

(but not really)

It's such a tranquil quiet

that you're not sure

you can hear

and the light and ground

absorb the sound

as well as you

but you want it to

you want to stay there/here forever

but on you

this world is getting clever

you feel that nature has some trick

up its sleeve

your thoughts are swirling

you feel to leave

you step through the doorway

inside

back to normal

# Bride-Be-Damned

MEGAN COOK

I received the invitation in the mail weeks before the event; the words printed in red raised ink on the linen card: "Bridal Fair 2002." I would be going with my mother, my niece, and my sister, ten years my senior. As my fingers ran across the words "Bride and guests," my heart raised itself awkwardly. I imagined the four of us roaming from sponsor booth to sponsor booth, feeling the soft cotton napkin samples and flipping through the black matted pages of photographers' best collections, the timeless expressions of brides and grooms smiling at us from among nameless family members lined up on church steps. My heart, though it fluttered, landed hard in the

bottom of my stomach as I dropped the card. "I am almost twenty-two, and I am getting married," I thought. All the excitement I felt thirty seconds ago had turned to more stress, and I felt an ulcer burning my stomach lining precisely where my heart had hit it.

Bridal Fair Sunday and I awake to the sound of the telephone. I was having another one of those nightmares where it is the Big Day, and the only things that are finalized are the dress and the tuxedo, which my fiancé and I are wearing as we rush around town in a frantic and desperate search for an officiate and the phone number of his grand-

parents in Kearney, Nebraska. I am awake for two rings before looking at the clock, which tells me it is much too early. I nudge my fiancé, busy snoring in the most offensive and irritating way (in the beginning I thought it "cute" in the same manner with which children shower wounded animals with undying affection). He finally rolls onto his side and the cacophony ends. I consider answering the phone with a chipper, "It is thirty on Sunday morning. This better be important," but settle on the ever fashionable, "Hello."

My mother's voice returns in an especially dry tone, "Are you awake?" I nod into the phone. "I'm just calling to remind you that you and your sister need



to be here by noon. I want to get this thing done and over with."

I assure her that we'll be there, then I hang up and go back to sleep.

We travel to the convention center in my mother's leased Corolla. She is in one of her particularly pleasant moods: she spent the entire morning arguing about God-knows-what with the live-in boyfriend, my common-law stepfather, Dick. Ann, my sister, croaks responses to my mother's line of tax return questions despite an undiagnosed case of laryngitis and the pain relievers she is taking for the three fresh stitches she has on her right index finger. Her daughter, Kristin, prattles on about the slumber party of four eleven-year-old girls she had last night to the window, to the cars passing by, to herself, but mostly to my transitive, wandering attention. "I am twenty-two, and I am getting married," I repeat in

my head. "Twenty-two. I've never been to a wedding, let alone planned one. I am twenty-two, and I am getting married." It's a mantra.

Actually, I've been to one wedding: my sister's. She had told me the day before that she was pregnant, and I wasn't supposed to tell Mom. I was a junior bridesmaid, a position which I took very seriously as a ten-year-old. I grew three inches up and out between the final dress fitting and the day I walked down the aisle beside my brother, who wore a boy's size twelve rented tuxedo. Her colors were dusky rose and sea-foam green, very appropriate to 1990. My dress, a brushed satin pink thing with starched fluffy sleeves, itched in the June humidity in places I couldn't reach. I fidgeted throughout the ceremony, was yelled at by my mother, who had a raging hangover, and spent the entire reception sipping stolen

champagne beneath the cover of the cake table. The next two hours I spent vomiting in the mint-green bathrooms in the church basement, which had been painted the day before. In my head, the smells of alcohol puke and fresh paint still mingle.

Ten years later, my brother and I, grown and out of church clothes, were on our way to Colorado Springs to rent a Ryder truck and move my sister and her three children home to Iowa and out of the ghetto-ized base housing of Petersen Air Force Base, where my soon-to-be ex-brother-in-law was a fireman. She was leaving first, not more than three weeks before his thirty-third birthday. Finally, the romance had ended. It didn't help that he was screwing her best friend and lying about it. Unfortunately for him, the children had eyes and mouths.

The glass doors of the convention center open to a mass of

hysterical mothers and their equally hysterical daughters. There is confusion as we scan the crowd for someone who looks like he or she is in charge. My mother elbows me in the ribs, my favorite of her habits, and points in the direction of a table in front of which are formed several attempts at straight lines. "You register there," she says.

Hesitant, I make my way through blond curls and cell phones to the registration table, where men in tuxedos and women in alternating red and blue sequined gowns guard stacks of invitations and black ball-point pens. Behind them hangs a banner reading "Bridal Fair 2002: Married in the USA." I pull the invitation from my back pocket, unfold it, and hand it to the nearest patriot. "I pre-registered," I explain. She smiles and begins shoving various brochures into a plastic bag similar to the ones that Malibu Barbie and her admirers are carrying around, telling me to be sure that I get a stamp on my card from every sponsor and reg-

ister for all the drawings. She beams a smile and hands me my bride-be-made tote. I think of some snappy "milking tragedy for all it's worth" remark, but, considering that it would be lost on her, turn and head back to my threesome of bored attendants. They look like the three stooges of the wedding world, if the three stooges stuck to a script formulated by the History Channel; dry, yawning, full of war stories. "Well, this ought to be a good time," I think.

We get in line and instantly become part of a moving current taking us past booths manned by beauty consultants, photographers, caterers, DJs, formal wear salesmen and limousine drivers, my mother's sharp elbow like an oar constantly in my ribs. "Grab a pen, grab a pen," she whispers. The river of the narrow hallway deposits us, at its end, into the main room. Our eyes turn to the massive stage built in the center. People rush by us, scribbling figures into their day planners. There is a giant flag on

the wall opposite the stage, dominating the decorations. Another banner hangs opposite us, yelling "MARRIED IN THE USA." A voice comes over the loud speaker, "Ladies and gentlemen, the fashion show is going to begin in twenty minutes. In order to be eligible for door prizes, your completed, stamped card must be turned in at the registration table before the beginning of the show. Thank you."

I hold up the card. Too much white space looks back at us. A fire in my mother's eyes signals that this no longer a fun family event, but a tour of duty, a mission assigned to us from some unknown personage behind a curtain. She is quick with a plan. "Okay girls," she says to Ann and me, "You go get the rest of your stamps, and Kristin and I will get seats. You have twenty minutes."

My sister, limp though she is, takes the bride-be-made tote, which, as it gets heavier with more literature from more sponsors, seems more like a bride-be-damned



bag. I follow; filling out registration cards in her wake as she scans every booth for the almighty Stamp Holder. We get to the end, missing two stamps. My mother appears to tell us that she has found seats on the other side of the room, that we only have ten minutes, and what did we mean we were missing two stamps? "You know, if these people really wanted to help you out, they'd just stamp them all for you."

Not willing to admit defeat, she takes the card and heads back into the river, pushing upstream to the registration booth in search of Mary Kay and Younkers. My sister and I struggle to keep up, but finally catch her at the registration table. She stuffs pamphlets about bridal makeovers and Waterford crystal into the bag, and hands the card to a man in a tuxedo who smiles, "Just in time ladies. The fashion show is about to begin."

**W**e watch the models parade down the run-

way in red, white, and blue. Then they come singly in white gowns, the trims sparkling as the models walk in time with the music. Under the weight of glass beadwork and twenty-pound petticoats, their swooshing strides add new harmonies. The crowd is transfixed. My mother's elbow finds its way into my side every time a dress comes in which she thinks I will look good.

**T**he only picture I have seen of my parent's wedding is a Polaroid snapshot of my mother in a short white dress standing beside my father in a white tuxedo. They are holding hands beside the wedding cake, a single-tiered confection, telling all there is to know about the turn out at the First Presbyterian Church in Fort Dodge, Iowa, on February 8, 1970. My mother is a young twenty and my father, a younger twenty-two. You can't see my sister in the picture, though she is making her presence known un-

der the white satin covering my mother's belly.

I could never get her to talk about her wedding, even when she was drunk. She has never told me why they got married in Fort Dodge, since my mother was from Storm Lake and my father from Glidden. I don't remember if I found the picture before or after my father left.

My brother helped him pack his bags the day after Christmas. He was going to live with my mother's best friend, who was less than two weeks divorced.

When my father lost his job and my mother lost all child support, we couldn't afford the mortgage in California. My grandmother was quick with a check for a Ryder truck, and soon we found ourselves home in Iowa.

My father married my stepmother sometime after Ann's wedding and sometime before my twelfth birthday, when I received a package, the first in three years, with a check signed with her new name. It's another wed-

ding we have never talked about.

This past Christmas my father strongly urged me to elope, which would save us (meaning my fiancé and me) both money and stress. He had previously told my sister that he planned to help me out, paying for at least half of the wedding. I figured it was some form of remittance, like birthdays and Christmases past due plus interest, and like always, he fell through. I already knew that I would be walking myself down the aisle.

The last of the models walks off the stage, and the overhead lights turn on. My mother already has her coat on, and again we find ourselves following her as she leads us out of the building quickly, in front of the flood of fellow fair-goers. I carry that bride-be-damned bag under my arm as if it were a deflated raft. My mother lights a cigarette and pats my shoulder. "Did you see that one with the long train? If we could alter that enough, you could wear

something like that. You could stand to lose some weight, y'know." She pats my baby-free tummy and half-laughs. Ann, who is scheduled to be my maid of honor, says from behind us, "We could all stand to lose some weight." My mom smiles, pulls in a double-lung full of menthol smoke.

"I am twenty-two, and I am getting married," I say, this time aloud.

"Yup." My mom exhales and puts her arm around my shoulders. ♦

# I Finally Moved to South Dakota

---

RICK RECTOR

I finally moved to South Dakota  
having lived so long across the river.  
I hate to go to work and leave her  
this new found love of earth,  
sky, magic, and rock.  
In my time, I'll pass on,  
but South Dakota won't.  
She will be, just like I want to.  
Now I know why I can't own land.  
Just like I can't own a cat.  
It agrees to stay.

## The Wake

---

RICK RECTOR

Slack breasted women in black print dresses  
Bring cold cuts on cracked ceramic saucers.  
There is bread with no butter  
Lukewarm lemonade in slick glasses  
That nearly slip through my fingers.  
Hot sun pounds through the filmy curtains  
And the rank smell of the street drifts in  
With the sound of cars and busses.  
With a nod I'm up  
Clomping toward the door  
Words of sympathy on my lips  
Handshakes and lowered eyes.  
He was my friend too.

# Psychology Man Knows

---

ANNIE DILOCKER

where are we right now?  
my literal man,  
I'm afraid you can  
not answer that easily.

(literature and poetry is  
borne of life's conflicts.  
the best stuff is a mix  
of love and war.)

so if you were to analyze,  
Mr. Psychology Man,  
what you think I'm thinking,  
would the material fill a poem—  
or a novel?

or would you be just as lost  
as me, not sure where to start  
in understanding the works of (lover's)  
words and hurts and the cured—  
and if they can be?

and I wonder if you ponder  
what I'm thinking, or if  
you think you already know  
(and if you do) then you've  
gone farther than I can go.



# Immersed

JENNY NICKLIN

Finals were over. Thank God. Wendy had just spent the last three hours filling blue books with essays on Hemingway, Faulkner, and Steinbeck. She had worn her number two pencil down to its nub and her poor hands were cramped and smudged with graphite.

"If I ever get feeling back, it will be a miracle," Wendy thought. "And my brains are leaking out of my ears. I will never form another complex thought again. Note to self: send Dr. Thompson a thank you letter."

The novel seminar had, thankfully, been Wendy's last test of the semester, and Christmas was just around the corner. But before she even thought about driving two hours home, she desperately needed to decompress.

The Cup 'n Page was a favorite local hangout of Wendy's. A bookstore and coffee shop, the Cup 'n Page provided many hours of relaxation to the school-stressed young woman. This was exactly what Wendy desired before packing up and driving home. So she put on her coat and scarf and stepped from her dorm into the frosty December afternoon. Wendy could smell snow on the air as she walked the

three blocks to her favorite shop.

A few flakes were floating to the ground as the coed opened the door to the Cup 'n Page. The cheerful bell jingled as Wendy said a prayer that the heavy snow would hold off until she left for home. She just needed time to herself before facing the dull highway and her family at the end of it. Christmas time was so *busy*, and Wendy knew this was her last opportunity for "me time." She was going to take advantage of this chance.

Wendy shucked her heavy winter garments and approached the counter. The owner, a friendly young woman named Miriam, greeted her.

"Wendy! So how were your finals?"

"Abysmal. But they are done, and I am happy!"

"Aren't you heading home for break?"

"Yes, but I'm still quite drained from Dr. T's final, and I wanted to refresh myself with a quick mocha and book. Speaking of which, do you have any suggestions?"

"Drink or book?"

"I'll have my usual mocha-berry. But I need a real light read – something that won't

make me feel like I have to write an analytical essay."

"I think I have just the thing. I just finished this absolutely *horrible* romance. Not smutty of course, but completely outlandish. It's called *The Grounds of Desire*, and it's about finding love in a coffee house."

Wendy laughed, "Sounds promising."

"You'll love it. I'll grab my copy with your mocha."

Wendy settled into her favorite overstuffed chair in a corner of the shop. White Christmas lights were strung up between shelves that, along with the lightly falling snow outside, created the perfect cozy atmosphere. Miriam brought over Wendy's beverage and reading material. Wendy took a sip, cursed her continual ability to forget that her hot mocha was hot, and looked at the cover of her book. Wendy chuckled at the Fabio look-a-like holding a giant gallon-sized coffee mug to the lips of his chosen ladylove.

"Hey Miriam," she called across the empty store. "Where is my hunk to pour scorching coffee down my throat?"

Miriam answered from the back room. "Sorry kiddo, he's on back-order. But I'm supposed to get a shipment in next week."

Wendy laughed and opened the front cover. She began to read.

*Coffee . . . ah coffee . . . was the only pleasure in young Gwendolyn's life. The heat in a cup was all that could fan the flame that sought to build itself within the beauteous blonde's heart. That is, until Sebastian en-*

*tered her life.*

"Excuse me, miss. But might I be permitted to join you in a cup of java?"

Gwendolyn looked up from her mug into the most searing emerald eyes she had ever beheld. Emerald eyes that were set in the face of a Greek god-like specimen of man. Emerald eyes that seemed to pierce to the very depths of her caffeinated soul.

Wendy continued through the less-than-literary reading material, an observer to the ridiculous coffee house courtship. Amid her chuckles, however, Wendy couldn't help but feel a bit jealous of Gwendolyn. "Why do all the good love stories have to be fictional?"

Currently single, Wendy had had her share of past relationships. None ever really worked out, though. There were several "friend-to-boyfriend-back-to-friend" pairings. Then the one "crush-to-date, only to discover he was a complete jerk expecting his woman to wait on him hand and foot" relationship. And, of course, the inevitable blind date disaster. Sure, Ricky was cute and at the top of his class in medical school, but Wendy knew he was wrong for her when he snapped his fingers at the waitress and patted her tush as she walked away. Never once had an honest-to-God gentleman swept Wendy off her feet.

*The Grounds of Desire* was coming to the inevitable "happily ever after" conclusion. Wendy was relieved at the lack of smuttiness, despite the ridiculous plot. She was about to tell Miriam, "If they had consummated their relationship on a pile of coffee beans, I would

have had to kill you!" But before she could, a deep voice next to her caught her attention.

"Excuse me, miss. Could I join you in a cup of java?"

Wendy swallowed hard, turned her head, looked into a pair of stunning emerald eyes . . . and laughed.

The young woman stared deeply into

Toby's awaiting gaze, and then reached out to scratch him behind the ears. She glanced up at Miriam, whose teasing expression could not be restrained any longer. She burst out laughing, and Toby looked up at his owner in annoyance. Wendy of course recognized this as the cat's usual expression. ♦



# Winter

---

GINNY EBERLY

## I.

Drive;  
as trees  
covered with ice  
go by my window.

Frigid leaves.

Cold, chipped bark.  
Solid trunk.  
Chilled twigs.

Roots of rime,  
unearthing.

## II.

Hanging,  
Frozen sap.

Like  
stalactites.

# Fairy Princess

---

ALLISON LANDERS

I once was your Fairy princess  
Caught amongst your web  
And you were a venomous spider  
Clouding up my head  
You disgusting wretched spider  
You ruined so many things  
Take the crown atop my head  
But do not clip my wings

# Gravity

---

KAY GOLDSMITH

I stand before the living room window and gaze out over the swimming pool in the courtyard and wonder if I should take my three children for a quick swim before supper. I watch as the water in the pool splashes against the sides and flips up into the air. Why is this happening when no one is in the pool? Our two pet parakeets begin to squawk and scurry into their cage where they flap their wings against the bars. Their behavior confuses me since they are hand-trained to come outside their cage on their own. They usually perch and play on top of their cage where I built a jungle gym, swings, and ladders for them to play on during the day. They go into

their cage at night when they are tired. Suddenly my safe world is shaking and falling apart by violent tremors beneath my feet. I stand still as if frozen in time. My son comes into the living room and begins to cry. He has a glass of apple juice in his hand that he does not know what to do with. He drops the glass and the apple juice stays in mid-air. Eventually it trickles onto the floor in slow motion as he tries to duck underneath the coffee table. I am proud of him for remembering the school earthquake drill. One of the most important rules says for us to duck under furniture for protection from flying debris. He bumps his head on the edge of the shaking coffee table and loses his bal-

ance. My two frightened daughters run into the living room and stare at the window because it begins to rattle.

I coax my son and daughters to follow me to the front hallway for shelter from breaking windows and falling objects. But we cannot reach the hallway because our television stand collapses and topples over in front of the doorway leading out of the living room. I lose my composure as pictures, dishes, clocks, and books fall all over the floor. The sound of breaking glass, objects hitting the floor, and splintering wood replace the train-like sound of the earthquake.

Emergency sirens begin to go off all over Los Gatos, California, and people in our



apartment complex begin to run outside in panic. The tremors stop and I take my children and our birds down the two flights of stairs into the courtyard near the swimming pool. Here, the other tenants have gathered, hugging one another and crying. I look at the swimming pool with most of its water splattered out on the sidewalk and notice a huge crack that runs from the deep to the shallow ends. "Damn," I think to myself, "Now we have to wait for the pool to be repaired before we can go swimming."

We are not allowed to go back into our apartments due to the constant aftershocks that continue to shake the apartment buildings. Luckily, we all have small tents and camping gear that we use in the courtyard for the night. Our forty-five unit apartment complex is transformed into a miniature campground for four days. My children and I are in an awkward situation because we have to spend time in close proximity with neighbors we do not know.

Darkness falls as aftershocks continue to make the

ground shake. I notice that the TV antennas that protrude from our apartment roof sway back and forth. My children and I are surrounded by strangers who are less than three feet from us. I hug my children tightly, as the direction of the wind shifts. Suddenly, I notice it is getting cold. We watch the neighbors as they go about their business of settling in for the night.

My children and I huddle together as we try to find our center of gravity. ♦

# Welding Weary

---

JASON WALKER

Blue flashes  
Acetylene  
Mini stars by masked machines

Hammers ringing  
eardrums screaming  
no one hears except for me

Nose stings  
breathing fire  
odors fighting for control

Smooth steel  
sharp edges  
one mistake could kill the pain

# The Scholar

---

JASON WALKER

A yearning soul before the sun  
He's come undone  
Lifeless paper shuffles before his eyes  
Weeks pass in a murky haze  
And worldly contact slowly dies

# Home Game

JENNY NICKLIN

It was only 5:15, and the gravel parking lot was already full. Kickoff wasn't even for another hour and fifteen minutes. I left home early so I wouldn't have to walk too far. I drove my Buick around, searching for the elusive open space. The back windows of SUVs and minivans stared at me, as if warning me away with blank yet reproachful stares. The occasional rusty Gremlin or banged up Beetle screamed school spirit in white paint—"Go Papiol!" "Beat Prep!" "We're #1!"

I finally found a spot on some grass, and began my trek to the stadium. Earlier, I had been reluctant to come. But my mother said it'd be "good" for me to spend a Friday night back in town at

my alma mater's homecoming football game. "You know you should go and catch up with your friends. You'll regret it if you don't." At least she gave me her teacher's pass so I wouldn't have to pay to get in.

But I had to admit, now that I was there, I really was hoping to see some of the old gang. Lizzy, Johnny, and I had been inseparable, starting in junior high when my dad was transferred to Offutt Air Force Base. Right up through graduation, we were every bit the "three musketeers" cliché.

But six years ago, I left for college. The other two stayed and attended the local university. We had promised to keep in touch. With e-mail, it couldn't be easier, right? Well, things hap-

pened, and the e-mails became less and less frequent, until they disappeared completely. I wondered how my best friends were now. I couldn't help but think they were great, with great jobs, great families, great everything.

By the time I arrived at the ticket taker's window on my side of the field, I was completely sure that I could renew my old friendships and things would be like they were in high school: gossip, eating, and cheering. It had been six years of our lives. Things couldn't change so fast from those influential years.

The pre-game show was about to start, so I headed towards the bleachers near my old proverbial hunting grounds, the band's stands.



Lizzy and I always had great fun between performances, sniffing pixie sticks (only once, after the initial sting), and seeing how long it would take for our tongues to stick to our freezing instruments. We could always count on Johnny, our own personal "Flutie Groupie," to toss up hot dogs during the third quarter slump. Lizzy and I sat at the top of the stands, so we could listen to the dramas going on behind us, under the bleachers, and by the concessions stand. There was at least one break-up per game, but on a good night, we'd get to hear a girl's hand connect with the face of her new ex. Then, after the game, Liz and I would reenact the soap opera scenes for Johnny, complete with exaggerated swoons and dramatic stage slaps.

The percussion's marching cadence jolted me back to reality. I felt the beat at the base of my spine, and my eyes tingled in recognition. *ba Ba ba Ba ba Ba Ba*. The band, now close to 200 members, at least 70

more than my class, filed out onto the field and began their formations. One song after another, I moved my fingers as an air-flutist.

They finished with the traditional "Star-Spangled Banner," and the audience stood with them. It really was a glorious sight. The setting pre-winter sun left an apricot glow on the field and reflected off of the polished trumpets and saxophones.

The team prepared to enter the field while the band marched off to "Our Team Will Shine." The tubas did their marching spiral on the track. Those guys always made me laugh. I can't believe these kids still follow that tradition. The school's cheerleaders raced onto the field with that same paper banner waiting to be ripped to shreds by the football team in the evening's first display of masculinity. The padded high schoolers—the players, not the cheerleaders—raced onto the green turf grunting. Those same popular guys, who didn't play football, grunted back, shirtless, from

the stand. Their spirited maroon-painted chests already began to peel in the frosty October air.

I was still standing in the aisle in front of the bleachers, looking up at the stands for a familiar face or empty seat.

I asked the nearest woman next to me how our team had been fairing over the season. She looked back at me as if I had asked, "Where does milk come from?"

"They're 2 and 2."

"Not bad. How's the team we're playing?"

"Creighton Prep? They're undefeated."

"Oh. I know they are a tough team. We had trouble with the—"

"Shh. The game's starting."

I watched the kickoff, and the opponent's return, and then scanned the bleachers behind me, and the continuous stream of people walking around me. It wasn't even a playoff game, yet the entire town seemed to have shown up. But there was no one I really wanted

to see. Where were my friends? We lived for these games, cheering on the team with everyone else, celebrating a victory or mourning a defeat.

My eyes returned to the field as depressed groans escaped the mouths around me. The opposition had scored a touchdown with two minutes left in the first quarter. The crowd shouted at the team as if they actually would hear.

"Come on, guys. How'd you let that through?"

"Let's go team!"

"That's not good, guys!"

I had to join in, "Get 'em now!"

"Hey, Val?"

I looked back up into the stands at the only person not staring intently at the field. A woman was waving. Was that really . . .

"Lizzy? Is that you?"

I hardly recognized her with a new "mature" shoulder-length haircut, thin wire glasses, and 20 fewer pounds. Damn. But this is still the same girl with

whom I shared everything: crushes, frustrations, joys, and depression. She scooted closer to the person next to her to make a little room for me, and I gave her a hug.

"So how have you been?" I was anxious to catch up on all I'd missed, partly out of interest, and partly to assuage the guilt I still felt at having lost touch in the first place. "And is Johnny around here? I haven't seen him yet."

"Oh, you know . . ." She seemed hesitant about something, but I encouraged her. "What?"

"Actually . . ." She looked up, resolution in her eyes. "We're married."

It felt like a football just hit me in the gut. The crowd cheered around me. We had been best friends, equally important to each other, or so I had thought. Had those six years together meant nothing? Was I so blind in school that I couldn't see a relationship building between them? Had I just been a third wheel for six years? What about all of

those great times we spent laughing and making memories? The *three* of us. Now, they were married. I didn't even get an invitation.

But, it *had* been six years. That's how long we'd been together in school. I chose to leave Papillion; it didn't force me out. And Papillion stayed there, despite my actions.

Memories. That's just what they were, and what they should remain. I had moved on. It wasn't fair for me to expect Liz and John not to.

"Val, are you ok?"

"Of course . . . sure."

"I'm sorry."

"Please, don't be. Really. I'm happy for you."

"Thanks."

We sat silent as the crowd roared around us. I missed another big play.

"How are you?"

"Great. Really great." And I meant it. "I'm working for a law firm in Boston. I love it."

"That's wonderful, Val."

"And you?"

"I'm teaching 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

at Tara Heights.”

“Your elementary school?” She nodded. “That’s great.”

Liz was still squirming in her seat. She kept her eyes down and said, “John’s the assistant principal.”

“Wow. Already? Wonders never cease.”

“Right. You know how ‘home-grown’ the Papillion school district is.”

“You mean inbred?” I muttered.

“What was that?”

“Oh, nothing.”

It wasn’t even halftime,

but I was ready to leave. The game was getting old, and I was getting cold in the October air. I gave Liz a pat on the back. “I hate to go, but I’ve got some work to take care of before I leave town. It was great seeing you again, Liz.”

“Yes. I’m glad you came.”

“Here, let me give you my e-mail.” I jotted it down on an old receipt I fished from my purse. “Keep in touch.”

“Absolutely.” I knew we wouldn’t.

“Yes, well. Give my love to John.”

“Sure. I will. Goodbye, Valerie.”

“Bye, Liz.”

As I maneuvered around the seated masses, I didn’t even bother to look at the scoreboard. It wouldn’t have made much difference. I didn’t feel bad. Just indifferent.

It was my last home football game. ♦



# What's the Fun in That?

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GINNY EBERLY

Adolf, with his  
"barely hangin' in there,"  
see-through,  
white t-shirt.  
Beat red, Crayola green  
suspenders  
and faded blue jeans  
pulled up past his waist.

"You play hearts."  
He says,  
in Lithuanian slowly  
so I can understand.  
"I'll keep score!"  
I say.

He asks,  
"Why score?  
Just play."

# Ding-Dong the Lockridge is Dead

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KALEEN HIRD

My heart stopped beating. I had heard about that kind of thing happening now and then, but I had never really put much stock in the claims. Then when I was on the phone with my mother just a few days ago, it happened. The one thing that I have wished for over the last ten years had happened. I just sat and listened as my mother chattered on with the details. She had said the words, but it just couldn't be. I even asked her to repeat her words slowly and carefully just to be sure that I wasn't snoozing away happily. But her voice echoed in my mind as she said the words again.

"Lockridge is closing."

To be perfectly honest, I never want to see the inside of that elementary school ever again. I think I would rather have my throat ripped out by wild dogs or maybe even jump off the tallest cliff (I am terrified of heights). Some people, especially the people who went

to school with me, have looked at me as though I was insane. They said that being a kid was the best time of their lives and going to that god-forsaken school helped to mold them into the individuals they are today. I don't doubt that for a second, and I will admit that if I had gone to a different school, I would quite possibly be a completely different person. But I never want to set foot over the threshold of my elementary school again.

The building itself isn't normally the type of building that would frighten me. It isn't centuries old, decorated with cobwebs, and harboring undead creatures intent upon swallowing my soul. It is just a simple two-story brick building that was built around the turn of the century. The bricks range in color from a rusty brown to a bright orange, and the window shades are teal. Way to go for complimentary colors. It's probably the only color combination that doesn't look like a pastel monster puked it up. There is a huge play-

ground sprawled across the area behind the school, which as far as I know could be at least one square mile. Part of the playground is a small square of blacktop that is littered with swing sets and four net-less basketball hoops. They just kind of stand dejectedly above the rest of the blacktop waiting for someone to notice that they have been reduced to rusty metal circles at the tops of rusty metal poles. The rest of the playground consists of a few plastic slides, a tire swing, a few metal slides, and the biggest empty field that a bunch of hyperactive kids could ask for. All in all, the school looks downright friendly. But there is that old saying about never judging a book . . .

I got a lot of good hard-earned torture out of that playground. During PE class, the teacher, Mr. Crew, used to make us run laps. If I happened to finish first, he would send me back to run a second lap with another student so they could “show me how to run slow.” I guess that wasn’t so bad, but this is the same teacher who singled me out in the middle of a kickball game to make fun of me because I had never played it before and didn’t know the rules. I swear he had invented some of those rules in his spare time. A couple of years later, he retired to start a new job working in a funeral home. A new and even more rigorous—when it came to the art of torment—teacher showed up to teach us how to hate class. His name was Mr. Rose, and he was young and funny and didn’t look like a wheezing skeleton. I actually thought that school was going to get just a little more bearable.

For the first year, he was great. He would joke with us and smile, and he never made me run a lap because I was faster than his favorite student. After that first year, however, his mask slipped, and I got to see how he really was.

He made up this hilarious little name game to make the class laugh. He’d take my last name and twist it just enough so he could rhyme it with “turd.” He knew I hated it. I had told him, asked him not to do it, but he would wave an impatient hand in my direction and find some reason to yell at me after class. He would play this little name game for half of the class period while we played our daily-designated torture sport. The sport was usually the ever-popular kickball game or baseball. But Mr. Rose never singled me out in kickball. I have to give him credit for that. But baseball, now, that was his thing.

The first real problem I had during one of his baseball games was when I was in the fourth grade. He had been doing the name game again, and I was a little upset. To add to it all, he had been making some not so nice comments about the girls in my class, and in general, he was acting worse than the guys were. They liked to make fun of us, but for god’s sake, they were fourth graders, and he was the teacher! I think the comment that finally sent me over the edge was, “Maybe I should help the girls out in this round, eh guys? After all, girls just aren’t very good at this kind of thing.” I just stood in the outfield and stared at him for a second. What was he saying? I had been under the impression that



we were playing a simple game of baseball, actually it was probably wiffleball, and I assumed that he was a teacher. It was hard enough to hear that “boys are better” crap from the boys my own age, but it was impossible to take it from someone who was supposed to know better. When I finally snapped out of my state of shock, I turned to my best friend and asked her if she had heard that. She nodded as we waited for the next pitch.

“Can you believe that?” I had asked, “Can you believe what he just said?”

Granted, I probably shouldn’t have said anything. I should probably just have waited until class was over and then asked him about it. I realized it as soon as I said it, because he swiveled around from his position on the pitcher’s mound to look at me. His eyes were narrowed and a scowl was firmly in place on his lips. Did I mention that he was six feet tall and not what I would consider a scrawny weakling? Anyway, he turned and shouted at me the last thing I expected to hear.

“I’m sick of you standing back there and bitching about my class,” he shouted, “If you don’t like this class, you can just leave.”

If you don’t like my class. You. Can. Just. Leave. My heart had raced in my chest, and I was having trouble seeing. But the words echoed inside my skull. You can just leave. Everyone was staring at me, snickering. You can leave. And so I did. I left. I took off across the playground and raced up the stairs to my classroom. I had been numb all over, and my fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Mattson didn’t even look up at me as I

slumped in my seat. My hands started to shake as I realized what I had done. Somehow I managed to open my desk and find my book, *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. I had to force myself to concentrate. That kind of thing never went unpunished, and I knew sooner or later it would come in the form of my true source of torment. It would come from the person who terrified me the most out of everyone I had ever encountered in that school. And sure enough, an hour later, he showed up at the classroom with his permanent frown on his mouth and his beady eyes glaring. It was the principal, but for the first time, when I probably actually deserved to be yelled at, he let me off with a warning.

His name was Mr. Carr, and he hated me. I was certain of that and I still am, even after ten years. He was a tall man, easily over six feet tall, and very skinny. He always wore a brown suit, dark brown, like trees or chocolate. In kindergarten when I first saw him, he reminded me of Abraham Lincoln. He even seemed to smile like pictures of good ole Abe, but then again, most of the teachers smiled like that at kindergarteners, a soft smile, kind and gentle. When their parents were around, that is. He had to crouch low just to shake my hand.

It wasn’t until the third grade when I started to have issues with him. It started on the bus. There were two boys in particular who would start it. They’d sit in the seats around me and pull at my shirt and call me names like inbred, bitch, ho, idiot, and anything they could think of. They’d make fun of

my face, my hair, my family, but mostly they would just make fun of me. Everything I did, everything I said, they would find a way to make it one big stupid joke. If they were feeling brave, they'd take a swipe at my arm and try to leave a bruise. One of the boys even knocked out my front tooth and bloodied my lip. Once they started, their buddies would join them, and soon half of the bus would be laughing at me. I don't know exactly why they singled me out. It could have been because my clothes came from Goodwill, or that I was smaller than the rest of them. It could have been because I was one of those kids who was always at the top of the class. It could even have been because I had dark hair while most of them were blonde. It could have been any or all of those things, but all I know is that they made bus rides like a journey into hell for me.

My mother used to call Mr. Carr and talk to him about them, but it never did any good. He would tell her I provoked them, that I had done something wrong, and he was going to speak to me about my behavior. I never knew what he meant by that. As far as I knew, I hadn't done anything but get on the damn bus. How is that provoking? Why was it my fault? I distinctly remember him saying things like that, because I used to pick up the phone when Mom called him. I'd listen and hope he would understand and maybe get them to leave me alone. He never did, and always, always, always after one of Mom's phone calls to him, the teasing and the name-calling would get worse. And always after Mom's phone calls,

Mr. Carr would call me into his office and yell at me about what I had done wrong.

I asked him how I was supposed to act, but he took it as insubordination. He took it as a mouthy little brat questioning his authority. He told me that I knew how I needed to act and if I would just be like the rest of my classmates we wouldn't have to have these little "talks." I will wholeheartedly admit that there were times when I deserved to get yelled at. There were times when I am sure I was a little monster, but most of the time, I was going along with the class. I was behaving the way they behaved and making the wise-assed jokes that they made. Those were the times when I accepted whatever punishment they gave me. I knew when I was wrong; I had been raised to know what was right and what was wrong. My mother was a Sunday school teacher—enough said. That could have been why it was so hard to sit in Mr. Carr's office while he was screaming at me about behavior. Once he even blamed me for a petition that my best friend had started. It asked that something be done about the behavior of the kids on the bus and the bus driver being oblivious to it all. She admitted right in front of me and to Mr. Carr that she had started it, but he didn't even listen to her. As far as he was concerned, I had done it. Justice didn't matter, because he knew how it all was. He just knew that I was "up to something," and it would "not be tolerated." It didn't even matter that almost everyone on the bus had signed the petition or that the title was written in my best friend's handwriting.



I guess that was why it had been such a shock when Mr. Carr didn't kill me for leaving Mr. Rose's class. He was almost apologetic about the incident. For the first and only time in my history at Lockridge Elementary School, I walked out of Mr. Carr's office unpunished. I think it may have had something to do with the fact that Mr. Rose admitted to saying I could leave and to saying that stupid crack about girls. In all honesty, I went out of my way to avoid an argument with him for the next few weeks because he hadn't lied. I expected it, but he had surprised me.

I don't want to leave you with the impression that life at Lockridge got better for me. It stayed pretty much the same until I left for

middle school. From what I have heard from my nieces and nephews who are still trapped in that school, it is still a hellhole. Mr. Rose is long gone, but Mr. Carr is still there and still singling out people who share my last name. One of my nieces had to leave the school because of the way she was treated. It just makes me sad to think about it, which is why the minute I got off the phone with my mother, I ran out into the hallway and did a little dance. Lockridge will close, and while Mr. Carr will still have a job as principal of another elementary school just a few miles away, he lost half of his salary. The school itself might be torn down, and if that happens, I want to be there. To light the match. ♦



# Untitled

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RICK RECTOR

you can't wash madness off in the sink  
or in the shower or even in Lake Michigan  
I swam in Lake Michigan in 1978  
Afterwards, I was still crazy  
my wife told me so  
my father told me so  
my brother told me so

## The Day They Buried Grandpa

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RICK RECTOR

the day they buried Grandpa  
my brother told my dad  
"He looks like you when you're pissed."  
I thought about his jaw bone turning gray  
like a chicken bone does  
Grandma called my name  
from the Alzheimer's chair she sat in  
and I hugged her frailness very gently.  
later, at the lake  
I skinny dipped with Michele  
and we made love with the curtains open

# Sparkling Splinters

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JESSI PLUEGER

splinters sparkling  
    even in the evening  
in the darkening sky  
sailing overhead  
    splinters caught by the glimpse  
        of passersby  
lured in  
    irresistible sparkle  
    not far to go  
caught up  
    in the beak  
    shot up  
        in retreat  
feathers floating  
    splinters sparkling





# Contributor and Staff Notes

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MEGAN COOK is a *Kiosk* veteran—she was a poetry editor in 1999, Co-Editor-in-Chief in 2000, and Editor-in-Chief in 2002. A senior, Megan is majoring in English Writing with a minor in Mass Communications. Her hometowns are Sioux City, Storm Lake, Iowa, and Denair, California.

DUSTIN COOPER is a senior from Sioux City. He is an English Education major with a minor in Mass Communications. This is Dustin's first contribution to *The Kiosk*.

JAN DEHNER is an English Writing major originally from Hinton, Iowa. Jan writes for *The Weekender* in Sioux City and wrote a chapter for KUNI Public Radio's murder mystery book by Iowa authors.

ANNIE DILOCKER is a senior from Missouri Valley, Iowa. She is majoring in English Writing with a minor in Music. Annie edited fiction for the 2002 *Kiosk* and was Honorable Mention in the Creative Writing Awards the same year.

GINNY EBERLY is a junior majoring in Philosophy with a minor in English Writing. From Sioux City, this is her first contribution to *The Kiosk*.

KAY GOLDSMITH is a senior from Sioux City. She is a Sociology major with a minor in English Writing. Kay finished 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the 2002 Excellence in Writing Awards. Editing creative nonfiction, this is Kay's first appearance on *Kiosk* staff, and her first publishing in the magazine.

MICHELLE HANDSAKER-JOLOUD is a senior from Sioux City. She is double majoring in English Writing and Religious Studies. In addition to editing both poetry and creative nonfiction this year, Michelle was published in the 2000 and 2002 *Kiosks*, and edited poetry in 2001.

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SHEILA PARTRIDGE is a sophomore majoring in Mass Communications Electronic Media with a minor in Photography. From Lawrence, Kansas, Sheila is a former features reporter and photographer for *The Mirror*, a branch of the *Lawrence Journal World*. As Cover Art Director, this is Sheila's first appearance on *Kiosk* staff.

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CATHIE STANGL is a sophomore from Des Moines. She is majoring in English Writ-

ing with a minor in Philosophy. In addition to being this year's Editor-In-Chief, Cathie was published in the 2002 *Kiosk*, and also placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Creative Writing Awards and 1<sup>st</sup> in the Excellence in Writing Awards the same year.

JASON WALKER is a 2001 graduate of Morningside College with a double major in International Affairs and Contemporary History with a minor in Spanish. He is currently working for AmeriCorps VISTA as the Service Learning Coordinator for Morningside. This is Jason's second publishing in the *Kiosk*, and he placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in the 1998 Excellence in Writing Awards.













