Agate (ág-it): a fine-grained crystalline mineral that forms in cavities in volcanic rock. Agate is prized for its beautiful patterned colors, and its hardness makes it ideal for delicate carving.
2009 SUNY DELHI
STUDENT WRITING CONTEST WINNERS

1st Place
Ana Cristina Ramos, “The Inner Workings of My Room”

2nd Place
Stephanie Davis, “Can Cough Drops Go Bad?”

3rd Place
Leah Paskalides, “Fenwick Island”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Heather Hilson for laying out this year’s Agate; to Patrick Flynn and the SUNY Delhi print shop; and to the Liberal Arts & Sciences Division—particularly Dean John Nader—for financial assistance.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Long Talk to Forever</td>
<td>Randi Fox</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untitled <em>Watercolor</em></td>
<td>Rhonda Harrow-Engel</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un-Luxury</td>
<td>Holly Beidler</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Maid's Party</td>
<td>Susan Rochmis</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Old Man in the Mountain</td>
<td>Marty Greenfield</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar Harbor Buoys <em>Photograph</em></td>
<td>Michael McKenna</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Cough Drops Go Bad?</td>
<td>Stephanie Davis</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Stone Creek <em>Photograph</em></td>
<td>John MR Keegan</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Gauge</td>
<td>Kirby Olson</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untitled <em>Drawing</em></td>
<td>John MR Keegan</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of the Mind</td>
<td>John MR Keegan</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing But a Dream</td>
<td>Arelis Rodriguez</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messy Corner <em>Drawing</em></td>
<td>Grady Miller</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Way Up High
Aaron Brown

Fenwick Island
Leah Paskalides

A Single Leaf
Christy Hubbard

A Phillies Fan
Justin Curry

Sunshine
Alan Kaplan

Untitled Drawing
Kevin Brodie

My Bad Year
Madeleine Uwase

Happiness
Arkil Straker

Untitled Drawing
Krittaya Sapkamnerd

The Inner Workings of My Room
Ana Cristina Ramos

Cold Soup
Amanda Olsen

Dionysian Summer Drawing
Ana Cristina Ramos

Fragments from the Edge of Night
Michael McKenna

Notes on Contributors
A Long Talk to Forever
Randi Fox

He stood on her front steps.

“I am fresh home from the war, I have killed many men, and I am stronger than any man in my platoon. My lieutenant made me captain, my captain made me major, and my major made me general. I am the toughest, strongest, and most respected man you will ever meet. Marry me, Lily.”

She looked at him with sad eyes.

“No, James, I will not marry you. I do not care how many men you have killed, I do not care if you are a general, I do not care if you are tough and strong and respected. I want to marry someone who is educated. I’m sorry.”

And she closed the door.

The next day, he stood on her front steps again.

“I am fresh home from the library, I have read many books, and I have written for you more intelligent words than any man has ever written. I’ve learned English to Math, Math to Science, and Science to History. I am the smartest, sharpest, and most educated man you will ever meet. Marry me, Lily.”

Again, she looked at him with sad eyes.

“No, James, I will not marry you. I do not care how many books you have read, I do not care if you’ve learned History, I do not care if you are smart and sharp and educated. I want to marry someone who is adoring. I’m sorry.”

And, again, she closed the door.

The next day, he stood on her front steps once more.

“I am fresh home from the town, I have bought for you many things, and I am willing to shower you with more gifts than any man on this planet. I have roses and chocolates, chocolates and teddy bears, and teddy bears and dresses. I am the richest, wealthiest, and most adoring man you will ever
meet. Marry me, Lily.”

Once more, she looked at him with sad eyes.

“No, James, I will not marry you. I do not care how many things you have bought for me, I do not care if you give me dresses, I do not care if you are rich and wealthy and adoring. I want to marry someone who is . . . someone who is. . . . Oh, James, I don’t know who I want right now. I’m sorry.” Once more, she closed the door.

He held it open.

“Lily, I don’t care if you don’t know what you want just yet—I don’t care if you don’t know what you want for a million years! But if you don’t know that then at least know that I love you. I am fresh home from being lonely, I have seen many women, and I have waited for you longer than any man ever has before me. From my eyes to my heart, my heart to my words, my words to you. I am the toughest because I have held out this long, I am the smartest because I realized that you were the only girl for me, and I am the richest because, even if you won’t marry me right now, at least I have been able to enjoy having you in my life this far.”

She looked at him.
He looked at her.

“There. Goodbye then, Lily.”
He turned to go down her steps one last time.
She ran to him.
She kissed him.
He kissed her.
She cried.
He smiled.
They were married.
Untitled *Watercolor*
Rhonda Harrow-Engel
Should I get up? I'm just going to be colder once I get outside. I'll stay in the tent. These clothes will dry eventually, right? It's just two nights. Two single nights of my entire life. I'm so cold. Maybe if my feet were warmer. I shove an article of clothing, who knows which one, to the bottom of my slippery, soft cocoon. My feet are already snug against a Nalgene bottle of hot water which I got from the campfire. At some point during this unrestful darkness, my mind conks out for a short time and I wake up to light and noise. Morning. I made it. Only I am cold, and I have a complete day, another night, and a morning in front of me in which I will inevitably be cold, and most probably miserable.

As I packed my belongings and readied myself for my first winter campout, I thought about what food to take, what clothes, what socks, but I hardly considered this trip to be different than our campout in the fall, peacefully cast against Alder Lake. Anyone can survive two nights of anything, I thought. Just do this, and get it over with. Before the campout began, I thought of how it would feel to be at the end of it. How much softer my pillows would feel, and how delicious the taste of food prepared by another's hands without ado. Trash would once again be of no consequence, and water found in every building and store. Whether in a backyard or a forest, camping tends to open your eyes to the mindlessness of everyday life. I pick up my toothbrush and turn on the sink every morning, but I am hardly even there. My mind is already in my next class, or on my next conversation. I don't give a thought to the water coming out of the sink and where it comes from. Turning on a light is hardly any different than turning on the sink. I do it hundreds of times a week, yet it's hardly worth talking about until the light breaks and I can't do my homework anymore. With the kind of easy life most of us Americans have, camping is quite a dip in the frigid waters of reality. Not only are many of us inadequate to survive out there in the forest, but we have to research how to properly take a dump. Unfortunately for my poor cold feet, I thought I could skate by on this one. Maybe I'd be cold for a short
while, but deliverance comes in the end. I threw that backpack together with things I needed in random order: gloves, hat, scarves, trail bars, map.

The howls of “wolves” rang across the empty winter sky. One, two, three, seven. I stopped, opened my mouth and howled, then ran in the direction of the howl I thought was Micah. He was the “alpha wolf,” and to win this game he had to accept us into his pack by allowing us to find him. I thought my howl was lame and human, and I doubted I would make it in with the wolf pack, but I tried anyway, scampering through the woods with my ears open, feet ready to chase. We played this game, then sat together in the dark woods and talked. I snuck down to the campfire where Dave and Chris were talking. “Sofi thinks there’s a spirit up there. She’s freaking everyone out.” By everyone I really meant me. Sofi believed in channeling and auras and her new-age ideas often took me aback. “I chalk it up to her overactive imagination,” said Chris, whose stunning good looks and presence of mind never ceased to amaze me. If Chris said it, I thought it must be true. Of course, no one can always be right, but in my mind Chris was right at least ninety percent of the time. Dave didn’t have much to say, as usual, but he listened. Sofi was born in Russia, grew up in New Jersey and had just graduated from college when she joined our AmeriCorps team in Delhi. She was always taking pictures, discussing her favorite books, and sharing her organic delicacies from the city. Chris, on the other hand, read far more than any of us and I could usually find him doing just that in his dorm room when we had free time. I became bored with the conversation and walked back up the hill behind our tents where we had been howling and running around for the past hour. I found the rest of the crew and we continued to talk, look up at the sky, and sit quietly, listening. The forest felt enchanted. The wind gently swept through the trees and shrubs, the snow glistened in the moonlight, and strangest of all, the trees talked. A time of silence would reign, and then a tree would squeak. Quiet, and then groan. They talked in a way I had never heard a tree talk. We decided it was the wind, but when you hear an unusual language in the forest the most important conclusion is not always scientific. The trees simply talked, lending an eerie dimension to our night game.

It was this night that I stumbled into my two-person tent in wet
clothes. We had been running in the snow, sitting in the precipitate, and I was undeniably damp. I knew that going to bed in wet clothes was a sure recipe for the shivers. Whether I forgot the rules I had learned weeks before or I decided they were not important to my own well-being is a worthy debate. Either way, I jumped into that sleeping bag so fast, believing if I could just be inside the tent, inside a sleeping bag inside of a tent, I would somehow magically be warm, or at least not be as cold. I suppose the real truth is that I didn’t want to take the time to change my clothes before zipping myself in for the night because that would require a short period of extreme chills. Sofi, from Russia, slept like a rock. I, on the other hand, felt like an American soldier in the Revolutionary War: underdressed, underprepared, and ready to desert my fellow soldiers for the home country. What was I doing out here anyway? I grew up in Florida, and this was my first winter in New York, much less the Catskill Mountains. Sensible thoughts often arrive at a time when they are no longer useful. It was too late to plead my case.

I made it through the night, only to awake to a misery that was possibly worse than the night before.

We were about to embark on a nine-mile snowshoe hike to the peak of Hunter Mountain. Not only was this mountain the second highest Catskill peak, but I was to do it in deep snow? After having no sleep? And my feet were already numb? I wanted to cry I was so frustrated. My mind finding blame, I expressed my disdain for the men who planned this snowshoe hike. “You didn’t say it was nine miles! You just said we were going on a hike. Why didn’t you tell me? I would have prepared better!” Incredulous that this hike could have missed my radar, I had no choice but to accept the fact and prepare. I somehow managed to eat some breakfast, although the pain incurred each time I took my glove off was hardly worth the caloric load. The wind painfully whipped the heat and moisture away from my thin skin as I took off my mittens to rip the granola wrapper, and I quickly put them back on. What misery I felt as I trudged down the wooded hill toward the trail head. I had this problem of keeping my feet warm, and despite my snow boots my toes were numb. Once we all arrived at the trail’s beginning, we stood in a circle as Micah instructed us to do a morning happy dance. Those
three words together are blatantly misfits, but somehow this activity cheered me up. For the first time on this day, my misery lessened.

Strapped into our snowshoes, we walked in a line, taking turns leading. The person in the front tamped the snow down, making it easier for those in tow to walk. We were like toy soldiers, lifting our knees out of the thick wet mass of precipitate and stamping them back down with each step. The going was difficult, yet we kept up a quick pace as an athletic crew of six. I was glad to allow the stronger hikers to take the lead in greater proportion than the weaker, and thankfully the others were rested and even adventurous. This trip up to the top of Hunter Mountain and back took nine hours altogether, and the freezing winds almost pushed me over the brink of sanity. But then, when you push yourself to a new limit, often you find that the edge of reason is just a couple feet farther than your first suspicion. Once at the bottom, I felt victorious but also numb to the accomplishment. I was in partial disbelief at the last 12 hours, awake and knowing that two days are equivalent to 48 hours, 2880 hours, and 172,800 seconds. When you are cold, each tick of a clock is more like the chime of an hour gone by. You are present, conscious, and wondering whether the next second’s consciousness will prove less painful. My mind could only demand positivity, and repeat over and over again that I can do this thing I have begun.

Back at camp, the two who stayed behind had started a fire and we sat by it, but with little enjoyment. A fire didn’t mean anything to me anymore; it was just just an illusion of warmth against a dark and lonely night. Wood, heat, and oxygen combusting into charred black remains to litter an open space between trees. My body was drawn to that one place of energy in an otherwise lifeless backdrop—the woods. I took trip and after trip out away from the fire to scout out more wood. There was one giant felled tree which I ripped branches off and carried back, making a pile. The forages away from the fire gave me time to think, and took my mind off of the idea of another night outside. This evening, already dark, we ate a soup dinner, and I made plans to sleep. I filled my Nalgene bottle with boiling water and went into the tent. I don’t remember much about this night except that it was a little better than my first attempt at sleep. All that was left of my winter camping
experience was packing up my belongings and taking down our makeshift home to leave. The next morning we did this, and as leader for the day I was expected to make sure everything went smoothly. We took down our tripod which held the pan of water (melted snow), our three burner trays which connected to a large propane tank, the tents, tarps, bin of food, leftover kindling, backpacks, rope, and knives. With our backpacks and camping materials we went down the hill in the sunlight, then loaded the van and drove home.

One moment from this trip I remember better than the rest, and it was on the last day. When I woke up in the morning, I was alert and chipper, unlike the day before. I felt like I could move again, and think straight, and with high spirits I walked away from our grouping of tents to our designated pee spot. I pulled my long johns down, and out of the freezing air around me a single snowflake landed on my leg. Due to the frigid temperature, I was able to really see a snowflake in all of its intricacy for the first time in my life. Here I was, the first awake, alone, white all around me, with one perfect snowflake unlike any other before or after present on my leg for me to truly see. Just one. Just me. Moments like these, the vast ingenuity and complexity of the universe seems to crash around you and your soul connects with a greater purpose. Despite all of the madness and the sorrow, I cease to be amazed at the beauty of life, and in the beauty of nature we can have that moment of eternity. And sometimes we treat life like an unimportant venture out. But I learned that no matter how short life is, it shouldn’t be a quick trip to the other side. After this weekend away, I was motivated to enjoy the luxuries I have while they exist. If that means taking a cold shower now and again to value a hot one, it’s worth it, and I’d even call it a responsibility. Let’s remember to appreciate our sweaters and stoves, our vacuum cleaners and dishwashers. Even on a camping trip, often we pamper ourselves with a cooler full of food, down sleeping bags, and the latest, greatest outdoor wear. Try fitting everything you own into a backpack and sleeping outside without this fancy equipment and you will be more like most of the world’s people than you currently are. Next, try it hungry. As we fill ourselves to excess, and suffer from obesity as a nation, others are starving. Next time
you need an epiphany in life, skip the camping trip and research one of the many preventable diseases in Africa, or the effects of hunger on infants and toddlers. Then, thank God for what you have, and start taking action to give something to those who have less.
At age seven, she was the perfect height to spy. Marion was uncomfortably “dressed up” for her Grandma’s party in a newly pressed red jumper and white blouse with a large sailor collar. Upon seeing her, Grandma Celeste still complained that fashions these days were hardly ladylike. The skeleton key had been removed so that the door was closed but not locked. Marion peeked through the keyhole at a view of the large buffet table and the adults who mingled behind the closed door. Marion and her two younger cousins had been paraded around the same table at 3 p.m. According to Grandma’s rules of behavior, children were to be dressed appropriately, fed separately, and then removed from sight.

Grandma had been a Southern belle. One of the last vestiges of her former status was to hire the maid, a young mulatto woman, for special occasions. Marion had grown up with the maid, a co-conspirator, who always worked hard but managed to give Marion sneak tastes of all the delicacies. The maid balanced endless stacks of trays while the other adults grew more and more unbalanced from trips to the bar. Marion hoped for an illicit sample of Grandma’s homemade ice cream. It was a delectable cross between ice cream and sherbet with large chunks of fresh fruit throughout.

In the foyer, Marion crouched between two large bronze statues. One statue was an old Negro man wiping his forehead with a large cloth. The other was a reproduction of Michelangelo’s David. Marion recognized the famous figure from the art books her father had shown her. The huge naked man and the jokes the adults made about him embarrassed her.

The door opened suddenly and Marion jumped aside as the maid exited, clearing the main-course dishes. She winked at Marion, who would soon follow her.

Too soon afterwards Uncle Stanley appeared and cornered Marion. “How’s my princess?” he slurred. He stroked her skinny arm up to the top of her white starched sleeve. Marion faked a smile and jerked her arm away. Next she was accosted by Aunt Ida, huffing and puffing, her weight getting
the best of her. “Darling, look at you all dressed up for the party! Marion darling, Uncle Stanley was just telling me the most fascinating stories of our childhood in Charleston. Perhaps when you grow up he’ll tell you too.”

Marion waited as Aunt Ida wobbled away and Uncle Stanley disappeared toward the bar. She ran off to find the maid. The kitchen was empty and Marion pushed open the heavy door to the servants’ entrance. She quickly closed it. It was the smell of garbage and cigarette smoke. It was seeing Uncle Stanley pressing the maid against the row of garbage cans.

After dessert, Marion found the maid alone in the kitchen, washing dishes. Marion handed the maid her untouched bowl of ice cream.
The Old Man in the Mountain
Marty Greenfield

Sometime shortly after midnight on May 3, 2003 in the town of Plymouth, New Hampshire, the natural rock formation and famous tourist attraction known as “The Old Man in the Mountain” crumbled under its own weight and collapsed to earth. While many people expressed their sadness at the loss of this great natural wonder, there was a 51-year-old man in upstate New York who gleefully snickered as a grudge that had simmered for the past 40 years had finally been settled.

Disappointments and rip-offs were nothing new to this baby boomer. Despite his tender age of only 11, already he had learned the hard way that things were not always the way they appeared.

The 500 army men complete with tanks, jeeps, and machine guns did not arrive in a giant foot locker that took two mailmen to carry it up to the door as he had imagined. Instead, all of the soldiers and accessories fit into a little box because they were actually only tiny pieces of plastic manufactured without any concern for true scale. The thousands of live, fun, and frolicking sea monkey eggs advertised in every comic book he owned rarely ever hatched, and when they did only produced tiny swimming insects, nothing akin to a monkey, or anywhere even near close to a fish. And perhaps the worst of all, despite threatening to kill each other for weeks on the television, somehow 500-pound wrestler Haystacks Calhoun and the German arch-villain Waldo Von Erich were seen driving away from the Island Gardens Arena in West Hempstead, New York in the same car after their absolutely final Texas Death Match.

Maybe it was a combination of all of these disappointments that made the idea of a family vacation seem so exciting when it was mentioned. Most intriguing of all was that my parents, who by now I had figured out were truly the anti-Christ of anything cool and fun, were actually talking about doing something unique and different. We were going to New Hampshire. We could see Plymouth Rock and the other historic sites I had learned about in school, plus visit the old man in the mountain.
The old man in the mountain—how cool was that? I imagined he would be kind of like the hermits that were occasionally featured in Roy Rogers or Gene Autry movies. Or maybe he might be somebody like Betty Boop’s grandpa with a whiney, high-pitched voice who always spoke in rhymes and walked around in a patched, baggy union suit. No matter what form he actually took, in my mind he was quirky, unconventional, and far outside of the realm of normality and orderliness that my parents tried so hard to project and maintain. That fact alone made him very exciting to me.

What would I ask him when I met him? I wondered more and more about the trip every day it grew closer. Would he be sitting on his porch and drinking moonshine from an old jug? Would he tell my parents cool stuff like, “Kids should eat ice cream and candy whenever they want, stay up as late as they want even on school nights, go to all of the monster and flying saucer movies that they want to, and drink Coca-Cola with every meal, especially breakfast”?

Day number one of the vacation was spent visiting Plymouth Rock, seeing where the Pilgrims landed, and walking around in an old cemetery. Day two was to be the day. We were going to see the old man in the mountain. I could not wait. After breakfast we piled into the Chevrolet Bel-Air and headed to see him.

I imagined driving up a very steep hill for a long time until we got there. Instead we pulled into a parking lot and began to walk towards a group of people standing around. It was different than I thought it would be, but I rationalized that maybe you had to wait your turn before you got to go up and see the old man. I did notice that everybody in the group was staring up at the side of the mountain. I assumed that they were all just trying to catch a glimpse of the old guy before it was their turn to go up and see him.

“Can you see him up there?” my mother asked, and I immediately replied, “No, not yet.” The strange look I received back kind of let me know that something was up. “Just look straight up,” she said. “There’s his nose, and his mouth, can’t you see them?” It was then that it hit me: there was no wise old man, no counterculture creature who would set my parents straight about the right way to raise kids, no person who set his own rules and ate whatever
he wanted to and did whatever he chose to do, whenever he wanted to do it. I had driven for six hours, put up with my brother’s mental and physical torture, my mother’s mood swings, and my father’s poor travel sense (which was tremendously compounded by his refusal to ever stop and ask directions) to see a pile of stupid rocks. To make matters even worse, I had to totally hide my outrage, lest I be accused of being a stupid little kid. I was also pretty disappointed in myself for even thinking that my parents would ever drive for six hours to see or do anything that was really cool or fun. Even at the tender age of eleven, I knew that piles of rocks were a lot more their speed than some crusty old mountain man.

I stood around and looked at the dumb rocks, pretending to seem interested and even snapping a few pictures with my Kodak Brownie Instamatic camera. I tried very hard to hide my anger, frustration, humiliation, and resentment, but I did make a vow to myself to get even with that old rock man in the mountain for making such a fool of me.

On that fateful day in May, 2003, many residents of Plymouth, New Hampshire, and tourists alike mourned the erosion and disappearance of this national treasure and source of tourist income. However, in upstate New York, one middle-aged man smirked with great satisfaction because a long-standing and humiliating debt had finally been settled in full.
Bar Harbor Buoys Photograph
Michael McKenna
Can Cough Drops Go Bad?
Stephanie Davis

We had a green bathtub, sea foam green to be exact. I was three years old and in love with Teddy Ruxpin, my extremely unsafe bouncy horse with the exposed springs, and my mother’s makeup. Once in a while I would combine my favorite things and put makeup on the bouncy horse while mom was sleeping. She worked nights at Bassett Hospital. My parents were legally separated, but undergoing counseling to try and work things out. I think it was the working things out that caused my brother to be conceived.

It was a Saturday or Sunday (I don’t really remember) and we were on our way to Dad’s apartment for my weekend visit. Mom had been coughing the whole car ride and I think she must have been coming down with a cold. Once we arrived at Dad’s, Mom immediately asked him for a cough drop. Everything was going as planned until I heard mom yell from the bathroom.

“Vern, are these cough drops bad? Do cough drops go bad?”

“No, I don’t think so. Why? What’s wrong?” Dad yelled down the hallway.

“I must be coming down with the stomach flu.”

We left shortly after that, and Mom puked three more times on the way home. She also puked before work, after work, and for about two more weeks, insisting that it was the stomach flu or a foul side effect of the cough drops.

Shortly after Mom’s stomach flu went away, she notified me that I might be getting a new brother or sister. I knew that when you “got” something, it was usually a present. I thought, Maybe a brother or sister is what I’m getting for Christmas. I wonder if it will pee water when I squeeze its belly like my Betsy Wetsy doll. At three years old I was too young to understand that it would be another human being and that it would change everything for the rest of my life.

Mom was thin and then all of a sudden she looked like my punching balloon, her belly button resembling the knot that held the air in. Her face, legs, and arms were fatter. She started to get this pale, clammy look to her
skin. I spent more time at my grandmother’s while Mom went to doctors’ appointments and struggled through work.

One morning mom didn’t come to pick me up. Just as Grandma started making phone calls and pacing back and forth in the living room, the phone rang. Mom was sick. Her increase in size wasn’t due to her gaining weight or the baby growing. She was suffering from toxemia.

Toxemia is a disease that can sometimes affect pregnant women. It can cause high blood pressure, fluid retention, kidney failure, liver failure, and even death. No one knows what causes it or how to prevent it. Mom was put on bed rest and ordered to stay in the hospital for the next three months.

I lived the good life at Grandma’s house. Most of my day consisted of watching Sesame Street and eating toast with strawberry jelly. We went to visit Mom twice a week and she seemed to be doing well too. Her doctor, who I called Mr. Rogers, assured us that everything was going to be fine and that I would have a new baby brother in a few more months. Mr. Rogers had salt-and-pepper hair, slip-on shoes, a smooth voice, and always smelled like bleach. I couldn't pronounce his real name and since he looked and sounded like Mr. Rogers, that’s the name that stuck.

A few months later, around dinner time, the phone rang. Grandma picked it up.

“Hello? This is her. You’re what? When? What’s going on? Is she OK? Oh my God. OK, we’ll meet you there.”

I was packed in the back seat of the car, tucked in with the itchy wool blanket that my grandmother always kept back there. It was dark and cold and I could see my breath in the air. I held onto Teddy Ruxpin and fell asleep, waking up only to hear the radio station change.

Mom had been airlifted by helicopter to Albany Medical Center. Her liver was starting to fail, and with her body so full of fluid, she was about to go into congestive heart failure. We all waited patiently. I couldn’t help but think of what my life would be like without a mother. Would I be an orphan? Would I have to clean the house while my ugly stepsisters made fun of me? Would I still get Christmas and birthday presents? Why isn’t Dad here, and why doesn’t he love us anymore? I cried and begged to see my mom.
Mr. Rogers suddenly appeared in the hallway and I ran to greet him. I wasn’t sure how he got to this new hospital, but I was so glad to see him. He asked for a moment alone with Grandma and assured me they’d be right back. Grandma came back in tears and insisted that we go find a hotel to spend the night in.

The doctors had to perform an emergency c-section to save my mother and the baby. When they extracted my brother he was extremely underweight, blue, not breathing, and had no ears. They quickly incubated him and put him on all sorts of IVs and breathing machines. Mom was put in the intensive care unit to recover. My new baby brother, Jonathan, was without oxygen for two and a half minutes and weighed only 3 lbs. at birth. There was a huge possibility that he would be disabled for the rest of his life, but the only way of knowing was to wait and see how he developed. A week after he was born it was finally my turn to hold him, but I had to go through a tedious routine before doing so. First, a doctor put a cap on my head, then wrapped a paper gown on me, took me to the sink, and we both scrubbed our hands and arms with this rough yellow sponge. He put paper booties over my shoes, tucked the sleeves of my gown into the gloves, and then put a mask over my mouth. I was walked towards the room and told not to touch anything.

I saw this little wrinkly thing, with only a diaper on, kicking its feet in the air. Mr. Rogers looked at me and said, “Would you like to hold him? You need to be very careful. Here, I’ll help you.”

“That’s my baby brother?” I was disappointed. Wasn’t he supposed to be big? I thought he’d come out and want to play with me. That’s what Mom said, that I’d have someone to play with. Friends and family were fussing over him and I felt left out. I wished he didn’t exist. I liked being Mommy’s only baby, and I wasn’t about to share my toys with him either.

Mom came home a few weeks later with staples in her belly. She looked thin, healthier, and in pain. Jonathan would need to stay at the hospital for another month. The growing that he couldn’t do in the womb took place in the incubator. His lungs started to develop, his ears formed, and he was able to cry for the first time. He doubled in size and ate well, so finally
they allowed us to bring him home.

As Jonathan grew and developed, his speech didn’t. His words came out like drunken slurs, but he seemed to understand what we were saying. It was our own language, and Mom and I were his interpreters.

When he was six years old he was diagnosed as being seventy percent deaf. The ear, nose, and throat specialist performed surgery to implant tubes into his ears, which rapidly improved his speech. As the years went by, Jonathan had many different diagnoses which included Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, drug allergies, and mild mental retardation. Finally, after multiple failures with treatment and medications, they concluded he had Asperger’s Syndrome.

Asperger’s Syndrome is a developmental disorder closely related to autism. Those diagnosed with this disorder are usually tall, lanky, clumsy, and emotionless. They speak normally and don’t exhibit any obvious abnormal behaviors. Children that have Asperger’s don’t respond to punishment because they have no attachment to the things that you might take away from them. They usually excel in an activity of their choice such as music, math, tinkering with electronics, and art.

I hated this disorder and all of the attention that came with it. Every bit of love, time, and energy was focused on my brother. After work and numerous school board discussions about how to improve the school’s special education department, exhaustion plagued my mother. No one noticed my straight A’s in school, that I had made varsity softball, or cared that I was leaving for Ohio to compete in an all-state choir competition. Mom and Dad were mostly concerned with who would take over my babysitting duties.

A month after I moved out of the house I received a phone call.

“Your mother has had a nervous breakdown and is in the hospital. We contacted other members of your family to ask if they’d be able to take your brother for a while, but everyone said no. Will you be able to pick him up from school today and keep him with you?”

At eighteen years old I took in my brother Jonathan. I realized we only had each other to rely on. Everyone that had shunned me in the past now shunned him in his time of need. I stopped hating him that day.
Jonathan is now twenty years old, has a job, and is living on his own. He’s my best friend and sometimes the only family I have. Last week he said to me, “Steph, are you going to take care of me when I’m old?”

“No, I’m older than you. You’ll be taking care of me.”

“Oh, can we take care of each other then?”

“Yes,” I said. “And I wouldn’t have it any other way.”
The Stone Creek Photograph
John MR Keegan
Water Gauge
Kirby Olson

Truscott the mayor motioned me over
To talk about a water gauge that
Mike McKenna had spotted along the Delaware River
I’d called the mayor for info

“It was built in the 1930s
WPA
To study the Cannonsville Reservoir idea
Abandoned in the 1980s
Now there’s a new one on Delaware Ave.
Over by Fitch’s bridge
It’s got a solar panel on the roof.”

I nodded.

“The old one can be accessed from Smith Pond Park.
There are nails in the door & it’s been gutted.
Are you getting all this down?
It goes into your poems!”

I shrugged.

“It had a ball floated
A tube down through the cement base
A needle recorded water heights on paper
Once a month the paper collected.”

Mayor still had more information.
A new window
A new roof
Added last spring by Americorps, etc.
In Australia among the aborigines
There is a keeper of song of each place:
Every lake, every tree, every mountain, has a song,
Passed from generation to generation, like a dream.

This is the song of the water gauge.
Untitled *Drawing*

John MR Keegan
I was always reckless. Consequential thoughts rarely preceded my actions. This was evident one day during the summer of 2000. My friend and I met up near my house. We had no scheduled plan for the day, but that didn't prevent us from enjoying ourselves to the fullest extent. Together, we marched through our neighborhood, laughing and singing the entire way. Alicia’s tall frame was not proportionate to her body mass, giving her a gangly appearance. Her long spindles of brunette hair seemed to be permanently caught in the bear trap of her hair tie. Compared to her, my height fell several inches short.

Our neighborhood stood directly adjacent to a large wooded area. The canopies of the trees provided shade to everyone’s backyard. Alicia and I rarely ventured inside the dense cluster of trees. We feared the animals that called the forest their habitat. Even the trees themselves were intimidating. They grew very close to one another with their roots intertwining like immensely thick vines. Entering the forest felt like stepping into a world of eternal night. However, my friend and I made a decision to journey into the night this day. Our curiosity commandeered our fear as we stepped through my backyard and into the trees.

Our first reactions to our new surroundings were immediate. We shared in oohs and ahhs of amazement. Perhaps our ten-year-old minds magnified and warped the reality around us. However, what we saw were enormous trees that were hidden in a deep valley. A sparkling blue river cut straight through the valley and ended at a cerulean lake. Although we were only ten feet in, we could only spot slivers of my house in the distance. Our small feet gently hit the soft earth, and we sidled around the huge tree trunks. Animals were chirping and fluttering in every direction. Life abounded all around us.

Suddenly we both stopped short. Neither of us had ever passed this point. Looking beyond, we could see nothing more than a few trees and total darkness. Alicia and I exchanged nervous glances before proceeding any
further, completely unaware of our silent stalker.

Together we pressed onward. We were simple spelunkers in a cave; our only purpose for being in this place was to explore. I ran my fingers over the cool bark of a tree that we passed. I noticed that some of it was missing, as though something had ripped claws across it. I paid no attention to this as Alicia was now ahead of me. I jogged up to her side, but she suddenly came to a halt. I almost fell forward as I tried to stop short.

“What’s wrong?” I asked her. I glanced at her face. Her eyes appeared to be strangely fixed on something straight ahead. I looked forward and squinted my eyes behind my glasses. At first, all that I saw was more trees, but after straining my eyes further, I knew what Alicia was staring at. About thirty feet ahead of us stood an enormous mansion; its tall gothic-style pillars pierced the sky above. A winding driveway led up to the large oak front doors. Our young and adventurous minds transformed a small and beat-up shack in the woods into something much more grand.

We reluctantly approached the building with our jaws gaping and our footsteps synchronized. Gazing around, our eyes eventually focused on the high wooden doors that were now in front of us. I stepped forward and placed a hand on the front door of the shack. Suddenly, Alicia took a step back.

“I don’t wanna go in,” she stuttered. I saw the fear in her eyes. I reached out my hand and grasped her own.

“It’ll be okay,” I said, trying to calm her down. She cast a reproachful look in my direction but gave in. I pulled her into the building.

The inside of the shack mirrored the condition of the outside. It was obviously an abandoned cottage. There was a large hole in the middle of the wall that divided the only two rooms. Electrical wires hung haphazardly from the ceiling above us, and bricks from the fireplace in the wall were strewn everywhere. This small room looked like a grand foyer to us. To the left of the doorway, a line of stairs made a steep drop down below.

“What do you think’s down there?” I asked Alicia as I pointed to the stairs. Her answer was a small shrug to say, “I dunno.” We separated to explore the two rooms. While Alicia explored the main room, I traipsed
over to the other one. My eyes fell upon an ornate bedroom with a crystal chandelier above my head. The lush silk bed was pushed against the back wall with the thick wooden headboard just below a window. In reality, the bed was broken; springs were protruding from the stained mattress. Discolored sheets were thrown on the floor beside the door, and the light fixture on the ceiling hung by a few wires. It swayed gently when a breeze blew through the hole in the window.

All of a sudden I began to stare at the window, mesmerized. The wafting trees outside hypnotized me. I was unable to shift my focus until something passed by the window. I had not been paying attention, so I wasn’t sure what it was. Apparently, whatever it was had decided to return and peer through the window. A small scream escaped my mouth as I saw a bear looking back at me through the windowpane. It bared its teeth and growled ferociously at me. Upon hearing my scream, Alicia bolted into the room.

“What’s going on?” she asked. Her eyes scanned the room and fell upon the creature on the other side of the glass.

“It’s just a squirrel,” she said soothingly yet firmly. I focused my eyes on the animal and it quickly morphed into a small harmless rodent. I stared at it, befuddled.

“Oh, right,” I stuttered.

We turned away and strode back into the main room. Our attention shifted again to the flight of stairs. They seemed to lead down into a dark dungeon. Perhaps it was my imagination, but I could have sworn that I heard a faint scream reverberate from inside. We queued up a few feet short of the first step. As we peered down into the dark basement below, the stairs now seemed endless. Again, Alicia took a few steps back.

“I don’t wanna go down there,” she said in a quivering tone.

“It’s gonna be okay,” I said reassuringly. Alicia clutched my shoulder tightly and I led the way downstairs. The basement must have been twenty degrees or more cooler. A slick blanket of cold settled on us when we reached the bottom. It felt like an enormous freezer. Alicia was now beginning to shiver, although I did not know if she was cold, frightened, or both. Her body shook against my own as she clung intensely to my back.
Our stay in the basement would have extended longer than this if we had not heard a low, dull sound echo from somewhere upstairs. Alicia and I sharply turned our heads toward the stairs which we had descended. We listened carefully, but there was no longer any sound. We craned our necks to peer up the stairs, but we saw nothing. Alicia was now terrified. Her eyes were wide, and she trembled with fear. Only my physical force could get her to move up the stairs.

We reached the landing and shot glances in every direction. No signs of life were present in the shack. In fear, we hurried out the front door. All was well for a few moments, but it was short lived. Alicia froze in horror. I saw it as well. Only a few yards away from where we stood was a brown bear. It wasn’t large enough to be an adult, but it was undeniably larger than a cub. We watched as it clambered over to a nearby tree and dug its claws into the bark.

I tried to tell myself that this was merely my imagination, but in this case it was not. I shut my eyes for a moment and reopened them only to find myself still looking at the bear. This was no far-fetched fantasy; this was real.

I could feel my heart pound against my Adam’s apple in my throat. I was temporarily stunned with fear. I had frozen on the spot. Then my instincts took over. Fresh adrenaline rushed through my body. I gripped Alicia’s hand in my own and tore her away. We both took off around the corner of the building. In my peripheral vision I saw the bear take notice of our leave. It began to trample after us.

Alicia and I reached the back of the building and pressed our bodies flat against the wall. It seemed as though we were no longer breathing. We listened carefully for any noise of the approaching animal. Sure enough, soft crunches were audible a few feet away as the bear’s thick paws pressed into the ground.

Then we heard another crunch sound, but the bear did not make this one. This one was farther away. Alicia scanned our surroundings for the source of the sound. Then she saw him. About twenty feet away, Alicia’s older brother was hiding behind a tree. He was holding something in one of his hands—a rock. I hoped that he did not intend to harm the bear.
Then he threw it. However, he did not throw it in the direction of the bear. Instead, he tossed the rock into the trees near the bear so that it produced a loud thunk sound as it collided with one of the trunks. We could now see the tip of the bear’s nose coming around the corner. The bear immediately ceased its sniffing when it heard the sound. It glanced in the direction of the noise and decided to go and investigate.

We now shifted our attention to Alicia’s brother who was beckoning us forward. We saw our opportunity and made a mad sprint in his direction. We did not stop to talk to him, and he joined us in our run. Not one of us dared to look back as we ran. We simply kept running until we were safely in my own backyard. All three of us sank our knees into the ground as we attempted to catch our breath. After a few minutes of panting, Alicia finally stood up. She caught her brother’s eyes and quickly ran over to embrace him. Tears rolled down her face and her smile spread from ear to ear.

“Thank you,” she whispered into his ear. I now stood up and watched the two of them hug. I felt an irresistible smile creep onto my own face as I was happy that he was there.

“How did you know?” I asked Alicia’s brother when he was eventually released from her grip.

“I saw you two go into the forest and wanted to make sure you’d be alright, so I followed you.” Suddenly, the smile evaporated from Alicia’s face. She now bore a look of worry.

“You’re not going to tell Mom, are you?” she asked timidly. He shook his head. Both of us breathed sighs of relief and continued inside for some cold drinks.

I learned this day that I needed to become a safer person. I must not go into the woods and get myself into any more trouble. This was a lasting impression.
Nothing But a Dream
Arelis Rodriguez

Where I come from Spanish is the main language, and food is the second one. Pride is inevitable and family is priority. The Bronx has been more than my birthplace and my childhood. It’s been a haven for my entire family, a place where everyone knows one another and you can pass on any given night and see the fathers and grandfathers on the sidewalk with their folding tables playing dominoes. You can catch the young “thugs” playing dice on the corner, and the little children running around back and forth in a very concentrated game of tag or basketball. The only thing you can smell is the chicken and rice cooking on the gas stoves, and you can hear from a mile away the beautiful beats of salsa music and someone yelling to the words. I wouldn’t change my hometown for anything in this world, but unfortunately not everything is perfect. All you have to do is turn on the television to the news and you can see our greatest downfall, hear about innocent people not making it to see their 25th birthday. This is probably the sole reason I hate watching the news. I used to watch my grandma sitting on her old, squeaky rocking chair, shaking her gray head. “Ay, dios mio. Que dios no ayude a todito,” she used to say. As I walked away all I heard in my mind was her words, “My God, please help us all.”

I walked into my room and found my sister lying on the bed, talking on the phone. This was a ritual for her. My sister was two years younger than me, but she looked like she was the oldest. She was taller and she was the loudest. My sister with her long hair—sometimes it was black, other times it was brown with highlights, she never had the same hair color for too long. She looked nothing like me, but if you spent five minutes with us you could tell we were the exact same person. My sister and I were like two peas in a pod. She was the cheese to my macaroni. There was never a moment when you saw her without me. I turned the on iPod, which was connected to the speakers, and all I heard was, “Turn that crap down! You don’t see I am on the phone?”

“Yeah, I see you on the phone. I don’t see your point, though.”
“OK, Nelly, you can call whoever you’re talking to back later. Stop being a *pendeja* and get up and let’s start practicing.” I didn’t have to turn around. I could tell who that voice belonged to any day. My older cousin Yessenia was the third musketeer in our little group. She was shorter than me, extremely skinny, and she had the laugh of a hyena, which made her ten times funnier. She was the type of person I saw myself being one day. Everyone knew her and everyone who didn’t wanted to get to know her. In my eyes she was one of the prettiest people I had ever met, and all I ever wanted was to one day be as popular and beautiful as she.

“Let’s go. Get your fat asses up. We have to practice.” My sister ended her phone call and grunted; I knew deep down she didn’t want to practice. We had been practicing at least once every day for the past two weeks. Yessenia believed in perfection, and she wasn’t going to be happy until the dance looked *PERFECT*. Yessenia had volunteered in her old high school for the annual talent show. Everyone knew her and everyone anticipated her presence in the show. Ever since her freshman year she had done a show, and they had gotten pretty popular, and this year Nelly and I were going to be a part of it. She turned on the music, and we went to work. After a couple of hours with no breaks we stopped and went downstairs to her house where my aunt had cooked. I felt a sudden feeling of relief. It smelled like my favorite food: fried pork chops and white rice with beans and fried plantains. I grabbed a seat at the table and waited contentedly for my plate of food. After everyone had eaten we all gathered in the living room to watch the Yankee game that was on. Yankee games were an old tradition for my family. We were huge Yankee fans, and we never missed a game. It was getting late and my aunt sent Nelly and me home. We said goodnight to everyone but Yessenia. She had been in the bathroom for the past hour. We knocked on the door.

“WHAT do you want?”
“We just wanted to say goodnight. We are going upstairs.”
“Goodnight. Love you girls.”
“Goodnight,” is what we said and then Nelly asked, “What’s wrong with you?” “Nothing. I just don’t feel too good. My stomach hurts. I
will be fine. Don’t worry. I will see you for practice tomorrow. Go to bed. Love you.”

With that Nelly and I walked out and up the one flight of stairs to our apartment and got ready for bed. At that time we had no idea what was going to happen, because if we did, we would have never left her side.

The following day after school we went to my aunt’s house looking for Yessenia so we could practice the dance, but she was nowhere to be found. We asked my aunt, “Titi, where’s Yessy at?” She simply looked at us, let out a sniffle and shook her head. I looked at Nelly’s puzzled face and could feel something wasn’t right. At that moment our mom walked in and hugged my aunt like no hug I had ever seen her give. She kissed us each on the forehead and told us to give her and my aunt a couple minutes of privacy. We walked into the living room listening to every word that they said in the kitchen. “What happened?” I thought. “She just had a stomachache.”

“That’s what we thought, but at four in the morning she was crying hysterically and she looked like she was in terrible pain, and we called the ambulance.”

“So what is it? What did they find out?”

“It’s the pacemaker. It’s encountered some type of problem, and she has to go on a waiting list or pay the fee, and we don’t have the money to pay for a new one.”

I felt my jaw drop and touch the floor. I ran to the doorway of the kitchen and stopped dead in my tracks. I stood there watching the two strongest women in my life cry hysterically, and I couldn’t help but stare. I wanted to drop on the floor and cry, but for some odd reason I was so scared, not one tear escaped my eyes.

That night I couldn’t sleep, and the feeling was mutual throughout the whole family. Nelly and I went about our normal routine in the morning, but not once did we share the slightest grin, chuckle, or smile. During the walk to school all I could think about was Yessy and how what was happening to her wasn’t fair. She had always been sick. She was diagnosed with a serious heart problem and she wasn’t expected to live past the age of four, but here she was, as alive as anyone could be at the age of 20. “What will
happen since we don’t have the money?” “How long is the wait to get a new pacemaker?” So many questions ran through my head, but it seemed no one knew the answers or if they did, they were too hurt to talk about it.

It was fourth period and my teacher got a call. “Arelis, they want you in the principal’s office, and take your stuff.” I had never gotten in trouble before and I was shocked because I was almost positive I hadn’t done anything. Everyone in my school knew Yessy and knew what was going on, so I had gotten thousands of sympathy hugs all day, and the idea of walking the halls while no one could see me seemed like a breath of fresh air. As I walked out of my classroom I heard, “Arelis, don’t worry about the project that’s due on Friday.” I shook my head in recognition but in reality I couldn’t realize why Mrs. Colon had told me to forget about the project that I had started already. I shrugged my shoulders and started my walk to the principal’s office. To my surprise Nelly was already there, sitting on the bench, staring at the floor. I joined her and couldn’t help but see the worried expression on her face. “It’s going to be OK. Remember what Yessy always says: ‘Never let your fear be bigger than your dreams.’” She shook her head, I grabbed her hand, and we stayed there for what seemed like an eternity. The door to the principal’s office finally swung open and our mother walked out, her eyes looking like something out of a horror movie. Tears flowed down her cheeks, and the bags under her eyes would have anyone thinking she hadn’t slept in two weeks. The principal was crying too, and at that moment I knew we had turned into the very people in the news that I hated to watch. My mother drove us to my aunt’s house. We walked in, and my eyes popped out of my face: I had never seen so many people in my aunt’s apartment. It seemed like too many to even fit. There were people everywhere; they even crowded the hallway.

Shortly after my aunt walked in everyone stopped talking, and some people ran up to her and started crying with her, hugging her and saying “sorry” in Spanish. Nelly and I were standing smack dab in the middle of the living room, and she walked up to us and hugged us like she never wanted to let go. She whispered in our ears, “Yessy loved you guys more than anything, y ahora ella esta en un sitio mejor, and she’s not suffering anymore.” I felt her
grabbing my hand. I opened it, and she placed Yessy’s gold chain in my palm and her gold bracelet in my sister’s hand. I jerked back and freed myself from the bear hug. “What you mean she’s in a better place?” I yelled. “She belongs here with us!” I could taste the tears that had begun to roll down my face. I ran to Yessy’s room and sat in a corner on the floor, clenching her favorite pillow. It seemed physically impossible to talk. It felt like I had a huge knot in my throat, and no matter how much or how hard I swallowed, it wouldn’t go away. I sat there trying to isolate myself from this world that had just taken away one of the most important people in my life. I tried to block out the screams and cries of everyone around me. I didn’t want to move. I didn’t want to eat. I felt my sister sit next to me and lay her head on the pillow that was on my lap. She grabbed my hand, and we cried together all night. I had always wondered what it was like to cry and never stop, and now that I knew I wished it were nothing but a dream. I hoped that I would wake up on the couch with Nelly and Yessy putting toothpaste on my face and taking a million embarrassing pictures. I used to hate when they played tricks on me, but at this moment I wished with all my might that it were the case.

A week later the funeral was held, and it seemed like the whole Bronx had come together in respect of Yessy and our family. The day couldn’t have been any worse. I was dressed from head to toe in black. I was burying a part of me. It was pouring rain, and the sky was pitch black. As I walked by Mother and my sister, I overheard Doña Sonia telling her husband, “Pedro, el cielo esta negro, porque los angeles estan llorando con nosotros.” I had told myself that morning that I wasn’t going to cry because there was no scientific way for my body to create any more tears. I was certain I couldn’t cry anymore, but as I heard her words, I felt the knot forming and I closed my eyes and thought about the last time I saw Yessy. Maybe Doña Sonia was right. Maybe the sky was so black because the angels were crying with us. The ceremony seemed like it took five years, and I didn’t know if I was still crying or it was the raindrops falling on my face.

That week was supposed to be the talent show, but in memory of my cousin they canceled it and made it into a huge tribute to her. They posted pictures of her everywhere and had people talk about the funny experiences
they had with her. I sat on the sidelines quietly weeping, but for the first time I cried and I smiled. I knew that Yessy wasn’t here but that her memory, her presence, would always be with everyone that she made smile. At random moments I remember something about her. At times I can picture her smile and hear her horrible laugh. I remember how she used to love dancing and how there was never a moment when she wasn’t dancing. I see her when I hear a song that she used to play. I hate the fact that she can’t see what my sister and I have become. I know she would be proud. They say that what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, and after losing Yessenia I think I can take on anything in the world. And if I reach that moment when I feel like I can’t win, I can just picture her smile and hear her say, “Never let your fear be bigger than your dreams, Arelis.”
Messy Corner Drawing
Grady Miller
The world is a circular motherboard, 
with the sun and the moon working as its wireless CPU’s, 
and their dueling capability as energy providers. 
Canals, rivers, lakes, and oceans are the lubricants that keep the earth from rusting. 
Even from my plane’s eye view, its dimensions seem endless. 
Vanilla cotton candy clouds look like the world on top of the world. 
Man wasn’t manufactured to fly, but our desire and resourcefulness outweighed our biological boundaries. 
Desert fields of brown zigzag below, patterns and arrays I’ve seen only in my dreams. This vision helps remind me just how small we truly are. 
I’m not an ancient, but as I gaze it is as if my ancestors speak to me. 
They’re saying, wow, how the world has changed.
Paradise can be found along the Fenwick Island beaches. Nestled between Bethany Beach and tourist-crazy Ocean City, Fenwick proves to be a secret paradise in Delaware. The quiet beaches always provide relaxation, yet fun for anyone who loves the beach. On these very beaches is where I spent my summers.

“John, the umbrella! Where’s the umbrella? The baby is going to get hot,” my mom yelled to my father, referring to my baby brother. Being the toddler I was unable to help carry much more than the plastic buckets and shovels that I needed to entertain me.

“I’m coming, Aline, just find a spot,” he yelled, as if a spot would be hard to find on the seemingly deserted beach. It was a hot day and I just plopped myself down and began playing with my toys.

“Perfect spot, Leah,” my mom said, smiling. We began making a sandcastle as the rest of the family piled onto the beach. When I say the whole family, I mean the whole big Greek family. My aunts, uncles, and cousins who flew in from Athens were there, as well as my family from the States. There must have been about thirty of us total. Screaming children everywhere refusing to wear sunscreen. The parents demanding them to put the sunscreen on or there would be no dessert. Little did I know that this vacation would turn out to be an every-year reunion.

Years passed, I was growing older. Unfortunately, my cousin Thomas was growing older as well. I was sixteen now, Thomas seventeen. I began to really hate my summers in Delaware. Thomas and I were known enemies. I’m positive that if we weren’t related and forced to talk to each other, we wouldn’t.

“I hate you,” I texted him from underneath the dinner table. He looked up, smiled, and mouthed, “I hate you too.” Things didn’t get any better. We constantly fought about everything. He would tell me that I was a “spoiled bitch” and I would simply reply, “Well, you’re an ignorant asshole.” It only got worse when I was forced to share a room with him at my
grandparents’ house.

“Mom, can’t I sleep in the television room?” I begged. I’d even attempted my puppy face, a face that had never failed me before.

“Absolutely not, think of this as a bonding experience,” my mother replied.

“Mom, have you ever seen the way he acts toward me? He’s clearly crazy and I refuse to share a room with him,” I said angrily.

“Leah, you are sharing a room with him, and that is that. End of discussion,” my mom said, storming off. Great, just great, I kept thinking to myself. I went into the room and found Thomas lying down on the bottom bunk.

“Thomas, get up, you’re on my bunk,” I said, clearly annoyed.

“Oh please, I don’t see your name on it, only your stupid pink blanket,” he said, throwing the blanket at me. I rolled my eyes and stormed up onto the top bunk. No more than a minute after I got up on my bunk I felt something cold, something wet. I peered over the edge and saw Thomas with a small water gun, squirting it repeatedly at me.

“Seriously, Thomas, how old are you?” I said, throwing anything I could find at him. I used a body pillow as my weapon of defense. I smacked him in the head with it, not that it actually hurt.

“Loosen up, I’m just trying to have fun,” he said with the most devilish grin on his face.

“Right, loosen up. It’s one in the morning. Do you realize that?” I asked. He apologized, something I had never heard him do before. I realized he actually wasn’t as terrible as I’d once thought. We began talking about school. I asked him where he was thinking about going to college. He told me he wanted to go to Harvard and become a mathematician. He said he didn’t want to be a math teacher or anything, he just liked math and wanted to see where it took him. I told him I’d hire him to do my math homework for me. He laughed.

Things just got better from there out. He was more than a cousin to me, he became my best friend. He taught me how to surf and how to drive. I taught him how to build sandcastles, not that that takes much talent. We
called each other weekly to say hi and talk about what was new. I usually complained about a boyfriend, while he told me about colleges he had been accepted to. He had gotten into Harvard, his first-choice school. He had even received a scholarship because of his running. I was beyond proud of him. “Congratulations, Tommy,” I said, trying to contain my excitement for him.

Our vacation had come to a close two days later. I was tanning at the beach with the rest of my family since we weren’t leaving until later that day. I specifically remember the sand being hot that day. I could feel the blisters forming on the bottom of my feet. There was a cool breeze blowing, a refreshing breeze. The waves were crashing in the background. It was truly a beautiful day for the beach. My brother was up by the dunes with a few locals playing football. I was hoping that next year we would get weather just as beautiful.

Then the day came. I was sitting at home watching TRL with a few of my friends. It was January 15, 2006, a cold, snowy day. It had started like any ordinary day: I went to school, came home, and was not motivated to start my homework. I had just made Orville Redenbacher’s movie theater butter popcorn; it smelled delicious. No sooner had I sat down when the phone rang. I let it ring two times before deciding that I should answer it. “Hello,” I said in my normal cheerful voice.

“Hey, Leah, it’s Aunt Caroline. I need to speak to you, it’s really important,” she said. I could sense nervousness in her voice.

“Umm, alright. What’s up?” I asked her nervously.

“It’s about Thomas; he passed away this morning,” she said, choking on her words. My heart sank and tears began pouring down my face.

“What do you mean? He’s dead?” I asked, tears continuing to well up in my eyes. She told me how he was driving home from a party the night before and his car slid off the road, flipped several times and hit a tree. She said this happened around three in the morning, but that the paramedics did not pronounce him dead until six that morning, around the time I had to wake up for school. She apologized for not telling me sooner, but she did not want me to have a bad day.

“I’m so sorry, I have to go,” I said.
The days following his death weren’t easy. There was his wake and funeral to go to, which was one of the hardest things I’d ever done. Gradually the days turned into months, and summer was quickly approaching. I kept thinking how lonely Fenwick would be without him.

Finally it was time for our first Fenwick vacation following Thomas’s death. The week went by painfully slow. I had no one to talk to until three in the morning and no one to shoot me with a water gun. It was clear our entire family missed him there, but we didn’t say anything to each other. We just carried on with our lives and tried to make that week go by as normally as possible.

It’s been a little less than three years since Thomas’s death. Every year I miss him a little more. Not only did I lose my cousin, but I lost a best friend. Fenwick Island always makes me miss him and makes me wish we could have gotten along his entire life, not just the summer before his death. To this day my family still travels to Fenwick Island every summer, and every summer I miss him more and more.
A Single Leaf *Photograph*

Christy Hubbard
A Phillies Fan
Justin Curry

On Saturday night, October 25, 2008, I watched Game 3 of the World Series featuring the Tampa Bay Rays and the Philadelphia Phillies at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. At 7 p.m. my family and I arrived and took seats in the theater to watch the game.

The theater is about the same size as a normal movie theater, except the seats are replicas of old-style stadium seats. As people began filling the seats, I noticed that most of the fans in attendance weren’t rooting for either team. In fact, there were more Yankees, Red Sox, Mets, Cardinals, and Cubs fans there than anyone else. I too don’t follow either team. Most people came just to say they were at the Hall of Fame.

As I sat in my stadium seat, someone caught my eye. I saw an elderly couple enter, the lady pushing a wheelchair with one hand and pulling an oxygen tank with the other, keeping it close to her side. The old man was in the wheelchair, sitting back with the oxygen tube in his nose. On his head, however, was a vintage 1980s Philadelphia Phillies baseball cap. They passed by and found a spot near me, and at the sight of him, I knew the Phillies were going to win the game.

When game time came at 8:15, they weren’t starting. It was pouring in Philly and there was absolutely no way they could have played in it. So the game was delayed, and the workers at the Hall of Fame played trivia games with the crowd for prizes. It was fairly entertaining, until the time kept passing by.

By 9:15, the rain was still coming down. By this point my family and I had lost hope, believing that the game would ultimately be cancelled. They continued the trivia games to keep the crowd alive, but everyone seemed to be growing nervous that the game wouldn’t be played. It wouldn’t be until 10:15, two hours after the original start time, that the game finally began. Young children had fallen asleep, it was past my grandfather’s and parents’ bedtimes, and the game was just starting. I glanced over at the Phillies fan and figured he would have fallen asleep, but he was wide awake.
The game went well from start until midnight. Five innings had passed and the Phillies were ahead four to one. A lot of fans had left the Hall of Fame, but that Phillies fan still remained with his wife, sitting in his wheelchair, his eyes wide and watching the screen. I turned to my grandpa and asked if he wanted to stay for the last four innings, since it was midnight and his bedtime was hours ago. Although he was sleepy, he preferred to stay, so we did.

In the top half of the seventh inning, there was a bang-bang play to first base. The Rays runner was called safe at first on a close play. However, replay revealed that the umpire missed the call. The Phillies first baseman had gotten the ball before the Rays runner had touched the bag. My cousin Rob turned to me and whispered, “Wouldn’t it be funny if because of this play, the Rays come back and win this game?”

I looked over at the Phillies fan and then back to Rob, shook my head, and told him, “No, Rob. The Rays can’t win this game.”

By the seventh-inning stretch, the Rays had produced two more runs, making the score four to three, still trailing the Phillies. Everyone in the room stood up, and as I did I noticed the old man. He couldn’t stand with us because of whatever had led him to that chair in the first place. But his wife stood up and put her hand on his shoulder and he removed his baseball cap and held it in the air as everyone sang “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.” I wish he could have been standing with us.

My cousin, it seemed, had been right. In the top of the eighth the Rays tied the ballgame four to four. My heart sank as I believed the momentum had shifted away from the Phillies. It was 1:30 in the morning by then, most people had left the theater, but a good twenty people were still there, along with that Phillies fan and his wife.

One of the employees announced that they were going to play one more game of trivia. The prior three games, the Phillies fan had his hand raised to answer their questions, but he wasn’t chosen. However, when the employee said they had one last prize to give, nearly everyone left in the crowd put their hands in the air. I don’t know if he had planned it, but the employee picked the Phillies fan. I was relieved as the old man got the
question right. He was awarded an elegant, laminated photo of baseball legend Hank Aaron.

As the ninth inning came along, I figured that if the Phillies lost, at least the fan had won something. But no, I wouldn’t let myself believe the Phillies would lose. The Phillies fan was there, sucking air through a tube at two in the morning to see probably one of the last games of his life. I knew that there was no way God would let the Phillies lose. They were this man’s Nobel Prize; they were what he believed in. With no doubts in my mind, I decided that the Phillies would still come out victorious.

In the top of the ninth, the Rays failed to score. It was about quarter after two when the Phillies stepped up to bat and everyone was exhausted. One run in this inning for the Phillies would win them the game. They started off hot and because of a couple of errors by the Rays fielders, the bases were loaded. The last of us in the crowd were on our feet, most of us rooting for Philly. The Phillies fan smiled as the crowd in Philadelphia roared for their team. Then, a Phillies batter hit the ball and the runner broke for home plate. The Rays shortstop fielded the ball and threw it to the catcher, but the throw was high, and the Phillies runner was safe at the plate. As the Phillies players stormed the field in celebration, everyone in the Hall of Fame cheered. The old man threw his hands in the air, swaying his arms back and forth.

As the players and fans celebrated on screen, I followed my family toward the exit, looking back at that Phillies fan one last time. As he beamed at his team’s victory, I felt so happy for him, and his eyes never left that screen.

*The Rays would not win another game. The Phillies won the World Series in the next two games.*
I’ve pretty much decided what I want as my epitaph. It isn’t imminent, as far as I can tell, but like us all, I’ll be taking that last trip “downtown.” The idea for this came from a fifty-year-old memory of such a trip, not to a final rest stop, but a journey to a subway stop.

It all began last week during a poker game. Something in the conversation reminded me of the first time I went down to “the city,” as we called it. The “we” in this case were my childhood friends, Gary, Larry, Neil, and Peter, my little group of musketeers.

At about 13 or 14, we were all living around 200th Street, Dyckman Street, near Fort Tryon Park in upper Manhattan, and anything below Harlem was the real city. We only got to see it with parents and Boy Scouts and other adults sightseeing at places like The Roxy Theater, Radio City Music Hall with The Rockettes, Rockefeller Center, and Macy’s windows. We even went on the Circle Line boat around Manhattan, and dreaded family outings that were not the adventure I craved.

So anyhow, one spring day when our hormones were likely raging, could have been anytime, the gang and I planned a trip to Times Square. In 1959 or ‘60 we knew instinctively that SEX would greet us, if we could only get there. Word had spread from the next oldest generation all around us about second-hand magazine shops and burlesque houses and all sorts of tawdry entertainment, including long-lost Hubert’s Museum, which was sort of a sideshow without all the class of a circus.

They had geeks and other freaks of nature and makeup men and even a lowly flea circus. We had no school and all our parents worked, so we coordinated the contraband trip. Should we take the ‘A’ train to the far west side and 8th Avenue? Or the No. 1 to Broadway and Times Square proper (or perhaps improper)? Our lives were prescribed and quite proper; it would be years before we began to act out. Peter ripped the subway map out of the yellow pages and we studied it like an in-country map of Vietnam, where sadly, a few years later, he would lose his life. But back to the trip.
We coordinated the time, the place, what to wear to look cooler than our years, and how much money to take, and then the journey began. As we passed each station in the tunnel, I think we each got older and bolder and less like the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts that we were supposed to be, and more like Hugh Hefner and James Bond.

By consensus we decided to go with the ‘A’ train down to 8th Avenue and 42nd Street, near the big bus station called Port Authority. Individually I had gone as far south as Fort Washington Ave. and the hospital where my mother worked, but 168th Street was my personal best as far as being a world explorer. No one else mentioned whether they’d been this far south alone. Whether it was peer group pressure or the bravado of group psychology, as a team we were fearless (well, mostly).

The long, rambling, and rumbling express run from 125th Street to 59th Street and Columbus Circle seemed to take a year. I was off in space, yet watchful of all the passengers, the men, the women, black, white, Hispanic. We lived in a fairly mixed neighborhood, so seeing other cultures wasn’t a big deal. The next two or three stops to Times Square zipped by.

As we ran up the subway stairs, Larry was first and I was the caboose, already carrying too much weight for my age. We had to go through the big bus station where lots of strange people were milling around, almost as if they had an appointed route. Stand here, go there, whisper in that one’s ear. By the time we got to the 8th Avenue exit, we’d already seen more degenerates than in all our previous years. One of the older neighbor kids had told us to keep our heads down so we wouldn’t look like tourists, but it was an impossible task. Of course we saw other people trying not to stand out. The general belief was that the victims of crime “asked” for it by looking at faces, so we glanced and darted our eyes with just enough focus to avoid falling down the stairs.

The wide avenue with hundreds of cars, mostly honking yellow cabs, looked dangerous and impossible to cross, even at the light, so we practiced our “cool” walk up the west side of 8th Avenue. I had never seen so much neon, like a symphony of colored lines. Since we knew our limitations, we slowly sauntered past the doors of suggestive bars and grilles and shops that
had mostly blacked-out windows, dead flies, tattered magazines with pinups, and other tawdry stuff.

We knew these were the “real” thing, though we weren’t 100 percent sure what that meant. But we had picked our destination. It was common knowledge in my neighborhood that the second-hand magazine shops were a front for less conventional “art” magazines. That’s where we were destined. I know we went to a shop around 47th and 8th, the name of which, beyond “Back Issue Magazines,” has been erased from my memory, but the excitement has not left after almost 50 years.

We four adventurers stopped at the door of one of the finest purveyors of *Life*, *Look*, and *Saturday Evening Post* magazines. We had all perused *National Geographic* and pretty much knew the female body (by heart and hand), but supposedly, in the darker depths of this store, they had every variety of “nekkid,” and we wanted it.

As we entered one at a time, there was a distinct hush from the many patrons. It seemed like everybody looked up and then went back to their perusing. There was a high counter with an old cash register on the left, and sitting on a stool was the largest, scruffiest, uncleanest-looking man I’d ever seen. He was wearing a flannel shirt that had open buttons at his waist, and needed at least two shaves to get to a jowly, pock-marked face. Larry missed a step, and we all half-bumped into him, reminiscent of the Three Stooges plus one. We regained our composure, and Neil and I went down one aisle and Larry and Peter went down the other. Racks of magazines with separating placards noting titles and dates filled both sides. We meandered through a few magazines we’d heard of and every few minutes sidled further down the aisle. The shop was busy. People would bring piles of paper to the counter, hand over cash, get a bag, and get lost in the Broadway crowd. After each transaction, we’d slip further toward the rear of the store. I was the first to find a dog-eared copy of *Ace*, pawing through it, looking for breasts. *Playboy* was already in existence, but we were looking for the gamier stuff. It was our right as American males. (I have no idea why I thought that).

As we sidled, you could hear a gasp or a whispered “wow” from one or the other of us. I felt my face flush and saw Peter and Larry turn equally
red, breathing even a little harder. Mind you, I am sure what we saw all those years ago is now on network TV all the time and likely much racier, but back then, oh my.

We were making pretty good progress, delving into stacks of magazines, ripping through the pages, checking nipples and pasties and in general having a fine old time.

Perhaps 20 minutes had passed and we were pretty close to a curtained-off back room. Men came out with actual plain brown wrappers and made a beeline to the front counter and paid more furtively and left the shop.

I snuck a peek at the clerk and he was apparently distracted by a fly buzzing around a neon sign, so I reached my hand out to pull aside the curtain and, as I touched it, from the front, in the loudest voice I’d ever heard, worse than the “Go to the principal” one, came, “All Right Sunshine, You’ve Seen Enough.” The jig was up, we’d been busted, and we froze and dropped whatever we were pawing, and ran or hobbled up the aisle adjusting things in our pants, and shot out the door, like clowns from a cannon.

As we passed the counter and the clerk, I looked up at him and saw his quizzical smile, which I finally understand. So if I am going to check out anytime soon, I want the world to know that I have actually seen enough and am ready to exit The Big Store.

Once we hit the street we became hysterical laughing and finally feeling like men of the world. It was exhilarating and never forgotten.
Untitled *Drawing*

Kevin Brodie
I have come to realize that my soul is stuck in the past; when summer had just begun and the sky burned red. Every Saturday my friends and I would go to bible school knowing at the end we would be rewarded with our baptism. My dress was white and matched my hat and shoes. I put on my rosary proudly, marching through the entrance of the cathedral with my friends in our white gowns and black suits. All my family was there to witness the beautiful ceremony. Later we drank, sang, and danced the night away. I sat on my father’s lap not knowing that a tragedy was about to come and take him away. We did not know that some of us would never see each other again. A genocide was about to come and take my people, my home, and childhood away.

In 1994, I was an eight-year-old child with no responsibilities except following my grandma around and listening to all the gossip that was going on in our small village. My life as a young child seemed to be perfect. We weren’t wealthy, but we had good land to plant our food and grow our banana trees. I spent most of my afternoons wandering around the village and visiting my uncle and aunt. I somehow always managed to get myself in trouble, either by getting in fights with other kids or arguing with my mother. However, life seemed good because I always found ways to amuse myself and managed to get away with it.

The summer of 1994 began in an unusual way. The grass was extra dry and the sky was darker than usual. The next couple of days we heard bad news: our president had been killed and the government was making threats against the people. It was encouraging the Hutus to go out and kill the Tutsi. My family had to be separated so in case the rebels were to find us, some of us could have a chance of survival. The rebels kept coming to my home, and my mother kept giving them money and convincing them to go away, but she knew they would come back, ask for more money and finally finish the job by killing us. Later one evening my mom finally called all of us together and told us to pack; we had to move quickly before the rebels came back. It
was very hard to convince my grandmother to leave everything she knew behind. She did not give in easily, but finally we convinced her. When the genocide started my father was working in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. My family was separated. I knew he might not survive because I kept hearing about the massacres in Kigali. Every time my family turned on the radio I would hear rebels and Hutus announcing the victims they had just killed and encouraging others to join them and go kill more Tutsis. I remember them saying all the Hutus should go out and kill all the cockroaches. They called us cockroaches.

The rebels targeted me personally because of my physical appearance. They used to ask me questions about my family and my ethnic background. A dark man in camouflage pointed a gun at me and asked me where my uncle was and said he was dead. I still remember his face because my body was shaking so hard from being scared. I thought he was going to shoot me in the head or cut my arms or legs off. Thank God my mother had told me to lie to anyone asking if I was Tutsi; I would tell everyone that I was a Hutu. In Rwanda it doesn't matter what your mother is: a person belongs to the ethnicity of her father.

Days went by, weeks went by then months came and went. We traveled away trying to find refuge anywhere we could. We had no more money left, so our parents made us go begging for food and money. People would throw rocks at us and chase us away so we didn’t steal their food. I remember I was so sick my skin started to peel. There was not much to eat so we had to share very little food. We managed by sharing food with other kids in the camps. Our bones started to stick out because we were so malnourished.

I heard stories of people who would leave the camps; they were killed on the roadside. Our parents changed our identities. My mother taught us what to say and what not to say to the rebels. If a child was lucky, they would simply shoot and not cut off any body parts until one bled to death. They had no mercy; they killed mothers, babies, and their own neighbors.

When the genocide finally ended, we started returning home. The plants were dead, houses were burned down, and the stores were robbed.
It was as if everything had never existed. There was no sound of people. The only sound in the background was bombs and gun shots. No one was talking; I don’t think anyone was really in a mood to talk. Dead bodies covered the ground and it smelled terrible. Dogs were dragging and eating the dead bodies. My family and I passed by a dead woman that was pregnant. Someone had stabbed her in the womb; I could not stop staring at her until my mom covered my eyes. It made me wonder how a person can hate someone so much that they would kill an unborn child.

A few months passed and we went back to school. Things were now different. The students that I once sat next to were no longer there; they were either dead or moved to another country. Many student orphans were in school, victims of genocide I had never seen before. On my way to school I had to watch where I was walking because of the bomb traps. Everything I knew had disappeared. My father had passed away and I never got a chance to bury him. The country I once called home had changed. The kids and neighbors I once knew were either dead or I no longer felt comfortable being around them.

Some things one likes to keep private, not because she wants to but because she wants to forget it ever happened. When a person loses everything she ever knew, it makes her question her identity, especially as a child. How do you tell an eight-year-old child that her father is dead and her country is no more?
Happiness
Arkil Straker

It was two o’clock in the morning when James Baird came home that night. His parents had already gone to sleep. His sister, Angel, was lying in her dark room watching a vampire show called *True Blood* on HBO and eating a tuna sandwich. His brother, Remo, and cousin, Rondell, were playing *Call of Duty* online in their room and drinking E & J Brandy which James had stolen earlier that evening from the family stash. James stumbled up the stairs into his parents’ apartment which was located in Brooklyn. He then noisily dashed through all the rooms screaming and shouting with a burst of excitement as if he had won a million dollars. His eyes bulged out, his clothes were ripped up, and the left side of his head was covered with dry blood as though he had been fighting in a war. His parents awoke and thought for sure he had gone mad. James then ran into his sister’s room

“Why you in here?” yelled Angel, who was angry because he was interrupting her favorite show. “And what’s wrong with you?”

“You wouldn’t believe it.”

“What is it?” his sister asked with growing curiosity.

“I just know you wouldn’t believe it, I can’t even believe it,” James said as he ran out of his sister’s room straight into his parents’ room. “Mom, Mom, did you see it, huh, did you?”

His mother was still a little dazed from sleeping and looked at her husband as if she were telling him to deal with their son.

“Boy, what are you going on about?” his father demanded to know.

“Dad, it’s . . . It’s definitely positively incredible. I never predicted such a thing could happen,” James explained while pulling the covers off his parents. His sister had left her show and run to her parents’ room to see what all the commotion was about. She was soon followed by Remo and Rondell, who had just finished washing their mouths so their parents couldn’t smell the brandy on their breaths.

Angel flicked on the lights as she entered the room. At this point, their mother got a good look at James and saw the condition he was in.
James! What happened to you? Are you OK? And why do you seem so excited?” she asked, panicking.

“James! What happened to you? Are you OK? And why do you seem so excited?” she asked, panicking.

“It’s because I’m so thrilled, Mamma! Do you know, now all of New York City knows of me! Before now only you knew there was a McDonald’s employee named James Baird; now all of New York knows it, Ma! Oh, Lord!”

James ran a few circles around the room and then melted on the bed. Filled with happiness, his legs couldn’t support him any more.


“You all live like animals, like cave men! Like bush people who are oblivious to the things which occur in our country. You don’t even watch the news and take notice of the information which is being read to you, and there’s so much that is interesting on the news. Nothing is ever hidden! If anything happens, it’s all known at once! Oh Lord! How happy I am! You know it’s only celebrities whose names are read on the news, right? And now they have read mine!”

“What do you mean?” said his now-irritated father.

“Yes! My name was on the news, now all New Yorkers know of me,” James said in his high-pitched voice. He then pulled out a VHS cassette, ran to the video player and rammed it in. His father put on his spectacles while his mother held onto the cross hanging from her chain and prayed she wasn’t about to see her son wanted on the news. “Look, listen, the lady is about to say my name,” James said alertly. The commentator began to read in a soft, relaxing voice.

“Good evening. I’m Mandy, and this is your eleven o’clock news. Breaking new story just in. At 10:45 this evening a McDonald’s employee by the name of James Baird…”

“You see, I told you,” James paused the video and announced to everyone.

“I speak for everyone when I say shut up and let that video play,” his sister said impatiently.

James looked as though he was unable to stop smiling and quickly pressed play when the commentator began to read, “…in an intoxicated state, was coming from a friend’s apartment on Carroll Street in the Crown
Heights district.”

“What, you were drunk?” his family screamed.

“See, the information is being described precisely, listen!” James informed them

“…fell into an uncovered manhole, which was under construction and surrounded by caution tapes. Baird was helped out of the hole by people in the area who then noticed he was unconscious. He was rushed to the hospital where the doctor examined him for the blow he had received on the side of his head.”

“I hit the step on the way down, Dad,” James clarified.

“The knot Baird received on the side of his head turned out not to be serious. The incident was duly reported. Medical aid was given to the injured man, and he was released.”

“Ah, so you see, now all of New York knows of me.” James quickly ejected the tape and grabbed his torn-up coat.

“Mom, I’m a go over the Jacobs and show it to them. Oh, I gotta show the Carpenters too.” James, joyful, proudly ran into the street.

His family, with drained faces, emotionless, showed no sign of their son’s fame.
Untitled *Drawing*
Krittaya Sapkamnerd
The Inner Workings of My Room

Ana Cristina Ramos

My room was a sanctuary; shelter from a troubling reality. My room could change shape, color, and size without losing its identity. My room carried objects that moved shamelessly within its quarters. My room could only be my room if it defied Mother Nature as I defied my own mother.

Love, War, and Bazooka-Wielding Teddy Bears

“Ana Cristina Ramos, you open this door right now! Open it right now or I’ll knock it down!” Today my room is a combat field. Joe, my trusty oversized teddy bear, advises me on the ground situation. General Ramos, the enemy has commenced preparation to bomb the perimeter. Do I have your approval to engage?—No, Lieutenant Teddy; hold your fire until I give the order. And the enemy persisted, gaining ground with every dishonorable tactic employed. Guilt bombs. “And here I am working my ass off at a factory while you’re just lounging around in your room not doing a damn thing.” I-told-you-so missiles. “ Didn’t I tell you you needed to be more social? Antisocial people are always miserable!” Now, General?—Not yet Lieutenant. “Young lady, I am dead serious!” And with that, my mother begins to slam herself against the door in an attempt to knock it down. I look Lieutenant Teddy square in his beady, plastic eye and give the order: You may engage.

“Ma, you’re ruining my concentration! Do you really want me to fail Physics?”—“Oh yeah, that’s rich! You haven’t been to school in weeks and you want me to believe you’re studying?”—“I will never surrender!”—“Oh Lord, I knew it! You’ve lost your mind! You see, didn’t I tell you you would? That’s what happens to people when they isolate themselves: they lose touch with reality. They . . .” Mama’s voice drifts away and her biting words become inaudible noise. I sigh in relief. Mission accomplished. My “studying” claim sent her on a long motherly lecture, thus distracting her from the task of knocking my door down and invading my camp.

Good work, Lt. Teddy. Our success is your doing. What with your
strategic genius, your extensive military record, your uncanny ability to . . .” And I, foolishly distracted in my praise of Lt. Teddy and gloating as though I had won a war, not a battle, was suddenly surprised to find that my mom’s voice was regaining clarity and volume. A cold sweat struck me. I looked to Lt. Teddy pleadingly, waiting for his invaluable advice. But no, it was too late! Lt. Teddy had transformed back into an inanimate object, Joe the teddy bear. I could feel my body being sucked back into the vortex that is reality. The vivid colors of the room began to turn gray and the previously unabashed moving objects froze in embarrassment. Unwilling to accept defeat, I shook the teddy bear hysterically. Snap out of it, Lieutenant! We’re in the middle of war, for God’s sake! And suddenly, I heard a door knob turn. I looked behind me; the sight of the moving knob horrified me. No, no . . . NO! The minute the door opened a blinding light raided my room. In genuine fear, I ran from it, anticipating an explosion of some sort. And curled up in the far right corner of my room. With my eyes shut, and my body shaking uncontrollably, I felt my mother wrap her arms around me. “But why?” I whispered. “You’re the enemy.”

A Tortured Soul’s Guide to Happiness

Chapter 1: Want companionship? Stop being so picky, stupid.

Don’t listen to those who tell you that human companionship is needed for happiness. It sounds hard to believe, but people are perfectly replaceable. All you need is a vivid imagination and a magical room. They’re not that hard to find. In fact, the former supplies the latter. You might be wondering, “What can you replace people with, and how could the substitute possibly be as charming as the original?” It’s simple, really. Objects can serve the same basic functions that people do; they can provide support, friendship, love, understanding, and even conversation. You just have to examine the functions of objects closely enough to see the comparison. Take your bed, for example. Say that you’re going through a difficult situation, and you need friends and family to help you through it. The mattress is a dependable
buddy; she’ll take on the weight of your burdens and tell you, “You can crash here, girly!” The pillow is a selfless boyfriend. “Bite and punch me all you want!” he says. “I want you to let all that frustration out, honey.” The blanket is a loving mother; she wipes your tears with her just-washed cotton dress and doesn’t mind that you’re drenching it in tears, spit, and mucus. “You go on and let it all out darlin’,” she says. And late at night, when you’ve run out of tears, when your swollen eyelids start to close and your body gives in to exhaustion, you lie on your buddy, who supports you; you unhand your lover, who cradles you; and reach for your mother, who shelters you. And as you drift into a peaceful slumber, you marvel at your luck, realizing that you bought a loving and protective family at the unbeatable price of $299.99 (compliments of IKEA).

Next: Chapter 2: Rethinking Conversation: Why Talking to Yourself is the Way to Go, and How to Exchange New, Insightful Ideas with Yourself.

Nightmares from My Mother

I was dreaming, as I often do. I saw an entrance to an empty, floorless room with collapsing wooden walls and only half a roof. There was dust in the air. I walked in, cautiously. Two little girls were sitting in a corner, conversing. “Hey, little kids!” They ignored me. “Hey! You!” Still no response. I ran toward them, hoping to scare them into acknowledging me. They didn’t get up, and though I tried to stop in my tracks, I couldn’t and fell right on them. But I felt only the ground beneath me. They’re ghosts, I thought. Or no, maybe I’m the ghost. Am I dead? The little girls were Spanish-speakers. They were dark-skinned, with thick, curly hair. One of them looked five years old; the other looked eight or nine. I sat next to them and listened. They were talking about stealing a bit of the neighbor’s crop. Here’s a translation of what they said:

8-year-old: If we go late at night, they won’t see us.
5-year-old: But what if they do? What if they tell Papa?
8-year-old: Then we’ll get a beating, that’s what: a beating from the owner and a beating from Papa.
I suddenly recognized the younger child. She had dark chocolate skin and prominent cheekbones. But most notably, she had the eyes of a sad and vulnerable child, a characteristic she would retain far into adulthood. It was my mother. The child dressed in torn rags and covered in dust was my mother. The other child, the 8-year-old, was my Aunt Maria.

I stared at Mama, and as she sat there silently, contemplating one thing or the other, I asked, “Why, Mama? Why is it that you haunt me even in my dreams?” The girl couldn't hear the question, but the dialogue that ensued answered it anyway. My mother wrapped her arms around a swollen but empty stomach and cried, “My belly’s hungry, but I don't want to steal. God sure wouldn’t like that.” My Aunt Maria laughed, and almost cruelly replied, “Don’t you understand, little sis? God abandoned you long before you were born.”

Awakening

Light crept into my room through the cracks of the window shades. I rolled onto my back and pulled the covers over my head, like a vampire allergic to sunlight. In fact, I might have hissed a couple of times. Annoyed by the sound of some distant music, I dragged myself out of bed, reluctantly. When I was on my feet, I looked around. I saw Joe the teddy bear on my TV set, my twin-sized bed covered in ugly, floral-patterned sheets, and my de-stuffed pillow covered in feathers. None of them said good morning. “Rude little bastards,” I thought. I walked toward my mirror. I looked at it, at first carelessly, and upon closer observation saw a glint of sadness in my eyes which disturbed me. Here I am mother, in my magical room, before my magical mirror, and see what even my imagination couldn’t conceal: in my reflection, Mama, I see you.

“Ana!” I heard Mama calling. “Yes, Mother?!” I replied. “Would you like some breakfast?” I thought of saying no, but realized that I needed some grub, after all those battles and what-not. “Sure. But can Lt. Teddy—uhh, I mean, Joe, join us?” “No, Ana, the creepy teddy bear has to stay. Just you and me this morning, alright?” Joe looked at me, I could tell he felt left out. I
looked at my magic mirror again, and asked whether it was okay to ditch Joe. But the mirror didn’t respond, and I, feeling a little silly for asking, started to laugh. I saw my smiling face in the mirror and thought back to my dream, and my desire to make that little girl smile again. “Coming, Mom!”
Leah stood bent over, a dull ache in the small of her back, polishing a tarnished silver platter. She stopped for a moment to wipe her sweaty brow and glanced down at her work. A weary young woman glanced back at her with eyes that had long since lost their sparkle of life. Her dull wheat hair was pulled back in a hasty braid and stray wisps framed her pallid, smudged face. Her coarse, brown dress was wrinkled and stained from constant use.

If Richard could see me now. A grim smile appeared on her pale lips, a smile devoid of humor. If her husband could see her now, there was no telling what he would do. With Richard, everything had to be perfect. He woke up every morning at precisely 7:00 and immediately took a fifteen-minute shower. When he emerged from the bathroom he expected his clothing to be laid out perfectly on the bed. At 7:30 he expected a hot breakfast to be waiting for him at the head of the dining room table. He left for work at precisely 8:00, and Leah was left to make sure everything was perfect for his return.

And she, his wife. He required her to be a vision of perfection at all times, with even the correct manner of walking. Her hair must be wound tightly in either a bun or a braid, with no strands out of place. No wrinkles could appear on her dress, no smudges on her face. No excess idle chatter, either. She was to speak only when spoken to and very minimally at that.

“Never speak out in public,” Leah remembered her husband telling her. “There’s no telling what stupid words will fall from your mouth.” At the memory black dots began to dance in front of her eyes. She sat on the floor and closed them, taking deep breaths: 1…2…3…4. She opened her eyes and sighed. Counting always helped calm her emotions. She had discovered that early in her marriage. Very early, now that she thought about it.

The clang of the grandfather clock woke her out of her reverie. She looked up, startled, and counted the tolls of the bell. Ding, ding, ding, ding, dong. She dropped the cloth she had been using in panic. Her husband was due home in less than an hour and she hadn't even begun dinner.
Leah rushed into the kitchen and began to peel potatoes. She methodically shaved off every bit of skin, remembering the anger her husband had displayed the time he had found a speck of red amidst the creamy white. Dumping the potatoes in a pot of water on the stove, she pushed the memory from her mind.

She prepared the soup as quickly as she could, keeping a wary eye on the clock. At 6:26 precisely, she opened the oven and slid in the chicken she had dressed earlier that afternoon. Leah knew from the past four years of living with Richard the precise amount of time it took to roast a small chicken. Her mind flew to the first time she made one for her husband, the time he knocked her unconscious because it was too dry. And then there was the time she had taken it out earlier to prevent the heat of the oven from sucking the juice from the breast. The time he smashed her great-grandmother’s china because his chicken was slightly cold.

She closed her eyes. 1…2…3…4…5. Opening them once more, Leah brushed a tear from her cheek. She banished the memory and headed up the sweeping staircase to change into something presentable.

Walking into the bathroom, Leah turned on the faucet to wash up. She brought her face close to the mirror, tilting her chin, examining every inch to be sure she had removed every smudge, every fleck of grime, remembering the first time he hit her. That first shocking blow. All because of a slight smudge beneath her cheek bone.

She remembered it clearly. It seemed like yesterday, and yet, at the same time, an incident of the distant past. She had been young and naïve back then, Leah thought bitterly. An idiot with all kinds of romantic notions about love. She had learned fast, though. She had tried harder, tried to please him, thought it was she who was to blame. It didn’t matter; nothing she did made a difference. The harder she tried, the more faults he found.

Leah closed her eyes and shook her head, trying to clear it of the tormenting memories that plagued her. She counted slowly, trying to steady her ragged breathing. 1…2…3…4…5…6. Her white-knuckle grip on the porcelain sink slowly loosened.

She walked slowly into her room and glanced at the clock on the
mantle of the fireplace. Her heart skipped a beat. Her husband would be home in precisely 8 minutes.

Leah hurriedly pulled the grubby dress over her head. Thrusting her hand into her wardrobe, she grasped the first dress her hand touched and hastily slipped the pale green silk over her head.

She rushed to her dresser, grimacing at the image reflected in the mirror. She combed out her hair hurriedly, tugging out the snarls. She heard the crunch of gravel and quickly wound her hair in a tight bun.

Leah flew down the stairs, pausing for a moment on the last step to catch her breath. She smoothed out her dress and walked calmly into the entrance hall as the door knob began to turn. She corrected her posture just in time to greet her husband.

“How was your day, my darling?” she asked pleasantly as her husband strolled through the door, a firm look set upon his face.

“Perfectly adequate,” he replied tersely, shrugging out of his coat and tossing it in her direction. Leah reached out her hand to catch it, but the silk lining slipped right through her fingers. He fixed her with a piercing stare, blue chips of ice meeting soft timid chocolate. Blood rushed to her face as she bent down to retrieve it. Brushing off invisible specks of dust, she walked quickly to the closet, slowly counting. 1…2…3…4…5…6…7.

“Must you forever plague me with your slovenly ways?” he asked, surveying the back of her. Her hand flew up to search for the flaw in her appearance, keeping her back to him. “Are you truly so dense? Do you honestly not realize how unkempt you appear?” he taunted, slowly walking towards her. “Very well, I shall inform you. It is the bow of your dress. Can you not tell that one end of the ribbon stretches down further than the other?” Leah swiftly and deftly reached a hand behind her back to adjust the lengths of her ribbon.

“You’re lucky I put up with you, my dear,” he murmured behind her, his hand light and possessive at the back of her neck, his cool breath trickling down her spine. “Few men would be able to deal with such an undisciplined wife. Few men possess the patience that I was blessed with.” She breathed in deeply and reached into the closet to hang the coat. 1…2…3…4…5…6…
His hand reached out and roughly grasped her arm, guiding her hand to hang the coat up. She dared not pull away, or even breathe, fearing that it would incite a fit of rage. She stood perfectly still as the tense seconds slowly ticked by, his hand clasped around her wrist. Finally, after what seemed like an hour, he released her and headed up the stairs to change.

Shivering, Leah walked into the kitchen to finish preparing dinner. At 5:52 precisely she removed the chicken from the oven and began to prepare the gravy. A chair scraped in the adjacent room as her husband seated himself at the head of the table. She began to move even faster, tasting the gravy and adding a little spice.

Suddenly, she heard him bellow from the dining room. “Are you so dense that you cannot tell time, my dear? Where is my dinner?”

She glanced at the clock. Ten seconds past six. Leah closed her eyes, sighing heavily. 1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9. She hustled through the kitchen door, her arms laden with two bowls of soup and a basket of freshly baked bread.

She set the bread down on his left side. “Here you are, darling,” Leah said with false cheerfulness, placing a bowl in front of him.

He grunted in reply. She set the second bowl at her seat and gracefully sank into her chair. She drank a spoonful, careful not to slurp, and watched as he lifted his spoon to sample the soup. His eyes suddenly hardened and he glowered ominously at her.

“How long will it take you to learn?” he practically whispered. “How long,” he asked, his voice steadily rising, “will it take for you to learn to never let my dinner grow cold!” He was practically shouting now. She shrunk in her chair, struggling to control the wide range of emotions that were ripping through her.

When I married you, it was under the notion that I would be able to rein you in, to mold you into the perfect wife. How wrong I was. I thought to myself, she may not possess the qualities necessary to run a successful household, but she’ll learn quickly enough. I thought your beauty would make up for your numerous faults.” He looked her crudely up and down and...
remarked callously, “I must have been blind.”

The rage welled up in Leah. She tried to force it back, to lock it up, to banish the feeling to its cold, dark home in the bottom of her soul, but to no avail. The anger rushed through her, engulfing her, drowning out her husband’s vicious tirade. She took a deep breath, tried to count, to calm herself. 1…

“I have never met a more abysmal failure. Lord knows I have done my best to transform you into a suitable wife,” he commented nastily, glaring at her through icy eyes. …2…3… “But you, my idiotic wife, are clearly just too stupid to learn.”

She could count no more. Leah closed her eyes for a moment, trying to hide the emotions that tore through her body. She opened her eyes and stood. Keeping her face devoid of emotion, she walked over to her husband and removed the steaming bowl of soup that had offended him so.

“I’m sorry to have failed you, husband,” she whispered, her voice meek and submissive. Leah turned and walked into the kitchen to serve the rest of the meal. She went over to the gravy, which was simmering on the stovetop, and tasted it. Frowning to herself, she grabbed a handful of small jars and began adding to the thick brown sauce.

When she was satisfied, she turned the stove off and went to grab two china plates. On one she placed a thin sliver of chicken and a small mound of mashed potatoes. On the other she placed a thick slab of breast and a heaping portion of potatoes. She topped it with a generous amount of gravy. Picking up the two plates, Leah walked briskly back to the dining room where her husband sat, impatiently drumming his fingers.

She placed a plate in front of him and retreated to her seat. Picking up her knife, she began to carve her chicken into bite-size pieces. A heavy silence passed over them, but she didn’t mind. She simply sat there, savoring the juicy chicken breast.

A gurgling noise broke the silence. Leah glanced up at her husband, who was staring back at her. A look of fear clouded his eyes. He tried to speak, but no sound could pass his lips. His entire body convulsed sporadically, shaking the table. She watched with calm curiosity, but made
no move to help him. His eyes went blank as he shuddered violently one last time. His head fell forward, falling into his potatoes.

She looked on a moment longer, then smiled to herself. Slouching back in her chair, she stabbed another piece of chicken and continued eating.
Dionysian Summer Drawing
Ana Cristina Ramos
Fragments from the Edge of Night
Michael McKenna

1.
Funny how day bleeds into day:
time slipping past, falling fast,
leaps untaken, chances forsaken;
mere routine embraced like a
long-lost love, the only reliable
anchor amid the shifting sands
(one step forward, two steps back—
easier that way, of course).

How hard it is to dance the dream,
to play in time with the song of
seeds, to feel the ancient backbeat
amid the rocks and thorns.

2.
The wind is full of ghosts tonight.
They sigh and tap upon the glass
outside the rain-lashed window.

3.
A stray dog wanders the midnight
streets, the pale, elusive moon entangled
in icy wires and scudding clouds.

4.
If I wore my love like starlight,
and my pain like a crown of thorns,
would an angel come to me in the night,
dispensing holy balm from healing hands,
washing away the wounds of the past in
the sweet baptism of lips and tongues,
the truth of the heart enfolding us
with sheltering wings?
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Holly Beidler is from Sarasota, Florida, and was a member of SUNY Delhi’s AmeriCorps Catskill Outdoor Education Corps in ’06-’07. She enjoys outdoor adventures, writing, drawing, playing violin, and singing. She plans to get a degree in plant science at Cornell University.

Kevin Brodie is a Physical Education major from Ontario, Canada.

Aaron Brown is a second-year Business Administration major who plans on transferring to SUNY Albany for a bachelor’s degree in Business.

Justin Curry is an Individual Studies major from Mount Vision, New York.

Stephanie Davis is a Liberal Arts and Sciences major from Oneonta, New York.

Randi Fox, a freshman Business Administration major from Ellicottville, New York, enjoys creating writing, music, and art in her spare time. She is planning on transferring to Binghamton University in the fall to study for a Master’s degree in Business and to continue her love for literature and creativity.

Marty Greenfield survived a childhood on Long Island. In 1970 he came to Delhi to attend college, and he forgot to leave.

Rhonda Harrow-Engel is the Art Center advisor and an adjunct instructor of Humanities at SUNY Delhi.

Christy Hubbard is a nursing major from Stamford, New York.

Alan Kaplan has actually been a butcher, a baker, and a candlestick maker. (Some of you may remember the ‘60s; there was a lot of that going around back then.) Later he owned a couple of book stores, had a fun business called Midnight Munchies, and even became a women’s evening-wear manufacturer. In the mid-‘80s he cooked in many Manhattan restaurants for five years then decided to relocate upstate to open his own restaurant. Fortunately for the mental health profession, it didn’t work out, but he had been decorating with antiques for the business, and, accidentally, he has continued in the antiques business.

John MR Keegan is a Liberal Arts and Sciences student from Oneonta, New York.
Michael McKenna teaches English at SUNY Delhi and has been a serious amateur photographer since 1971.

Grady Miller is a bachelor’s degree student in Information Technology from Laurens, New York.

Kirby Olson is an associate professor of Humanities at SUNY Delhi. He is currently trying to find a publisher for his second novel, *The Surrogate*, which is set in the village of Delhi.

Amanda Olsen is a Veterinary Science major at SUNY Delhi. She began writing in earnest in her senior year of high school and hasn’t put down her pen since.

Leah Paskalides is a sophomore in the Liberal Arts program at Delhi. Born and raised in Saratoga Springs, New York, she is looking to forward her education as an elementary education teacher at SUNY Old Westbury.

Ana Cristina Ramos comes from a lively Dominican neighborhood in Washington Heights, Manhattan. A Liberal Arts major, she acts for the Delhi College Players and enjoys interpreting the world through art, prose, and theater. Her academic interests include law, politics, and gender studies.

Susan Rochmis is an adjunct instructor of English and Theatre Arts at SUNY Delhi.

Arelis Rodriguez is a Hotel and Resort Management major at SUNY Delhi. She was born on May 30th, 1990 in the Bronx, and is of Puerto Rican and Colombian heritage.

Krittaya Sapkamnerd is an Architectural Technology major from Bangkok.

Arkil Straker, a Computer Information Systems major, is 22 years old. He is originally from the beautiful island of Trinidad, but he moved to Brooklyn at age 16 where he now lives with his mother, brother, cousin, and little sister. Arkil attended Thomas Jefferson High. In addition to writing, he enjoys running track and trying to sing.

Madeleine Uwase was born in Rwanda and came to the U.S. in 1999. She is a Liberal Arts student who lives in Walton, New York, and whose ambition is to work in human services. Ms. Uwase enjoys cooking, shopping, and spending time with family and friends.