

*LOCH NORSE MAGAZINE*

*Loch Norse Magazine* accepts submissions of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and artwork annually November through February.

Loch Norse Magazine  
Northern Kentucky University  
Highland Heights, KY 41076

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EDITOR'S NOTE</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>POETRY</b>	
<i>Caitlin Neely</i> I'm No Scientist	<b>8</b>
<i>Ashley Blake</i> Red String	<b>9</b>
<i>Ryan Krebiel</i> Innocence	<b>18</b>
<i>Christopher Montgomery</i> Prophet	<b>19</b>
<i>Jordan Holden</i> Language with Hands	<b>20</b>
<i>Jordan Padgett</i> Awoken	<b>28</b>
<i>Ashley Blake</i> The Great Flood	<b>29</b>
<i>Vickie Kneuen</i> Scattering Ashes	<b>49</b>
<i>Ryan Krebiel</i> Peach	<b>50</b>
<i>Collin Eckertle</i> i tip 35%	<b>51</b>
<i>Cory Bankemper</i> query query query	<b>58</b>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Alexander Duvall</i> The Black Sheep	<b>59</b>
<i>Christopher Montgomery</i> At a Traffic Light	<b>60</b>
<i>Collin Eckertle</i> watching <i>A New Hope</i>	<b>72</b>
<b>CREATIVE NONFICTION</b>	
<i>Lauren Lombardo</i> Confessions of a Die-Hard Teenybopper	<b>10</b>
<i>Anna Maloney</i> To Drive	<b>22</b>
<i>Christopher Montgomery</i> Welcome to Cincinnati	<b>38</b>
<b>FICTION</b>	
<i>Alexander Duvall</i> They Called Him Twinkles	<b>52</b>
<i>Elisa Sims</i> Losing My Title	<b>61</b>
<b>ARTWORK</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>	<b>74</b>

#### EDITOR'S NOTE

"This is the beginning. Almost anything can happen. This is where you find the creation of light, a fish wriggling onto land..."

—Billy Collins, "Aristotle"

This is the beginning: *Loch Norse Magazine*, Issue 1. This thought was ever present in my mind as my editors and I compiled this magazine. Beginnings are both evocative and daunting in their possibility. As editor, my task was to somehow transform the vibrant and multifaceted writing community of Northern Kentucky University into a magazine that would best serve as a precedent for the many issues to follow.

The creative work presented in this issue is varied in form, theme, and content, but in the hours spent staring at these pages scattered across my kitchen table, specific themes emerged. The emotional current of this issue is a Rubik's cube, a delicate dance between sympathy and apathy. Once an emotion is presented, the following piece immediately thwarts it, a shifting that mirrors the alternating views each individual experiences in the search for understanding. The contributors of this magazine give us characters and speakers unable (yet striving when at their best) to connect with nature, modern life, people, and their own selves.

This issue was compiled as a cohesive whole and is intended to be read in the same manner. Upon exploration, the reader will certainly unpack other themes and currents as these artists resound off each other. While the inability to connect may be a seemingly somber theme, these voices merge to create a loud chorus that looks forward to something beyond this place, this instance, this moment. Because remember:

This is the beginning. Almost anything can happen.

Jennifer Whalen  
Editor

*Caitlin Neely*

### I'm No Scientist

I almost see the atoms burst inside you.  
Spread through your fingers  
sticky with sweat.

We pluck honeysuckles  
from low hanging trees  
and suck the life from them  
like hummingbirds.

A bee stinger  
stuck my sole.  
It disintegrated.  
It became a part of me.

I sliced a frog open  
and saw his heart.  
I made you finish the rest.

*Ashley Blake*

### Red String

I collected the stones, tied  
them with red string.  
Moonstone. Tiger's eye, but  
the threads unraveled.

Fine like fishing lure and  
I'm reminded of the fish  
with his five silver hooks, but  
what wisdom had I gained?  
There's no wisdom in loving.  
Just a glass necklace,  
a dusty piece of moon crust  
hidden in my dresser.

*Lauren Lombardo*

## Confessions of a Die—Hard Teenybopper

I CAN STILL FEEL the sweltering heat of that late August night when we posed outside The Cincinnati Gardens. Or maybe it's the rush of embarrassment that makes my body feel like a baked potato trapped in its own skin. The scrapbook's cover draws me like a magnet. There we are, in the center photograph--four metal-mouthed teenyboppers raging with hormones and flower power. Cathy and I looked like twins in our purple spandex halter-tops, purple flowered culottes, cool purple platform sandals, and identical purple velvet chokers. Purple was *his* favorite color.

The relic rattles my senses. It is a painful reminder of my days as an emotional, starstruck adolescent on the brink of burgeoning sexuality. My first instinct is to bury it in the bottom of the box. But unlike the rest of the memorabilia, it screams for my attention. The stash of pasted, yellowed memories traps me like a prisoner. Surprisingly, my heart still pounds at the first glimpse of those hypnotic brown eyes. Even before I look beyond the first page I realize this long lost treasure is probably my most significant discovery of the day. It is the cold, hard evidence that I was once poised to meet the boy of my dreams, my hearthrob, my beloved teen idol: Donny Osmond.

The scrapbook's second page nearly blinds me. It is crammed with dozens of magazine photos and randomly cut news articles. One from The New York Post reads, "Osmonds--Phenomenal Magnet for Younger Set!" Since I am pretty much an expert on anything Osmond-related (or used to be), this headline was a veritable truth. In 1972, Donny Osmond was an important part of a larger phenomenon: The Osmond Brothers. The four older brothers began as a barber

shop quartet in the 1960's. Once Donny joined the group in the early '70's he became a screaming sensation overnight.

Between the five brothers, they mastered countless musical instruments (but always had a back-up band on stage), performed engaging choreography (such as karate chopping the air and sometimes each other), and showcased vocal harmonies with perfect pitch (this was fairly accurate). In fact, they accrued nine gold records in one year (1971), surpassing the Beatles and Elvis in record sales for a single year. But it was Donny and his dreamy voice that made me blush, made me tremble, and made me want to scream at the mere mention of his name.

His effect on me was electric from the start. I heard his voice for the first time in the spring of 1971. I was outside and noticed Mr. Fitzpatrick, our neighborhood's number one Hugh Hefner fan, washing his car. Rumor had it that Mr. Fitzpatrick's collection of Playboy magazines dated back to 1958. Some of the neighborhood boys had stolen a few copies from their basement during the Fitzpatrick's' annual haunted house extravaganza. I *may* have looked at them once or twice. Anyway, there he was in his driveway with a bottle of Palmolive and his transistor radio blaring "W-S-A-I" so loud I could hear it three houses away.

And then, I heard this high-pitched, sugary voice singing over the airwaves, "I love the little wiggle in your walk, the way you cuddle on my shoul-ul-ul-der, but come back when you're older." His voice attracted me instantly, with those heartfelt expressions of infatuation and unrequited love. I remember feeling almost sick to my stomach. I was excited, dizzy, and nauseous for hours.

Turning to page 9 I nearly laugh as I see Donny's chocolate brown eyes look at me from the top of a "Meow Column." Question: "Does Donny like fat girls, because I'm a little overweight?" Answer: "Donny says a lot depends on a girl's personality." Next to the article is a *Tiger Beat Magazine*

photo of Donny signed, “I See You in My Dreams! Love, Donny.” Again, my face burns with embarrassment as I try to calculate the hours I must have spent fantasizing about this guy.

It isn’t hard to remember when I saw his picture for the first time. My parents had recently divorced, and money was tight. But I was determined to purchase his first album. During a weekend at my Dad’s apartment, I ironed five of his shirts in exchange for The Donny Osmond Album.

“Just don’t ask me to go to one of those concerts,” he sighed, as he handed over a five dollar bill. “I about got trampled to death at Crosley Field when your sisters dragged me to see the Beagles.”

Dad was a classical musician who teased all of us by intentionally mispronouncing the names of modern musicians. When I saw the picture of Donny’s face that first time, it was plastered across the entire album cover. The new love of my life had tousled, shaggy brown hair that caressed brilliant brown eyes and smooth fair cheeks. But the most noticeable facial feature was Donny’s smile. To me, he looked like the happiest human being alive. His perfectly white keyboard teeth conveyed a sparkling, wholesome image.

Locked away in my bedroom, I spent that afternoon staring at his picture and listening to him sing “Hey, little girl in the high school sweater, gee, but I’d like to know you better,” over and over. I was smitten. And I was convinced I would love him for the rest of my life.

Page 15. “Oh my God,” I hear myself whisper. I carefully open an oversized poster of Donny pointing at me, wearing crimson hip-hugger bell-bottoms, a matching gold-studded jacket and dark brown leather boots. “How I’d show my love on Valentine’s Day” is scrawled above his head. I try to imagine what the photographer must have said to Donny before he snapped this one.

While under Donny’s spell I often wondered, *What is happening to me? How can one person have such an effect on*

*me?* I didn’t know then that millions of girls had fallen victim to the powers of crooning teen idols for years. Screaming, fainting females had regularly surrounded Frank Sinatra, Fabian, Elvis Presley, and, as my Dad can testify, The Beatles.

More recently, teenage girls cry, yank their hair and twist their faces in agony over The Hanson Brothers, The Jonas Brothers, and Justin Bieber.

I remember crying like an eight-year-old the day after I saw The Osmond Brothers in concert the first time. I imagine I was disappointed to see there were over twenty thousand girls in Cincinnati alone competing for Donny’s heart.

But my mom hugged me and said, “Even Freud recognized the validity of young love. When real love comes along, you’ll know the difference.” This only brought more tears and I wondered, *Who the heck is Freud?*

Page 18. Here is one of my all-time favorites. I smile at the life-sized color photo (folded four times) of Donny playing in the Hawaiian surf, wearing purple swim trunks, a purple lei hanging around his neck.

Page 19. I try to smooth the edges of two wrinkled clippings from Sixteen Magazine: “Find the Way to Donny’s Heart: Donny’s List of Favorites” and “The Secret Recipe for Donny’s Favorite Lemon Pudding Cake!” I’m not sure where my mother found the patience to tolerate my growing obsession. She allowed me to wallpaper my bedroom with dozens of posters, like this one. She even tolerated my new diet that included Donny’s favorite foods like fried chicken, pasta with olive oil, and peanut butter cookies. Oh yes, and I baked a lemon pudding cake every week.

I even kept a bottle of his favorite cologne, British Sterling, on my dresser. My wardrobe was (no surprise) mostly purple. It wasn’t enough to know that we breathed the same air every day or saw the same moon every night. This total sensory experience somehow made me feel connected to Donny.

Page 22. I read the headlines from two *Tiger Beat* magazine articles: "You Are Donny's First Date" and "Osmonds Trapped in Hotel Fire!" On page 24 I find "Fresh-Faced Osmonds' Appeal Looks Like One Bad Apple." Below this article I recognize my thirteen-year old large looped handwriting and break into laughter. *This is an example of the jealous reviewers who have written about Donny in such a way that's absolutely gross. Amen, sister.*

I remember the day I wrote that. But as much as I defended the boy of my dreams, I knew the general public couldn't stomach the squeaky clean image of the Osmond clan. Consequently, I endured painful moments of teasing from my brother ("OhDonnyOhDonnyOhDonny"), neighborhood friends ("And they called it Puppy Lo-hu-u-ove"), and the boys at school ("Look up bubblegum music in the dictionary and there's his picture.")

Thankfully Cathy, my best friend who lived next door, was also a huge fan. But her family moved out of town when I turned twelve, so we were forced to do our Donny fan clubbing activities long distance. We'd arrange to buy fan magazines on the same day and swoon through our letter writing, "Did you see how TUFF he looked in that picture of him at Caesar's Palace?" and "OH MY GOSH, did you see the way he flipped his hair on *The Lucy Show*?"

It was not long after Cathy moved when I started noticing that magazines were recycling pictures of Donny from old photo sessions, and the news items in the "Meow Column" seemed contrived. Although this awareness was definitely a sign that my bout with Osmondmania was waning, I could have never dreamed that my most memorable Osmond moment was yet to come.

I still own the wide, fringed belt I wore that day. It was the quintessential accessory every cool thirteen-year old girl owned in 1973. Mine was dark purple, of course. And I was certain *he* would notice it. With shaking hands, I disentangled

the strap of my Polaroid Colorpack 80 and waited for the elevator to reach the nineteenth floor. *Please let him be here, I prayed.*

Cathy and I, along with two of her girlfriends from Pikeville, had managed to track down The Osmonds after seeing them in concert at The Cincinnati Gardens that hot August night in 1973. We had spent the early hours of the next morning scouring every corner of The Stouffer's Inn for any sign of our beloved idol.

Finally, at nine o'clock Cathy convinced one of the tight-lipped maids to tell us the Osmonds' floor number. I can still visualize Cathy's wide-eyed expression that day. The smell of Clearasil and Ambush perfume permeated the elevator as we ascended to our date with destiny. My hands were shaking and my ears were still ringing with the sound of screaming girls from the concert the night before. I had never felt more thrilled in my entire life. This was it. I was finally going to meet the boy of my dreams.

On page 42 I find the original, yellowed newspaper announcement from *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, dated August 11, 1973. It reads, "The Osmonds Live--Tonight! Tickets \$6.00 \$5.00 \$4.00." To the side is a typed Caravello Travel page that lists each member of the Osmond family (including the parents) and corresponding room number.

On page 43 are six handwritten pages of Marie Osmond's journal, including passages like, "Sometimes I think how much I would enjoy having a sister" and "I just wish all the kids I meet could have a happy home like I do." Pages 44, 45, and 46 are littered with countless souvenirs, like Trident gum wrappers, brass room keys, fan letters written in purple, orange and pink ink, an envelope addressed to a LaVerna Osmond in Ogden, Utah, and an envelope, antiqued with age, that protects a precious strand of Donny's hair.

What an emotional rollercoaster my friends and I experienced that morning. After what seemed like an eternity, we

reached the nineteenth floor of the hotel. We flew off the elevator and heard nothing but silence. We looked everywhere, but not an Osmond was in sight. The girls and I looked at each other, aghast that the floor seemed deserted. We were too late. There I was, dressed in my coolest outfit when suddenly, my eight-year-old took over. I burst into tears right in front of everyone.

A housekeeping maid suddenly appeared and said, “Oh, girls, they left right after dawn. I’m sorry.” *That was nearly three hours ago. We weren’t even close.* I felt sick. Life, as I knew it, was over.

“I’ll tell you what,” the maid said with a smile. “I’ve got the keys to every room. How ‘bout I let you girls in and you can look around a while?” Well, this offer certainly beat a blank. But still, I was crushed.

I never met Donny that day. Then again, I was pretty lucky I had the chance to raid eighteen hotel rooms and collect dozens of souvenirs that could never be purchased, even through The Osmond Fan Club.

I moan with disappointment as I realize the remaining pages of the scrapbook are empty. It takes me a few minutes to remember why. Shortly after my close encounter with Donny, I realized that my journey with him had reached its summit. Standing in his hotel room that day was the next best thing to meeting him.

When I started ninth grade a few weeks later, it occurred to me that there was no secret, underlying reason why I had been obsessed with Donny Osmond for two years. It hadn’t filled some hidden void in my life. I wasn’t some disturbed, lonely teenager. My souvenirs proved that he was exactly what I thought: a talented, wholesome performer who shared a bedroom with his brother. That was all I would ever know about him. And that was the reason he faded from my life.

I close the scrapbook and wonder what this massive collection of memories says about the person I’ve become. I’d like to think that Donny faded from my life because I suddenly grew up and finally understood the difference between fantasy and reality. But that’s not what really happened. Sure, I started dating and I stopped buying *Tiger Beat* magazines. I got my driver’s license and went off to college. But that love-struck, excitable teenager never completely disappeared. I was always on the lookout for Donny’s twin. It’s no coincidence that Jeremy, my husband, has dark brown hair, dreamy brown eyes, and a white, toothy smile.

As I wait for Jeremy to return with the moving van, a feeling of nostalgia overtakes me, and I smile. Donny Osmond awakened the passion, romance, and sexuality that were destined to become part of my identity. Even my dream of becoming a writer was born while listening to the syrupy lyrics to most of his songs.

To this day, I still have celebrity crushes. Of course, I’m not the swooning type anymore. Nonetheless, I still gush over singers and musicians when I see them in concert. My friends and family members love to tease me about my “men.”

A few years ago, Cathy surprised me by coming in town for my fortieth birthday party. It was the first time we had seen each other in years. She insisted that I open her gift in front of everyone. It was a re-mastered copy of Donny’s greatest hits. I remember wanting to die from embarrassment. But what I didn’t remember until now is that my friends and family loved seeing this part of my past. I think it freed them to admit that the child within never disappears completely. It still comes out to play every now and then.



*Ryan Kriebiel***Innocence**

My craving  
for bubble-gum ice cream.

The peach rising  
behind powdered-sugar mountaintops.

Who spilled the cranberry juice  
on the clouds?

Smiling  
at nothing.

*Christopher Montgomery***Prophet**

A bunk bed sits against a crayoned wall —  
a building where I survey  
the safety of the people below.

A watchtower for comic-book heroes,  
a soft cotton blanket on my back.

An empty armchair by the window —  
my vast desert battlefield of brown leather,  
an endless war zone full of cracks and traps.  
Atop this mountain figurines fall,  
yet only I see their death.

My Grandfather lifts me with able arms —  
to give a simple see you later boy.  
I cling tight to his neck,  
the knot in my stomach is a warning.

My mother tells me to put away my toys —  
I lock my imagination away in the toy-chest,  
yet I knew her father's hug was his last.

*Jordan Holden*

## Language with Hands

### *For Crystal*

Hand from chest to face  
as if a claw.

*Anger.*

Tips on chest (right before left), lightly  
sweep the pavement.

*Happy.*

Middle fingers to thumbs,  
flick the pest.

*Hate.*

Hands in fist, cross over heart,  
protect from harm.

*Love.*

Right hand extends above forehead,  
close slowly like heavy eyelids.

*Sleep.*

Hands cross back and forth quicker  
than a parking lot gate, shield the chest.

*Fear.*

Left arm curved like the crescent moon,  
as right hand glides across the harp.

*Sing or Music.*

Extend left palm, tips of right index and middle  
finger sway back and forth on the floor.

*Dance.*

Right index and thumb spell “L”, touch corner  
of mouth, fists box with the air.

*Loud.*

Right index in front of lips,  
both hands flatten the air into a plain.

*Silence.*

## *Anna Maloney*

### To Drive

#### To Home

WE HADN'T SPOKEN TO EACH OTHER for fifty miles. We weren't angry. My dad was listening absentmindedly to National Public Radio – some political riffraff. I stared out the tinted window at the blurred Ohio cornfields and kept a running tally of the dead animals on the side of the road: seven raccoons, four possums, two doe, and sixty more miles to scan before we reached my house in Northern Kentucky. My dad drummed his fingers on the leather steering wheel; he got antsy whenever he wanted a cigarette, and I knew he was holding back for my sake.

“Next time you come up, we'll do something, I promise,” he said. Maybe he was apologizing because he was legitimately sorry, or maybe because he was trying to distract himself from that cigarette. I couldn't tell.

“Oh Daddy, it's okay. I like doing nothing,” I assured him. I was only sort of lying.

“Yeah, but it would be nice to get out somewhere. We can't just sit around and watch TV every other weekend.” Yellowsprings, the small Ohio village my dad resided in, didn't offer much beyond head shops and restaurants specializing in organic cuisine, and there's only so much pot and tofu one can take. And although the Village of Yellowsprings is nestled along the edge of John Bryan State Park, which had an excellent network of hike and pedestrian trails, it was a chilly, damp November weekend — not welcome weather for a walk.

“Well the weather was pretty crappy,” I offered. The statement seemed to make my dad feel a little less guilty.

“Eh, that's true,” he said, “when it warms up in the spring we can go horseback riding or hiking or canoeing or something.” My dad looked at me sideways. I stared blankly out the window. I knew that like we'd never reach the ever approaching horizon, we'd never do these things together. But I forced a smile anyway and said, “Okay Daddy, that sounds great,” as convincingly as I could.

#### To Chicoutimi

We hadn't spoken to each other for forty miles. We weren't angry; we'd only run out of things to say. Although I usually enjoyed silence, I was in the mood to chat. Unfortunately, my dad was the only other English-speaking person around; we had left my aunt and uncle at the Maine/Quebec border thirty miles ago.

“Daddy, I'm bored,” I whined. I was sixteen, but long car rides could reduce my temper to that of a petulant four-year old. To pass the time (and, I suspect, to shut me up) my dad suggested I look for moose. This suggestion was comical: since we started our drive it had been raining cats and dogs. Or it was “raining moose and caribou,” as I'd said to my dad after the first cloud burst. I was practically reduced to tears at my own wit, but my dad didn't even crack a smile; he just asked me the name of the town we were heading to.

“Chicitee?” I wondered aloud. My dad shrugged, not really interested in the answer. My aunt and uncle had suggested we visit a quaint fjord-side town, especially worth the trip for the beautiful drive along the St. Lawrence Seaway — but we could not remember the name of our destination to save our lives.

I mused to myself as to what the name could be — it was full of sharp c's and t's I was sure — and watched raindrops race across the passenger window. As a puny drop overtook a plump one for the win (I cheered inwardly), the static emanating from the dashboard finally cut out.

“And the Supernatural reigns as king! Come with me and listen to the tale of... The Dance of the Devil Dolls!”

Horror Hour was still on the Old Time Radio station.

The scary stories of the 1940s are meek in comparison to the blood bath psychopathic thrillers of the 21st century, but that's why I like them. The Canadian wilderness created the perfect ambiance for the old ghost tales—the boundless pine trees were like forests of jagged knives, and the mountains towered above us threateningly. Just as I was getting into the story (two friends, a lonely cabin in the wilds, a peculiar man inquiring about a doll) the static cut in again. I sighed, resigned to boredom.

“Where the hell are we going again? Chiciwhatsit?” my dad asked, cocking his head toward me, as though he hadn't just asked and I hadn't just proved as ignorant as he.

“Chicacoutami?” I suggested.

“Chicawawa?”

“Chicacouhahmit?”

I checked the map. With my finger I traced our route down the highway that followed Saguenay Fjord.

“Chicoutini!” I read triumphantly, jabbing my index finger on the labeled dot. Then I sighed. “We're never going to remember that,” I said.

“Well you know, Anna,” my dad said, surprising me with a bellowing voice, “the journey is often more important than the destination.”

“Daddy, you're so corny,” I laughed, but I suspected that, in this case, he might be right.

### To Nashville

We hadn't spoken to each other for thirty miles. We weren't angry; it was just too early. It was 9 am and my dad and I were making the four and half hour drive to Nashville for a concert that wasn't due to start until seven that evening.

When I grumpily asked him why we had to leave so early, he tersely replied, “Traffic.”

On a Kentucky Sunday morning, however, there was no traffic—everyone was either in church or eating breakfast at the local Cracker Barrel. As my dad sped down I-71 at 85 miles an hour, I passed the time staring drowsily out the window. Islands of trees broke the monotony of wheat and tobacco fields. The sky was blue, the sun was yellow, the September leaves were red. There was nothing spectacular about the primary-colored view.

My dad turned on the radio. We were too far out of range of the Cincinnati metro to listen to his preset stations. He kept his finger on the seek button until he found a station.

“My baby rode away—”

“Ohhh daarin’—”

“And the Lord said—”

“Praise Jesus, oh Pr—”

“God sa—”

“Well hallelujah Praise the Lord, we in Kentucky, we got everythin' we need in Jesus and tobaccal, oh thank Jesus we ain't need no shoes nor no teeth,” my dad sermonized energetically.

“Daddy, you smoke a pack a day,” I reminded him.

“I guess that is pretty hypocritical of me,” he said, smiling.

“It wouldn't be hypocritical if you quit smoking.” I looked at him as sweetly as possible and batted my eyelashes. My dad sighed, annoyed.

“I'm sorry,” I mumbled. He patted my leg. We didn't speak again until we crossed into Tennessee.

### To Quebec City

We hadn't spoken to each other for twenty miles. We weren't angry, only lost. The silence I usually enjoyed was continually interrupted by a string of profanities.

“Jesus fucking Christ, there aren’t any fucking road signs!” my dad howled. We had been circling around Quebec City for half an hour, trying to find our way to the hotel.

“Recalculating,” said the GPS on the dashboard. She sounded disappointed. For the past three days in Canada, my dad and I had done nothing but mess up the clear-cut directions she gave us. She had become particularly frazzled on one occasion when she didn’t recognize the road my dad and I were driving on. She squawked “You are not on a marked road” for an hour before my dad got so irritated he threw her in the backseat.

“Shit! God damnit what the fuck is wrong with this fucking city! They use ketchup as pizza sauce and they don’t know how to lay out their fucking roads!” He revved the engine.

“What the fuck street is this?”

“Daddy, go straight!”

“Recalculating.”

“Tell me where the fuck to go you moron!” my dad yelled at the GPS. “Okay numb--nuts, who taught you to drive?” he yelled to the car in front of us.

“Continue straight in twenty feet.”

“Daddy you’re in the left turn only lane!” I yelled, adding to the madness.

“Fuck it,” my dad said. The light was yellow but my dad sped up, cutting off two lanes of traffic and speeding through the intersection, narrowly missing getting hit by a flustered old woman in a minivan.

“Daddy!” I screamed. “What the hell was that?”

“You gotta do what you gotta do,” he said.

“You know when we were in Boston and that car cut us off and you said people in Massachusetts didn’t know how to drive and were known as Mass-holes?”

“Yeah,” my dad said, laughing. He seemed to know where I was going with this.

“Well, you’re definitely a Mass-hole now.”

“Loud and proud,” he said. I smiled.

### To Dad’s

We hadn’t spoken to each other for ten miles. We weren’t angry; my dad was on the phone with my uncle. The pressure of thinking of a topic of conversation was momentarily lifted but was instantly replaced by a different kind of pressure. I shifted uncomfortably in my seat.

I poked my dad’s leg. He turned his head slightly.

“Daddy I have to go to the bathroom,” I whispered loudly.

He turned his eyes back to the road and asked my uncle why my aunt would drive so far away for a dance class. I sighed and kept note of the upcoming exits. There was a McDonald’s in two miles. I glanced at my dad, starting to panic. I had to go. Really badly. I wasn’t sure if he noticed my in-seat pee-dance, but over the blare of my iPod I thought I heard him say something about a bathroom....

An agonizing ten minutes later, my dad set his phone in the cup holder.

“Now what were you asking me?” he asked, straining towards me.

“I had to go to the bathroom.”

“Oh! Do you still need to go?”

“No. I already did.”

My dad looked momentarily startled, but then laughed. It wasn’t the hardest I’d ever seen him laugh, but it was close.

*Jordan Padgett*

### *Awoken*

There is a peace that comes from having your head  
blown open.

It's like throwing up, at first.  
It hurts, but then you feel better.

The last time I felt that calm  
was at five on the swing.

Before the sound of my life  
became a squeal in the brakes.

*Ashley Blake*

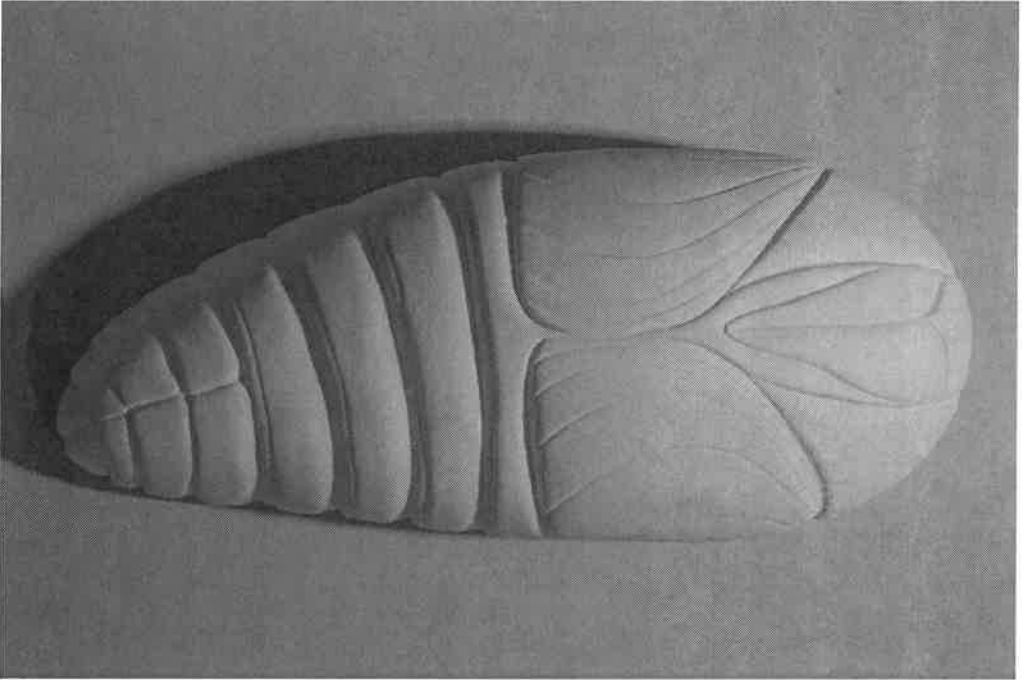
### *The Great Flood*

Be a sweetheart, pour another glass.  
She told me I was the enabler once, but  
I did it so you wouldn't stagger.

What a good niece

I was to stir the glass for you,  
to smell the grapes off in Italy  
being plucked from their hearty vines  
just for you. And when no one was looking  
to take a tentative sip for taste  
just for you.

I held it before you,  
a holy chalice, and I remember  
that with a laugh you asked if the flood  
that washed away the sinners  
was fresh water or salt?  
Yel, it washed us away regardless.



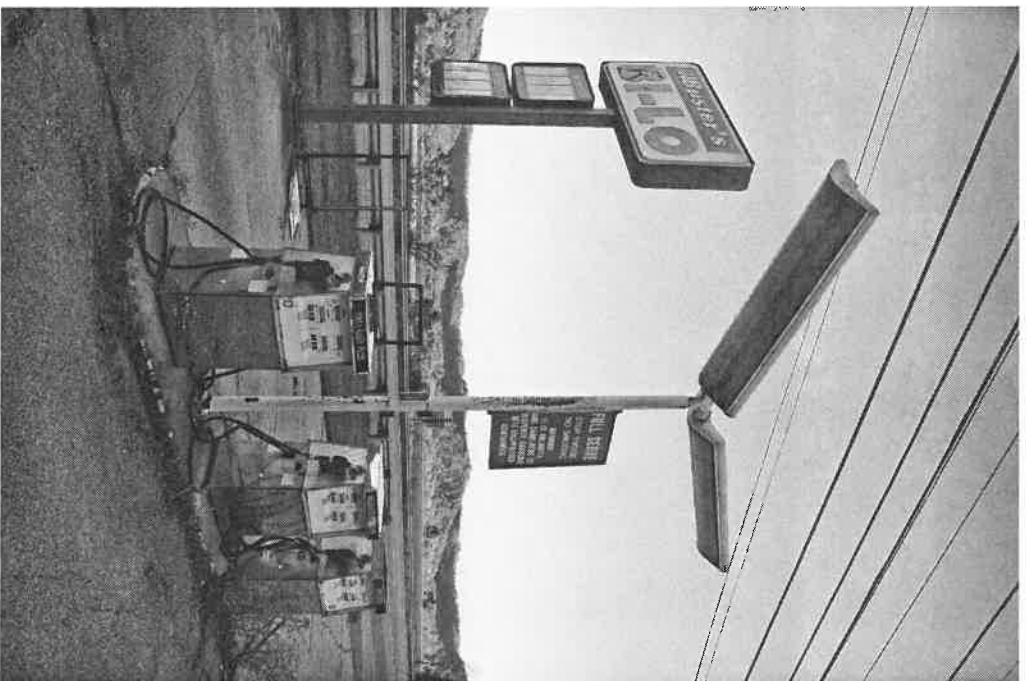
Didem Mert - "Womb"  
Medium: Cone 9 porcelain, 21" x 9" x 7.5"  
Photo by Nicole Berger



Ryan Griffin - "Firefighter One, Series: Everyday Normalities"  
Medium: Photography



Tyler Griese - "Self Portrait"  
Medium: Oil on Board



Chad Schultz - "Full Serve"  
Medium: Photography





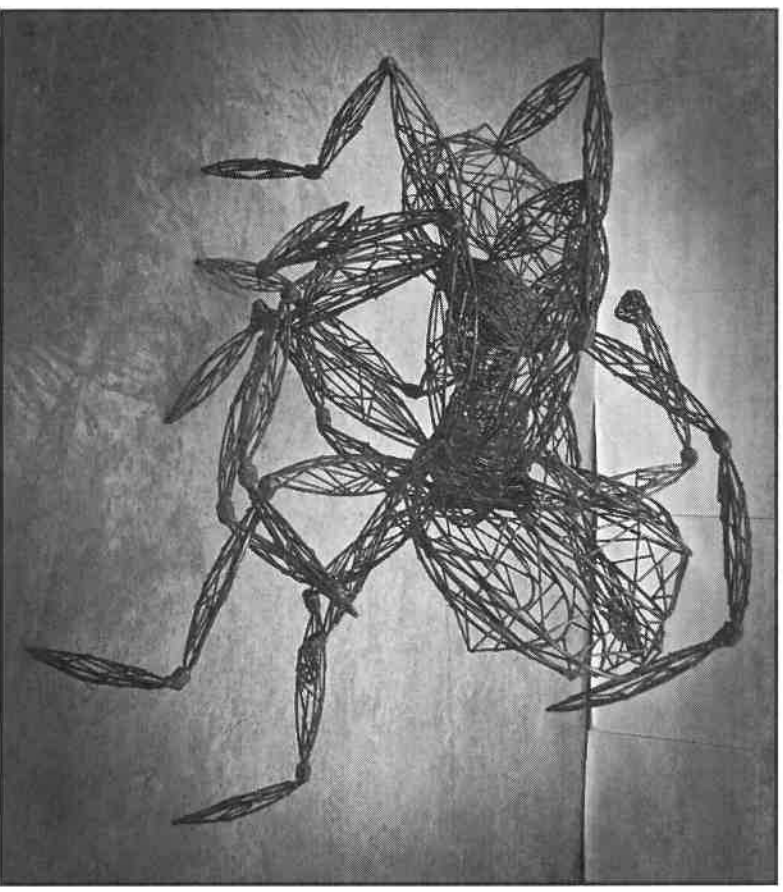
Nicole Berger - "Looking Glass"  
Medium: Photography



Jesse Byerly - "Scratched"  
Medium: Photography



Courtney Perry - "Wall and Vines"  
Medium: Photography



Kendra Douglas - "An Encounter with Deception: Latrodectus Mactan IV"  
Medium: Rusted steel and copper coated steel 4X2X3

*Christopher Montgomery*

## Welcome to Cincinnati

I WALKED DOWN THE MAKESHIFT parking lot that sat adjacent to the worn, graffitied brick wall of an old record shop. I always thought it fitting to park there, as I was in a band. Maybe I thought it clever to park next to a record store, as if doing so solidified my status as a 'Rock Star.' The chalky gravel comprising the lot slid under my feet as I made my way down towards my car. The moon hid behind stifling smog. The brief passing headlights of cars and the soft glow of traffic lights provided the only illumination for the dark parking lot. I clumsily made my way down to my car, my mind on anything but my task. I considered my breath crystallizing in the winter air, the growl in my stomach, my thoughts eventually resting on the night's events. After playing a few shows, breaking down and loading my own set-up afterward (because *I* don't have a road crew), I could do the routine with my mind somewhere else.

I fumbled my keys and went to open my car door, not noticing anything unusual. The infrequent lights only played into my being deceived. Even when its brief glimmer reflected off the driver window and not the rear seat window, it still took a triple take for me to realize something was wrong. Once this registered, my mind still fought the inevitable conclusion. When my mind finally conceded, my heart raced and my stomach seemed to be ripped in half. There was a fire lit behind my face; it felt as though someone had a gloved hand around my throat. I checked my person, desperate to find my cell phone as if it would help me breathe again. I immediately dialed Dennis. He answered in two rings, but the time between rings felt like an eternity.

"*W*hats up?" he asked, puzzled by my call, as I had just left him moments ago.

I finally felt the clench release from my throat, and I took a deep breath.

"Get down here. Now." I replied.

He must have sensed the weight of the problem, as his response was quickly alarmed.

"Okay man. What's wrong?"

"It's gone. It's all gone..."

#

I had gone to the Willis Music shop nearly every day over the course of the 1998-99 school year to stare at the Hamer Diablo guitar that hung on the wall, to have the salesmen bring it down so I could anxiously hold it—trying not to drool on its finish. I would always carry a fear in my gut as I approached that this might be the time the beautiful instrument that I so desired would be gone, that some ill-deserving goon would be putting his or her filthy paws all over the fine piece of equipment, ignorantly man-handling it. I would ritualistically go to pine for this guitar, much to the merriment of my friends and to the grief of my parents. The guitar was \$750.00 dollars, a common price-point for a guitar at the entry-point of a high-end, professional instrument. Alas, \$750.00 dollars seems insurmountable to a fourteen-year-old high school freshman. I would take friends to see it and would be confused when they didn't share my sentiment.

"It's just a guitar!" they would tease.

"Oh. No. It's not *just* a guitar," I would defend as though I were infatuated with puppy love.

To my surprise, my parents bought me that very Hamer Diablo for my fifteenth birthday. By that time, I had been playing guitar for over a year and had shown an aptitude for the instrument. I learned quickly, and my skills had vastly

increased. I had shown immense dedication to the craft and had cut my teeth on a lesser piece of equipment. This was enough to warrant an upgrade in my parents' eyes, and they were willing to make an investment.

As I walked into the Willis Music Store, my heart filled with joy. "I'll be buying that one today," I said, pointing at my guitar and beaming with a parental pride. The worker handed it down to me with a big smile, as he recognized me from my days as a groupie for this instrument. As the guitar was placed in my hands, it was as though the clouds opened, and 'heavenly light' poured down and angels sang and played harps. The universe smiled. Like a proud father holding his newborn child, showing her or him off to the world, I clutched the guitar tight to my chest as I walked through the mall, beaming with pride and joy. All I needed were cigars to hand out! Once in the car, I strapped the guitar safely in with the seat-belt.

Such devotion might seem strange to some folks—like a silly obsession. My friends equate it to the guy who names his car and spends more time with it than his own wife, but that wouldn't quite be a fair assessment. As a musician, my guitar is the tool, the vessel by which I connect to the world around me. The subtleties and nuances in production make every guitar as unique as the fingerprints they bear.

The guitar becomes an extension of the player. The way my body would rest on the guitar, wearing down specific places on its emerald green body. The oils from my hands, working into the maple and rosewood fretboard; the sweat, the scratches, the dings—the guitar was molded to suit me. We grew together over the course of 12 years.

#

"Great show!" I shouted.

"As always!" Dennis replied.

We bumped fists and did other man-gestures as we celebrated another successful gig for our band, the third band I had been in since picking up the guitar. This was Dennis' first band, but he brought a young, fresh energy with his playing. We both had a passionate love for playing music, and our band had recently been playing shows in Cincinnati. While I was a bit more experienced than Dennis and while we were both into the groove of playing shows, breaking down, and hitting the road, both of us were relatively new to playing in CinCY.

Dennis and I clumsily made our way down the long, bright-white hall of the T.U.C. building and out past the back of the Catskellar Bar, the smoke and beer smells intertwining as they escaped into the night air. Poor and roadie-less, we loaded our own equipment into my illegally parked car. We were happy to do so, especially after a great show. We didn't mind the extra hours needed. Already exhausted, we were running on energy fumes, on the vibe of the night. We wore the chore like a badge of honor.

"Oh man, I'm so tired," I jokingly whined, "and the stuff is so heavy." I chuckled as I lifted my combo amp into my trunk and laid it down flat.

"Don't you just feel...old?" Dennis quipped as he stood by, waiting to hand me my effects board.

"Cute, Dennis . . . real cute." I took the effects board from him and situated it safely in the trunk as well. Next came all the cables. As I took them I continued with my sarcastic, almost boastful game. "Ugh, and so much stuff to load. Doesn't this suck to have so much stuff to load?"

"You know it!" Dennis answered, laughing. "It's definitely a great problem to have."

We put my guitar case in last and shut the trunk tight, locking the contents securely within. We then loaded the majority of Dennis' stuff in the back seat. Bass amp, cables, and instrument stands found their familiar, designated places.

Stacked equipment overran my back and passenger windows. From a distance I'm sure my car looked as though some vagabond had stowed away in it.

All the band members exchanged pleasantries: the half-hug half-hand-shake, 'bro-hug,' and the more traditional high-fives. We all resounded in the usual "good show," which echoed off the walls of the side alley loading area. Dennis and I got in my car to head out, him having to hold his bass in the front with him.

"Thanks for the ride home," he said, the case for his bass pushing against his cheek and distorting his enunciation.

"No problem bro. Always a pleasure."

We drove through the loading area, much to the surprise and annoyance of pedestrians as we were well beyond the "no cars allowed beyond this point" sign. We made our way safely up the hill, weaving through people-traffic. We arrived at Dennis' place within minutes, as it is located exactly one block across from the venue. We pulled into the bumpy gravel lot, white dust pluming up around my car. As I parked, Dennis gave me a desperate, pained look from over his instrument case, which still remained lodged in his face.

"Help me get all this stuff up to my room?" he pleaded.

I agreed. We did, after all, have extra equipment that night. Besides, my stuff was locked in the trunk, and I'd only be a minute.

#

"911 Operator, what is your emergency?"

"I—um—I would like to—I need to report a r-robbery," I nervously fumbled my words. This was the first time in my life that I had ever had to call the police. And not that it's ever good to have to call the police, but I hated that it was under these circumstances.

"What is your location, sir?" she asked coldly.

"The gravel parking lot at the corner of—" I had been there so many times and yet I was forgetting where I was. I looked frantically for the street sign. "Um—the corner of Calhoun St. and," I squinted to read the other sign in the dark, "Scioto," I finally blurted out.

"I'm not sure where you are, sir."

*You're the dispatcher for the Cincinnati Police and you don't know where I'm talking about?* I thought to myself. *Maybe I'm pronouncing it wrong?* I didn't have time for the benefit of the doubt.

"The gravel parking lot that connects Calhoun Street and West McMillian!" I shouted in desperation. My hands trembled in shock as I clung to my phone.

"Okay, I've got your location," she said after an excruciating pause to check her computer, the clicking on the keyboard loud in my ear. "Are you hurt at all?"

"No ma'am."

"Can you describe what happened?"

"Yes ma'am. Someone smashed out the back passenger window of my car and stole all my stuff." As I talked to her I walked around the car, surveying the damage. I noticed that other cars were missing their windows as well. Confident that I was helping, and hoping somehow it might make everything move faster, I added the information. "It looks like whoever did this got several cars. Please send someone."

"A squad car is on its way," she replied, giving me no sympathy.

Dennis was approaching just as I hung up the phone. He could see the damage and was already piecing together what had happened in his mind.

"Whoa man, what—what happened?" he asked, realizing the answer but wanting to be supportive nonetheless.

I recounted the story to Dennis, and he offered a kind—albeit clumsy—attempt to help. Scratching his head as scenarios ran through his mind, he mustered a reply. "Wow,

everything? I—I assume the cops are on their way?”

“Yes,” I mumbled.

Going over everything again caused a sick feeling to well up inside. Helplessness and betrayal washed over me as Dennis and I surveyed the damage. The door made a crunching sound as I opened it. I brushed window out of the front seat and sat down. Glass covered the entire back of the car. The back seat was folded down—the thief’s entry point into my trunk. A black space filled the place where my beloved equipment was stacked just moments before.

“How could they know that stuff was in there? How’d they know to look in the trunk?” I asked.

“It looks like they hit a bunch of cars, and yours just happened to be one.”

Just then, one of the people parked next to me who had also been hit walked up.

“Hey guys, this your car?” I asked.

“Yeah why? What’s up?” she questioned apprehensively.

“We all got broken into and robbed.” I felt bad as I broke the news to her, yet it helped to have someone to relate to my pain, at least somewhat. She shouted some choice explicative and checked her car.

“They got my iPod and...and my purse!” We all looked on in shock. “I had it under the passenger seat.”

I suddenly didn’t feel so dumb for having my stuff stolen. *At least mine was in the trunk, not obviously sitting in the front seat of my car—on Calhoun Street!*

“Did you call the cops?” she asked. “Where are they?”

I was annoyed that yet another person asked me if I had called the cops, annoyed with the implication that I wouldn’t think to do that. However, thinking about it caused me to realize the cops still weren’t there. I became furious, as it was at least an hour since I had called.

“Yeah, but I’m gonna call them back.” I dialed and got the same operator. “Yeah I reported a robbery . . . like an hour

ago! The cars that got broken into on Calhoun?”

“Right, the gravel lot,” she replied in that same unsympathetic tone. “They’re on their way.”

“Are you sure?” I shouted. “It’s been over an hour,”

I reminded her, feeling forgotten—hurt that my plight, my desperate situation had been overlooked.

“Yes sir!” she snapped. “They’re a little busy dealing with real crimes like murder, rape, and robbery!”

*Does this not qualify as a real crime?* I thought. *Is this not a robbery? Didn’t I just say that?* “Well, if they could hurry, that’d be great!” That was all I could muster as my face burned red.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the police cruiser arrived, covering us in clouds of white chalk, tickling our lungs. The police officer sat in his cruiser momentarily, finishing paperwork. He got out and nonchalantly walked over to us, his gun-belt squeaking as he moved.

“You put in the call?”

“Yes,” I replied defiantly.

“So explain what happened.”

I went into a frantic recount of what happened. Detailing the loading, the unloading, how I was only gone for a brief moment. He then asked the girl what happened. She confessed that she had only found out a few moments ago that she had been broken into.

“Welcome to Cincinnati,” the officer said callously, almost chuckling.

*As if the freezing cold, my smashed out car window, and the ease with which my belongings were taken wasn’t isn’t enough,* I thought.

Appalled by this, I decided to defend myself. “How would they know the stuff was in my car?” I demanded.

“They probably saw you start loading and followed you,” he suggested. I was a bit more satisfied with this conjecture but still not happy with his lack of understanding for my situation.

“How long were you away from the car?” he continued.  
 “Just a few minutes.”

“Never leave stuff in your car in Cincinnati,” he said, rolling his eyes.

“We do this all the time and have never had any problems,” I said in desperation, already feeling dumb enough as is and frustrated that we took additional time unload Dennis’ extra equipment.

Dennis shook his head, confirming with the officer that we had indeed never had this problem.

“Well, it looks like they got several cars, and stole a car to load everything into.”

“Welcome to Cincinnati!” the girl shouted with disdain for the situation and the officer’s annoyingly correct assessment.

The police officer began to gather more information, asking the girl what was stolen out of her car. As he did so, he was able to uncover by the girl’s clumsy admission that she had left her purse in the front of the car that “Maybe they could’ve seen it.” He wrote down a list of stolen items and in a true palm-to-forehead moment we all learned that nothing was in her purse. So all she lost was an iPod. My list amounted to: my amplifier, my foot-switch board, my multiple effects units, several cables, cases, and of course, my Hamer Diablo guitar. After listing the items lost, I asked a question I still dread the answer to.

“So how will I—will I be able to get my stuff back?”

“You can pretty much kiss that stuff goodbye,” was the police officer’s calloused answer.

As I drove home that night, the cold winter air billowed through my car. The freezing air offset my hot, burning red face, helping me fight back tears. The last thing Dennis had said to me was, “I’m really sorry, but I’m proud of you—you handled it well.” Yet the wintry air only made worse the memory of the guitar hanging in the window at Willis Music—my guitar.

#

The police did absolutely no follow up. They did nothing about it and were satisfied to let the whole situation fall to the wayside. I, on the other hand, did not have it so easy. After that night, I really struggled. It was hard to adjust to not having something that was such a huge part of my life for so long. I always looked forward to coming in after a hard day at work or a tedious day at school and losing myself in playing guitar. This was my routine for many years. Now I would look for my guitar, eager to play, and would only be reminded I couldn’t play anymore. My fingers would ache. My body would literally crave playing. It was truly like withdrawal. The thought of *If only I had done it differently* went through my head daily.

I had to quit the band I so dearly loved. I had amassed all my equipment over several years, and to lose it all in one fell swoop was devastating. I got a check from the car insurance company for a whole \$500—less than the cost of my guitar alone. Not having a vast, expendable income meant I was back to square one. No equipment meant I couldn’t play shows.

I found myself lingering about the house sorrowfully—aimless without a vessel for expression. I went into the music shops to look for replacement equipment, but no suitable replacement could be found. I became restless and frustrated, generally no fun to be around.

I found myself sitting in my room, books and posters surrounding me. All of this could easily be a trap if I let it. I sat staring out the window, wrestling with how I might get all of these feelings out, and realized that I had pick up and move on—but how? I looked through all my books. Most I’d read many times over; others I had yet to explore. Upon examination of the shelves and their content, I discovered a book out of place. Small and bound in red leather, it stood out from the rest. As I took it from between the two books which held it captive, older memories resurfaced. I brushed

off the dust from the sturdy cover and cracked the book open. On the first page, I saw the clumsy inscription which read *Christopher Montgomery's Writing Journal*. It was as though I had found a long lost friend. I whipped through the pages to unearth old poetry, prayers, skeletons of stories, and details of trips all written and abandoned by me.

I sat down at my desk with the book still in hand. I ripped open the desk drawer and frantically located a pen. I began to write again. It was sloppy, visceral, and cathartic, a joyful rediscovery of something I had packed away.

After spending some overdue time with pen in hand, I sat back from the little red book with a new satisfaction. I had been able to approach writing from a new angle and with fresh vigor. I got a phone call from Dennis soon after.

“Hey man, you want to go do something tonight?”

“Sure,” I replied.

*What the hell, I thought, I'll go find some new things to write about.*

*Vickie Kneuen*

### Scattering Ashes

You drifted away  
on the sea  
until it became sky and stars.

The rain fell the next morning.

I thought of evaporation  
the transfer of energy.

I walked outside and soaked you up—  
Rooted myself to the ground,  
hands up, waiting for branches  
to grow, birds to perch in my fingers.



*Ryan Kriebehl*

**Peach**

I palm your voluptuous body--  
 only a membrane apart.  
 Jagged nail squinching  
 that thick nectar—  
 so warm on my tongue.  
 You have nothing left  
 for me, I'm quenched.  
 Splayed in the dirt, I leave  
 with your core in my pocket.

*Collin Eckertle*

**i tip 35%**

as if I mind the scars on her face  
 i hadn't noticed  
 until now.  
 it's something about the smile  
 and the way i'm called guy  
 and favorite  
 and how i'm getting sucked  
 for cash.  
 not that i haven't been sucked  
 for reasons worse.  
 and i know my wallet  
 is as empty as my chest  
 with the echoes of each breath  
 as they rise above empty plates  
 on her wrists.

*Alexander Duvall*

## They Called Him Twinkles

IT WAS DURING THE YELLOW HAZE of a warm, August evening when I first seen it, right off my porch. I still don't know what to make of it yet, though it were the oddest damn thing I ever did remember, I can tell you that much. The only thing that I do know is that the kids who skateboard in the neighborhood, which don't bother me like it bothers some of the other old codgers around here, well, they called him "Twinkles" and informed me of his grim presence in Berea, Kentucky.

I had bought this house near the railroad tracks and the park near the art college a few years after my wife had passed away. Damn-near everything in our old house of thirty-seven years reminded me of her, so I figured it were time to move on. Wonderful porches, those old homes in central Kentucky have got. The houses with solid insulation and fading paint that gives them a cozy, rural flavor. Anyhow, like I said, it was warm and hazy and the black birds were picking seeds and worms in the dried dirt and yellowed grass of the field across the sidewalk. I was sitting on my porch, having a pipe and a cold pitcher of pink lemonade that I brewed for the thirsty kids (an old summer habit of my daddy's), when the shadow of something appeared in the smog out in the field.

At first I thought it were a scarecrow that I'd never seemed to notice, or a man picking his way through the field as a shortcut. The queer sense of urgency that I got from first seeing it, though, were something I'd never forget.

Now, usually when I was out on my porch, I never bothered to get up for a greeting unless it were for someone who approached me for a handshake, or for the occasional kid who would stop by to sit and talk with me, but when I saw the shadow of that thing coming, I stood up faster than my bones

had anticipated and leaped against the railing for a better look. The figure got larger as it approached and strange enough, the size of it were as tall as the fellows that used to work with me in the lumber yard way back when. What had really curled my hair though was when the shadow of black faded off it once it were close enough to reveal its odd colors.

It were a damn clown, I tell you! Silliest, most sinister damn thing I ever did see in my sixty-eight years of living. Tall as a streetlight and plump as an old housewife, it wore the grimmest, most tight-fitting grey jumpsuit I ever saw on a normal clown you'd expect to see at a circus, which is where it belonged. If you wanted my opinion, I'd say that it more likely belonged in a mental institution. Its shoes looked like a flattened pair of the old Buster Browns we wore as kids, and there weren't a single part of that clown's skin and hair that weren't all tarted up in damn-near every shade of the rainbow on God's green earth. Hell, even the crack of its bulging rear-end that poked out of its buttoned drop-seat were painted white. And never before did I see a clown with a beard, but this one sure had one and it were colored the most unnatural shade of red you'd expect to see on a man.

I joked at the bar one time that it looked like a cross between that fast-food clown and its retarded fat friend, though I don't remember their names (my kids probably do). Anyhow, this "Twinkles," as the kids called it, sure as hell made himself known. He stopped once he reached the sidewalk. I placed my hand over my eyes to shade the setting sun and glared at what stood across my house.

There he stood staring, still as a portrait of a dead farm on a windless day. Now, I wouldn't mind sharing the comforts I made for myself with anyone, but I didn't want whatever this loose screw was to come anywhere near me or my property. I thought about hollering at it to scram, but I sure as hell didn't want to intimidate it. I had my old rifle upstairs in the cabinet, but didn't want to just turn and run into the house.

I thought about asking if I could help it with anything, but to be honest, the damn thing intimidated me too much to open my mouth. It noticed me glaring at it, and it weren't going to remove its awful stare from my eyes as it stood there with its heavy back hunched over by the weight of its sagging chest and belly.

Finally, after five minutes of such horrible awkward stillness, I didn't know what else to do. I raised my arms in defeat and scooted back over to my rocker and sat back down. There, I sat rocking and watching it as it stood there watching back. It weren't long before the crickets and peepers started their night choruses and I wanted to go back inside to cool off, while it just stood there in the muggy darkness.

Once inside, you better believe I locked all my doors and windows, shut all the curtains, and gave them all a second look-over and the knobs a few good test pulls. Maybe I should have called the police, but if I were a policeman, I sure as hell wouldn't have taken an old fool such as myself too seriously. I had me an old Irish setter the previous year, but the old girl had to be put to sleep because her arthritis was acting up. Having a big old dog that night would have put my mind more to ease, I can tell you that much.

Of course I wondered in my own sound mind if I was starting to get the mental weakness of an old man, but I had never seemed abnormal or sick. I went to bed that night and didn't get a wink of sleep.

Lucky for me, at that time I had been retired for at least the past couple of years and didn't need the sleep of a working man. Upstairs in my bed, I dozed off now and then, but didn't get the good night's sleep a man needed to feel refreshed during the day. I blamed the heat to convince myself I weren't scared, and when I awoke, I peered out my window to find that it was gone.

Now, at this point, I were hesitant to go outside. I ate breakfast and did some chores around the house, but after I

wasted damn-near half the day all cooped up, I stepped out and took the truck out to the store and to do some errands. After returning, I talked to my neighbor, Mr. Plunkett, to see if he had noticed anything shady about the neighborhood, but he just shook his head and said everything were as normal and quiet as it always were.

That evening, I repeated the same tasks of the evening before, sitting outside with my pipe and frosty pink lemonade to share with the kids. A polite young man named Jimmy, I think was his name, and his sister, Sarah, stopped by for some lemonade. I asked them if they had heard of this Twinkles fellow and if they had seen anything funny in the neighborhood.

While Sarah timidly shook her head as if she'd thought I were crazy, Jimmy, or Bobby might have been his name, told me all the outlandish stories that his schoolyard pals must have told him of the clown. Probably stuff that they heard in a damn video game or movie. He mentioned stuff such as it being found in a dumpster as a baby, carrying an axe, driving a wild ice cream truck, being raised by a family of monkeys in a traveling carnival, and all other sorts of nonsense.

I was nice and listened to him though. He was only a boy, after all. Besides, the kid had heard more about this Twinkles than me. Even though I didn't believe him, I have to say that his stories set me on edge. I reckon that it did actually help that other people had told stories about the clown, but who among us old timers had seen the damn thing and were too afraid to say something?

Not an hour after the kids left, the same dark figure appeared in the haze of the summer eve and picked his way through the field to stand on the sidewalk across the street. I didn't get up this time, but just watched him uncomfortably until it was time to go back inside. The only difference from the night before were the fact that instead of standing so still, the damn thing rudely scratched its large behind and let out a belch that were tuned out by the sound of some obnoxious clown horn.

Once inside, I repeated my ritual of locking doors, closing curtains and testing the knobs. My sleep was slightly better than last night's and it only got better as the weeks passed. Every night for the rest of that summer, Twinkles showed up from the same eerie route it picked since that first night I saw it. It unnerved me, of course, but I grew accustomed to its visits and listened to the many stories that the neighborhood kids told of Twinkles the Clown.

Finally, autumn came and my evenings out on the porch were coming to a close. Soon enough, I very rarely ventured outside, but whether or not the damn thing waited outside for me in the rain, snow, and whatever else the Good Lord threw at Central Kentucky for weather, I didn't care to find out.

I suppose that it were out of morbid curiosity that I peeked outside to see if I could see it out there, but it were always dark by six and my old eyes couldn't make out if he were there or not.

Seasons passed as they have the past sixty-something years of my life, and summer returned as it always had. It weren't no surprise when I sat out on my porch that very first warm evening that old Twinkles appeared in the field and picked his way over to the sidewalk. Staring that awful stare at me once more, I decided that enough was enough. I had brought my gun out onto the porch (something I should have done last year) and pointed it at the damn thing.

"Alright!" I shouted. "What the hell are you, clown, huh?" I demanded, shaking the rifle in my already shivering hands. "Answer me!"

What else could I say? If I wasn't going to find out why the hell the damn clown was haunting me every time I sat out on my porch, then I sure as hell meant to scare it off once and for all.

And then it did the most bizarre thing I promise you I ever did see in all my years.

Without saying a word, old Twinkles' toothy grimace widened on his fat, sinister face, and he honked the green horn on his

nose. I cringed in disgust and fear as he waddled forward and turned sideways, undid the childish and ridiculous drop-seat on his filthy, skin-tight jumpsuit, and allowed his hairy, bulbous, makeup-covered ass to spill out. Then, scrunching up his face and grinding his brown teeth, that horrible clown horn replaced all of the crude, but natural, sounds a human makes while moving his or her bowels while the clown pinched off a steaming, rainbow-colored pile of shit right onto the damn sidewalk! Then, to make the scene all the more fitting and bizarre, it did that ridiculous trick where a clown pulls out a long line of tied, colored cloth out of his mouth and used it to wipe himself.

My jaw dropped open and I cocked my gun to fire a warning shot at its feet. I didn't miss my mark, for old Twinkles buttoned up his flap without picking up after himself and waddled back into the field as fast as his flat feet and plump physique allowed him. It were then when I called the police and told them everything. They may not have believed my story, but they sure as hell couldn't explain that hot, rainbow-colored pile of shit, stinking of moldy fruit and sitting there on the sidewalk.

Now, the stories never went away. In fact, they grew in popularity since then and even started to include me, but I sure as hell never did see Twinkles the Clown again, that's for sure.

*Cory Bankemper*

query query query

I'm little—

but a man  
with uhh,

yellow suit,  
short of George  
or uhh

kitten killed

post scratch  
and sniff to

find answers  
instead of  
uhh—

nother mystery.

*Alexander Duwall*

The Black Sheep

Lighter than the fuzz on a May peach—  
the fleece on the blue ear  
of a plant that survives November,  
or the fluff over the lip  
and genitals  
of my adolescent self,  
or the bruised fur on a  
shattered, forgotten jar of baby food—  
longer than these too,  
the hair that stands on end  
over the nape of my wet neck,  
above a head, matted with sweat  
and tucked under a wool blanket  
in August,  
but not quite as thin—  
or fine, like the brown wisps  
that tickled my brow,  
or the blond ones that would  
fall from step-brother's scalp—  
a black sheep stood at my bedside,  
on two cloven hooves—  
a mockery of the fat,  
grazing manifestation  
that Blake saw  
as the image  
of the bundled Christ—  
Fluffy beast, black sheep,  
how are you perceived to be so  
fucking innocent?

*Christopher Montgomery*

### At a Traffic Light

I'm breathing heavy  
 a Salem witch trial  
 rock on my chest.  
 Obsessed with the slow-moving,  
 loud-clicking,  
 clock ticking in my head.  
 The gears won't turn.  
 I keep checking the clock.  
 Am I late?  
 Heavy breathing, broken sweat  
 like a slow leaking pipe.  
 My pipes have lead in them.  
 The water isn't safe.  
 Breathing heavy like running a mile  
 sitting in my car.  
 My brakes aren't safe.  
 My engine will stop.  
 I wish this light would change—  
 I have to get home.  
 I have to wash my hands  
 with the steam of hot water  
 and stinging powder soap.  
 I breathe deep as they refuse to learn.  
 Crackling skin separates in rebellion.  
 They will learn to be clean.

*Elisa Sims*

### Losing My Title

“WHERE THE *FUCK* IS TONY?!” I bellow, returning to the arena after what must have been my tenth smoke break to find that Tony was still nowhere in sight.

The other guys stare back at me uneasily until one, Kenny “Mouth of the South” Mains, finally grows brave enough to offer the answer they all know I don't want. “He's, uh, still not here, Moretti.”

The show has already started and he *still* hasn't arrived. Now granted, our match is the last one of the night, so he's not in any danger of missing it yet, but it takes a lot of nerve to be late for a show—especially one of our big weekend events.

I throw my hands up in frustration, nerves welling up to the point of nausea. I shouldn't be surprised. The night is already scheduled to end badly, so why wouldn't it begin badly too? For nearly nine months I've carried the CWA Heavyweight Championship belt and though it's a small company, I'm pretty damn proud to hold the belt. Being champ pretty much makes you the face of the company, and I've worked my ass off to earn that role.

Tonight, though, I'm being forced to hand it off to that hotshot rookie, Flyin' Tony Flannery. Now, I've got no problem laying down my title—I've done it several times before, but I'd feel a hell of a lot better about it if Tony weren't such an arrogant prick.

Boss thinks it's a good idea though, because the crowd just eats Tony right up. He won all our female fans over immediately because he's young and good-looking, and then our male fans because he's willing to turn flips off the turnbuckle like a maniac. In reality, though, the kid couldn't wrestle his way out of a paper bag. That's the thing about the audience—

it's easy to impress 'em. Mix a good gimmick with a few flashy moves and they're yours. I, on the other hand, play the opposite end of it—the villain, or as we typically say in wrestling, the *heel*. I've been wrestling nearly sixteen years now, and the majority of that time has been spent portraying the heel rather than the face—and I'm pretty damn good at it. People just love to hate me, I guess.

Sixteen years. This business has given me my life, but it's also forcing me to an early grave. I'm nearly forty years old and it's almost time for me to retire. *Retire*. Most men my age won't be throwing that word around for another twenty years at least—but most men my age haven't broken nearly every bone in their bodies either.

It was the neck that really did me in, though. Since breaking it five years ago, I've known my days were limited; in fact, I probably should have thrown in the towel right after it happened. But like most other people in this world, I just couldn't see livin' without the one thing I truly loved. Maybe life would have been easier if I'd picked something a little more normal to love, like a woman, but I don't regret any of it. Well... I don't regret anything I've done *so far*. When the time comes, and I'm sure it'll be sooner than later, I know I'll regret leaving. Especially knowing that the hands I'm leaving this company in can't even properly execute a suplex.

“And now, entering the arena, weighing in at two hundred and five pounds, your soon to be heavyweight champion, *FLYIN' TONY FLANNERY!*” Tony bursts in through the back door, announcing himself, cocky as ever. Everyone around gapes as he saunters right up to me, not a care in the world. He whips his sunglasses off his face in a slightly clumsy gesture, then eyes my belt greedily. “Wanna just go ahead and hand it over?” he asks in a joking voice, clearly not picking up on the fact that I'm in no mood to joke.

“We need to go over the match,” I say curtly. The mere fact that I am being forced to go over it beforehand is insulting.

Being able to call a match in the ring is a mark of pride, and Tony is taking that away from me.

“Ah, Jeff, man, let's just call it in the ring,” he answers, close enough to me now that I can detect the horrible stench on his breath.

“Have you been drinking?” I ask, horrified.

“I thought a little pre-game might be in order.” He smiles and brushes his slick black hair out of his eyes.

“You've got to be kidding me.”

“Oh, come on Jeff, I'm fine! I'm good to go, I swear!”

“You're good for nothing,” I say.

The buzz is clearly working in his favor, because he simply laughs my remark off. “Let's just call the match in the ring, okay?”

“No way—I don't trust you to do that sober,” I say, to which he laughs again.

“All right,” he gives in. “Let's talk it through.”

Though he is highly distracted, Tony and I manage to agree on all the big spots we want to incorporate, mostly beginning and end stuff, and I finally give in and tell him we can improvise most of the middle. As he heads away fifteen minutes later, I call after him, “Don't you dare gig tonight, Tony!” There are a lot of different terms for getting bloody during a match, but they all translate to the same thing—you slice your forehead open with a razor blade hidden in your wrist tape in order to sell an especially brutal shot. Usually I'm all about getting color during a match, especially a title match because the crowd really gets into it, but with alcohol in his system I know he'd lose blood too quickly, and I don't need another reason for him not to be thinking clearly.

“Why the hell not?” he asks, that same damn smile playing across his face.

“Your blood'll be thin; you'll lose too much!”

“I'll be alright, man.”

“Tony, I'm serious, *don't*.”

“Sure, sure, whatever you say,” he says, putting his hands up in a defensive motion. Then, in an effort to avoid any more of my demands, he rushes off. I can hear him from a distance gloating to anyone who’ll listen about his soon to be championship belt, and I am more pissed than ever.

On a good night, Tony Flannery is a chore to work with, but tonight is going to be hell. I consider complaining to Boss, but I know it wouldn’t accomplish anything. The match has been hyped for weeks; the crowd is desperate for it. Tony couldn’t come in coked up and Boss still would’ve sent him on.

I watch with envy as the time goes by and everyone else puts on kickass matches. The crowd is electric tonight, and while part of me is eager to give them what they want, the other part of me knows I can’t without a two man effort. The mix tag team match ahead of us is drawing to an end; I can tell from the reaction out there that Lexi Monroe just hit her finisher.

The audience counts along: *One...two...three...* and it’s over. Inside my head, the numbers are running in the other direction. Counting down to the inevitable bomb that would be me versus Tony. He runs up to me, shaking with anticipation, and slaps me on the back. “Ready?”

“Are you ready?” I counter.

“That’s the spirit,” he responds stupidly, looking dazed.

“Tony—do you remember the spots we worked out?”

“Course.”

I’m suddenly panicked. “Are you sure? Do we need to go over them again?”

“Pssh. We don’t have time for that.”

“We can make time—”

Wayne, our ref for the night, approaches. “They’re ready for you guys. See you out there.”

“Relax, man,” Tony says, smiling. “I got this.” I hear his entrance music come on loud, and he disappears behind the curtain to a wave of cheers.

For a brief moment, I consider bailing on the whole thing, just running out the back door, jumping in my car and getting the hell out of there, belt ‘n all. Then my own entrance music blares, and a fresh surge of the dedication I feel to this business pumps through me. The match will probably be a disaster, but I know it’s my duty to at least make that fact less noticeable. In the same way the audience can’t really tell good wrestlers from bad, they can’t always tell good *matches* from bad either. You just gotta do a really badass job of faking it.

I stroll out beyond the curtain, the jeers and catcalls swallowing me up immediately. “Making his way to the ring,” the announcer calls, “weighing in at two hundred and twenty pounds, he is the current CWA heavyweight champion-- JEFF MORETTI!” I hold the belt over my head, taunting the fans with my possession of it. My trek to the ring doesn’t take nearly as long as I’d hoped, and before I know it, though every part of me is fighting doing it, I am handing the belt off to the ref...and though technically it hasn’t changed hands yet, I know it isn’t really mine anymore. I look around at the crowd—their eyes fixed hungrily on Tony. They aren’t mine either.

“Alright guys, you got forty-five minutes,” Wayne says lightly, communicating to us what Boss is telling him through his headpiece. Forty-five minutes is pretty standard for a title match, and it can even feel too short when you’re working with an equal opponent...but I have a feeling forty five minutes is really going to drag tonight. I had told Tony that we’d start the match with a good thirty second stare-down—those really help build the audience anticipation—but, go figure, that asshole grabs me the second the bell rings.

He releases a flurry of messy quick kicks on me, but I sell them as best as I can. I can tell the crowd is really loving seeing me get my ass beat. It’s always a good idea to let the face take control of the match immediately, so I give him a good ten minutes to kick the absolute crap out of me with



few counters on my end. I can tell Tony is a little dizzy, and I think he can tell too—he hasn't climbed up on the turnbuckle yet, and he usually would have by this point. In fact, nothing too terrible has happened so far, so maybe drunk Tony isn't going to end up being a whole lot worse than regular Tony.

"Thirty five minutes, guys," comes from Wayne.

"I'm gonna hit the spinner," Tony whispers. I've been calling the entire match up to this point, and *this* is why. The kid has no clue how to do it. His spinning DDT move, a favorite of the crowd's, is enough to reasonably finish me, so anyone with even a grain of sense knows you save those moves until the end of the match. That's Tony's problem—he can't wait for anything, but there are a few rules in wrestling regarding waiting. One, you wait for a pivotal moment before you climb the turnbuckle. Two, you wait till near the end of the match before you hit a finisher. And three—YOU WAIT UNTIL AFTER THE MATCH TO GET PISS-ASS DRUNK.

"Forget it," I whisper.

I'm not sure if he doesn't hear me, or if he just hopes I'll end up going along with it, but he starts setting me up for the damn DDT. The crowd is buzzing, probably because they figure he'll get the pin over me afterward, but I'm not about to let it get that far. I shove him off me full-force and see a confused expression cross his face for a split second before I elbow it off of him.

"My turn," I whisper as I choked him over the ropes. I take my turn then, dealing out the beating, and the audience grows increasingly enraged—I think I even see one young girl crying for her "hero."

"You all like that?" I yell out, standing over a practically lifeless Tony who I've just hit with a body-slam. They look murderous as I go for the most arrogant cover I can, placing only a foot over Tony's chest. He kicks out at the two count and as I bend down to further antagonize him, I manage to whisper a command for him to counter my next move, but to

let me keep the lead afterward. I wrap him up in my submission, a sharpshooter variation, and scream maniacally for him to tap out.

"Twenty five minutes," Wayne says, though I can hardly hear him over the unified chants of "Tony! Tony!" emanating from the audience.

I can feel him starting to wiggle out of the hold and loosen my hands a bit to assist him, while keeping my expression lethal for the crowd. "Taaaaaap!!!!!!!!!" I scream.

He finally maneuvers out of it and kicks me away from him. I'm sure the audience hopes for a second that their beloved has gotten his second wind and is going to take control of things again, but I crush that hope immediately by delivering a cracking clothesline to his throat. Their hopes fall right along with his body.

"Twenty minutes," Wayne tells me and I turn to provoke the crowd a bit more. They seem especially heated and when I turn to face Tony again, I realize why. There is a stream of blood rolling down his face.

He's giggled.

I feel so many things at once that for a moment I'm simply rooted to the spot. There are so many things wrong: I can hardly sort through them in my head. For starters, in his jumbled state, he appears to have nicked a vein in his forehead, doubling the blood flow—which like I'd warned him, was dangerously thin due to the alcohol. Secondly, he giggled after a *clothesline*. A person does not, *under any circumstances*, gig if it's not absolutely warranted. We're talking chair shots, or really any kind of face against steel contact. I stare at him, horrified, and he may or may not be staring back at me. I can't tell from the blood pouring over his eyes.

I'm done. I can't carry a match with someone so stupid anymore; I can't in good conscience take my part in helping to ruin this business by letting some asshole glide his way to the top. I've kicked and cried and bled (when *warranted*) my

way up, and I don't want the match, or my career, to end this way. It's gonna end on my terms.

Rolling out of the ring, I grab my belt back, and head towards the curtain, ready to face any anger Boss wants to direct at me.

I can hear the commentators talking to one another, trying to excuse my actions. "Moretti obviously feels he's entitled to keep the belt after that blow," one says.

"No, he's nothing but a coward," the other argues.

The audience, who have clearly heard the commentators, are agreeing with the coward remark and begin chanting the word fiercely as I pass them.

"COWARD! COWARD!"

I stop for a moment, allowing the crowd's reaction to bother me for the first time in a long time. I'm not a coward. I've done everything for this business. I've given everything I have. I'm weak, broken, and sleeping alone. I'm a puppet. I win and lose at the pull of a string, doing everything exactly as I'm supposed to, and they...well I suppose they're just doing what they're supposed to too.

Bosses write scripts.

Good guys win.

Bad guys lose.

And the crowd loves who they're told to love.

Everybody plays their part; but can a person really be considered a puppet when they tie the strings on themselves? I've tied my strings on...so has the crowd, as much as I don't want to admit it—so has Tony.

I look around, feeling the intensity of the crowd; their hatred pointed directly at me...and in that moment, I can't help but love them. I don't owe Tony shit, but I owe them something... I owe them a match.

Young guys win titles.

Old guys retire.

But Tony sure as hell is gonna earn that blood.

"I AM NOT A COWARD!" I yell back at the crowd, playing my attempted exit off as part of the show. "THIS IS MY BELT! DO I REALLY NEED TO PROVE IT ANY MORE?!"

"YES!" they jeer back together.

"FINE! I'LL FINISH HIM OFF FOR YOU ALL!"

I jump back into the ring and up my beating on Tony to match my anger. I'm honestly not even sure he's feeling it, though—his eyes are completely unfocused. I continue my assault, pulling Tony's limp form around the ring and calling my moves out, which appear to be reaching deaf ears. Tony makes no arguments and no suggestions and I can feel the energy draining out of him along with the blood.

"Ten minutes," Wayne says and as much as I don't want to face it, I know things are going to have to turn around.

"Tony," I whisper. "You're going to have to take control. I'll set up my finisher, you twist out of it."

He gives a half nod and I pull him up, positioning both of us for my signature move, 'The Murder-eth,' but he makes no move to free himself from it like I've told him to. I nudge him with my leg, silently pleading with him to do *something*... *anything*...but he doesn't move. I stand still for a beat too long, wondering how I can get him out of it without any effort on his part. I don't have enough time to think it through though, so I decide to just hit the move and let him kick out.

I cover him, whispering "kick out, kick out." I've lost any bit of faith in him though, so by the time the ref hits two, I go ahead and discreetly pulled him out of the pin on my own. "Tony, look at me," I whisper, and he manages to make eye contact. My words are a bit disappointed because I'm trying to aim them at him around each blow I deliver. "You... have... GOT...to...help...me...out...here." I hold him down then, choking him. "Just hit your stupid damn spinner and we'll end the thing a little early, okay?"

"Mmmk," he slurs.

"I'm gonna whip you into the corner and come at you. If

you plan on walking out of this place alive, Tony, you'd better dodge the damn hit and reverse it. Then hit your move and cover me immediately." I pull him up and for the first time in awhile, he seems to be standing on his own, which is definitely a good sign. My urgency and semi-death threat must have done the trick. I'm still not sure whether or not he'll remember to get out of the way, though. Only one way to find out...

I whip him into the corner, run forward, and . . . make contact with the turnbuckle. He'd moved out of the way—and I cheer inwardly right along with the crowd. He gives me a swift kick to the stomach, setting me up for The Spinner. He executes the move as well as could be expected and we both fall down, leaving him open to score the pin. I wait and wait for him to capitalize, but he never comes. I roll over and see that he's lying feet away from me, evidently worn out from the exertion his move has caused him. "Tony," I hissed, "cover me!" His eyes meet mine and in that moment I actually feel sorry for him for the first time; he just looks so damn pitiful. Blood has crusted all down his face, he's gone pale, and he has this dull, finished look in his eyes. "I'm coming," he croaks, starting to crawl in my direction. By the time he makes it, though, too much time had passed for him to believably get the three count. I know I can't let him pin me now, but I don't know what else to do. The crowd counts along with the ref, as I try to quickly decide, "One...two..." and then frustrated groans erupt throughout the building as I make the decision to kick out.

No one groans as loud as Tony, though... I think he might cry. "What are you doing?" he asks.

"It took you too long to get the cover—you're going to have to do something bigger now. You're going to have to finish me with The Up Top."

Tony looks at me with the same horror I feel. The Up Top is his typical finisher—a head scissors move executed from the top rope. "I can't, Jeff," he says.

"I'll catch you Tony, I'll flip you, and I'll make it look good—all you have to do is jump."

"I don't think I can," he moans.

I look him square in the eye. "I'll catch you, Tony. I promise."

He exhales loudly. "All right."

I'm still milking the pain The Spinner has caused me, but I watch out of the corner of my eye to make sure that Tony is actually getting up. It's slow work, but he makes his way to the corner and starts to climb. The crowd sounds like they're all about to piss themselves they're so excited, and I hope that's giving Tony a bit of fuel for the move. When he's nearly all the way up, I start to feign struggle to my feet, getting ready to face him and take, or, well, *do* the move.

Taking a deep breath, I ready myself and whisper a prayer to any God that will listen that this won't end badly. Then, with no excuse to put it off any longer, I turn, and there he is, flying at me. His legs land, as planned, right on my shoulders—I'm sure instinct has kicked in for him a bit, helping him get this far, but I keep good on my promise to execute the rest of it. I flip his body backward and careen my own forward to sell it just right. Fortunately, the move ends with his body splayed right over mine, so he doesn't have to move an inch to score the fall.

"ONE...TWO...THREE..." and the place explodes.

"Thanks," Tony whispers to me as I roll out of the ring.

I watch Wayne come forward and pull Tony, clumsy as ever, to his feet and present him the belt. Tony balances himself on the ropes and holds the belt over his head as cameras flash all around him.

I want to feel bitter—seeing all the cameras go off, and hearing everyone cheer like that, wondering whether or not they have any idea what they're really cheering for. Even if they don't realize whose victory this is, though, it doesn't make it any less mine. And on that note, I have a hell of a time trying not to break character and break out a smile as I head back through the curtain.

*Collin Eckertle*

*watching A New Hope*

she lies

on the couch with eyes

blank green and between

the guitar and toilet

you can't hear her cry

because she isn't.

but if you look

you can see everything from

sex to boredom.

she wants to held like

a child but is thrown

like a whore.

when she dies I hope someone says a prayer  
not for her but for those who need to be held.

## CONTRIBUTORS

CORY BANKEMPER is a senior at Northern Kentucky University double majoring in philosophy and media informatics. He is currently exploring graduate school options. Of “query query query” he says, “While this piece began as light hearted, conversational ways I had expressed curiosity on a given topic, in time the culmination of the more prominent phrases grew into something a bit more. I hope it draws at least a curious second look from its readers as well.”

NICOLE BERGER is a Northern Kentucky University alumni of the class of 2011 with a Bachelor of Arts in studio arts. Of the photograph “Looking Glass” she states, “Holding on while letting go in a single instant is the hardest thing to imagine. Looking forward while looking back is the worst vision to endure when you’ve become accustomed to envisioning life in a single direction. When the day arrives we are hanging on our 20/20 hindsight. That is the purest form of truth we will ever see.”

ASHLEY BLAKE is an English major at Northern Kentucky University with an emphasis in creative writing and a minor in psychology. Of her poetry she says, “The idea behind the ‘The Great Flood’ came from a conversation with my alcoholic uncle that inspired me to think about our relationship and how alcoholism can come to consume an entire family, much like the biblical flood.” The poem “Red Strings” is loosely based on a Chinese myth.

JESSE BVERTLY is a senior at Northern Kentucky University pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in new media art and a minor in Spanish. Of the photograph “Scratched” he states, “Transitioning from the end of an emotionally unstable relationship to being self-dependent, I found myself alone. Throughout that time, I wandered through a labyrinth of other possible pasts and presents. Photography served as a mirror through which I could begin to recognize who I was and all that was happening.”

KENDRA DOUGLAS is a senior at Northern Kentucky University completing her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in sculpture and a bachelor’s degree in art education. Of “Latrodectus Mactan” she says, “Like humans in relationships, these spiders are fighting and making up. The motion of the arms emphasizes the motion of the cycle. I saw a graph of the connections between the Human, Physical, and Spiritual worlds. I’m still in the Human world, admiring and criticizing people’s work and lives relating to my own. Eventually, I will explore the Physical and Spiritual worlds. But I’m not ready yet. That comes last.”

ALEXANDER DUVAL is an English major at Northern Kentucky University and is scheduled to graduate in May 2012. The setting for the short story “They Called Him Twinkles” was based on Berea, Kentucky. He states, “I couldn’t think of a more perfect setting for such a strange event to occur, and I aimed to capture the atmosphere of Madison County and its people.” “The Black Sheep” is a mesh of a childhood dream and the experience of losing a family member to cancer: “I remember waking from a nightmare one Friday night involving the haunting black sheep in the poem. I decided to mourn by taking my aggression out on Romantic poets.”

COLLIN ECKERLE is sophomore English major at Northern Kentucky University with a concentration in creative writing. Of poetry, he states, “I cannot exactly state anything. In fact, it would be unfair. My personal opinion on poetry and art may very well differ from what the reader may believe. Maybe not. But who am I to tell anyone what to think about what I have written? Someone else is new reading it, not me. I already wrote it, thought about it, and now the rest is on the reader.”

## CONTRIBUTORS

TYLER GRIESE is a sophomore studying fine arts with a concentration in painting at Northern Kentucky University. Of the painting “Self Portrait” he states, “I am interested in creating art that portrays reality in the context of my perspective. I create figurative artwork because it shows the reality of the human condition. My goal is make art that evokes a universal feeling in my audience.”

RYAN GRIFFIN graduated from Northern Kentucky University in 2011 and has two photographs permanently hanging at The Children’s Law Center in Covington, Kentucky. Of “Firefighter One: Everyday Normalities” he says, “The ‘Everyday Normalities’ series was inspired by people we take for granted: police officers, military personnel, paramedics, nurses, doctors, and firefighters. As a token of gratitude, I wanted to show their importance by slowing everyday motions with the click of my shutter.”

JORDAN HOLDEN is a junior English major at Northern Kentucky University with an area of concentration in communications. Of her inspiration for “Language with Hands,” she states, “‘Language with Hands’ was inspired by my sign language tutor and friend, Crystal. As an English major, I am constantly surrounded by words, both written and verbal. Crystal taught me that a voice or words on a page is not necessary to have language. Sometimes all you need is your hands.”

VICKIE KNEEVEN received her Bachelor of Arts degree in literature, and is currently pursuing her master’s degree at Northern Kentucky University. Of “Scattering Ashes” she says, “‘Scattering Ashes’ is a poem written after my uncle’s remains were scattered into the beautiful Gulf of Mexico one peaceful summer evening. He was a fisherman, and I love that his remains went back to the same seas he fished—the idea that, in death, we come full circle.”

RYAN KREBIENL is a sophomore English major at Northern Kentucky University with a concentration in creative writing who aspires to be a published novelist. Of his poetry, he states, “In ‘Innocence,’ I wanted to compose childhood summer days before responsibility in a simplistic way to reflect what they represent. ‘Peach’ began as a lovely imagery piece with vibrant language. However, the poem made a sharp turn down a dark road. It was a step outside my comfort zone—a step I feel we all need to take sometimes to arrive at a perspective we didn’t know we had.”

LAUREN LOMBARDO is an English major at Northern Kentucky University. Of creative nonfiction, she states, “I have spent the past year exploring the Bildungsroman (coming-of-age story). The infamous scrapbook in ‘Confessions’ has survived six moves and two floods, serving as a steadfast reminder that the transformation from child to adult is often slow and painful. The fact that I still own the scrapbook is proof that growing up didn’t necessarily mean my ‘child within’ magically disappeared. I aim to become an effective storyteller with my ‘child’ ever present.”

ANNA MALONEY is a junior English major at Northern Kentucky University who was raised in Covington, Kentucky. Of “To Drive” she says, “Writing about my relationship with my father has always been difficult for me. For this essay, I chose to explore our relationship through car trips we have taken together. I love when writers use small moments to capture the essence of a person or relationship, and this essay was a good experiment in that approach.”

DIDEM MERT is a junior at Northern Kentucky University working towards a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with an emphasis in ceramics. Of the sculpture “Womb” she says, “In my work I explore the idea of containers and vessels. Containers all have similarities: the womb, a cocoon, a bird’s nest, and a pharaoh’s tomb are all used for some sort of metamorphosis. Whether that metamorphosis is rebirth or a change in chemical composition or physical appearance, the soul is transferred or rejuvenated.”

## CONTRIBUTORS

CHRISTOPHER MONTGOMERY is a senior at Northern Kentucky

University majoring in English with a minor in electronic media broadcasting. Of writing, he states, "I find it to be a powerful mode of expression, equivalent to in some sense and yet surpassing the universal nature of music. Whether reminiscing, wrestling with my faith and doubt, or coming to terms with the loss of innocence, writing is a way to discover truth. Writing allows us to paint beautiful or fearful images with words. It enables us to venture, to discover things about ourselves that we may or may not have wanted to learn and wrestle with them."

CAITLIN NEELY is an English major at Northern Kentucky University with a minor in honors studies, and is currently enrolled in the poetry writing class. Of "I'm No Scientist" she states, "'I'm No Scientist' explores a complicated relationship with nature. Through a slow realization, a discomfort in harming nature is revealed, whether it be sucking the life from a honeysuckle or slicing open a frog for biology class."

JORDAN PADGETT is a sophomore at Northern Kentucky University studying English with an emphasis on creative writing. Of poetry and "Awoken" she states, "I don't write poetry to move the reader to any certain, defined understanding. I write in hopes of spurring readers to find their own direction. 'Awoken' pushes the reader to literalizing that brink of clarity. I am of the opinion that words are never badly packaged; rather, they are meant for the reader to open."

COURTNEY PERRY is a senior English major at Northern Kentucky University with a focus in creative writing. Of the photograph "Wall and Vines" she says, "I shot this photograph because of the vines crawling up the side of the building and the light and dark contrast. It was striking and eye-catching, and even though I've taken hundreds of pictures, it remains one of my favorites."

ELISA SIMS is a senior at Northern Kentucky University in the creative writing program. Of her short story, "Losing My Title," she says, "For whatever reason, the artistic value of professional wrestling has appealed to me ever since I was a kid. Writing 'Losing My Title' was my attempt to unpack the immense respect I have for wrestlers and exhibit the amount of dedication and care they put into their work."

CHAD SCHULTZ is a junior English major with a focus in creative writing at Northern Kentucky University. His minor is electronic media broadcasting with an area of concentration in photography. Of photography he states, "I began photographing the sunset on the hills and could not get a good shot. I crossed the highway and began shooting with the pumps in the foreground and produced this shot. My father inspires photos portraying days gone by, and full serve gas stations are few and far between today."