

PORTALS



Spring 2006

PORTALS

Literary and Arts Magazine

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Professor of English
University of Illinois
1964-1984

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Table of Contents

Poetry

Grey Padgett, <i>A Casual Act</i>	5
John K. Boehmer, <i>Blinded by the SEX</i>	6-7
Carol Bowen-Davis, <i>what they know?</i>	8
Mornin Townsend, <i>AT In Va</i>	21
Nancy Gadzuk, <i>General Assembly</i>	28
Courtney Webb, <i>The Sheet and I</i>	29
Will Ransom, <i>At Home with the Spiders</i>	41
Tyler Rivenbark, <i>A Technicality</i>	42
Adam Kaynan, <i>Bookshop Sixteenth of December</i>	43
Lee Christmas, <i>She Left Before Sunrise</i>	44
Tyler Simmons, <i>Black Sheep</i>	46
Elizabeth Martin, <i>Blank Palate</i>	48
Phillip Brown, Jr., <i>420</i>	50
Emily Parry, <i>Fallen Soldier</i>	54
Grey Padgett, <i>Glass Ocean</i>	60
Nancy Gadzuk, <i>To my Soft Sweet Friend</i>	62
Carol Bowen-Davis, <i>Aubade to Monogamy</i>	63
Emily Parry, <i>Silence's Fury</i>	64
Tyler Rivenbark, <i>A Collision to Speed Up For</i>	72
Will Ransom, <i>The Blue Shirt</i>	73
Nancy Gadzuk, <i>Fort Fisher Beach</i>	81
Mornin Townsend, <i>Grayson Highlands</i>	85

Non-Fiction

Laura Fussell, <i>Billowing Smoke</i>	23-27
Elena Watson, <i>Picture From Paradise</i>	77-79
Phillip Brown, Jr., <i>Don't Ask Don't Tell</i>	82-83

Fiction

Will Ransom, <i>A Bump in the Road</i>	11-18
Heather Coulter, <i>Through Closed Doors</i>	31-39
Phillip Brown, Jr., <i>Reminders of the Past</i>	56-57
Adam Kaynan, <i>I See Eyes To I</i>	67-71

All art and photography submitted by CFCC art students.

A Casual Act

Grey Padgett

Tomorrow, today will sting
Like smoke from a cigarette
Flat as the back of a flipped and long-dead cockroach.
We play games of power
That mean nothing but getting off
With the wrong man
At the wrong stop.
Eyes are heavy and thin
A latex glove filled with hot water
Anxious to burst
Because love is defined now
Love is hot...tender...genius...unafraid...
But love lives only in my head today,
Not my heart
My fingers pull my own
My eyes reflect the sky
Not the gentle lips and lashes of love.
So tomorrow, today will sting
Because I fell for my own cheap tricks again
Reached for slumbering toes with mine
Yanked eyes open with an accidental exploit
Snared my mouth on temptation
And slept alone.

Blinded by the SEX

John K. Boehmer

I remember going to her house, it was a pleasant place...

Well, she had boxes and stuff
stacked all over the place.

I remember we would sip wine together and talk...

Well, she usually drank too
much and then became horny.

I remember her beautiful smile and pretty eyes...

Well, she had a few wrinkles
and looked older than her age.

I remember her tender kisses and soft touch...

Well, she was a sloppy kisser and
at times could be a bit rough.

I remember her talking about her pleasant life...

Well, she was very bitter
her husband left her for
a younger woman.

I remember she was such a compassionate woman...

Well, she actually compared me to
some damn wish list she wrote.

I remember my name spoken in sweet sounding voice...

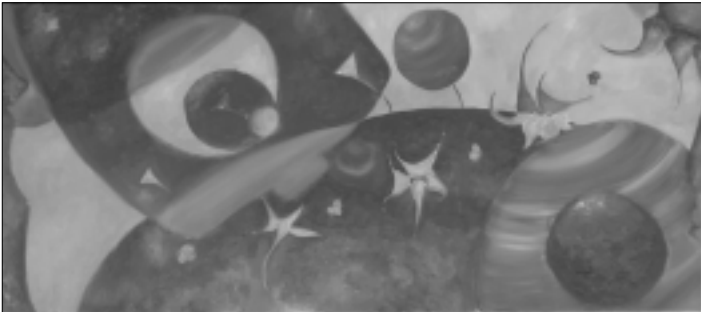
Well, her voice was.. at times, it
could be rather squeaky.

I remember the wonderful love making we shared...

Well, whenever we got together
we made a pile of clothes and
had sex together.

I want to remember the possibility for love still exists....

Well, I suppose one day we will get
together and have sex one more
time with the aid of her favorite
bottle of wine.



abstract

Patricia Chacon

what they know

Carol Bowen-Davis

they always talkin.
whisperin bout my dresses and
how i always wearin em too short.
“careful or she’ll have yo man,”
they always sayin.

like they know me.

they always lookin.
starin me up n down like
if they take they eyes off me
i liable to steal they shadow.
caught shopliftin once, now
they act like i gonna snatch they souls.

they don’t know me.

they always hidin.
peekin at me through closed shades.
i see the meat of they eyes peerin
through they windows.
piercing my tuff skin as i
pass by they house pretendin
not to notice-but i be knowin
what’s behind them shades cause *i*

know them.



untitled

Alexandra Anderson



Alleyway

Taylor Grennan

A Bump in The Road

Will Ransom

Edna had always thought of herself as a forgiving person with the fabled patience of Job. Of all the tests that the Lord had placed before her, there was none as trying as her husband, Buford. He had cheated on her far too many times to gather any kind of accurate count. One time he had even been caught with two different women in the same night at the same hotel. What Buford lacked in decency, he more than compensated for in sheer nerve.

Still, for twenty-seven years his sainted wife had managed to forgive each of his dalliances. Every one of Edna's friends and neighbors, not to mention a good many family members, told her that sooner or later enough would have to be enough. They all said that she would be well within her rights to seek a divorce, and a few had even suggested that they knew a good lawyer. The kind of lawyer that could easily secure Edna a divorce, and the house and the car, too. But Edna hung in there.

She continued on with her life as if nothing was at all out of sorts. Every Tuesday, just after her favorite game show ended, she would get up off of the plastic-coated sofa and get dressed in her shopping clothes. This was a ghastly outfit consisting of blue nylon capri pants the shade of a mid-May sky and a flowered blouse with a similar blue background. She would hop into the Olds Delta 88 that Buford had given her the third time he had been caught in bed with a family friend. He had given her the car and sworn he would change, and she had forgiven him almost immediately. She couldn't even remember the name of the girl with whom she had once been so close.

Edna would then drive down Orange Avenue to the little shopping mall on the corner at Sixth where she would spend about an hour or so doing all of the shopping for

the week. When she was finished, she would always pull her buggy into checkout aisle number five. It didn't make a difference to Edna how many people were waiting at number five, or that she would have a shorter wait or maybe even no wait at all in another line. Number five was Vicki's aisle, and Vicki was the only one that Edna thought she could talk with about Buford's philandering ways.

She would have little to tell Vicki today, thought Edna as she turned the corner from the bread aisle to frozen foods. Somehow Buford had managed to remain faithful for the last ten weeks or so. Maybe the girls around town had started spreading the word to stay away from him because he was married. Edna never could understand these girls who seemingly showed no respect for the vows. It was amazing to Edna how little the sight of a wedding ring meant these days.

Edna decide that a steak dinner would be a fitting reward for Buford's Herculean attempt at fidelity. As she reached for the meat and saw the remains of the bone, Edna started giggling to herself. It reminded her of that story she had read years ago about the jilted housewife who battered her husband with a frozen leg of mutton, killing him instantly. As Edna recalled, when the authorities came to question the widow about the death of her husband, she had fed the leg of mutton to the police, destroying the murder weapon. The very idea of crowning Buford, especially with something as costly as a good leg of mutton, made Edna laugh. She would never waste such a thing on her shiftless husband's head.

Having retrieved all of the items she had placed on her list the night before, Edna wheeled her cart up to register number five, half-expecting to see a long wait at Vicki's line. To her surprise, she was the only customer there ready for checkout. Vicki's face seemed to brighten up when she saw Edna coming toward her.

"At last," said Vicki, smiling at Edna's approach.

“A human being! How are you today, girl?”

“Just fine, Miss Vicki,” said Edna. “Plastic bags, please.” Edna began rummaging through her purse for her coupons while Vicki began scanning and bagging the items at an alarming rate. Edna always thought of Vicki as the consummate professional among cashiers. She was fast but courteous and never made the bags so heavy that they either broke or Edna couldn’t carry them herself. Vicki spoke up and asked her right away about Buford.

“How is that husband of yours treating you these days, Edna?” Even in asking this simple question, Vicki had remained a true professional and only hinted at sarcasm in her use of the word “husband.”

Edna smiled and was almost proud to reply, “Do you know he has been faithful for nearly three months now?”

Vicki’s sarcasm was impossible to hide this time. “No! You don’t say? Three whole months, huh? Well I never would have guessed he had it in him, girl.”

“Yeah, me neither,” laughed Edna. “I thought he has been such a good boy that he deserves a good steak dinner and dessert for his efforts.”

Vicki gave her a mock look of shock and indignation and said, “Now hang on a minute. I have been your checkout girl every Tuesday for the last year and a half without fail. Where’s my steak dinner? I have been more devoted to you than old Buford has.” Both women got a good laugh at that one.

Changing the subject a little, Edna asked why the store was so empty that morning. Vicki, as usual, gave her the inside scoop. There was a construction crew down on Orange laying a new sidewalk and repaving the street. Edna recalled seeing them on her way to the store. Vicki told her that the work had interrupted the flow of business for almost two weeks now but they were just about finished.

“The sooner they are done, the happier I’ll be, too,”

said Vicki. "My man, Jackson, is the crew foreman and he comes home every night smelling like sweat, tar and asphalt."

"At least your man does something," replied Edna. "Ever since Buford retired all he does is chase anything in a skirt. If he's not doing that he's sitting at home like a bump on my couch, drinking his damned Budweisers, watching fishing shows, and burping up noxious fumes." By now, Vicki had her bagged and totaled and Edna was soon on her way home to "Paradise Central."

As she was wheeling away, Vicki asked her if she would be going down Orange to get home. Edna thought this odd as Vicki knew perfectly well that she always went down Orange. Vicki then asked her to take a package to Jackson for her and described him to a tee. Edna, always thoughtful and kindhearted, quickly agreed.

Pulling off on to the shoulder near the construction site, Edna got out of her car and found Jackson almost immediately. Vicki had described him perfectly — six-foot-four, around 220 pounds with light red-brown hair and the deepest blue eyes that Edna had ever seen. He had his shirt off in the blazing heat and every inch of him was covered with that glorious kind of suntan one can only get by working in the sun all day long.

Edna walked over and introduced herself as a friend of Vicki's. She handed him the package and contemplated an affair of her own for the first time in twenty-seven years. She quickly decided to put that thought out of her head, although something about the appreciative way that Jackson had looked at her made her feel like the option was definitely on the table. Nice to know that somebody likes what he sees, she thought.

"So what are you guys doing out here?" she asked Jackson after the initial introductions had been completed.

"Well," he said, "truth be told we are just about finished. This afternoon we'll lay the cement for the sidewalk and the speed bump. We'll let them set and dry

overnight. Then we'll come back tomorrow, smooth out the surfaces, and paint the crosswalk and the speed bump and we are finished."

"You know," said Edna, "Vicki says she'll be glad when you don't come home every night smelling like tar and asphalt anymore." Frankly, she wouldn't give a damn what he smelled like as long as he didn't smell like another woman. She walked back to her car, adding a little extra sway just in case Jackson, or any of his crew, might be watching. Then she headed home to prepare Buford's celebratory dinner. She doubted if the old bump on a log would even notice that she had made him something different to eat. "I mean really," she said to herself. "It's not as if I have bought him Heineken instead of Budweiser."

Once she had put away the groceries and discovered that Buford was not at home, Edna sat down and read the mail. She was thrilled to discover her new catalog from Macy's and not so thrilled to see the latest bill from MasterCard. She was even less thrilled when she noticed three charges from the Holiday Inn in Waterton, a small town about thirty minutes away from where she and Buford lived.

All three charges came on consecutive Tuesdays at the same time of day. Edna knew right away that Buford was up to his old tricks. The idea of crowning him with that steak became more and more entertaining. She couldn't do that, she thought. However, this time would be the last. Edna was going to file for divorce and take the house, the car, the savings account and anything else she wanted. She had told him the last time that if she ever caught him cheating again he would have an ex-wife. Obviously, Buford just didn't care. More correctly, he just hadn't cared enough. Edna would simply wait for him to come home and tell him to get out.

Meanwhile, it was to be business as usual for the woman who was now only temporarily still Mrs. Buford

Cahill. She got out her cooking utensils and began preparing a sumptuous steak dinner for herself, celebrating her upcoming new life. She sautéed onions and mushrooms for the steak and put on some water for the corn on the cob. She also began to mix up her Jello brand instant pudding. She noticed that she had actually bought her own favorite flavor, pistachio, almost as if her subconscious had known all along.

While the steak was sizzling and the corn was boiling, Buford came strolling into the house like a cat that can hear the can opener signaling dinner. He kissed Edna on the cheek and she could almost smell the perfume. She thought it smelled like that Obsession. She wasn't sure if it was Calvin Klein or not, but it was definitely an obsession that she smelled. Buford leaned over the stove and buried his face in the steam, taking a good long whiff. He had no clue that this meal was not for his consumption. "Smells great, hon," he said. "Steak? What's the occasion?"

Now Edna was good and mad, and she could feel her rage boiling inside of her just like the corn in the silver pot on the back burner. First the continuous affairs and the lies to go along with them, and now he comes into the house and stands directly over the stove, basking in the fumes of her dinner to try and hide the smell of his latest hussy. The nerve!

Without thinking, without warning, and without hesitating Edna struck Buford in the back of the head with her marble rolling pin. It had been a wedding gift from her mother and Edna could hear her voice in her head as the bludgeon crushed Buford's skull at the base of his head.

"Put it to good use," her mother had said.

* * * * *

As with most things that occur in the heat of a moment, once the moment is gone reality comes breezing

back into the room and into the mind of Edna Cahill. She had done it! She had brained Buford with her rolling pin. The best use she had ever found for that damned thing. “Okay,” she thought, “so I killed him. Now what?”

In a matter of seconds Edna narrowed her choice of actions down to two. She could call the police and turn herself in, or she could try to cover it up. Edna realized that society would dictate that when faced with this type of decision, she should respond as a right-minded individual and turn herself in. However, she also reasoned that no right-minded individual brains her husband with a marble rolling pin.

Maybe the courts and a jury of her peers would sympathize with her plight once she told her tale. The lout clearly had it coming to him. Everyone knew that she had forgiven his dalliances over and over again. There were literally any number of people that could testify to her saintly patience when it came to the nature of her husband, Buford. Edna thought long and hard about it and came up with the same conclusion that you or I would likely attain — life in prison.

Hiding the body was her only real choice. She quickly cleaned the rolling pin and put it back in her cabinet. Then she sat down to a nice dinner of steak and mushrooms with corn-on-the-cob. While she ate she gave much consideration to how she could dispose of the body. She also made a mental note that next time she should cook the steak a little longer and add just a touch more salt. Her gravy hadn’t come out quite thick enough. That’s when the solution to her problems came to her. It was something in the consistency of the gravy that actually gave her the solution that she was searching for.

Edna finished eating and cleaned up her dishes and pans, stepping over Buford’s body to get to the sink. She even cleaned up the little specks of blood that had dashed onto the appliances. Since the little rug on the floor was already saturated with blood and a little grey matter from

the cavity of the brain itself, she used it to wrap up Buford's body. Then she went outside and drove the Olds into the garage and shut the door.

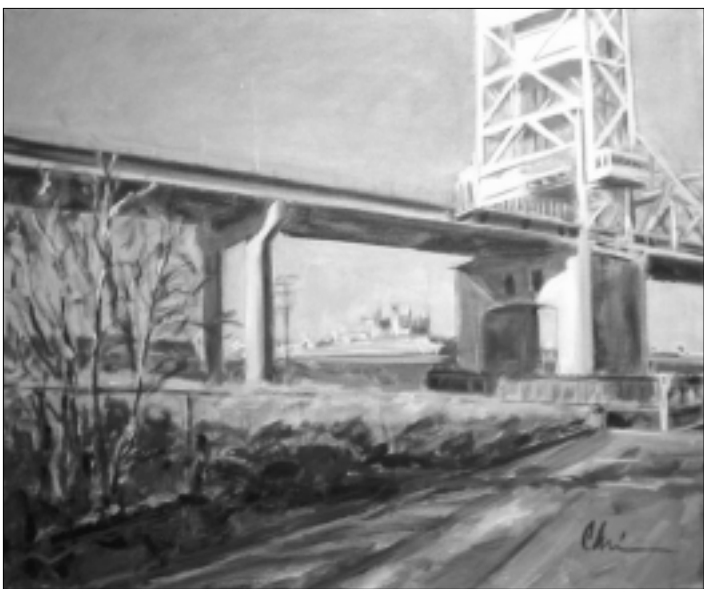
Scurrying back into the kitchen, Edna thought of Alfred Hitchcock. The old director would have loved to have seen this. He probably would have added an additional twist, thought Edna. Something like the body not being where she had left it. The very thought of such a thing made Edna's heart pound so loudly she was certain her neighbors would hear it.

Much to Edna's relief the old man was still lying on the floor, rolled up in that multi-colored rug that had belonged to Buford's mama. "Well," said Edna, "at least that God-awful rug is staying in your family, you old bump on a log." It took her a good half-an-hour to wrestle his lifeless body into the trunk of the car. Now she would wait until well after midnight for the final part of her plan, when she was certain there would be no traffic downtown.

She busied herself by cleaning up the entire house, especially the kitchen. She wanted no tell-tale traces of anything being left behind. In a few days she would call the police and it simply would not do to have them find blood in the kitchen. After all, she did not have a leg of mutton to cook for them, and she certainly wasn't going to serve them her rolling pin.

A few days later Edna almost laughed hysterically when Officer Peters and Investigator Fulton told her that they were as baffled by her husband's disappearance as she was. They had no clues and had found no trace of Buford Cahill. He had seemingly vanished into thin air. For the next twenty years this was all the police could tell her. And every Tuesday for those twenty years, as Edna drove down Orange Avenue on her weekly sojourn to and from the grocery store, she would cackle hysterically as she passed the road sign that read:

WARNING: BUMP IN ROAD AHEAD



Memorial Bridge

Christine Pfohl



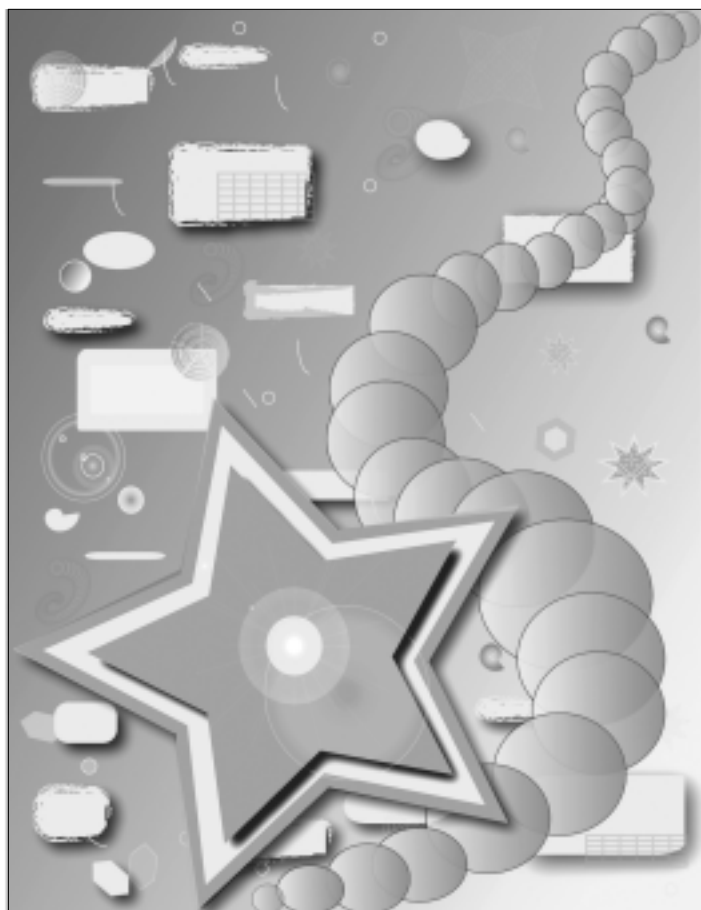
Dock Lanterns

Taylor Grennan

AT In Va

Mornin Townsend

Twists and turns through wooden posts
like cattle, single file
trudging through trenches
paths of mental delirium.
A nomad steps out of line
only to fall, realizing the softness of nature,
a pleasant recollection.
Paths with traces of life,
reminders of who were lost and found themselves here.
The sun sets on this beautiful sky,
Where life exists.



abstract

Sara Rouse

Billowing Smoke

Laura Fussell

I lay there, on a stretcher, looking around at all the others on stretchers around me. I had three blankets over me, but I was still cold. I couldn't decide if the cold was coming from the outside or the inside. All I knew was that I was trembling.

I tried to reach for the blankets, to pull them higher to my face, when I remembered I was strapped down to the bed. I didn't think this was necessary. I wasn't going anywhere. This was what had to be done. I didn't want to be in pain anymore.

I looked around at all the old people surrounding me. I wondered why there weren't any more ten year olds in the room with me. I realized it was because most ten year olds are healthy. There probably weren't very many ten year olds that were at risk of losing an entire arm. Although by the looks on their faces, my situation was probably far less severe.

The man lying next to me was an elderly black man. He had soft, wrinkly skin, the color of cocoa powder just before you add the hot water. He had but only three strands of hair on top of his head, yet full bushy white eyebrows that reminded me of the smoke that always came billowing out of the grill when my dad cooked out.

My dad loved to cook out. In the summer time we spent more time outdoors than we ever did indoors. At least that was how it used to be. Now that my parents were divorced, I wasn't quite sure how this summer would be. My dad was now living in an apartment, and he didn't even have a yard to put his grill in.

As I continued to look at the little old man, I wondered what had caused him to be here today. He looked as though he was barely alive. There were three different tubes coming out of him, connected to different machines. He even had a machine I had seen on several different

T.V. shows, which monitored your heart rate. I watched as the lines moved up and down, beeping out a lullaby that was beginning to make me sleepy.

I hoped that perhaps his lullaby would put me to sleep. I hadn't been sleeping all that much lately. I was having horrible nightmares. The worst one was a nightmare that I was going into surgery and the anesthesia wouldn't work. Yet, I would be paralyzed, unable to tell the surgeons that I could feel their sharp instruments slicing and tearing into my cold, clammy flesh. I would see my crimson blood pool out, covering the surgeon's latex gloves and pressed white coat. Just the thought made me wince.

I had also been having nightmares about my father. I dreamed about him sitting in his car, down by the river. He would hold his face in his hands and cry. I was on the other side of the river, calling out to him. I was telling him not to cry. I was reaching my hands out to him, but I couldn't reach. I was screaming out to him, but he couldn't hear me. No matter what, he was always so far out of reach.

The little man next to me had not opened his eyes once since he was wheeled in next to me. I wondered what he was dreaming about. I wondered if he was dreaming about when he was young, grilling out in his backyard, with his father. I also wondered if perhaps he was having nightmares, as I had been having. I hoped he wasn't.

As I watched the man's chest slowly move up and down, in the corner of my eye I noticed the lines on the heart monitor were no longer reaching the heights and depths they once were. The once deep valleys and towering mountains were now mere hills and slopes, barely rising above the center. The sound of the beeping from the machine was no longer the sweet melody it was once. I wondered what this meant. It didn't take long for me to figure out that it wasn't good, by the look on the nurse's

face as she called out for help.

I wanted to jump from the bed and run to him. I wanted to throw my arms around him and tell him it would be okay. I wanted to reach my hands into his soul and warm his heart with my fingers. I wanted to hold his heart tightly between my fingers, protecting it from harm. I wanted to sing in his ear, the way my father sang in my ear whenever I was afraid. But all I could do was lay there, strapped to a cold stretcher. All I could do was watch as the hills and slopes became but one continuous line, and the beeps became but one constant sound.

A team of doctors and nurses burst through the door and ran to the man, opening his eyelids and screaming out his name. I couldn't comprehend what his name was. The only sound I could hear and understand was the sound of the machine; the constant sound that rang out the word dead. I was watching this man die right before my very eyes.

The nurse wheeled over a cart, which contained two metal paddles. I recognized them right away. My mother had always been a fan of hospital shows, so I had seen this procedure many times. Although, I had never seen it right in front of my face. I had never tasted the electricity in the air, lingering on my lips and tongue. As they shocked the man, his lifeless body flew in the air as if his soul was trying to get out. I just lay there, hoping his soul would decide to give up. I prayed that this man would not die.

Just then, I began to feel my bed move. At first I was confused. Then I realized that they were beginning to wheel me out of the waiting room and into surgery. I tried to scream out to them to let me stay. I wanted them to let me off of the stretcher, so I could run to him. Yet, nothing came out. My voice was frozen. All I could feel was the stinging of the words at the back of my throat. As I was wheeled out the doors, the last thing I heard was the nurse saying that the man was gone. He was dead.

As soon as I heard those very words, my voice returned back to me. I began to scream, “NO! NO! LET ME GO! I DON’T WANT TO DIE!” The nurses reassured me and told me that everything was going to be fine. They wheeled me in as fast as they could, hurrying to anesthetize me. I suddenly felt a burning from within me. The burning was shooting through my veins, lighting them on fire. I knew I would be asleep soon.

When I finally came out of the anesthesia, my mind was awake before my eyes were. They felt heavy, like someone was purposely holding them down. I struggled to open them, not quite sure where I was. There were no sounds, no smells, nothing. The events before surgery slowly started coming back to me, until I realized what had happened just before they rolled me away.

I kept on pushing, with all my strength, eventually making one eyelid slowly rise up. As my eye adjusted to the light, I began to focus on what was right in front of me. It didn’t take long before I realized what it was. It was the man from the waiting room. It was the man that died right in front of my eyes.

“I’M DEAD! I’M DEAD! I’M IN THE MORGUE! WHY GOD? WHY!” I began to scream. I tried to jump off of the bed, but I was still strapped down. I opened my mouth to scream again, ignoring the intense pain that was now shooting through my entire body. That is when the old man’s eyes opened and his lips parted. I stopped, frozen in that moment. And then he spoke. “Relax child. You are not dead. Neither am I. We are both alive and recovering. The nurse will be here shortly. Just shut your eyes, and pray to God. Thank him for making us whole again.”

In that moment, my other eyelid opened. Both of my eyes began to sting. I realized that I was alive and that the man was alive, too. Tears started streaming down my face.

Ever since my dad moved out, I had felt so alone. I

was so afraid of what was going on and what was happening to our family. I was so angry. All I could think about was what I didn't have. I was afraid I would feel like that forever. But in that moment, looking at that man, as I watched his chest move up and down, I realized everything would be just fine.



Girl in Cafe

Lane Patterson

General Assembly

Nancy Gadzuk

She constructs cappuccino in a hiss of steam, swaying
slightly in time with the Springsteen flowing from the
corner speakers.

Fills a tall cup – a deep mocha to match the police
horse
that just happens to pass outside the window as she
pours molten caffeine.

Three young women at the round table near the door
sneak
sly glances at the handcuffs dangling from his belt.

Or maybe they are looking at his butt, imagining the
curve of his flesh
under the dark blue uniform.

One giggles. Yes.
Yes, that must be it.

The Sheet and I

Courtney Webb

He kissed my neck
in the place that only he knows.
His lips fit there, a perfect fit,
and we are one again.

I close my eyes and everything is
spinning, and at the same time, very still.
For one lost moment,
I do not even know where I am.

But the moment passes
and all that warmth is taken from me.
He does not seem to notice
that he has left me here, exposed and empty.

There is only this wrinkled sheet
and it does not know me like he does.
It cannot melt into my body and
make me feel whole again.

Yet, I pull it up, and wrap its
musty scent around me.
I find comfort in the sheet
for we have both been left behind.



Still Life

Kayla Wyatt

Through Closed Doors

Heather Coulter

Steven sopped up the juices from his roast beef with a slice of white bread and popped the whole thing in his mouth. Some dark pink juices ran down his chin, and Harold laughed and gave him a napkin.

“You’re not hungry tonight, are ya Steve-o?”

Steven grinned widely and showed some bread still clinging to his teeth. He then swallowed with a gulp you could have heard across the kitchen.

“So, how are you feeling about Claudia and your dad having another anniversary?” asked Harold, his twinkling eyes now filled with concern.

Steven just looked down at the battle ground of peas and potatoes and little red rivers on his plate and shrugged. Harold picked up his own plate and limped over to the kitchen sink. He patted Steven on the back and whispered, “It’s OK,” as he set his plate down in the dirty water.

“Grandpa?” Steven asked suddenly. “How long were Mom and Dad married before—she died?”

“About a year,” sighed Harold, settling back down into his plastic chair.

“Oh,” mumbled Steven, turning back to his food.

“You know, your mother and father really loved each other. And she loved you so much. She was a good one. I know you think that your dad doesn’t love you, but he really does, in his own way. Your dad just didn’t know what to do with himself after your mother passed, and he didn’t know what to do with you; you were just a baby, after all. That was why he married Claudia, Steven. I don’t know if it was such a good decision, but he did it for you because he knew you needed a mother.”

Steven knew all of this (he had heard it so many times before), and it didn’t help him at all because Claudia hated kids and he thought she probably knew less about

them than his dad. The most quality time he ever had with her was holding her “Perfectly Pink” nail polish while she sat on the kitchen counters and painted her toenails, and they didn’t really talk at all: he just stood there marvelling at how her legs seemed to go on forever, and he wondered how she could even reach her toes.

The way he saw it, his dad had decided that all their family needed was a mom so that he wouldn’t have to worry about “the kid.”

Steven looked at his grandpa and wondered how his dad could have turned out so different from him.

At nine years old, Steven knew for a fact that he didn’t know his dad at all. He never really knew what was going through his head, only that sometimes his dad was so calm it made him shiver because he knew what was coming, though it never came to him. His father only hit Claudia, and perhaps his mother, but this didn’t make Steven feel any better as he had learned that sometimes the only thing that hurts worse than hate is simply having no feeling at all. In some ways, he would have preferred a beating.

Harold and Steven both looked up at the sound of Claudia strutting into the room. She had long hair that should have been blonde, but was now more green than anything, and she wore short, blue, silky pyjamas.

“Hey Stevie!” she said in her rough voice, trying (and failing) to sound sweet. “Your daddy’s taking me to dinner tonight, so I’m gonna need your help gettin’ ready.” Steven nodded and shovelled the rest of the peas and potatoes into his mouth without even tasting them.

His dad, a small muscular man with coarse, straw-coloured hair, and a red face like a beet stomped into the room. “Well you’d better hurry; I’m leaving in twenty minutes. With or without you,” he said to Claudia without a glance to Steven or his dad. Steven leaped up at the sound of his father’s voice, and picking up his plate and fork he turned quickly to the sink, but he moved too

quickly, and he lost hold of the plate. It fell to the floor and broke into three large pieces and a handful of dust-like shards.

“Boy!” he hollered, finally turning to Steven. “Do you know what those plates cost me? I can’t afford another set of those! If you don’t watch it, you’re going to be eating out of your hands for the next month; now clean that up and go to your room, and you’d better not come out till tomorrow!” And he turned back to Claudia, but was interrupted when she said: “No, you’d better just stay in the bathroom, ‘cause I’m gonna need you,”

Steven’s dad gave her a very dark look and stomped back out of the room.

“Steven, don’t worry, I know it was just an accident,” whispered his grandpa, and he helped him mop up what remained of the plate.

When Steven and Harold had finished mopping, Steven had to go and wait for Claudia in the bathroom. He’d been sitting on the toilet lid for ten minutes before she finally came in and flicked on the light. She wore a black dress that was a bit too tight, he thought. The only thing she said to him was “Here—” as she thrust a foundation bottle and some lipsticks into his hands. His job was simple: hand her whatever she needed. “Foundation. Tissue. Mascara. Brush. ‘Cherry Red’ Lipstick—no, I changed my mind, ‘Frosty Pink’,” was all she said.

When it was all over, he put her things back in her plastic black bag, and watched her lean right up next to the mirror, tilt her head towards the ceiling light, open her mouth, and run the tip of her tongue along her top teeth. She said this was to get any lipstick off her teeth. The shadows in her mouth when she did this looked like demons to Steven.

The minute that Claudia and Steven’s dad stepped out of the house, Grandpa Harold poked his head in the doorway and saw Steven sitting on the bathroom floor,

the lights still out from when Claudia left the room.

“How about a few rounds of Rummy before bed?” asked Harold.

Steven looked up at him, and mouthed “OK.”

That night Steven won at Rummy against Grandpa Harold for the first time. Harold never let Steven win, and Steven liked that because he was the type of kid who wanted to know that he won on his own, without sympathy.

“Good game, Steve-o!” his grandpa said, patting him on the back. Steven looked up into his old, smiling face and grinned triumphantly. He picked up the cards and stuffed them back into the box. That was the sort of thing his dad would have yelled at him about, but he knew he didn’t have to worry about it from Grandpa Harold.

Harold moved in with them when Steven was seven. He had a stroke while he was outside, feeding his old cat, Chester. It was only a minor stroke, but his dad (grudgingly) asked him to live with them anyway, and they all agreed that the one hurt most was Chester, because Harold had fallen on top of him, and the poor cat wound up dead. Harold was like a small whale back then, but by the time Steven was nine, he was scrawny and his old bones were almost visible through his sagging skin. Despite the limp that he had to live with, Harold was really grateful for the stroke because it gave him the chance to watch over Steven.

“Let’s get to bed, Steve-o; it’s getting on to midnight.”

“Ok, goodnight grandpa.” Steven left the cards on the floor, clicked off the light and pulled back his covers.

Harold yawned so slowly it was almost slow motion. In the dark, Steven thought he’d already fallen asleep. “Night Steven... good job tonight...”

Steven smiled and looked out the window at the head of his bed, watching the car lights go by, and soon

he had drifted into sleep.

But not for long.

There was a scream—it sounded like Claudia. His dad bellowed at her, and the sound surged through the house. He heard Claudia wailing as she ran to the bedroom she shared with his father; his father came running after her. Steven jerked awake, scared, shaking. He looked at the clock: twelve past two in the morning. He pushed back the covers and ran to Harold.

Steven reached out and quickly shook Harold's thin, cold shoulder. He wouldn't wake up. "How's he sleeping through this? He's so cold," thought Steven vaguely. Feeling foolish for what he was about to do, he put his right hand over his grandpa's mouth and nose, knowing he was being ridiculous, sure that he would find his grandpa only sleeping. But there was no breath on his hand. His grandpa just lay there, eyes closed as if in sleep; his mouth slightly open—open far enough so that Steven could see his tongue limp and slack in his mouth. His blue and green flannel blanket was still pulled up to his chin. His left arm was stretched out toward the wall, as if reaching for someone.

He jerked away, crashed into Harold's old particle board end table, and brought the green desk lamp shattering to the ground. He heard nothing. He didn't flinch at the sharp glass that grazed the back of his calf as it fell. He only blinked furiously trying to see past the terrifying scene before him which had, in an instant, become his entire world.

His mind raced, and yet it was blank to him; a locked door guarding its contents from a stranger. He didn't think to find a key.

Somewhere, so far away it could have been in some dream-world, there was shouting. Something heavy hit the door. Instinctively, Steven walked to the door and locked it. He collapsed when a second blow came to the door. This time it was Claudia.

“Hey—let me in!” came a muffled, angry voice.

Steven didn’t hear her; he crawled to the wall at the foot of his grandpa’s bed and leaned his head against it. It felt cool on his clammy skin. He shivered, rolled so that his back was up against the wall, and pushed his legs out in front of him.

Fists punched the door. Claudia screamed hysterically, “Don’t you care what’s going on you little brat?! HAROLD! Open up!” None of this reached Steven’s unwilling ears. He looked down at his knobbly feet. His toes were long and gangly and none of them lay straight; they all turned slightly in or out. “They’re like Grandpa Harold’s, not like Dad’s,” he realized, and without even any warning from himself, his eyes snapped up to his grandpa’s body lying on the bed.

He immediately wished he hadn’t looked again, but now that he had he couldn’t turn away from the kind, peaceful face of the only person who really cared for him. It seemed incomprehensible that he would never feel the comfort of his Grandpa Harold’s presence again.

Tears welled up in his eyes and he felt them fall slowly down his face, down his neck, and absorb in his undershirt which was already damp with perspiration. He felt them, but he didn’t recognize them.

The golden dawn trickled through the window just above Steven’s head. It traced his grandpa’s face with its warm fingertips and lit up his dishevelled silver hair. Steven stayed in the shadows, untouched by the light.

There was another knock at the door. This was a different sort of knock (Claudia had faded away hours ago). It was harder, colder, as if the hand were made of steel or ice.

“Steven, Dad, open this goddamn door.”

Silence. Steven got awkwardly to his feet, his eyes still fixed on his grandpa’s lifeless body. His dad growled.

“If you don’t open this door right now, it’s coming down. NOW!”

Steven finally slid his eyes off his grandpa. They paused momentarily on the broken lamp; his unmade bed. It was in another life that he had lain in it.

"Give me a minute..." he choked. There was a pause from behind the door.

"Are you alright, Dad?" Steven's father asked gruffly.

There was no use keeping him shut out, Steven knew. He couldn't stay safe forever. He looked back at the body, and he abruptly remembered what his grandpa did every morning. Making his way back to the end table, he looked for the comb, but it wasn't there: it had fallen to the floor along with the lamp. His dad heaved against the door, howling with rage. Steven ignored him; it didn't matter now what his dad did. Nothing mattered except doing what he knew he had to do.

Grandpa Harold would have never let himself be seen by anyone other than Steven without his hair combed. Steven sat on the bed facing his grandpa, and painstakingly began to comb his hair. He cried again as the translucent silver hair fell through his fingers; somewhere inside him, he knew he had to hold on to every detail with everything he had because he would be the only one who would. And it was important. All of it was so important. He couldn't forget the mole on the side of his jaw, just below his ear. Nor could he forget a single one of the lines that were spread across his face. They were a map of his grandfather's life, and though he could no longer be questioned, the answers were still there.

The door opened. Steven's father stood in the doorway, his pocket knife in his hand. He threw it to the ground with a thump, and in less time than it takes to draw a breath, he grabbed Steven around the shoulders and pulled him off the bed. He let go, and Steven fell.

"What do you think you're doing?! Are you STUPID? When I tell you to open the door, you OPEN the goddamn door!" His eyes flicked around the room, drinking it in like poison: the broken lamp, the cards strewn

about the floor, the unmade bed... his father.

“Dad?” he said quietly, turning abruptly to him. He sat down next to him on the bed, and put a hand under his neck, lifted him... his other hand felt the neck all over, seeking something that wasn’t there.

“No pulse,” he whispered and he leaned forward, pulling his father to him so their foreheads touched. He grimaced and his eyes winced as if in pain, but just as suddenly, they were blank. Then angry. He let go of his father and stood over his cowering son.

“What did you do?” he asked through gritted teeth. “Why didn’t you tell me? What did you do to him, you little shit?!”

“I-I combed his hair...”

His dad stared at him as though he would have rather anyone else were crouching before him. “You—you should have come and got me!—Claudia—”

“You were fighting,” Steven whispered.

His dad came close to him, bent down low, and grumbled, “Well Claudia’s left me now, and so has Dad, and now—now...” He trailed off, stood up, turned to face his father, his back to Steven. “Get out. I don’t want to see your face,” he said simply.

Steven got to his feet, and walked quickly to the door. He paused, grabbed some socks from the dirty clothes hamper at the foot of his bed, and left the room. He hopped on one foot in the hallway, pulled a sock on, then switched feet and pulled on the last. A loud thump came from the room he shared with his grandpa, and then a stifled exclamation “Why—!” Steven paused, but then shook his head, and walked straight down the hallway to their den.

It was a mess. Claudia’s clothes were in a pile on the old, floral sofa, and an open, empty suitcase leaned against the television. The coffee table was on its side as if it had been kicked over, and the old crumpled napkins and unused ketchup packets that had been piled on it

were strewn all about. Someone had stamped on a packet, and ketchup oozed out onto the greying carpet. He tried not to look at the room and walked directly to the closet next to the television and took out his coat and rubber boots. He was still in his pyjamas, but this didn't matter. As he pulled on his coat, he pushed his feet into the boots, and seconds later was out the door.

He walked two blocks in silence, trying as hard as he could to just not think. Nothing about his grandpa. Nothing about how his life had changed; about how he felt he could never be happy again.

By the third block, one thought was beginning to bubble to the surface: "Where am I going?" He cast his eyes around as though an answer would jump out at him, but there wasn't an answer. There was a bus stop, but he had no money. That was when he realized he couldn't go anywhere. His dad could tell him to go whenever he pleased, but Steven couldn't go, no matter how much he wanted to.

With one hand his father roughly shoved him aside, but with the other he held him so tightly that he nearly burst with the pressure of it.

Steven shivered in the frigid air. He zipped his coat up all the way to his face, and turning his back to the wind, he trudged back home.



Shoo Fly

Tonya Robinson

At Home with the Spiders

Will Ransom

There are two spiders in my home
Our shared domain is theirs to roam
I don't bother them; they don't bother me
A mutual policy of "Live and let be."

The landlord, of course, wishes them dead
But it is bad luck, or so "they" have always said
To kill a spider inside of a house
Funny: "They" don't mind if you kill a mouse.

Still, though, I often find a great deal of fun
Looking for Spider Two and Spider Number One
"One" is almost always upstairs near the shower
"Two" changes locations almost by the hour
The living room, the kitchen, the coffee table...
Each adorned with that mystic, silken cable.

Sometimes I watch them as they climb up the wall
And find myself struck with a sense of awe
I must admit, they are dutifully complete
For there are no other bugs in our shared retreat

So, for now, we'll maintain the status quo
And I'll let these two spiders roam to and fro
Up until the day my space they offend
Then, bad luck or no, their lives I will end.

A Technicality
Tyler Rivenbark

I lost my virginity,
but only technically,
lying there naked,
but never consummating.

Our hands traveled
under sheets unraveled.
Did we lose our innocence
while we were tangled?

If so, it was just a technicality.



Greenfield Lake

Craig Smith

Bookshop Sixteenth of December

Adam Kaynan

You can tell a lot about people
by their magazines.
The way they flip through covers
read the lines between.
While reaching
Glancing away
Scanning
Peering inside
They pace
Crouch
Kneel
Bend
Discoveries hide.
Upon covers are secrets held
Deep within.
Who clasps it?
Windows transparent
Personality in palm
Notice each in paper
Plastic
Grip tight to your life, advertise it
Wear yourself while we read.
Don't disguise it.

She Left Before Sunrise

Lee Christmas

Lost in just this night,
enchanted/asleep,
scenery of light,
wind, and plants of bright
colors filled his dreams.

[False] Serenity
spawned from her movements;
Feet imprinted leaf
shapes. She was dancing;
foliage held its breath.

Ivy and petals
of roses never
met in such dreams... All
of the stems climbed walls,
reaching up to her;

But reality
will, too soon, sink in-
They'll infinitely
grow without touching
her; She has left him.

Daybreak brought its doom:
 Night has now ended,
 killing springtime's bloom.
 Daytime hangs the moon;
 Night hung the sun, red

 from roses' petals,
 choked by sweet ivy.
His world is enthralled,
continues to fall,
unawake; Asleep.



Music Library

Jenna Ingram

Black Sheep

Tyler Simmons

Your loving son
Swooped down like a vulture in November
Upon the carcass of a lamb
Lifeless inside himself
Out of your house, into
Others, where welcome
Lasted about as long
As his green thumb
Charred black within a day or two
By the flame on the spoon



An American Christmas

Adam Kaynan

Blank Palate

Elizabeth Martin

The air became chilled and the ground beneath
Began to form a frozen layer. It crunched as if
Walking on broken glass.

The evening sun tried with every effort to shine
through the thick clouds that layered the sky,
like a huge blanket completely covering
everything.

Eventually the sun forsakes us into other parts of
The world, bringing rays of warmth
Elsewhere.

Not one single star could be seen by the
Naked eye as night was cast
Out.

The bitter cold, freezes all that gets in
Its path. The only protection is hidden indoors
Or under coverings.

As night moves on the blanket that engulfs
Our entire city lets out cold, wet shapes,
And forms each differently, but to our eyes the only
Appearance we can comprehend is soft white
Balls the size of a pinhead. A clever term which
we know as snow.

Eventually the ground turns to white as it falls
Harder and harder turning our world into a clean
Palate. Where we imagine painting beauty
Upon.

Creating ideas like no other person surrounding
Has even considered. Not ever replacing the old mass
Of nature that began long ago. Only replacing what
was demolished. A restoration to bring new life
without a technological path
behind it.

With our minds traveling into other atmospheres
Night has passed even before we could acknowledge
Its presence. The snow still falls, over the horizon
Bringing forth its light, casting an aluminous amount
Over our imagination our very own picture of what
We see.

Even though the cold still strikes us, and the snow
Still beats across our bodies we feel our inner souls
Warm. As we look amongst what is layered
upon our handmade canvas. Each small piece
of individual work became a contribution of what
The other ended at. The paints have mixed,
And turned into a completed mural,
Causing us to see equality,
A team.

As we embarked home we took one last glance
Behind and what was found was a place covered in
Soft white snow, yet our imaginations is where
The portrait came from.

420

Phillip Brown, Jr.

You finger some grass,
no it's something else.
You roll the paper,
lick it,
seal it.

You want it,
but off it instead,
I decline.
I want to watch.
I like to watch.

Put your lips to it,
inhale deep.
Hold it. Keep it.
Exhale.
Feeling good?

His eyes grow red,
skin cells tingle,
hunger grows strong.
I know what you want.
I know what you need.

Lift your shirt,
hairs march from navel to boxers.
Show me more.
Tell me what you want.
Tell me what you need.



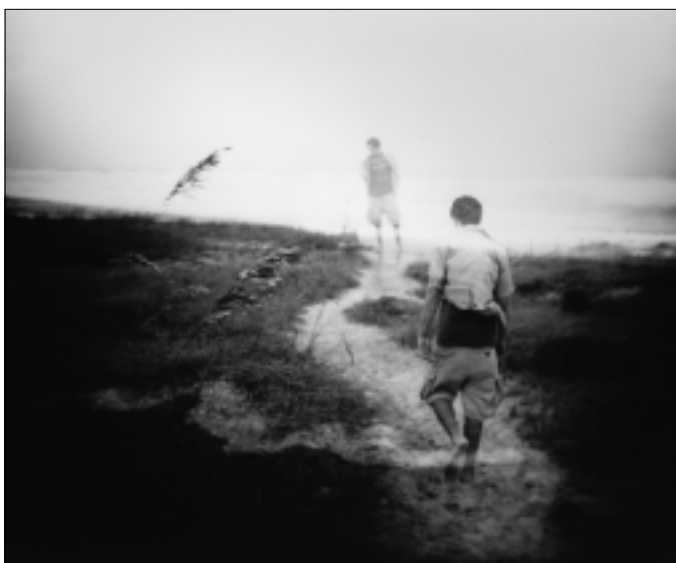
Summer in Wrightsville

Alex Hoggard



Roma Band

Lane Patterson



Ghost

Tracy Parrish

Fallen Soldier

Emily Parry

Softly treads the one
Who walks among the fallen
Pausing with each stride

Fingers brush the rock
That's filled with the cold hardness
Of forever death

As icy winds blow
Unrestrained and powerful
He does not fight them

Tears begin to slip
Memories fall to the ground
The world crashes in

Knees collide with dirt
Collapsing onto the earth
A fallen soldier

For a brief moment
Life clings desperately to death
Commemorating



Guiding Light

Andron Massey-Walker

Reminders of the Past

Phillip Brown, Jr.

I bring the cup to my lips and sip the last bits of hot liquid. It's my second cup within the past thirty minutes and already it's gone. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee dances beneath my nose. Instantly I long for another cup. People talk while plastic bags crunch. A baby is crying and someone's cell phone is...no it's just the cash register.

"Excuse me, Mr. Brown?" Such a pleasant voice.

Snap out of it. You have priorities. "Oh, I'm sorry. Yes?"

"I'm such a huge fan of your work. You write so honestly and your characters are quite brilliant." Her voice is kind and yet overbearing all at once.

"Thank you. That means a lot." Does it really?

"Oh you're very welcome." She smiles graciously, lipstick-smeared teeth gleaming. "This one is for my brother Philip. That's with one 'l' and not two like yours." She giggles like a little girl. "This one is for me. That's Cathie, spelled i-e instead of y." She opens the cover of each book pointing to a clear spot for me to sign.

The woman leans in, both hands pressed against the table in front of me, a few strands of dark hair drop in front of green eyes. Her breasts look as if they're going to spill out onto me, but they don't. My attention drifts to a young man standing behind her impatiently. He looks to be eighteen, or maybe nineteen, in age. He's tall, much taller than six feet, with dirty blond hair sticking out from beneath a fitted baseball cap. He reminds me of someone but I don't know who. Cathie has dropped something in front of me.

"That's for you." With a smile she winks, kindly picks up the two books and steps aside. The tiny piece of paper is yellow with the woman's address and telephone number written in purple ink. I guess she hasn't

read my memoir just yet.

The young man steps forward opening his book to a preferred page. It's a copy of my memoir. I understand.

"Can you sign right here?" His voice is soft, almost afraid to be heard. He never looks me in the eye.

"Sure, no problem." I know that face, but I don't. That face isn't in my life anymore. After scribbling a short note in what can only be described as writer's script, I hand the book back to him. "If you like that one, you should definitely check out my next book."

"Cool." From under the security of the cap he smiles, we shake hands, and I feel eighteen again. I watch him walk away into a sea of bookcases and magazine racks, longing to follow. My cup is still empty. I need another coffee.



untitled

Kristin Strickland



abstract

Liza Locascio



Crossing Front Street

Christine Pfohl

Glass Ocean

Grey Padgett

Perhaps the artificial tear is a sin
perhaps it's a tool
to feel
what is real

and real is what I need—

a hand to heap
 to heal
 to stroke my velvet ribs towards
bliss.

I attempt to sail on my own
wetness, but the juice is frozen.
I fight to cry
 for biting lies
but the vessel is gripped by ice.

Thawing truth
is picking at the chill
 prizing heat

and not conditions—
the drop that rolls back home
along the oily wing of an uncooked hen

A year of sandy dreams
fit into tin
and roasted by friendly heat,
reduced to a fistful

these dreams grow hard with time

and molded, rise
as lava ghosting frost
from a black, forgotten mountain
home to a black, forgotten culture
and their iridescent spires.



untitled

Elizabeth Martin

To my Soft Sweet Friend

Nancy Gadzuk

Your soft ears lie quiet now,
your eyes closed.

I stretch across your still body and my
tears slide into your fur –
still warm, unmoving.

Oh sweet friend, I already miss you.

I miss your soft tongue licking my hand while we sit and
you listen.

I miss your ears flapping as you point your nose into
the ocean's wind.

I miss your big teeth grinning with the joy of lying in the
grass.

I miss your wet dog smell from walking in the rain.

I told you everything those years we roamed (you
swam) along the Ipswich:

you kept my secrets
you knew my fears
you loved me anyway.

Every other time I cried into your soft fur
You licked the tears off my face.

My sweet friend, I almighty miss you.



untitled

Alexandra Anderson

Silence's Fury

Emily Parry

She talks and talks and talks some more. Her mouth stays open like a door, propped open with a chair. As water flows from a faucet, filling up the sink, words fill the air and cloud my vision. I cannot see nor think. I want to scream. At her and at me. But I bite my tongue. Bite so hard it bleeds and I swallow the bitter words. My fists clench and dirty nails dig deep into my skin. It pains me. My silence. Anger reddens my face, blood boiling to the surface. I scream at her and cry. I let her know it's not right. Only in my head. My outside smiles instead, through gritted teeth. As Hell's fury spins and churns deep inside.



Market Street Dawn

Christine Pfohl



untitled

Kristin Strickland

I See Eyes to I

Adam Kaynan

I.

I've always been fond of myself.

I know who I am.

I see myself everyday and hear my voice when it speaks.

I sleep on a small bed, half in a closet, in a small room. Everything I need rests close at hand. The dresser is not four feet from my bed. My alarm clock rests even closer so that I may smack it. Above my head at night my dress shirts swing from their hangers; I watch them sway when the windows are open. Normally though, the windows are closed. My room is usually stuffy, and hot. My floors are cluttered. *I have so much garbage everywhere.* I see clothes all over the place, trinkets from my childhood, magazines and lamps. I can't reach one lamp; I don't even think it's plugged in. *How would I know, I just live here.* No space remains on my walls, only posters, and drawings, and articles; too many thumb-tacks. I had shelves installed to get the junk off my floor, now the same junk suffocates the shelves.

Oh and least importantly, I have an iguana. He doesn't know his own name; I don't know why I even use it. I hate him sometimes. He defecates under my bed, and it reeks.

I'm not angry though, I know when I'm angry.

I get up every morning and do what I must.

I live with my parents. I don't have a job.

I go to school. It's there I find pleasure. It's there I excel. I know most people now, recall their faces. I've attended this college for three years. Still, I find strangers. I find the urge to speak to them, but I can never find the right words.

Between classes I sit alone outside, in my own stoop. It's far from cluttered; it has clean benches, a

large umbrella, an expansive courtyard ahead, and a huge stone wall behind me. It's enough space for someone as large as I am. I'm seven feet tall, no more, no less. My hands have long thick fingers, not bony like malnourished children. I am a massive man; I have veins that pulse from my forearms and one on my brow. My dark eyes are shaded by my thick brown eyebrows. This world isn't big enough for me, so I sit alone.

People pass me, some give me a look, and others don't. I suppose you have to know me to understand why such a big man sits alone under a large low umbrella. I gaze back at people. I think what they're thinking, or at least I think I do.

A young woman employed in the college office will pass, cigarette in her hand, smoke in her lungs, and I know she's thinking, "What a beast. He'll have his way with me I bet."

"You know I will," I would blurt aloud, and she'd squint her eyes at me.

Do I look peculiar?

A college boy will strut by me and catch a glance with my eyes. I know he fears my strength. I holler, "Keep walking!" He ignores me.

No one dares test me, not on my watch. These are my grounds.

I see people I know and smile my enormous set of teeth; *I could crush a Campbell's soup can with them.*

Everyday I sit at my stoop. The clouds are rolling in today; rays of light pierce the ceiling. Shadows shade those who pass and I know they're thinking, "Thank the heavens I can hide my face from him today." They can't hide. I know what they're thinking. I've laughed all day. Too many times I have heard silent sighs of relief from their minds.

There's one fellow across the courtyard; he hasn't moved today. I've noticed him twice now. He sits so stiff facing me, staring, *how dare him.*

So at home I lay upon my bed, gazing up at the tails of the shirts above me and I inhale deep. When I inhale deep, I sleep better. If it wasn't for the stench of feces, I'd rest; *that god forsaken lizard!*

I can't sleep tonight.

Why am I here in this tiny place?

I can't stand it; I have to sleep on the other side of my bed. My head hangs off this way. I toss and turn, cocoon my body in sheets. Inhaling deep, I fade away.

II.

There is that fellow again, staring at me, across the courtyard. I clench my fists, pooling blood that bulges my veins, contracting my might. *He smiled. I swear he smirked. I'll read his mind. There's nothing. Try again. Is he empty? He smirked. This time I know, for he is fixed upon me, gazing confidently.*

Why must he look at me?

Am I peculiar?

Oh no.

"He's reading my thoughts; must I speak to divert his concentration." The man looks away, left then right and back again. Then for me, he smiles.

"He knows what I know and what I know not." I fix my eyes on him and probe but nothing. *He's laughing, all alone, staring at me, laughing.*

My chest is heaving, heart is racing, but I fret not. *I must focus.*

I don't blink, for nearly a minute, and in that minute I draw him closer, blocking out everything around him. The scenery blurs, his figure defines, and he enlarges. I can describe him now, middle age, pale skin, stubble, blue eyes and graying hair. I even notice a mole, hair within it, pointing at me. *Even his mole hair mocks me.* I blink.

Everything is back to normal. He is distant now. He stands up, tilts his head towards me, and then grins.

“You taunt me so!” I spit towards him furiously while curling my toes in my shoes.

I must focus. I stare intently at the blue-eyed man blurring everything around him. He seems to consume my sight; he expands so much I can see within his eyes. I see myself, my reflection, thirty yards or more away leaning forward. *I seem terrified.* I blink.

I stand up and shake my head viciously, huffing and puffing. *I will take this no longer.* The man is closer now, in the middle of the courtyard peering at me. *How rude.* I stamp my feet plotting my next move. I try once more to hear his intentions; I look upon him and listen... “You’re all alone now, Peter. Can you hear me?” He smiles upon me now, eyebrows turned down into his nose; a lunatic, fixed upon me.

You enjoy invading my privacy, come closer; I’ll share something more tangible with you! At that the man walks closer, unceasingly, twenty yards from me, fifteen, and ten. He stops. I hear him ask, “Closer?” My hair stands on end as I hesitate before responding. A lump in my throat loosens and I leak the word *no*. Bigger then before and drooling now is a pale faced smile, cracked lips and chipped teeth.

I rub my eyes.

Towards me he marches. I see his mouth gaping, the corners of his lips stretching, and then tension rips them apart. His cheeks are bisected and he grins literally ear to ear. But it doesn’t stop there. From this opening his head folds backwards and a black hole exists upon his neck. He looms upon me chuckling without a face. In fear I pull back and punch straight through his chest, obliterating him.

III.

It feels like my fist collided with a wall; I’m sweating profusely, sitting up at the edge of my bed. My knuckles are bleeding and my alarm clock says 4:32 in the morn-

ing. I can't escape the fumes of manure. I shake my head bewildered.

I know it was just a dream.

I know I'm sane.

I need help. My hand aches.

Beneath my bed comes a rustling. I look over the edge and see my iguana appear. He twitches, frightened by my awareness. He proceeds out from under the bed and heads towards his cage. I follow him. He rushes and perches inside upon a branch. With sleepy eyes I gaze upon him.

"You better cut the crap," I command him. He ignores me, as usual. Then catches glance with eyes.

He smiles and whispers... "You're alone now, Peter. Can you hear me?"



untitled

Kristin Strickland

A Collision to Speed Up For

Tyler Rivenbark

I want to gather your words for winter
and hibernate inside you.

I want to hum along to songs
that you know the words to.

I speak awkward silence.
We have great conversations.

”What the world doesn’t understand
the world has to learn.”

You stay in perfect time
with the beat my heart skips.

I wince when I look in the mirror,
but I never take my eyes off of you.

I want to die right now
unaware of anything, but right now.

The Blue Shirt

Will Ransom

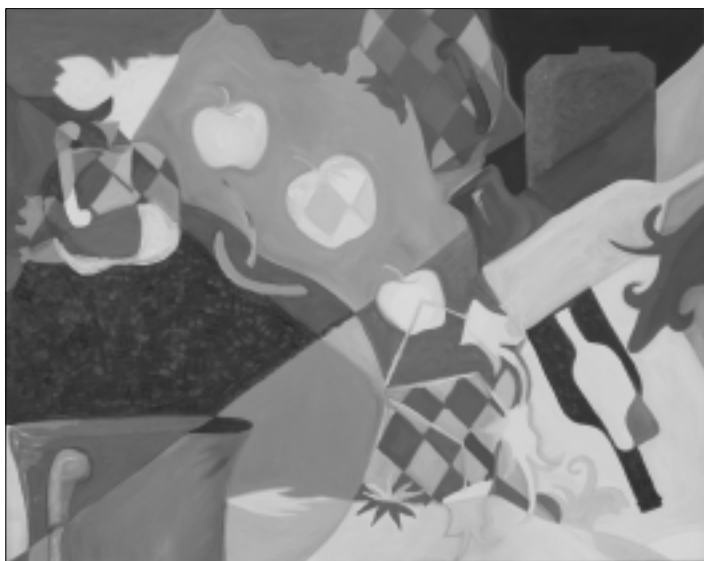
My wife bought me this shirt
The blue one that is the color of baby boys
She says it matches my own baby blues
The ones that I know are actually hazel green

She says this shirt brings out the color in my eyes
And makes them sparkle with life and joy
A life and joy that she seemingly sees
In shades of sky blue spritzed with sapphire
Hues that I have always held and beheld
To be a horribly humdrum half-green, half-grey hazel

At least that's how I have always seen them.

She likes this soft blue shirt on me
And I wrap it round me and rejoice
Safely stowing away the secret
That I like that she likes it on me

She thinks it matches my eyes
And I begin to think that maybe she is right
Or maybe it's just that I am able to see myself
The way she sees me and
I finally like the color of my eyes



abstract

Caroline Rogers

Aubade to Monogamy

Carol Bowen-Davis

Slipping from the sheets,
her feet touch the carpet with regret.
She tips to the shower.
In, then out. Leaving last night's sins
spiraling down the drain.

Dressing quietly and quickly,
she applies her red lipstick.
First, heavy.
Then tissueing off some so
it doesn't look too fresh.

Her keys are where she left them.
She sweeps them up as she throws
her purse across her shoulder.
Without looking back
she leaves.

Checking herself in the rear-view mirror
she touches up her hair.
As she pulls away, she catches a glance of
the hotel room door.

410.

And she knows that every number before that
no longer matters.



abstract

September Krueger

Picture from Paradise

Elena Watson

The palm trees are swaying in the breeze, dancing lightly to the rhythm of the ocean. The present hum of people at the market echo this rhythm as if, in this place, and at this moment, man and earth dance together, celebrating all that is life.

This place is paradise, a hidden heaven slightly tucked off the beaten path of tourist hot spots and honeymoon destinations, and maybe that is why I find myself dreaming of it so. Maybe it is this seclusion that makes my head swim with the local rhythm. This place is for me, home, for others, a getaway, but to all this place is Panama.

There is something in this atmosphere, this Panama air that reminds me of how much I take for granted when I am not here. The delirium of nature and culture capture me as soon as I arrive, and with it I willingly succumb to its rhythmic spell. I remember little of what I left behind, and for a time I choose to bask in the natural beauty of this country.

The land that Panama possesses is abundant, fertile land seemingly graced by an angel's fingertips. The reason for such fertile land is Panama's warm climate. In Panama, there are only two seasons: the warm, summer season, and the rainy season, which would be equivalent to our winter.

This warm climate allows for many plants and flowers to bloom year round. The abundance of beautiful, bulbous flowers growing in the wild fill my senses with their sweet fragrances as they float in the breeze.

The tropical flowers call out to me in red, yellow, and lavender. They whisper soft words as I pass by. Delicate and intricate, these flowers seem as if they were hand painted and designed for someone special. Small raindrops paint their petals like tiny tears from a little child

and shine like diamonds in the majestic sun.

The Panama beaches, like the Morro Negro, the beach near my home, become my personal escape when I come to Panama. The blue-green ocean sings a song to me as the waves gently rock me to sleep.

The sand, that at this moment I can almost feel in between my fingers, is of pure white, almost as pure sugar, but instead the color is a delight to the eyes. Sometimes the sand reminds me of an hourglass's sand slowly falling and passing time. Except in my mind, when I am here time stands still. Everything is exactly how it has always been, untouched and breathtaking, undoubtedly since the beginning of time.

One of the most characteristic parts of Panamanian life is the market. Rows and rows of makeshift straw huts line the dirt streets in the downtown section of Panama City with the daily variety of fruits, vegetables, clothing, and livestock.

Ripe, green avocados can be found nestled inside handmade, straw baskets, distinctly placed to catch the eye of passersby. Long, neat rows of each fruit are stacked in old, wooden soda crates of years past, from the smallest on top to the largest on bottom.

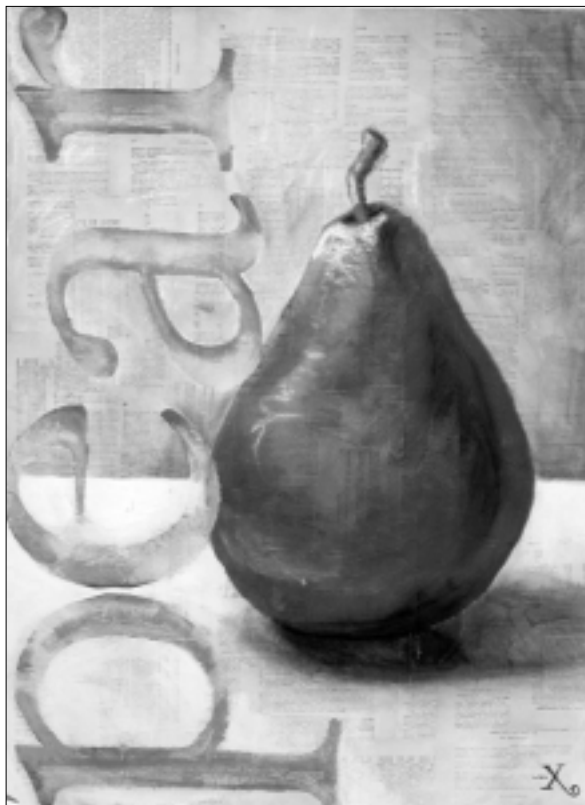
Bananas, papayas, coconuts, and pineapples are found nearby in another makeshift hut being sold for mere pennies by a toothless elder who complains to the policia that the butcher's singing is scaring away all the customers.

Further down the road, shoppers are met by street bands on either side, playing their music as loud as the other, creating a potpourri of sounds. Fortunetellers and petty magicians perform for left over coins and bills dropped in their scarves or hats by the occasional passerby. The steady chatter of buyers and sellers bartering for prices on merchandise can be faintly heard over the tired grunts and groans of cows, horses and even goats, and the honks and rumbles from the speeding, yellow taxicabs in the daily five o'clock traffic jam.

The market goes on for several blocks, taking up most of downtown Panama City and is the Panamanians' means

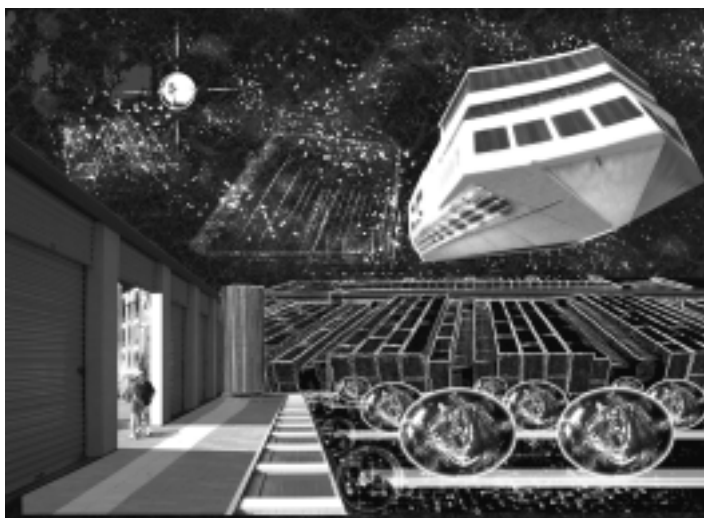
for buying food, clothing, and many of their everyday needs. The market is not just a place to buy and sell, but it is a Panamanian way of life, full of laughter, kinsman ship, and culture. The market defines who Panamanians are and ultimately gives us a front row view into their lives.

Panama is a harbor for all things beautiful, and the amazing qualities Panama possesses far exceed the average expectations. All that is Panama, the gentle rhythm of the rolling waves, the exquisite plant life that paints the countryside with a rainbow of color, and the openness of an amazing people is what keeps me coming back to Panama year after year.



untitled

Alexandra Anderson



Space Port

James Tanner

Fort Fisher Beach

Nancy Gadzuk

Pelicans dive into the undulating water;
The sea explodes from the crash of impact.

Silver fish leap in the air toward the mayfly.
The gleam a moving target for their feathered foe.

Terns chase the line of foam snaking along the shore,
digging their bills into the wet sand for sustenance.

The pull of the waves, the shriek of the seagull
sound a rhythm to the cycle that unfolds.

Two players come together for the ocean endgame.
I watch, sifting sand between my fingers, deciding
which shells to take home.

Don't Ask Don't Tell

Phillip Brown, Jr.

Sunlight reflects off the silver surface of the coffee mug. Its plastic black handle looks awkwardly out of place. Steam rises from the brim, and I can't remember when I put it on the dresser. An anchor, an eagle carrying a banner, and a globe all come together neatly to form the insignia. Beneath it, spelled in bold black letters is the word Marines. I look at it, then at you, and smile. That's the most I can do while you're still sleeping.

It's art, at least to me it is, the way your chest rises and falls in perfect continuous motions. I run a finger along seven tiny spiked strands of hair, pressed against your forehead with even tinier beads of sweat. I've interrupted your calm, but you only turn on your side, face grazing the pillow. I can see the flag of Puerto Rico now. It's just a small tattoo on your shoulder, but a reminder of where you come from. Your eyes are beautiful, yes even when they're closed. I look to your ear, at least the visible lobe. In the past you called them car doors. I laugh inside not wanting to wake you.

Dog tags lay next to your chest. I want to touch them but I don't, and I can't explain why. It was just last night that you began to remove them when I stopped you. You didn't understand. "—because I like the way they look on you" was what I said. It was what I wanted, so you let them hang from your neck all night. Just for me.

The alarm clock tells me that it's seven in the morning. I desperately want to wake you now. I want to touch you, be held by you. I want to see your eyes, their perfect auburn hue. I want to see you smile. You have James Dean's smile. I reach for your face, but I stop.

I could wake you and be with you. I could see your smile and your eyes and hear you tell me that you love me...but I hold back. You're probably dreaming. Dreaming of a wife and the son that I know you want to have.

They're your world. It's a world where I, and the complications of us, don't exist. It's a world where Jonathan, United States Marine, doesn't have to hide the fact that he's in love. It's a perfect world, and I don't intend to steal you away from it. So I lay my head against the pillow, silent, confused and sad.

You deploy in a few days time. I may never see you again, so for now, I let you sleep. This time I will wait for you to come back to me.



untitled

September Krueger



Phone Booth

Tracy Parrish

Grayson Highlands

Mornin Townsend

Watching the sun set
over the Cape Fear River
My thoughts lead to
two days ago
watching that same sun set
from four thousand feet
atop a boulder looking over
Grayson Highlands
I close my eyes
and go back there
where all was at peace
and my soul touched nature.



Zoe Nathan

Lane Patterson

Portals Contributors

John K. Boehmer considers himself a part of the “Great Southern Migration” of the new millennium. He spent his adult life living in Ohio, and now plans to spend the near future in Wilmington, NC, living a healthy lifestyle with regular exercise, no smoking, and no drugs. He plans to pursue his interests in dancing, physical fitness, singing, writing, reading, music, and enjoying his pet cats.

Carol Bowen-Davis is currently a student at CFCC. Carol will be graduating in the spring of 2006 with an AA in English. She will transfer to UNCW in the summer to pursue a BA (major undecided). However, she is confident that it will have something to do with writing. Carol has been married for twenty years and has three children (two of which attend CFCC). She also has a grandchild.

Heather Coulter has been writing her whole life, and it’s really the only thing she’s ever been able to envision herself doing. After having taken creative writing at CFCC, she feels as if she is actually getting more in tune with her own voice and the craft of writing.

Lee Christmas is a nineteen-year-old sophomore student at CFCC. He currently has a job at a local car wash for low hourly pay (but great tips). He really enjoys music in all aspects--listening to music, seeing live bands, and playing music. He has been writing poetry for a little over three years.

Laura Fussell is currently a full-time student, as well as a full-time wife. She is a pre-English major, and plans on transferring to UNCW in the fall. She is 22 years old, and eventually plans on going on to get her Masters in English. Laura hopes to teach English at the community college level, and she also enjoys reading and writing in her spare time.

Nancy Gadzuk moved two years ago from New England to warm and wonderful Wilmington. She is a part-time student at CFCC and discovered she enjoyed writing poetry in Gary Gulliksen’s creative writing class this fall.

Elizabeth Martin is a student studying arts at CFCC. She has lived in NC for four years, and absolutely loves it at the time. Elizabeth has always loved to write. It has been one of her favorite pastimes ever since she saw a poem published by her father. It's a way for her to express who she is in many different ways. She is trying to get some poems published so that others will be able to read her work, and maybe one day Elizabeth will make something of her poetry pastime.

Grey Padgett is a P.K. (preacher's kid) and has lived in parts of North Carolina and Florida most of his life. He is used to moving about every two years. He lived in Greensboro, NC, for nearly six years; in New York City for about six months; and then in February he moved to Wilmington. Grey writes poetry, essays, short stories, mythology, children's literature, and is working on a novel. He is currently working toward both his AA and AS at CFCC for college transfer.

Will Ransom served as President of the Cape Fear Writer's Club in the fall of 2004, and his short story "Love In An Elevator" appeared in last year's *Portals*. He has been writing for as long as he can remember and is set to graduate from CFCC. Despite kidney failure from diabetes, he has managed to keep a high B average and is a member of Phi Theta Kappa. He plans to go on to UNCW where he hopes to major in English and Sociology. He commonly cites his three teenaged children and his wife as his muses.

Tyler Rivenbark is twenty years old and has been writing for eight years. He started writing songs and playing music, which led into poetry, short stories, and screenplays. He is influenced greatly by music, film, and everything that surrounds him.

Courtney Webb majored in psychology at UNCW where she recently graduated in May. She took the creative writing class at CFCC to fulfill a requirement to apply to graduate school in Occupation Therapy next fall. She is twenty-two years old and has had no previous writing experience before this recent creative writing class (which she turned out to love!).

All art selections submitted by CFCC students.

Guidelines for Submissions

Writer's Guidelines

1. All submissions must be typed, double-spaced, with name, address, and telephone or e-mail address on the first page (or each poem for poetry submissions). Please include sufficient biographical information in your cover letter for a biographical note should your piece be selected for inclusion.
2. Also include the submission on a 3.5" disk in *Microsoft Word*. Manuscripts will not be returned.
3. Fiction should not exceed 4000 words. Poetry should not exceed 50 lines. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable if noted in a cover letter. Personal essays should also fall within the 4000-word limit.
4. *Portals* acquires First North American Serial Rights. All other rights revert to the author upon publication. Previously unpublished submissions only.

Artist's and Photographer's Guidelines

1. All camera-ready slides and prints must be digitally prepared and submitted.
2. Vertical or horizontal art will be considered.
3. All digital art should include the artist's name, address, telephone or e-mail address. A brief biographical sketch, an appropriate title, and the medium used in preparation should also be included.

Send all submissions to:

Portals
Cape Fear Community College
English Department
411 North Front Street
Wilmington, NC 28401-3993