The background of the cover is a photograph of green ivy leaves with prominent veins, growing on a red brick wall. The leaves are dense and cover most of the right side and bottom of the image. The brick wall is visible in the background, showing a pattern of red bricks with light-colored mortar.

2003  
*Hedera helix*

*Literary Journal  
of Sigma Kappa Delta*

**The National English Honor Society  
for Two-Year Colleges and Universities**

**Volume II**

## **Purpose of Sigma Kappa Delta**

**Sigma Kappa Delta serves two-year college students who achieve academic excellence in English. Members need not be English majors but must demonstrate an interest and proficiency in literature and writing. SKD offers its members opportunities for**

- **Scholarships**
- **Awards**
- **Leadership**
- **Competition**
- **Publication**
- **Travel**
- **National conferences**
- **Networking**

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### ***Hedera helix***

***Hedera helix* is the scientific name for English Ivy, symbolizing resilience and individual growth.**



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## **Sigma Kappa Delta 2003 National Conference**

Members and chapter sponsors of Sigma Kappa Delta attended the Sigma Tau Delta/Sigma Kappa Delta National Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, March 21-23, 2003. The following writing awards were presented there.

### **Literary Magazine Awards**

*Aurora*

Northeast Alabama Community College  
Rainsville, AL

*The Muse*

Calhoun Community College  
Decatur, AL

### **Writing Awards**

#### **First Place Short Fiction**

*The Soldier*

Pat Murphree  
Grayson County College, Denison, TX

#### **First Place Literary Analysis**

*Setting as Symbol in Atwood's "Death by Landscape"*

Gina M. Sully  
Community College of Southern Nevada, Henderson, NV

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# *Personal Narratives*

**“I merely took the energy  
it takes to pout and wrote  
some blues.”**

*Duke Ellington*

## My Name is Gina

by Gina M. Sully

My name is Gina, and I'm an alcoholic. I haven't had a drink in nearly nine years now. Yet, sometimes the lurking monster whispers to me. It says, "How could one beer hurt? Wouldn't you like to feel the comforting sensation of a frosty, sweaty bottle in your hand? Wouldn't you like to once again feel the cold liquid flow down, chilling its way to your stomach, landing with an arctic thud? Don't you miss the sensation of the icy warmth spreading through your veins, weakening your knees, loosening your joints, breaking the bonds of rationality, setting your inhibitions free?"

I never liked the softly lit clean bars with trendy themes and piped-in jazz where well dressed Yuppies hung out "networking" or trawling for love. I liked dives -- dark, smoke-filled trashy joints with the underscent of stale alcohol and rancid grease from frying burgers. Places with graffiti-covered walls and cigarette-scarred mahogany bar tops. Places where nobody is really looking for anything except a buzz and maybe a game of pool. Places where the beer is cheap, and you drink it from the bottle because you don't trust the glasses. Places where the Ramones and Iggy Pop scream from the jukebox. Places where vending machines next to the bar are stocked with condoms and three brands of rolling papers. Places with Harleys out front and leather inside. I felt at home in those places. I belonged in them.

Nobody judged me and found me wanting in those places. After a couple of beers, I could make people laugh. I could dance without inhibition, without worrying about how I looked or about my clumsiness. I could purchase friendship without closeness in those places for the price of a beer or with a good tip.

I was a happy drunk. I never got into fights. Alcohol made me witty, confident, and articulate. My companions laughed at my jokes; my

vocabulary impressed them. Shared conversation kept loneliness away for a few hours, until I had to go home. But beer transformed me into a desirable woman. Men and women offered themselves to me. Sometimes I accepted, using them to fend off isolation for a few more hours.

People admired my remarkable capacity for intoxicants. They shared their drugs with me. My partying buddies would joke and say that I was like a walking *Physician's Desk Reference*. I knew the name and properties of just about any pill on the street. I had tried most of them. There were a few I didn't particularly like, but if nothing else were available, I'd take them anyway. If one turned up that I didn't know, I'd take it, saying that I'd know what it did in about half an hour.

For a long time, I only accepted jobs where I could drink. I worked as a waitress and as a bartender. I worked in bars, and I played in bars. I didn't know how to socialize without a buzz on. I didn't know how to meet people without using drugs or alcohol to open the door. I'd say, "Hi, my name is Gina. Can I buy you a drink?" or "Would you like to smoke a joint?" or "Would you like to do a line?" depending on what I had in my pocket at the time.

I had a lot of fun for a long time. But there came a time when I no longer drank or did drugs because it was fun. I did them because I couldn't stop. I tried lots of different ways of cutting down. First, I decided that I would only drink when I wasn't at work. Then my boss told me never to turn down a drink if someone offered to buy me one, so I resolved to drink only *at work*. But once I started drinking, I couldn't always stop, so I changed my resolution to allow myself to drink only on days when I worked. My boyfriend complained that he never saw me because I stayed at work until the place closed.

Next, I gave up liquor. I didn't drink shots or mixed drinks for a while. I stuck to beer. But I gained weight, so I found that solution unsatisfactory. Finally, I decided to give up working in bars. From that point on, I had to pay for my own drinks and drugs, but my income dropped significantly.

So, I would wake up every morning and tell myself that I would neither drink nor do any drugs that day. By ten o'clock in the morning, I'd head out to the store for a forty-ounce beer to tide me over until the dealer could get to my house with something else. I lied to my friends, my family, and my boyfriend. I used other men to supply me with whatever I could get out of them. I'd string them along until they figured out that I would never come through with whatever sexual gratification I'd hinted they'd eventually receive from me, and then I'd move on to the next guy. At this point in my life, I thought of men as wallets with legs. I had little respect for them. I had even less for myself.

One night, another couple invited my boyfriend and me over for dinner. It turned out that what they told me would be just a casual dinner was really an intervention. The three of them had planned it carefully. I'd known Vanessa and Lisa for a long time. Vanessa had told me more than once that my feminist perspective had had a profound impact on her and that she had changed her life as a direct result of conversations we'd had. She admired me. But that night, she informed me that she did not like the woman I had turned into. She and Lisa said that I had become an unreliable liar. Joel, my boyfriend of eight years, told me that he didn't intend to spend the rest of his life cleaning up after a drunk. I cried and agreed with them and sneaked off to comfort myself with a few lines in the bathroom. I promised to go into detox and then rehab.

*continued*

I put off going into rehab. Then, another friend who knew that I needed some income offered me a chance to work as a waitress at a club she managed. She couldn't afford to pay me, but she promised that the tips would be good. Despite Joel's misgivings, I agreed to work one night to check it out.

I drank a lot that night. I drank shots of vodka gimlets. I drank beer. I drank whatever anyone wanted to buy for me. Toward the end of the night, Irene pointed out a couple of tables that I had neglected to clean. I cursed at her as I told her that since she wasn't paying me, she could clean them herself. Then, I went outside to catch a ride with a guy who had some coke and some beer. I don't remember the rest of the night.

I had always prided myself on not being a nasty drunk. When I awakened the next morning, in my own bed, thank God, I called Irene to apologize for having talked to her as I had. Her voice was cold as she told me that I had better quit just talking about going for treatment and not to call her again until I had done it. I called Joel for some sympathy. He also spoke coldly as he asked me why I hadn't come to his house the previous night after work as I had promised to do. He wanted to know where I'd been, and I couldn't tell him because I didn't know myself. He told me that he had made plans for that day and that he wouldn't be able to see me. Finally, I called Vanessa, and she made arrangements to get me a bed on the detox ward where she worked as a nurse.

After three days in detox, Vanessa told me that there was a bed available for me in a thirty-day rehab program. She and Joel persuaded me to go by telling me that I could leave whenever I wanted.

I have never felt lonelier than I did that first night in rehab. When I awakened in the morning, I watched myself cry in the mirror, and I asked my reflection what I was doing there with a bunch of junkies. We started the day with breakfast and an

Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. I ate alone and sat on the floor behind a garbage can during the meeting, terrified that I would be expected to engage in the kind of self-revelation I heard from others.

The staff structured our days. We had to eat three times a day. We had to exercise after breakfast, and we had to walk a mile and a half after lunch. We could only smoke at certain times and only in a designated spot outside. We attended classes, sex-segregated group therapy, and individual counseling sessions. We had AA meetings at least once a day. We couldn't make or receive phone calls for the first ten days. We couldn't have visitors for the first week. We were awakened during the night for random drug testing. Some people were kicked out because they tested positive. I stayed because I was afraid I'd be alone if I didn't.

The group counseling sessions were brutal. I tried all of my old survival techniques. I told people what I thought they wanted to hear. They called me a liar. I tried to project an image of what I thought they wanted to see. They called me a phony. I told them all of the reasons I had to want to escape reality. They called me a coward.

The AA meetings were worse. People I didn't know wanted me to hold their hands and pray with them. They told us "newcomers" that we couldn't get sober for anyone else; we had to do it for ourselves. But I knew that I didn't deserve what they were telling me I could have if I got clean and sober. I kept going because I knew it would please Joel if I managed to do it. Maybe that was really for myself, though. I didn't want to end up alone, and I knew that he would leave me if I didn't get it together and keep it together.

But then something happened at one particular meeting. The people there told me that I didn't have to let anyone touch me, that I didn't have to pray if I didn't want to. They said that I could get sober and stay sober as long as I really wanted to and as

long as I attended meetings and asked for help when I needed it. For the first time in my life, I felt safe with a group of strangers without the assistance of alcohol or drugs. For the first time in my life, I felt as though I belonged somewhere.

For the first year after I got out of rehab, I attended AA meetings at least once a day. Sometimes, I attended two or three meetings in a single day if I were having an especially difficult time. I went to an outpatient clinic every day for two years, receiving both group and individual treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder related to childhood abuse. I learned coping techniques that most people master in childhood. I finally became a whole person.

I've learned a lot of things during the last nine years. I've learned how to honestly assess the strengths and weaknesses of my character without needing to use other people or their desires as my gauge. I've learned how to let other people get close without fearing the closeness or what they might see in me. I've learned how to love freely and without reservation and how to determine if I should. I've learned to accept love and pain without hiding. I've learned that I don't have to be perfect to deserve love.

The day I finished my last counseling session with my primary counselor, I recalled a tradition from Girl Scout camp. The last day of camp, we'd tie a rawhide thong around the wrist of the girl to whom we'd been closest during that two weeks. We called it a friendship bracelet. On my way home from the clinic that day, I bought some rawhide shoelaces. When I got home, I tied one around my own wrist. It fell off a year or so ago, and I tied a new one on in its place. It may seem silly to people who are not addicts or alcoholics. But it reminds me that I must be a friend to myself if I want to hang on to my sobriety and with it the capacity to be a true friend to anyone else. My name is Gina, and I'm an alcoholic.

## First-Year College Students

by Patricia Gilliam

On the typical college campus across America, there is a variety of students from all walks of life. The students come to college for various reasons -- some to advance in their chosen fields of study, others to learn a new career, others because their parents expect them to get a college education. On the campus of Northeast Alabama Community College, the first-year students can be divided into three categories: the Card Sharks, the Jugglers, and the Geezers. Identifying the three groups by appearance, study habits, and odd traits makes me truly appreciate the diversity of this campus.

The Card Sharks are easily identified because their appearance is of utmost importance to them. The designer fashions, the team-of-the-year sport shirts, and the name brand shoes all add a touch of class to the campus. If the professors passed out grades for good looks, all the Card Sharks would get A's. Most of the Card Sharks are fresh out of high school, bringing with them the vitality of youth, but, unfortunately, they also bring habits of their high school years. For example, in high school, their teachers spoon-fed them with

study guides, open book quizzes, and scaled tests. Because of this pampering, the Card Sharks have a hard time adjusting to the college way of learning, which is classroom discussion, reading the next day's assignments, researching in the library, and computer interaction. For the Card Sharks, socializing is more important than getting good grades, so they tend to congregate in the student center to eat, laugh, and play a few cards, thus their name. If the Card Sharks have a big test for which they didn't study, they merely skip that class, hoping to take a make-up exam. With their laid-back way of looking at the world, they must think time will always be on their side, for they are in no rush to get a college education.

On the other hand, watching the Jugglers on campus is better than going to the circus. Besides being students, they also have full-time jobs and small children to look after. They arrive on campus in the mornings, usually in blue jeans and tops, happy that they finally found the missing sock they needed, stuffed under a couch cushion. Short, easy-to-maintain hairstyles, bags under their eyes, and gum stuck to the bottoms of their sneakers are characteristics of their typical appearance. They stay up late, burning the midnight oil to study for exams, do homework assignments, or figure out why  $x=36$ . There are days they must miss class because one of their kids is sick, but most of the time they are in classes, turning in homework and participating in classroom discussions. There have been times that the Jugglers, true to their names, have been seen on campus carrying small children on their hips because the babysitter cancelled at the last minute. It is mind-boggling how the Juggler manages to keep up this hectic lifestyle without falling apart at the seams.

Lastly, scattered across the campus are a handful of Geezers. They are distinguishable by their yard sale clothes, bifocals, and gray hair. They study hard for tests, turn in assignments, and ask questions in class because that was the way they learned when they went to grade school. In their high school days, they are quick to tell you, they had to hunt for answers in the book; they had to memorize long lists and documents, and asking questions wasn't considered "nerdy." With their children grown, they take time to study, but mostly out of fear that they will not be able to keep up with younger students. They know the Columbus system for computer usage (hunt and land), and they have been seen wandering about the library looking for the card catalog and mumbling something about the "Dewey Decimal System." Being the same age as many of the more seasoned professors, they laugh at the professors' corny jokes and remember the examples of long forgotten historical events that took place before many of the other students were even born. The Geezers are appreciative that they finally have the chance to receive a college education.

Being exposed to such diversity adds to the overall college experience and teaches tolerance and understanding. Students not only learn from their professors and books but from other students, as well. In order to get ahead, the smart ones in all groups learn from the mistakes and successes of the others. In college, good grades are earned through hard work, good study habits, and class participation, but students also grow from observing the student population. Those who learn these lessons will go on to become second year students; all the others will not. As Robert Frost once said, "Life is tons of discipline."



## A Golden Treasure

by Loretta Y. Tuttle

“Hey, kids! I found a treasure of gold!” Mom’s call echoed the universal tone used by mothers everywhere when a wonderful event occurs. Although intrigued by a broken toy, I immediately joined my siblings to converge upon Mom. She was rummaging through a pile of worn, badly damaged books that had the name of our school printed on the inside cover. The books were treasures, nonetheless, for a family with limited social contact and only a radio for entertainment. We took the books home and devoured them one by one, our hungry minds seeking the excitement and enlightenment contained within. Margaret Fuller said, “A house is not a home unless it contains food and fire for the mind as well as for the body.” Each book was a golden vessel that held the precious oil and the spark that fed and lit many lamps carried along the road to education and community service.

In retrospect, I believe those

books, inadvertently found at the city dump, coupled with our formal education, gave us a perspective that would generally keep the five of us children out of trouble in our teen and young adult years. Later, my knowledge would give me hope and strength to persevere, even in the bleakest hour when my bent and twisted body cried out for release from the tentacles of scoliosis and as suicide summoned me. Through those books, I had learned that people often give up just short of rescue and success and that life gives the means of changing circumstances if one endures and searches long enough. I am indebted to the school for discarding those books near the dumpsite, to my mother who knew gold when she saw it, and to educators everywhere.

Never will I forget the personal and community outreach made on our behalf: the Christmas gifts and food, books, clothing, medicines, medical

treatments, and even kindness or simple smiles. Most of our benefactors had died by the time we reached adulthood; however, in their honor, my four siblings and I became active in community service, promoting higher education, giving blood, aiding the physically and mentally challenged, donating food to the hungry, and even housing and finding homes for abandoned animals.

Yet, important community service work remains work of which many lack awareness. So, I wonder, “What if one day hungry minds were to find my writings dog-eared, ragged, and torn nearly beyond reading?” It would bring me the highest satisfaction conceivable to write golden treasures that families rescue from the trash heap, to feed the lamps of the intellectually hungry, and to light their paths in the dark hours as they travel the academic road to success and community service.

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## Changing High Schools Transformed My Life

by Susan Pinkerton

In high school, I made a life-changing decision. I gained self-esteem and confidence from leaving one school in the middle of my ninth grade year and starting over in a new one. This decision led to better grades, more school involvement, and a good basis for my adult life. I learned when the going gets rough, people don’t have to take the abuse. I learned that I could start over.

My freshman year at \_\_\_ High School started out badly and became worse. A girl I thought was my friend decided she didn’t like me any more. It was a simple thing, yet it had serious consequences for me. She convinced others with violent natures to join her in harassing me. Life, as hard as it usually is at fourteen, transformed into a living hell.

The siege on my sanity began with the girls following me to my classes, knocking books from my

arms, and uttering insults in singsong voices. I was casually slammed into lockers as a group of my pestering demons passed by me. They were careful to make everything seem accidental, but their grating laughter gave their intentions away. When they started to follow me home from school and make prank calls to my house, I knew it was time for action.

The thought of me switching schools did not appeal to my parents. “Stick it out, girl,” they said. “Just ignore them.” They kept asking me what I had done to make so many people angry. I didn’t have an answer. Soon enough, the situation escalated.

My father started driving me to school because I refused to walk any more. At 7:45 a.m. on a Tuesday morning, we pulled up in front of the high school. As I started to get out of the truck, one of the girls walked by and flipped me off. My father didn’t

take that very well. By the end of the day, I was enrolled in a different school – Bowlegs High School.

Bowlegs was so different from anything I expected. I was liked and respected as myself and not ridiculed because of the things that made me different. My grades improved from D’s to A’s in just one semester. I auditioned to become a cheerleader and was welcomed onto the squad. The rest of my school years at Bowlegs High were truly the best time of my young life.

Many people ask if I felt cheated of a better education. I have to say, “No.” At \_\_\_ High School, the opportunities were greater, but the social issues kept me from being my best. At Bowlegs, I was able to learn all I could in a comfortable environment. At Bowlegs, I learned the most important lesson of all – to like myself.

## A Royal Holiday

by Jim Dupy

“Jim, if I knew leaving would be this hard, I would never have agreed to come,” said my wife, Joy, as she wept uncontrollably. I wanted to console her, but I couldn’t speak without losing control of my own emotions. Leaving America for a three-year tour of duty in England, we said goodbye to friends and family, including our four-year-old granddaughter, Jennifer. How would we ever manage without our family? And, in just a few short months, how would we ever survive our first Christmas without them?

We settled into our new home in southwest England in an area called the Cotswolds, which means “sheep on the hill.” We loved our little village of South Cerney and made friends with several of our neighbors. We worked hard at settling into our new environment. We attended socials, worked with a small church in our community, and traveled extensively. We knew the holidays were coming, so we began planning activities geared toward getting around the dreaded holiday depression. Our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary would precede Christmas by just eleven days. That day, we

agreed, would mark the beginning of a countdown to a truly special Christmas.

On the morning of our anniversary, we boarded a train for a two-hour trip to London. Our plans included sightseeing and shopping. We hoped to see some special parts of the old town, but more than anything, we wanted to be among all the shoppers, capturing their excitement and happiness for ourselves. What a success! With every step, our loneliness began to wash away. We rode buses and experienced the notorious London taxicabs. We listened to the sidewalk performers called “buskers.” We didn’t have much time for sightseeing, but we shopped at places like Harrods, picking up some very special gifts, including several for little Jennifer.

Our last stop was Whitehall. We had just stumbled into the entrance to the Buckingham Palace courtyard when we heard a tour guide say to his group of visitors, “The queen is coming!” Just learning of a royal motorcade heading our way, he busily began jockeying his group into position for a good view. As the vehicles approached, we found ourselves

in the very front of the small crowd, cameras ready. First came the motorcycles; then the guards marched by, and then, oh, yes – the Queen of England! Her Highness smiled and waved as shutters snapped. Brilliant! On our very first trip to London, we saw the Queen!

We barely spoke on the long ride home, but every once in a while, we looked at each other and laughed. We had succeeded in making that Christmas special. We were okay. Life in England was good. We had a very royal holiday.



# Short Fiction

“If I had more time, I  
would write a shorter  
story.”

*Mark Twain*

## The Soldier

by Pat Murphree

Facing the Gulf of Tonkin in east Vietnam, Allen knelt down. His hands trembled, dripping with his Army buddy's blood. As the waves of the crashing tide washed death from Allen's hands, he fought to control his emotions and show the courage expected of an airborne ranger. Nothing remained but the endless wait on the beach for transport back to a carrier that would return his platoon to the mainland. Holding his buddy Charles in his arms, Allen raged inside, asking, "What the hell happened?" Why had his platoon's "routine" reconnaissance and training mission met fierce combat?

Allen remembered parachuting out of the plane into the Vietnam jungle. The excitement of landing somewhere other than a training field elated him. Besides, being new to the airborne infantry, he felt no fear of impending combat. After all, their platoon was merely to use high-tech satellite transponders to signal the carrier regarding possible resistance in the area.

Soon after landing, he and his platoon of eleven dedicated soldiers, including Charles with whom he had served since boot camp, trekked toward the area from which they were to send their first transmission. They had traversed a mere three kilometers when a Vietnamese patrol approached them.

Suddenly, shocking the entire platoon, the Vietnamese patrol opened fire on them. Allen and his unit fell to the ground, seeking cover in the vegetation, their only chance to escape the patrol's raging bullets. Confusion raced through Allen's veins as he lay frozen to the ground in fear, unable to fathom the fire-fight. His sergeant began barking orders to return fire; Allen's thoughts shouted in disbelief, "This is war!"

With bullets and shrapnel pounding around him, he faced the fact that he had to engage the enemy. All of the training he had received should have prepared him for this moment. He chambered a round into his M-16 rifle, sighted in his intended target, and began to squeeze the trigger. Then he paused. The target seemed too real, too human. *Is this what I envisioned when I joined*

*the military?* Allen asked himself. Then, among the height of the battle sounds and firing, he lost the human image in his sights, never noticing his weapon's barrel already smoking from the rounds that he had discharged at the enemy, thirteen of whom he had killed.

All at once, he turned to search for Charles, his friend since boot camp. From a distance, Allen could see blood gushing from a bullet wound in Charles' chest. Allen began to crawl frantically beneath the highway of lead that sought to take his life. He cradled his fallen friend in his arms and saw the gaping wound that penetrated Charles' body. Allen tried desperately to stop the life pouring from the hole, but to no avail; Charles died in Allen's arms. While Allen held his lifeless friend in his arms, he could only wonder, "Why?" The thought of his young friend dying enraged Allen to the point that he began to fight like a serpent of evil.

Allen and his platoon began to sweep across the remaining Vietnamese like a thunderous storm of destruction. The platoon, after defeating the enemy, reassembled to check for losses. The sergeant of Allen's platoon radioed the carrier and advised the commander of the ambush. While the platoon was assembling for their return, Allen went to retrieve his friend. Knowing he would never fire it again, he dropped his rifle and tenderly picked his friend up.

During the hike back to the coast, Allen had an empty feeling in his soul. He knew he could never engage in war again. The thought of holding another brave soldier while life poured from him was more than Allen bargained for. He decided that he had to do something for the soldiers who would face the unavoidable treachery of war in the future.

Allen and his platoon were picked up and returned to the carrier within a couple of hours, but for Allen, time stood still. After returning to his duty post, Allen requested a transfer to the ministry so that he could comfort soldiers during war. Knowing what Allen had faced in the bloody battle, his commanding officer graciously approved the

request.

Allen began his new mission back into the dense jungles of Vietnam. His mission was not only to help the other soldiers but also to help himself deal with the loss of his good friend. He knew the scars of war were permanent, but somehow he knew he had the gift of comfort. His gift would be a great weapon to the weary soldiers returning from the battles that erupted shortly after Allen's platoon was ruthlessly attacked. He started going to war camps, knowing the blood-soaked soldiers would soon return with horrors of their own.

Once the soldiers began to arrive, Allen's presence among the brave warriors made a saint-like impact. He often volunteered to help carry the shattered bodies of wounded soldiers. He even took on the grave task of writing to relatives of the deceased, a task that not too many jumped to complete. His most noticeable service was to the souls of the people of war. He lifted the spirits of the men and women who were forever branded by the tragedies of war.

His stories and visions of home-cooked meals and hot apple pie somehow reminded the struggling souls of a better place. His calming voice reminded the soldiers of a kid brother at home or of a fellow soldier lost in the battle. The thought of Allen waiting back in camp provided the weary soldiers with a sense that someone cared. When the battle-beaten troops arrived back from what they called "the forest of death," the soldiers were at peace to see Allen because they knew that they had survived another day.

Years later in Desert Storm, a soldier like Allen, who had suffered similarly to Allen, called him Reverend. Although Allen had not seen himself in this light, he felt honored to be remembered for his role in Vietnam. The respect that he had earned throughout his military career was that of a decorated war hero. Although medals did not drape across his chest like a warm blanket, Allen had the comfort of knowing he would forever be known as a soldier -- a soldier of souls.

## Visibly Hidden

by Anita Eason

Seeing her family the night of her twenty-first birthday made her feel as if she were reliving the night of her ninth birthday. That night was firmly implanted in her mind. It was that night, after a day of torment, that she first escaped her fear-filled life. She remembered first hearing the music that had awakened and called to her. Music, wafting from singers who serenaded her below her second-floor balcony beckoned her to flee her home and follow. The words of the magical music said, "Michelle, all's well." Pronounced "Me-Shell," the words promised protection.

The night was one of those southern nights when low clouds partially covered the moon and stars. A light, white fog rolled upon the damp grass as if to say "hush" to a night of secrets and mystery – "hush" to the memories of beatings, bruises, and sexual sadism from the men in her family.

The memory of how she evaded her father to reach the singers eludes her now, yet she remembers going with them as they reassured her, "Michelle, you're safe. Happiness awaits you." The bruised pain she had gone to bed with from the beating she had received mysteriously disappeared as the cool night air tenderly caressed her face. As the singers moved Michelle without touching their feet to the ground, relief ran through her veins while tears rolled from her eyes.

Her escorts -- the singers -- looked foreign, sporting what her mom would have called Dutch-boy haircuts. Their hair was black, and they had a funny accent when they "spoke" inside her head.

Fleeing with her singing saviors to an unknown place, the girl never lost sight of the old place and "those" people, her torturers. She feared that she and the singers weren't going fast enough or far enough and called out in panic, "Farther! We must get far, far away or they'll..." "Michelle, all's well," they sang to calm her as they

assured her, "You'll be safe, and they will never find you." It was at this time her name was changed to Michelle as if it were the most natural thing to do.

Then a simple white wood-framed house appeared. She had visited the house before and felt safe and comfortable as a child would in her grandmother's home. Excitement came over her, for Michelle was home. Feeling no need to knock at her own door, she walked casually inside and found everything familiar. The furniture was dark mahogany; hanging protectively from the windows, royal curtains with simple gold trim blocked the intruding eyes of the curious -- those who did not belong. Fluffy pillows lay on the floors as well as on the furniture.

Comfort was everywhere. Softness glazed the air from burning candles, giving a gentle glowing light as music emanated from the walls, creating a dreamy atmosphere. There were other children there whom she knew but couldn't remember from where. Yet they and every element of the house welcomed her.

Suddenly, ease spread throughout her body as she collapsed upon the silky soft sofa and wrapped her warm robe tighter around her like a security blanket. A deep, restful sleep, a sleep she had never before known, enveloped her and erased all worries of being awakened in the middle of the night to service her brothers. For the first time in her nine years of life, Michelle slept a peaceful sleep.

A sharp sound awakened her. Someone pounded on the door. Yet those living in the house showed no fear. As she watched with amazement, the walls changed, instantly building a box of protection around her. The angry voice of the girl's father yelled, "Open the damned door! You..." He pounded his fists so hard against the door that she thought he would certainly break it down. "Where's my daughter?" he demanded after they opened the door. In calm voices, her

protectors answered that they didn't know he had a daughter. The girl could hear the walls giggle over their secret, for now she was visibly hidden from those who wanted to own her life for their malevolent desires.

Time within her "own" house gradually etched happiness, freedom, joy, and security into her world. Michelle and the other children in the house played dress-up and danced to the music in the walls. Laughter was an easy lesson for her to learn, for the walls taught Michelle well. More than humans lived in this mysterious house. Little creatures wearing seashells around their bodies played little jokes on the children, chasing them around. The creatures were no bigger than the palm of Michelle's hand. They would sneak up, tickle the children's feet, and run. Laughter permeated the days, for every once in a while, one of those little creatures would pass gas. It would make the funniest sound, like a muffled whistle coming from those seashells. As the children chased their elf-like friends and laughed, the creatures would disappear into a hole in the wall.

Nobody ever asked the questions, "Where did you come from?" or "How did you get here?" They just accepted that they all belonged together in this wonderful house. No worries or fears intruded upon the young minds because the house protected them with magic walls and watchful windows. The children drank Poly-Pop and ate hotdogs and yummy chocolate cake most every day except on Sundays when they had fried bologna and cheese sandwiches and potato chips after Bible study. Those days were particularly joyful because they made Sunday their day to thank the house that saved and comforted them. On Sundays, the house played its best music as the children sang praises, and each night, the walls sang the sweetest lullaby to ease the children to sleep.

*continued*

Time lost its meaning for the girl and the others. They had no idea how long they had been there -- weeks, months, or years. The house had given them what the world had refused them. The house gave them love, acceptance, laughter, and protection.

One day a warning came from the house. "Trouble is at hand, Michelle. Someone told your dad she thought she heard your voice coming from inside the house."

The police arrived with the girl's dad and brothers to search for her. Ah, but then Michelle was amazed once again, for the magical house had another trick up its sleeve. Mysteriously, her appearance changed. She was no longer strawberry blonde with naturally curly hair; she suddenly had straight jet-black hair. Her eyes, no longer hazel, sparkled the deepest emerald green. The skinny mite of a girl became squeezed-cheeked fat with freckles. As the policemen, her dad, and brothers walked around her angrily searching for their possession, she could hear the walls giggling once again over their secret. Michelle smiled, knowing she was safe forever. No one could ever hurt her again. After the intruders left empty-handed, Michelle and all her housemates had a party, dancing, singing and rejoicing. The

house was truly their home.

Years, Michelle felt certain, had passed because more and more children had come to live in their home. The house never ran out of room, expanding its dimensions to accommodate the injured. However, several were missing, but she couldn't remember who they were. No matter how hard Michelle tried, she couldn't bring images of their faces to mind. Yet, she knew that several were missing. Times had come and gone in which her dad and others had tried to find her to no avail. Each time they came, she mysteriously changed into someone totally different from herself. The house had told Michelle in a whisper not to worry about those who had left, for it was their time. "Time for what," Michelle asked.

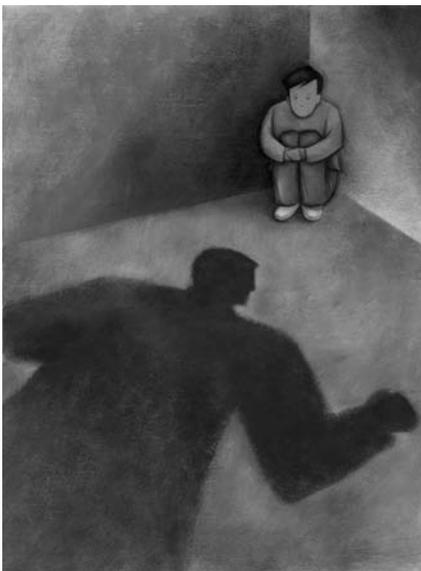
"Time to live," the house said as it explained to Michelle that her time was coming soon, too. Michelle's age had outgrown the house, and it was time.

She awoke one day in a strange new world. Wondering if the safe house with the laughing walls of protection had been her imagination, Michelle scanned her surroundings. The walls were different and unmoving. There were no songs in the air. The curtains were light and airy as the wind streamed through the window. Stepping out of bed, her unsteady feet touched the cold wooden floor. Looking around the room, she saw the mirror she had known as a child. Standing in front of the mirror, she saw someone new, older, yet still young. Reaching out to touch the face that had changed with years, she saw a diamond ring on the third finger of her left hand, an engagement ring. In the mirror was a young, beautiful woman with strawberry blonde hair and shining hazel eyes. A smile

spread across her face as her mind rushed with memories of someone who loved her in a way that was safe and warm. Michelle knew then the reason she had left the safe house. She now had a chance at a new life, free from pain and fear of abuse.

Throughout the years since her marriage, changes have brought a true happiness, love, and joy that she never knew as a child. Having no desire to know what had happened all those years when she lived inside the mysterious house, she just feels thankful that she had a safe haven for a while.

Nowadays, Michelle's challenges come from knowing that the walls of protection she once found in a magical house really live inside her. Walls meant to protect her from the brokenness, fear, and pain she once knew still exist just in case she needs to feel safe again. It will take a while to remodel the walls in her heart to accept light and love. Yet, occasionally, she giggles inside, remembering the little seashell creatures. The song that drew Michelle into the world of her safe house serves to remind her that all is well. Whether she is hidden visibly or completely invisible, no one knows, for she can change who she is in a moment's notice.



## A Perfect Morning

by Stacey Seabolt

The sun dances through the trees in the early morning sky. As the sun makes its first appearance of the day, I make my way to work. I always try to get to Mr. James' house before the sun hits his dining room windows.

I carry my backpack, laptop, and breakfast to the door. I pull on the storm door, only to find the first of many surprises of the day from Mr. James. The door is tightly latched. I slowly make my way to the car, dumping my stuff on the hood. If I am lucky and wiggle my fingers, I can open the latch quickly. I am successful and make my way with my stuff to the dining room table. I breathe a sigh of relief to be in the house; all is quiet and peaceful.

A moment of truth happens next. I quickly walk to the bedroom door. I listen for the regular breathing of sleep. I have had a few surprises here as well. I have often wondered what I would do if he were not sleeping. What if he were in heaven? Dead? I quickly push those thoughts far away. I finally hear him, sleeping deeply. I breathe another sigh of relief and get on with my day.

Soon, I am sitting at the dining room table, my laptop up and connected, coffee water simmering on the stove. I have accomplished one of my goals of the day. As I connect to the Internet, the morning sun bathes the dining room with a golden glow. I prepare for Mr. James' waking up while sipping a cup of hot Irish tea. As the sun peeks through the trees, I hear the first grunts of life.

As islandfm.co.uk radio in Guernsey plays in the background, I start waking him up. I pull on the string attached to the overhead light, and I am greeted with a scowling look. "Good morning, Mr. James. How are you today?"

"I am about fizzled out," Mr. James says from deep within the covers.

"You are? Do you think maybe

you can get up for me this morning?" I say from the foot of the bed.

"I don't know if I can or not. Where's my snuff?"

"It is in here, in the living room. It is waiting on you when you get up. First, I want you to sit on the side of the bed. I want you to put clean clothes on for me," I say.

"Do I have to? These are not too bad. They don't smell yet," he says, hoping that I believe him.

"Now, Mr. James, you know we go through this every day," I say as I wave his clean underwear over my head. "I want you to sit up in the bed. I want you to take all of your old clothes off. I need you to take your old underwear off. I want you to put these clean underwear on, after you take the old ones off. Do you understand?" I ask hopefully.

"Yeah, I understand. Do you know you are aggravating?" He gives me another grouchy look as he swings his feet to the floor.

"Now, I need you to take your old undershirt off. Take the black one off and put the white one on. I need you to take off all of your clothes. Do not leave any dirty clothes on." I say as I leave the room.

"Are you sure these clothes are mine? Are these underwear mine?" he asks innocently.

"Yes, Mr. James, these are yours. They are not mine. So they have to be yours," I say from the adjoining living room.

"I guess they are mine. They fit me. Hey! Do you have me any breakfast? I am hungry. Where's my snuff?"

I hear him moving slowly as I get his breakfast ready. I hear a familiar ding coming from the laptop.

"What timing he has!" I say as I sit down at the table. I see that my best friend Paul has logged on, and he is ready to chat. A huge smile radiates from my face. I know it is going to be a very good day.

Mr. James slowly makes his way to his recliner. In my mind, I hope that he has only one pair of underwear on.

I type a fast greeting to Paul as I hurry back and forth to the kitchen.

"Good morning, Guernsey. How are you today?" I quickly type.

"I am good. Busy. We have many flowers this morning. What are you into this morning?" Paul replies.

"We are just sitting down to breakfast. Mr. James has his shoes and socks on and is heading to the bathroom to wash," I type.

"I just had lunch. A cold cut sandwich and a drink here. How is he this morning?"

"He is good. He is just sitting down at the table. BRB (be right back)." I type as I quickly help Mr. James to the table.

My progress is cut short as I hear him earnestly ask, "Where are my teeth?"

I sigh as I grumble to myself, "I don't have your teeth. Where did you leave them?" I ask him.

"I don't rightly know. I don't remember where they went. Go find them for me," he says.

I sit at the table for only a short time, watching my breakfast cooling. Looking at the screen of the laptop, I write, "BRB. He has lost his teeth again." Then I begin to look for his teeth. I look in all the familiar places: in the bed, on the nightstand, in the bathroom, and still no luck. I can hear him talking to me, asking where his teeth are. "What have you done with them?" he asks impatiently.

"Me? They are not my teeth. I keep up with mine. Where did you put them? Let me look in the kitchen." I open the fridge, nothing. I open the freezer and see a cup with paper towels waded up in it.

I found them. "Hold on. I am coming. Here you go. What made you put them in the freezer?" I ask for some insight.

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## The Big Bad World

by Andrew Taheri

"I don't know. I think that is a good place for them. Don't you?" he asks.

I hear another ding from the laptop. I sit back down and start talking to Paul where we left off.

"Did you find them? Where were they this morning? Let me guess, the bathroom cupboard?"

"Yes. I found them. You will never believe where I found them. They were in the freezer!" I laugh as I type a reply.

"Gives new meaning to the word 'BURRRR!'" flashes across my screen. We laugh and spend the rest of the time getting caught up on what is happening in our lives. The minutes slip away. Mr. James is happy eating his breakfast; I am happy chatting with my best friend, talking about his flower business and finally eating my breakfast. Soon, Paul and I are saying good-byes, and I look over across the table to see Mr. James licking the syrup from his plate. I tell Paul, and we share yet another perfect morning.

"You know, I never learnt the first grade very well, but I know a few things," starts another chapter of my morning. It is just the two of us in the living room. He is exercising and reliving the past. I am clearing the table and making him exercise without cheating. "Mrs. Anna was the only woman I ever knew. She kept me lined up about like you do. She was a good woman. I worked on that lake in Sylvania. They would have never finished it if it was not for me. I got in there and cleaned out those beaver dams. Took me close to four years, but I did it," he says rambling on. "I made us a good living here on the farm. I plowed the fool out of those mules raising cotton."

I reflect on the last few hours. I have really made a difference in someone's life. I enable him to stay alone in the home he has known for fifty years. I share in his funny stories and get to see many funny things every day. I am learning a lot about the old days -- what the important things in life are.

As I leave, I casually wonder how many other people get to be so lucky.

It was a hot, muggy day when the gigantic airliner touched the ground.

"I can't believe I'm finally gonna get to meet all my family!" the boy exclaimed to his father. Auron was only eleven years old, and he had just flown farther than most anyone else in his small hometown. Tidus was extremely happy that his son had even taken an interest in wanting to visit the country where his father had grown up.

"Okay, son, do you remember all the greetings and customs I taught you?" Tidus asked.

"Of course, Dad," Auron replied.

"Zanarkand isn't exactly the most accepting place below the birds," Tidus thought. He wanted to make sure no one gave his son a hard time. As the pair walked into the dingy old airport, Auron immediately ran to the group he recognized as his grandparents, uncle, aunt, and cousins. Everyone seized him and began hugging and kissing him until he could barely breathe. Suddenly, his robust Aunt Rikku grabbed him and began hugging with all the might her thick tree-like arms could muster. The children were extremely excited to see their American cousin coming to visit them. Auron symbolized everything they dreamed of becoming.

"Hello! Welcome!" the children screamed as they hugged him tightly. Auron had never had so much attention in his life. They left the airport. Auron overflowed with happiness. He walked past a lady leading three small children. Suddenly, he caught her cold, disapproving eyes glaring at him. Later that day, as he was putting away his things at his grandparents' home where he would stay for the duration of the visit, Auron could not put away the thought of the disgusting look he had received.

"I'm just a normal American boy," Auron thought as he looked into the mirror. He had tan skin and dark hair just like all the other kids in Zanarkand, except there was something about him

that he knew screamed out his difference.

Early the next morning after breakfast, Auron and Tidus walked into town along with all of Auron's cousins. Auron walked into a shop that sold all kinds of clothing and electronics that he was familiar with. "Hey, aren't you gonna come inside?" he asked his cousins.

"No. That's not our kind of store," one cousin, Wakka, replied.

"What do you mean?" asked Auron.

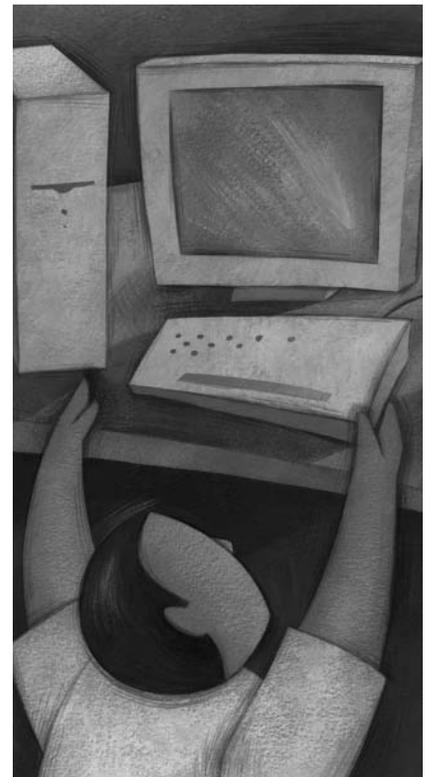
"We don't belong in a store like that," Wakka replied.

"Come on in," Auron's father urged. "Pick out whatever you want."

They all had fun that day as they shopped; finally, they picked out the same clothes as Auron wore.

Auron thought, "It sure feels good to have people look up to me."

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Once again, he felt as if he were on cloud nine as the crew walked happily down the street. Soon, he couldn't help noticing the stares and dirty looks that his family was receiving. Then, an older gentleman, who smelled of peanut butter, looked at him. Then, the rest of the group, all dressed like Auron, softly muttered something that could not have been pleasant. He could not understand why everyone despised him so much. "What is wrong with me?" he asked his father.

Tidus said, "Son, some people don't accept other people and the way they look or live. Since you are half American, a lot of people will pass judgment on you before they even know you."

"But, how can I make them see that I'm not really a bad person?" Auron asked.

"You will just have to be strong and remember that there is nothing wrong with you. They are the ones who are wrong because they are judging you."

The boy did not understand why people wouldn't like him just because he was American.

A few days later, the boy went to play soccer with Wakka and the rest of their cousins. They met some other boys already playing, and they went to join in on the fun. As the boys saw Auron, they became deathly quiet. "We can't play with you," one said. "Our parents say that you are bad, and you are coming here to poison our culture," Seymore explained.

Auron just watched, and after a while, the other boys, except for Seymore, began to let him in on the game. Seymore said, "I'd rather be dead than play with an American!" before he quickly ran home. The others had an excellent time until Seymore returned with his father.

"I think everyone better go back home, NOW!" said the father.

The boys scattered. They didn't want to be around Seymore's father any longer than they had to. As

Auron also began to turn and run away, he felt a hand grab his shoulder.

"So, you think you can just come here and do whatever you want, typical American?" the father huffed.

"I haven't done anything," Auron shot back. "You don't even know me," he said.

"I don't want to know you, and I don't want my son to know you, and your presence here is what you've done wrong," said the father. "You and your kind give the wrong idea about life. You send the message that anyone can do what he or she wants. You make people like your father leave to chase a dream that should never be found. You are a worker for the devil, and I would be doing the world a favor by killing you right now!" he said.

Suddenly, another figure approached from the shadows. "That's enough, Khimari!" Tidus commanded.

"So, you do still remember who your best friend used to be? Tell me, Tidus, did you find the better place you were looking for?" taunted Khimari.

"I'm sorry, old friend, that you didn't get to go with me," Tidus answered as several of the boys stopped to listen. "I hoped every day that you would find a way to join me. I know how badly you always wanted to get away from here, but that is no excuse for the threats to my son."

"You and your pathetic son," snarled Khimari. "I now realize how wrong I was for wanting to go there. America is an evil and wicked place," he said. "You disgrace our culture by still pretending you are one of us."

"I'm sorry you feel such hatred for us," said Tidus.

As Tidus turned to leave with his son, Khimari picked up a glass bottle and smashed it over Tidus' head. As his father slumped to the ground, Auron tried to fight the man.

Khimari slapped Auron to the ground. Suddenly, a ball smashed Khimari's face. He was knocked unconscious as his head hit the ground.

"You didn't think I'd let you fight all by yourself, did you?" asked Wakka.

As Auron's father got to his feet, he decided that they would get an early flight that evening. Tidus stayed back as the boys ran to the house.

"I'm sorry, old friend," he said as he looked down at Khimari.

That evening, they prepared to pack their things for the long flight home. Auron had many questions for his father, but he knew they could wait. It was obviously a sore subject for his father to discuss. He was outside putting some things in the car when he saw another older gentleman walking by. The man simply smiled at Auron, but that was the friendliest act anyone had shown him.

Behind him, a voice said, "Do you want to play with us?"

Auron didn't know what to say; he was so stunned. He felt as though everyone were accepting him now. He stood gawking at the children, and finally, he blurted out, "Sure. I'll be right back." He sprinted to his father's room and told him everything.

"Dad, can we please stay the rest of the trip here?" Auron asked.

"Are you sure, son?" Tidus asked.

"Dad, I think we just met the wrong people before. I don't think this place is all bad."

The father smiled as his son ran out to play with his new friends. He knew what it was like to be excited because someone finally smiled at you. He had moved to America as a young man. Tidus remembered what prejudice felt like.

## At the Stars

by Billy Ray Brewton

He searched the stars for her beautiful face among the patchwork of constellations, planets, and twinkling lights. “*Look up at the stars and that’s where I’ll be,*” she had told him, her breath dying away slowly thereafter. “*I’ll be my own constellation. I hope you find me.*” Then she was gone.

He had never known a love so pure, so tangible, and so brief. It was as if God had blessed him with an exquisite angel only to realize He needed her back. The phrase “Indian-giver” came to mind, but he had no intention of pointing fingers or laying blame. He figured it was just one of those things that had to happen for some reason or another. He couldn’t explain it, and he didn’t agree with it, but the past was just that.

After the light of his life expired, he tried to move on past the incredible memories of passionate nights spent laughing and loving and the hours spent rehearsing just how he was going to pop the question over dinner or after dessert. Each time he tried getting close to another woman, the memories would hit him like a bowling ball dropped from the roof of a skyscraper – it hurt, and it hurt badly. He eventually decided that even though he believed in love, it evidently did not believe in him, at least not enough to offer any kind of attempt at a normal love life. Maybe Rachel had been the woman he was meant to spend the rest of his life with, both dead and alive.

The sky was gorgeous. He came to the spot often to look at the stars, and the nights were usually pretty, but they were never as tranquil and shimmering as that night. There was something surreal about the way the moon smiled down at him and the way the stars worked together, appearing more massive than they really were. It almost seemed as if he

were still dreaming. That being the case, he wished for eternal sleep.

He couldn’t pinpoint why he had decided to come to “the spot” that night. The car seemed to almost drive itself up the steep incline, through the small towns along Route 11, past the icy waters of the Snodgrass River, and deep into the woods to Mount Jersey where he and Rachel had vacationed their first summer together. The trip seemed short, although it took an hour. He figured he had driven to “the spot” for several reasons, the most important being the anniversary of Rachel’s death – a date he looked forward to and loathed for many reasons. But he also drove to “the spot” for some sort of closure. He had decided days before that he had to rid himself of the grief that had totally consumed his once vital and thriving life, the grief that had prevented him from making any type of meaningful step at love. Letting go was a necessary step, and letting go at “the spot” seemed more powerful and more poignant.

Since Rachel’s death three years before, he had celebrated the anniversary every year. It was a routine that kept him sane, and he feared breaking the routine would cause some kind of involuntary reaction that would leave him paralyzed or dead, emotionally and mentally. So he popped the cork on an expensive bottle of Merlot, turned his car radio to the oldies station he and Rachel swore by, and spread a bright orange blanket out on the hood of his old Mustang. They had done it five years prior, and he felt satisfied repeating it every year since.

Turning the bottle up, he could see the stars through the clear glass, their light blurring a little through the liquid. It, too, seemed surreal, like the images in dreams that make us realize they are just that. The hood

of his car was cold, even with the blanket on top. He didn’t care. He wasn’t there for physical comfort. The wine warmed his body enough for his mind to completely block out the coldness.

The first time they had celebrated at “the spot,” he could remember everything being so perfect, so picturesque. He and Rachel had been lying on the blanket, their wine glasses half empty, the stars shining radiantly overhead, when the radio caught some static and temporarily shut off. Just as he rose to check it out, the dead air subsided, and what would become their song started playing – “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes.” He had never liked the Platters much, but there was something about being there with Rachel that made the song unbelievably perfect for the occasion. The song had not aired again since he had been coming to “the spot.” Every now and again, an occasional Platters song would play, but never the one he wanted. The last time he had heard the song was at Rachel’s funeral; she had requested it to be played twice, once at the beginning and once at the end. It was symbolic to him in that he assumed it marked her passing, also meaning he would probably never hear it again.

Lying on his back, he started thinking about what Rachel had told him. “*I’ll be my own constellation. I hope you find me.*” There was Taurus, and there was the Big Dipper. He looked through the endless patterns, hoping to find one he had never seen before. But they all looked the same, star after star after star – nothing special. Then, with half the bottle of wine gone and two songs away from a Platters’ song he knew would be average, he caught the glimpse of a little cluster of stars just underneath the moon, a cluster he had never seen before. They were all huddled together, forming what

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appeared to be some kind of circle or oval. They sat there, motionless, barely twinkling at all, radiating just enough light for him to tell they were indeed stars. He smiled. It was probably nothing, but he liked to think it was she, smiling down on him from millions of miles away.

“Is that you?” he spoke to the air, his voice heavy and his words thunderous. “Are you up there?” It was probably the wine talking, he thought, slightly embarrassed at speaking to himself, though not embarrassed enough to cease. “You know I can’t come here anymore, don’t you? I have to move on. I can’t keep doing this to myself. It doesn’t do you or me any good. I can see you just as well from my back porch at home. And if some nights I can’t, well then, we’ll just have to go a night without seeing one another.”

He took another drink of the wine, a long drink, emptying the bottle. “I love you, but you know that already.” He slid down off the hood of the car, the blanket sliding with him. “I need to go ahead and leave. I know I usually stay longer, but I’ve got to get up early tomorrow morning for a meeting.”

He didn’t have a meeting. He was having breakfast with a coworker of his – Sarah. He never told Rachel if he was meeting other women, even for strictly work-related purposes. She got jealous easily. He knew she probably knew the truth but figured she took amusement in his still refusing to make her feel uncomfortable.

“Bye,” he told her, brushing his hand through the air. He dropped the wine bottle on the ground – he figured he would pick it up on his next visit. Then he remembered – there was not going to be a next visit. So he stooped down and picked it

back up, tossing it into the back seat of his car.

He slid into the front seat of his car and cranked it up. He was slightly inebriated and didn’t want to drive home for fear of what might happen. But he didn’t want to stay there until morning. As he placed the car in drive, a part of him hesitated. When he drove away from “the spot,” it would be the last time he ever saw it. It would be the last time he would picnic above a blanket of orange and beneath a blanket of stars. He smiled. They were good memories, but memories were of the past, and the past was just that.

He slowly pulled away from the spot, each foot he drove becoming harder and harder than the previous one. Then, with his past but a few years behind him and his future straight ahead, a song came on the radio. At first, he wasn’t sure what it was because of some static at the beginning. Then the static cleared, and he knew precisely what it was. He switched off the radio and smiled to himself. He started to sing into the night air, his voice as strong and melodic as it had always been when singing that song. The starlit darkness that had previously been home to the crackling sounds of the best oldies station around was replaced with the all-consuming voice of a true expert on the song at hand. He didn’t need the Platters – he knew the words by heart.



## Vengeance

by Linda Trott

The sound that split the night air seemed oddly muffled. Caught day-dreaming, Kyle initially could not pinpoint the sound. Then suddenly as he listened to the sharp pings against the wall, he realized they were under attack. Man! What had he gotten himself into this time? Wait. They *couldn't* be under attack, not in the middle of nowhere, not in this deserted town where his platoon was merely to clean up after the detachment that had supposedly taken out the terrorists and sympathizers. Kyle's platoon was to come up from behind, make sure that no enemy remained, and dispose of the bodies so that disease would not present a problem.

Kyle's platoon was new, and the military did not intend to place the green platoons in the line of fire. Kyle's unit had just cleaned the area, which suited him just fine, more than fine, actually. He wouldn't relish killing anyone. He didn't think he could willingly do it. Of course, he had gone to training camp, but Lieutenant Dan and General Miles had said that Kyle would not find himself in the line of fire. Neither the lieutenant nor the general would lie, or would they? Had they started making empty promises? God, how he wanted people to tell him the truth, tell him what could and would happen instead of empty words that wouldn't do him a lick of good! How were those words going to help now that his platoon had come under attack? What was he going to do now?

The sporadic gunfire ceased. Kyle looked to the man left of him. He could see the fear in his eyes. Fear. Oh, my God! It hit him then; the enemy really had shot at them and would resume fire at any minute. Kyle knew that his time to open fire had come. He knew he could no

longer think about blood that would be on his hands, but he must think about the cause, the cause for justice. He had to reach deep inside himself, but once there, his need for revenge grew and he could taste it.

After all, he had lost his father, a man who had shaped his life, and his twin brother, his second half. The two most important people in his life were dead because of the war. Now he was alone, his family members stolen by someone who tried to make some point by killing innocent people. Well, they would have to pay.

He looked to Lieutenant Dan, who signaled him to advance and open fire. Kyle wanted justice -- yes, justice for the death of his father and his twin brother who were working at the family business in the World Trade Towers when the planes took them down. That had brought him here in the first place. He wanted to see justice done first-hand because he had no family, no parents, no grandparents, just himself, the last line of a very long heritage. His mother had died giving birth to twin boys when she supposedly could not get pregnant. All that remained was the family business, the world's biggest and best accounting agency, Eagle Eye. Until he had seen some type of justice served, Kyle could not go back to the business and work with the memory of his father and brother, not to mention the thousands of employees who had lost their lives while working for him in the first place. In a way, he had thousands of deaths already on his hands, but at the moment, all he could think about was the sweet taste of revenge for the way he had been left alone in the world. He never even had the chance to tell them he loved them or to say goodbye.

Kyle turned to the man on his right and saw terror in his ghostly

white eyes. The man turned to look at Kyle and seemed shocked to see the determination in his eyes. All Kyle could do was grin. Sure, he was determined, determined to get even, no matter the cost! Kyle looked for Lieutenant Dan and got the nod to move forward, but the sound of gunfire stilled his movements. He looked around and saw two more of his own people signaling to him and the two men beside him. They were telling them that there were twenty-two on the opposing side; Kyle knew there were only ten men in his platoon. Two-to-one odds against them!

Kyle vowed to even everything. He saw that they were taking cover in a building that was missing its back. A forest began behind the line of men. Kyle signaled his platoon to cover him while he tried to make it to the trees without being seen. He began to move, dodging between cars and buildings. Now, he needed to make a big circle to get behind the opposing force. He entered the forest and used all his skill to move silently behind the enemy. He had told the two men who were beside him a few moments ago to tell everyone to open fire once he was in place. As he thought about it, he did not know how they could tell the sound of his Glock from that of the other guns, but he hoped to God that they could.

Kyle slowly edged up to the place where the men awaited death. He counted twenty-two on the enemy's side. He was hoping the soldiers who had told him the number of opposing forces had been wrong, but somehow he knew the soldiers had been right.

Slowly, he walked behind the closest soldier, the man farthest away from the group. Kyle pulled his silenced Glock .9mm semi-automatic with an eleven-bullet clip and took care of the man. Kyle stood very still

*continued*

as he waited to see if the enemy had discovered him.

Twenty-one soldiers and ten bullets. Two men walked his way to relieve themselves. Well, Kyle thought, I might as well help them out. Now, the opposition only had nineteen soldiers and he had eight bullets remaining. Silently, he waited a few more moments to ensure that no one had heard him. Two more soldiers appeared to check on the previous two, and Kyle took care of them as well.

Seventeen remaining, and he had six bullets left. Kyle decided to make his move before more came to check on the others. As he turned to the path, he spotted three men sitting on a log, talking to one another. Fourteen left with three bullets. The odds on his side looked better now. He waited a few minutes and saw a man coming to talk to the three who had been sitting on the log.

Thirteen men remaining with only one bullet left. Kyle had to be more careful! He would not live very long if he allowed them to sneak up behind him again. He saw a man on his left smoking a cigarette. Eleven left. Kyle quickly changed the clip. Eleven more bullets. He looked around and saw two men to his right talking and smoking. How could they look so calm? Kyle wondered.

Nine enemy soldiers, nine bullets. Ten yards from the back of the building, Kyle felt his heart racing so fast that he thought he might have a heart attack. Not now! Kyle hid behind a tree to breathe for a few minutes. He knew he had to be quick before an alarm was sounded. How many were left? He forgot! Wait. One bullet per person. He checked his clip.

Nine bullets and nine men to go. He turned to look into the building. Five were on the wall, firing at his platoon. They would have to be last, he thought. Three sat on the edge of the building, looking out into the forest, which meant Kyle had to be

extremely careful. One was missing. Kyle stood and looked for five extensive, agonizing minutes. He was not about to budge without knowing the missing man's location. Kyle saw a figure moving to his left and focused only on it. It had to be the missing person. He quickly took him out. Eight men in the building and eight bullets remained. He knew that with one mistake he might not live, but then again, why should he care if he had no family left. Quietly, he turned from the cover of the tree and began shooting. He hit all but one before he missed because his hand had begun to tremble from the aftershock caused by firing the gun. No more bullets! Kyle moved behind the cover of a tree, but he knew it was hopeless since the last man standing had seen him. Kyle knew that armed soldier now pursued him. Kyle closed his eyes, said a quick prayer, and opened his eyes only to see the enemy in front of him with his gun pointed in his face. Bam!

Kyle was still alive! How? He slowly opened his eyes, backed up, and saw a body in front of him. He looked beyond the body and saw Lieutenant Dan. Kyle looked into the lieutenant's eyes and read, "I could not let one of my boys die."

Slowly, silently, Kyle withdrew from the place he had found deep inside himself. Now, he felt nothing but regret. He had just killed twenty-one men in cold blood. How would he ever be able to live with himself if he had to kill more people before the fight for justice ended? How?

## Butterfly

by Carlisa McElyea

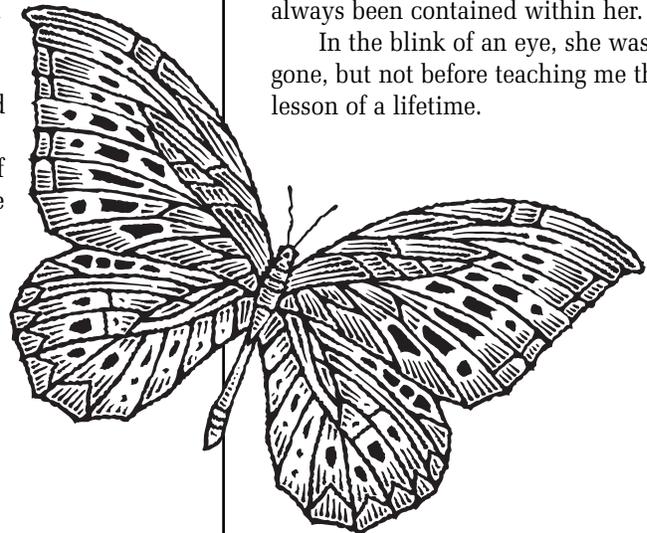
I watched her as she struggled. It seemed as if the task were taking all of her energy and concentration. I wanted to help, to reach out, to free her from the bonds that enveloped her weakened body, but I knew to do so would hurt her more than anything else.

No one else had even stopped to notice the transactions that were occurring that early March morning. The sun was barely lighting up the horizon, but already the dew sparkled like tiny diamonds scattered about by a careless fairy. She was the sore spot, the darkness amongst all the glitter. I happened upon her by accident, yet something told me our meeting was meant to be.

I caught my breath as she squirmed farther from the bonds that restrained her. All of a sudden, she lay free, panting from the effort. Was she alive? Had she really made it through her tortuous ordeal?

All of a sudden, my heart flew as she spread her azure wings and took to the breaking dawn. The once simple, basic grub that no one paid attention to, the creature forced to hide from cruel hunters, now stretched forth her golden-tipped wings and proudly revealed the majesty that had always been contained within her.

In the blink of an eye, she was gone, but not before teaching me the lesson of a lifetime.



# Poetry

“I was working on the proof of one of my poems all the morning, and took out a comma. In the afternoon, I put it back again.”

*Oscar Wilde*

## The Girl You See

by Missy Parker

Sometimes the girl you know  
is not the girl you see.  
She may be normal, but inside  
she's not what she appears to be.

Inside, I am a trembling mess,  
all awkward and unsure.  
Outside, I am sophisticated,  
charming, and mature.

Appearing to be serene,  
inside, I am screaming loud.  
I feel like no one sees me  
when I'm standing in the crowd.  
Outside, I am unique  
though that's hardly how I feel.  
Inside, I feel misplaced,  
obscure, and so unreal.

So never think what may appear  
is what actually may be.  
Because the me I really am  
is not the girl you see.

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## I Regret to Inform You

by Missy Parker

I've looked over your resume  
and found it quite too long.  
There are far too many women  
that you have done wrong.

So I regret to inform you  
that you must be on your way  
because the loss of my heart  
is too great a price to pay.

## Do You Ever Wonder?

by Missy Parker

Do you ever wonder what you would become  
if you lost all your fingers but kept your thumb?

Do you ever wonder why girls ask for more  
than a kiss and a hug and their own Tiffany's store?

Do you ever wonder why guys can't stay in love  
with anything more than a baseball glove?

Do you ever wonder why poems have to rhyme,  
like words only have meaning if they're paired with time?

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## Doubts

by Derek Schaab

Doubts upon doubts.  
Vicious blade of silver  
that cleaves the soul  
and rends the mind.  
Endless play of *might-have-beens*,  
*If onlys*, and *maybes*.  
Stubborn lace of regrets  
tinges the weave of uncertain-  
ty.  
Contemplation wavers,  
Reason fails.  
Could I?

Would I?

Should I?  
Logic debates while emotions argue,  
clouding the waters of thought  
with their ringing cries  
of self-contradiction.  
To do or not to do:  
that is indeed the question.  
Dare I tread on unsure of footing?

## The Group

by James Dupy

They sit encircled in this place,  
Each looking to another's face  
To find a semblance of their fear  
Beneath another's thin veneer.

Each clothed in some unique disguise,  
Not yet prepared to verbalize,  
But rather, steeled and resolute,  
They shun the slightest brief dispute.

Some wear the guilt of troubled past  
While others, shamed as those outcast,  
Wear clothing of another's sins  
And take their seats as mannequins.

But in the circle of lament,  
One by one, their garments rent,  
They strip their seedy clothes of shame  
And shed the tattered rags of blame.

Now, looking deep inside each soul,  
The circle, seeking to console  
Each wounded heart within the sphere,  
In silence shed harmonious tear.

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## The Devil's in the Details

By Michelle Hill

The devil's in the kitchen,  
as always,  
watching the sunrise through the oaks.  
He taps his cigarette,  
runs his hand over the heavy creases  
that speak of anger and age.  
Behind these lines lie  
a handsome man.  
And some don't seem to notice  
how seldom he smiles,  
his watery eyes,  
crooked hands,  
or the Jim Beam on his breath.  
As always, the devil's in the details.

## Church, Work, and Death

by Matthew Nolan

Hello. How are you?  
I am fine. Nice day to you.

The weather is nice.  
My garden is grand,  
and off to church we go.

How is the family? Just fine.  
I just painted the house.  
All things must be shiny and new,  
and off to work we go.

I am telling the truth. My wife is happy.  
I grab her neck. She spits in my face.  
The kids are gone; I love this place,  
and off to church we go.

The job is good. How dare you ask?  
I told you I don't wear a mask.  
Boss thinks I am good and that's enough  
for me to acquire brand name stuff,  
and off to work we go.

My life is good.  
It was not a waste.  
My mark was made  
like a finger removing dust,

Afraid to risk,  
Afraid to change,  
Disease ate my body,  
But my dreams stayed the same,  
And off to death we go.

# Literary Analysis

**“I keep six honest serving men  
They taught me all I knew;  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.”**

*Rudyard Kipling*

## Setting as Symbol in Atwood's "Death by Landscape"

by Gina M. Sully

There are three distinct settings in Margaret Atwood's short story "Death by Landscape." The first setting is the condo where Lois lives after the death of her husband, Robert. The second is the summer camp, which is visible to the reader only through flashback. The third is the landscapes with which Lois surrounds herself despite the fact that "[...] she does not find them peaceful in the least" (Atwood 100). Each setting may be interpreted to symbolize an aspect of Lois' relationship to nature. The condo represents Lois' disconnection from and fear of the wildness and the unpredictability of nature. Camp Manitou and the woods represent the last time that Lois was truly alive and relatively at ease with her relationship to nature. The paintings represent Lois' inner need to reconnect with nature.

By moving into the condo, Lois embraces safety and constancy while forsaking even the limited, primarily vicarious connection she had with nature while her husband was living. Lois has not been out in the wild since Lucy disappeared: "She would never go up north, to Rob's family cottage or to any place with wild lakes and wild trees and the calls of loons" (117). Instead, in the form of the paintings, she brings nature into her home where she can control it. After her husband's death, she moves to a building where there is a "[...] security system, and the only plant life is in pots in the solarium" (99). There is no longer any need for Lois to even minimally connect with nature. "She is relieved not to have to worry about the lawn, or about the ivy pushing its muscular little suckers into the brickwork, or the squirrels gnawing their way into the attic and eating the insulation off the

wiring, or about strange noises" (99). But safety entails living a life in which "she never felt like she was paying full attention" (117). Her memories of her family are much less vivid than her memories of Camp Manitou and Lucy: "She can hardly remember, now, having her two boys in the hospital, nursing them as babies; she can hardly remember getting married, or what Rob looked like" (117).

Although Lois did not like Camp Manitou at first, "[b]y the time she was thirteen she liked it. She was an old hand by then" (103). She feels competent in nature: "It's amazing to Lois that they've traveled so far, over all that water, with nothing to propel them but their own arms. It makes her feel strong. There are all kinds of things she is capable of doing" (112). She hides her excitement about the canoe trip from Lucy, who does not share her enthusiasm. On the night before Lucy's disappearance, they sleep outside of the tents, under the stars. After Lucy either goes to sleep or pretends to, Lois remains awake:

There was a moon, and a movement of the trees. In the sky there were stars, layers of stars that went down and down [...] Out on the lake there were two loons, calling to each other in their insane, mournful voices. At the time it did not sound like grief. It was just background (110).

She is connected to nature, unafraid of it. Lucy's disappearance robs her of these feelings in relationship to nature, and she becomes disconnected; nature becomes frightening to her.

The landscapes are the most interesting of the settings. The art-



work of the Group of Seven is disturbing. The landscapes give the illusion of motion. They threaten. In Tom Thomson's "Afternoon Algonquin," mist-covered mountains loom in the background. The trees in the center of the canvas are deep red. The foreground is composed of long, twisted, finger-like shadows cast on the grey-blue snow by trees that are off-canvas. A.Y. Jackson's work "Maple and Birches" is dominated by a misshapen, barren tree with tentacle-like branches reaching so far up that their tops are off-canvas. The only light in this painting is in the middle of the canvas. The foreground and background colors are deep and dark. Both the water and the clouds in J.E.H. MacDonald's "Falls-Montreal River" roil. They are violently agitated. All of the paintings are intensely layered with shadows and a depth that is almost surreal.

In the old house, the paintings are scattered, unobtrusive. In the condo, the paintings "[...] are more crowded together than they were in the house [...] blocks of pictures, above and beside one another [...]" (99). In the old house, the paintings might seem like a backdrop, but in the condo "[y]ou know it's not supposed to be furniture" (99). The crowding of the paintings is not the "old acceptable manner of sprinkling art around so that it does not get too intrusive" (99). The grouping of the paintings reflects and reinforces the dense richness of the paintings themselves. They *are* obtrusive when hung in this way. The denseness of the groupings recreates the denseness of the actual wilderness where Lucy was lost:

And these paintings are not landscape paintings [...]  
 Instead there's a tangle, a receding maze, in which you can become lost as soon as you step off the path.  
 There are no backgrounds in any of these paintings, no vistas; only a great deal of foreground that goes back

and back, endlessly involving you in its twists and turns of tree and branch and rock. No matter how far back in you go, there will be more. And the trees themselves are hardly trees; they are currents of energy, charged with violent color (118).

While her husband was alive and the boys were home, she was able to quiet the unease that these pictures aroused in her; her family's "noise" allowed her to "pretend she didn't hear it, this empty space in sound" (117). Without the other people there, she can't control the paintings, nor by implication, nature, even indoors.

Atwood's use of setting in "Death by Landscape" is evocative. Through her spare description of Lois' feelings about the condo, Atwood calls up in the reader a sense of the sterility and flatness of Lois' life since her disconnection from nature. One can almost smell the campfires of Camp Manitou. The reader feels the power of the landscapes without actually seeing them. Without saying so, Atwood conveys the message that Lois is one of the "living dead." The condo is the place where Lois lives but is not alive. The paintings, the "holes that open inwards on the wall, not like windows, but like doors" (117) are Lois' way out of her half-life, back to Lucy and the freedom, wildness, and unpredictability that both Lucy and nature offered her in her youth.



## Dimensions of Diction and Irony in “The Story of an Hour”

by Justin Xavier Carteret

In the short story “The Story of an Hour,” Kate Chopin uses many literary devices in the development of the plot. Chopin effectively utilizes descriptive diction and irony to depict various dimensions of love, joy, and freedom.

Chopin’s use of diction guides the reader on how to better interpret the feelings of the main character. After hearing the news of her husband’s death, Mrs. Mallard experiences a “storm of grief” (394). “Storm” is used to allow the reader to understand the intensity of the character’s grief. The tone of the diction then takes a turn as Mrs. Mallard realizes her newfound freedom and suddenly describes everything in a new light. The trees are “aquiver with new life” (394) and the breath of rain is described as “delicious.” Chopin describes Mrs. Mallard’s ecstasy as “monstrous joy” (394) because the freedom she now feels is a little morbid since it is found in the death of her husband.

In the story, Chopin explains Mrs. Mallard’s love for her husband: “And yet she had loved him-sometimes. Often she had not” (394). This statement is clear in its objective. Chopin very simply, without flowery words, states that Mrs. Mallard did not always love her husband, thus explaining the reason for Mrs. Mallard’s warped sense of happiness in this time of tragedy. To convey the sense of freedom Mrs. Mallard now feels, Chopin includes the adjective “open” in describing the window as she states, “she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.” The tone of the diction changes once more in the last statement of the

story, “When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease- of joy that kills” (395). The word “joy” invokes a morbid feeling just as it does earlier in the story, only this time it describes Mrs. Mallard’s death.

Irony is presented in two particular parts of the short story. First, irony is found in Mrs. Mallard’s happiness. Once she hears of the death of her husband, she is grief-stricken but quickly has a revelation. Chopin creates irony by incorporating freedom in death as a main theme. Mrs. Mallard undoubtedly finds freedom when she whispers the words “free, free, free!” (394) right after she weeps for the death of her husband. At the very end of the story, death brings freedom as the return of Mrs. Mallard’s husband kills her, freeing her from the bondage of her marriage forever. Dramatic irony can be found in the statement “joy that kills” (395). The audience knows Mrs. Mallard dies because the sight of her once thought-to-be dead husband kills her joy, yet the characters in the story think her death results from being overjoyed at the sight of her living husband.

The diction employed by Chopin has a profound effect on both the story and the reader. The shifts in tone are also well defined by the colorful adjectives used in describing the broad array of emotions Mrs. Mallard feels. The twists and turns throughout the story, produced by the irony, allow Mrs. Mallard’s feelings to be conveyed to the audience. Overall, Kate Chopin sets excellent examples on how to use literary devices, diction, and irony to their fullest potential.



## Creating Tone Through the Elements of Poetry in “A Work of Artifice”

By Justin Xavier Carteret

Marge Piercy explains the way she feels about the treatment of women by men in her poem, “A Work of Artifice.” Piercy employs an extended metaphor when describing the type of relationship between men and women; she compares it to that of a gardener and a bonsai tree. Piercy utilizes a broad array of diction to create a sarcastic tone in the poem; she also uses historical allusion to woman’s niche in society.

Piercy compares the woman to a bonsai tree and the man to a gardener. She uses a bonsai tree to describe a woman because bonsai trees are known for being domesticated. A bonsai tree in its natural state “could have grown eighty feet high” (line 3), just as a woman by herself can branch out to be magnificent like the bonsai’s stature. However, just as the bonsai tree is “carefully pruned” (line 7), so is a woman. The gardener represents man and the dominating nature of man’s masculinity. In order for man to be the one in control, he “whittles back the branches” (line 10) of woman. The words the gardener speaks to the bonsai tree make his arrogance prevalent. The gardener says - “It is your nature/ to be small and cozy/ domestic and weak” (lines 12-14). The gardener finally admits that he makes effort “to dwarf” (line 19) the growth of the bonsai tree, just as man consistently dwarfs the growth of woman’s position in society.

To make the lines powerful, Piercy carefully chooses her words. The words in essence create the tone of the poem. Negative diction best describes the method of domestication used by man. Piercy uses the word “whittle” (line 10) to give a feeling of negativity. The word “whittle” invokes a feeling of the way man

daily limits the destiny of woman. In line thirteen, Piercy compares the words “small and cozy”; these words really mean by keeping a woman small a man can feel cozy. Yet, in reference to a woman’s opinion, Piercy compares the words “domestic and weak” (line 14). For a woman to be domestic, she must become weak. In describing the growth of a woman, Piercy uses the word “dwarf” to add a feel of sarcasm to the tone. The “pot” used in lines two and sixteen is symbolic. The pot represents the world and life of a woman. Moreover, the pot represents the society in which the woman must exist. The pot holds the tree back just as the constraints of society hold woman back.

Toward the end of the poem, Piercy uses allusions to prove her point. Piercy alludes to an ancient Chinese tradition for women - “the bound feet” (line 20). Since the fashion in China was for the women to be small and dainty to show their femininity, the women would painfully bind their feet for years at a time. “The crippled brain” alludes to the fact that women were kept uneducated for years so that man’s authority could remain unquestioned. “The hair in curlers” alludes to what woman must go through in order to be considered pretty by men; all of which alludes to the fact that a woman, like a bonsai tree, must be refined to the standards of men in order to be accepted. Once a woman has bound her feet, curled her hair, and remained uneducated she then has “the hands you love to touch” (lines 23-24).

Through the sarcastic tone, negative diction, extended metaphor, and allusions to women in culture, Piercy allows the reader to have a more in-



depth look at woman’s role in society. The arrogance of man is brought on due to the societal idea that man is to be supreme. This idea adds pressure to men. Therefore, man cripples the brain and binds the feet of woman to make his role easier.

## About the students . . .

In addition to publishing the winners of the national Sigma Kappa Delta writing contest, *Hedera helix* also contains selected writings from the literary journals submitted for judging at the 2003 conference. The students published in this journal include the following:

From Calhoun Community College, Decatur, Alabama

Carlisa McElyea, Matthew Nolan, Michelle Hill



From Fayetteville Technical Community College, Fayetteville, North Carolina

Justin Xavier Carteret



From Grayson Community College, Dennison, Texas

Pat Murphree, Loretta Y. Tuttle, Anita Eason, Linda Trott, Derek Schaab



From Northeast Alabama Community College, Rainsville, Alabama

Billy Ray Brewton, Missy Parker, Andrew Taheri, Patricia Gilliam, Stacey Seabolt



From Seminole State College, Seminole, Oklahoma

James Dupy, Susan Pinkerton



From Southern Nevada Community College, Henderson, Nevada

Gina M. Sully

Sigma Kappa Delta invites members currently enrolled in two-year colleges to submit writings to the national writing contest each year. Details of the contest are available on our website at [www.English2.org](http://www.English2.org).