



CROWDER QUILL

LITERARY-ART MAGAZINE
SPRING 2024

MISSION STATEMENT

The Crowder Quill is a literary-art magazine published by the Applied Graphic Design and Digital Marketing Campaigns class at Crowder College in order to encourage and showcase the creative abilities of local writers, artists, and photographers, as well as provide a cultural link between Crowder College and our surrounding communities.

The publication is funded through Crowder College as an educational tool and service to the community. Both the contest and publication are free. *The Crowder Quill* is published each spring semester in May. The contest deadline is Feb. 1 each year through CrowderQuill.com.

For more information about the contest and publication, see pages 3-4 and 75-80.



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The literary-art magazine and contest of Crowder College
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Neosho's Big Spring Park

John D. Mills | Neosho Community | Silver | 2D Art

History states the big spring attracted native Americans for water and recreation and was called Neosho, meaning "living waters". This painting was commissioned by La-Z-Boy Residential for their Big Spring Conference Center in the newly completed expansion of their Crowder manufacturing facility.

Neosho native, John D. Mills is a Crowder alum. His career in his family's retail business has been followed by his passion for creating representational art in oil paint. Having traveled extensively throughout America and Europe, Mills has had the opportunity to visit many of the world's great art collections which have influenced his style and technique.

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 Back cover: "Sunflowers of Missouri" by Stacy Kern



Music Has the Power

Joshua Weaver | Joplin High School
 Honorable Mention | Digital Art

*I decided to put a guitar player on top of a musical bar line almost like they were in another world with the music they were creating. Made in Canva
 Weaver is in the Eagle Pride marching band and plans to become a teacher in his parents' footsteps.*

CURRENT STAFF JUDGES AND CONTRIBUTORS

The primary task of the *Crowder Quill* staff is to produce the magazine from contributed contest entries, not produce the contents themselves. However, staff members are required to submit entries as a class assignment to demonstrate expertise in their field of judging. Winning entries are honorarily published but do not receive awards. The staff entries published in this issue were chosen by the following honorary judges:

- **Literary entries:** *Quill* faculty adviser Latonia Bailey and Leandra Toomoth, adjunct English instructor/ Instructional Design
- **Art entries:** Art instructors Joshua Knott and Josh Novak
- **Photography and digital art:** Graphic design instructor Diane Visalis

Staff members publicize the contest, select winning entries, and design the magazine. A variety of majors are represented on the staff. See the winning entries for additional author/artist statements as well as biographical information from each contributor to the magazine.

Members of the 2024 staff:

Hannah Allen, Joplin, pp. 16-27
 Melody Burton, Anderson, pp. 52-54, 56-59
 Diana Enamorado, Carthage, pp. 48-51
 Gavin Hollingshead, Joplin, pp. 55, 70-74

Stacy Kern, Stotts City, pp. 60-69
 Zackery Pierce, Pineville, pp. 28-34
 Jaelyn Swaffar, Joplin, pp. 34, 44-47
 Saydee Wheeler, Goodman, pp. 35-43
 Terri White, Joplin, pp. 5-15

CROWDER QUILL HISTORY

The Crowder Quill magazine and contest was proposed and founded by Crowder College English faculty Dan Richard in 1980. With 43 years since its inception, the *Quill* strives to consistently move forward in producing quality content.

Initially, the *Crowder Quill* contest was open to students of Crowder College as well as high school students and community members. Nearly all entries were published, but winners received a “Gold Quill” certificate award and designation in the publication. The contest was expanded to include a “Junior Division,” grades 1-8, starting in 1985.

The magazine was published bi-annually until 2006 when it was changed to a yearly contest cycle. At that time, the Junior Division was also removed. In its place was an annual K-8 fine arts day, held in the fall of each year until 2011.

The feather logo was created by Mark Hollandsworth and solely graced the cover of each publication from 1981-1989. The logo is still used as a symbol of the contest and publication today, present on all publicity materials and in the magazine itself.

Color was increasingly added to the cover and contents, prompting the addition of separate color categories for art and photography in spring 2003. Digital Art was added in 2010 to reflect the new art of extensively altered photographs, particularly using photo-manipulation software such as PhotoShop, as well as computer-generated art. In 2013, the art categories were modified to reflect the academic departments at Crowder: 2D Art and 3D Art. Also, \$500 scholarships were added to the prize for each high school gold winners for all eight categories. Each year, the contest receives around 1,000 entries.

Beginning in 2023 and the pivot of the journalism program to digital marketing to meet the demands of a growing career field, the *Crowder Quill* has again undergone some modifications. The course changed from “Magazine Production” to “Applied Graphic Design and Digital Media Campaigns.” Magazines and certificates are mailed in May, and the annual awards ceremony was replaced with additional digital content available on social media.

Dan Richard served as adviser until his retirement in spring 1988. David Sherlock took over the magazine in fall 1988 to spring 1990 in addition to his duties as adviser for the *Crowder Sentry* and director of the theatre department. Nina Gibson’s turn was from fall 1990 to spring 1992, and Suzanne Woolever from fall 1992 to spring 1994.

Latonia Bailey has served as adviser since fall 1994. Bailey won a *Quill* gold award in 1987 as a high school student and then joined the staff as poetry editor in spring 1989. As adviser, her works in nearly every category have been chosen for honorary publication through the years by faculty and students.

AWARDS from the American Scholastic Press Association,
College Point, New York:

2013-2023 Best Community College Literary-Art Magazine

2010-2023 First Place with Special Merit

2009 First Place

1993-2008 Did not compete

1992 First Place

1988-1991 First Place with Special Merit

1988 Outstanding Service for the Community

1987 Second Place

In 2017, The *Crowder Quill* was given the highest possible honor by the College Media Association: The Pinnacle for 1st Place for two-year literary magazines.





Ferry Boat

Lacey Nix
McDonald County
High School
Honorable
Mention
2D Art

The idea of taking a lot small broken pieces to make something beautiful is what inspired me to make this piece.

Nix is planning on traveling the US before starting her first semester at MSSU to earn her prerequisites for a chiropractic university in Iowa. She aspires to also own a successful online business that is centered around her art.

I THINK THEY HEAR ME WHISPER

Emilee Kuschel
Ozark
Community
Silver
Poetry

This poem is hyperbolic, but it is a look into the mind of a woman loved for her beauty, but who is forced to exist only to be beautiful and nothing more.

Kuschel is a Crowder College graduate. She has been published in the Crowder Quill in 2016, 2017, and 2018 and hopes to continue to learn more about the world through writing and creating stories.

I think they hear me whisper; Oh! I meant, of course, to roar.
Instead, I stand here stagnant; Longing, aching, evermore.
Am I cursed to sit still sweetly, like a prisoner of war?
Mascara runs down my cheeks; I cry for it is ruined.
“I’m innocent!” I cry, scream; but still I cannot prove it.
I think they hear me whisper; Oh! I meant, of course, to roar.
I pass through crowds like shadows; I choke on my own bile.
I pose, a macabre array; my chin raised towards the black sky.
Am I cursed to sit still sweetly, like a prisoner of war?
Pins poke beneath my collar; pins poke beneath my tall chair.
They keep me still and silent; they run between my white teeth.
I think they hear me whisper; Oh! I meant, of course, to roar.
I am a doll; a plaything. A toy for the whims of men.
Inanimate? No, I’m not. My heart beats within my chest.
Am I cursed to sit still sweetly, like a prisoner of war?
A bird trapped in a birdcage; a songbird without a voice.
I long for freedom every day. I long to have a choice.
I think they hear me whisper; Oh! I meant, of course, to roar.
Am I cursed to sit still sweetly, like a prisoner of war?

The King of Sumatra

John Shiflett
Joplin
Community
Gold
2D Art

This design, pattern and panel are my exclusive design. I made the eyes by fusing some glass together. I am not sure how many pieces of glass there is in it. It is 21” wide and 28” tall including the oak frame. It was created using the copper foil method, black patina and hand polished as always. It also has a zinc came frame which fits inside the oak frame as well. I have always had a passion for the big cats and that’s the reason why I created this panel.

Shiflett has been creating stained glass panels for five years now at the urging of his son. It has been a most delightful process and has turned into a passion. He hopes to continue creating these wonderful panels and improving his skills at every level along the way.



BIG BLACK HORSE AND AN APPLE TREE

Nash stepped out of the trailer and into the bright sunshine. He shook his dark mane and blinked rapidly, driving away the stinging sensation of sudden light. The grass beneath his hooves was soft, and he lowered his head for a sniff, breathing in the scent of fescue and red clover. As the trailer pulled away, the magnificent colt reared and kicked out, frolicking in his new home like a spring lamb. This pasture would do.

He scanned his surroundings. Wild roses and grapevines grew along the fence, and a few short trees dotted the pasture where it sloped toward a small pond on the far end. Except for a sturdy barn, the pasture was mostly a wide, grassy field with plenty of room to run.

A small, bushy tree standing on its own near the pond caught his eye. It looked different than the rest. Curiosity got the better of him, and he wandered toward it.

The trunk of the tree leaned far over as though it had been shoved and left to die as a sapling. Over time, branches had grown around the lop-sided trunk, giving it the appearance of a bush. Nash leaned in and breathed the sweet aroma of the pale pink blossoms clustered on its limbs.

"Hello," a tender voice said.

Startled, Nash threw his head back, whipping his long neck around to look behind him. His ears flicked to and fro, but he could not find the source of the voice.

"Who spoke?"

"I did."

Nash swung his head around and stared at the little tree.

"Are you a bird?" He peered at an old nest tucked into the fork of a branch.

The voice chuckled. "No, not at all. It's me."

"Who?"

"The tree in front of you."

"Oooooohhh..." Nash had no idea trees possessed a voice. "Wh-what are you called?"

"My proper name is Arkansas Black Apple, but the mother bird who used to live in my branches called me Violet."

"Violet." He liked the sound of that. "I am pleased to know you."

"Thank you." A smile crept into the little tree's voice. "Do you have a name?"

He snorted. He'd forgotten to introduce

himself. "I am called Nash."

"I like that." The tree paused. "I've not seen a creature quite like you before. What are you?"

"I am a colt, a Tennessee Walking Horse, actually."

"A horse? I've never seen one up close. But, why are you called a 'walking' horse? Do not all horses walk?"

Nash gave a soft nicker. "Indeed, unless they are injured. Horses like me have a special way of walking. Shall I show you?"

"Please do."

The sunshine glanced off Nash's sleek dark coat as he stepped back. In one smooth motion, he lowered his hindquarters and took high, stylized steps with his front legs, bobbing his head so that his mane waved and danced as he walked.

"Oh, Nash. That was beautiful!" The little tree's branches rustled with pleasure.

"Thank you. It takes practice."

The new friends spent the rest of the day in each other's company, laughing and talking. When evening came, Nash retired to the barn, pleasant thoughts swirling in his head.

Spring bled into summer, and Nash and Violet visited every day. He told her of his training sessions and competitions in large arenas. She told him of the tornado she once saw and about Durango, the large red bull who used to live in the pasture.

Whenever it rained, Nash laid down beside Violet instead of sheltering in the barn, and she protected him as best she could with her leaves. And when it hailed, Nash stood tall beside Violet, bracing himself against the pelting ice to protect her and her precious green apples from the damaging hail.

Through the summer heat and lightning storms, Nash and Violet's friendship grew stronger by the day. And when autumn arrived, Violet's branches were loaded with dark burgundy apples.

"I'm sorry," Nash said. "I can't do it."

She chuckled. "It's quite all right, Nash. It doesn't hurt."

Nash snorted. He didn't see how eating an apple straight from Violet's branches wouldn't hurt.

"Dearest friend, if it worries you that much, I will find a solution."

She gave herself a shake, and several

[Continued to 3]

Prix Gautney
Cassville
Community
Fiction
Silver
Fantasy

One of our trees died, and I thought it was dead forever. When it finally sprouted again more than a year later, the idea for this story took root.

Gautney is a fantasy author. She works part-time at a local law firm and spends her spare time farming cats and chickens.

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round apples plopped onto the ground with a gentle thud.

“Go on, Nash. It’s my gift to you.”

Nash stepped forward and gingerly sniffed one of the fallen apples. Wrapping his lips around a dark fruit, he pulled it from beneath Violet’s branches and moved it into the open. He took a bite. An explosion of honey-sweet goodness flooded his mouth. Nash closed his eyes and savored the delicious flavor.

When he was finished, he walked up to the little apple tree. “Thank you, Violet. That was wonderful.”

Throughout the autumn, Nash enjoyed the apples Violet gifted him until they were completely gone. A cold snap hit the countryside, and frigid winds brought the promise of winter. Nash’s coat thickened, growing fluffy and warm, but Violet did not seem to fare so well.

“Are you unwell?”

Violet’s voice dragged. “I’m very tired. Winter is coming.”

Her leaves had turned color, and some of them had been ripped away by the wind.

Violet stifled a yawn. “I’m afraid it’s time for me to sleep. I will see you in the spring.”

Nash remained by Violet’s side for three days, only slipping away to drink water or relieve himself. Once he was certain she was asleep, he retired to the barn. That winter, Nash was moved to a different barn with several other Tennessee Walking Horses. He learned techniques from them and practiced his steps to keep himself occupied. But in the lonely hours, when all was dark and still, his mind wandered to the little hunched-over apple tree who’d become his best friend on Earth.

After some time, the light outside changed, and warm currents of air drove away the cold. Spring arrived, and new life sprouted all across the landscape, greening the fields. Nash stepped out of a trailer into the bright sunshine and cantered straight for Violet. Pale pink blossoms filled her branches.

“Nash!”

“I’m here, Violet.” He sniffed a cluster of blossoms. “How are you feeling?”

“Awake.” She laughed. “I think this is going to be a good year for apples. Look at how many blossoms I have.”

“I see.”

“How have you been?”

Nash told of the other horses in the big barn and showed her a few new steps he’d

learned. She showed him the new nest in her branches and said it belonged to a tiny, fast bird with a long beak.

Days turned into seasons, and seasons turned into years, and Nash and Violet settled into a routine. Sometimes Nash would leave for days at a time to compete against other horses, but he always returned. Some seasons Violet’s apple crop was poor, but each spring she produced new blossoms. For years, the

Seashells and Stained Glass

Aubree Chisam
Crane
Community
Bronze
3D Art

I created this piece for my 2D design class for the texture unit. I wanted to use materials I typically collect but never incorporate in my art.

Chisam is a Crowder alumni currently working on her bachelor’s degree in Graphic Design and Photography from Missouri State University.



OUR COMET

Linda Sartin
Cassville
Community
Gold
Nonfiction
Personal historical
narrative

In the spring of 1971, I awoke in the middle of the night and felt compelled to walk out into our yard and look at the sky. I saw a stationary comet so large it was clearly visible to the naked eye. Though my husband and I watched it for hours, it was gone the next night and never acknowledged by the media or science community.

There are events in every person's life that defy explanation. Some are insignificant. We tilt our head in question, give them a few moments thought, then go about the business of living.

But occasionally a person experiences the proverbial once-in-a-lifetime event.

Something woke me that March night in 1971. I wasn't sure what. I turned expectantly toward my husband, Gary. We have this connection, you see, and sometimes I know if something's bothering him. But his eyes were closed. His deep breathing told me he was sound asleep.

"Gary?" I nudged his arm. He snuffled, mumbled something I couldn't understand and rolled onto his back. A minute later he was snoring. He never admitted to snoring, told me he'd know if he snored. Yeah, right.

Still, something had interrupted my sleep. I glanced at the clock—a little after three. I got up to check on our two girls. Maybe one or both were awake. Missy, three years, and Angie, six months old, shared a bedroom.

Missy had climbed into the crib with Angie at some point during the night. She had her thumb in her mouth and an arm around her baby sister. I pulled the blanket over them and tiptoed out of their room, intending to go back to bed.

I didn't though. I stood in our bedroom, wide awake, filled with this odd, restless energy. Pulling my robe over my nightgown, I slipped on my shoes. I walked through the house, out the back door, and kept going until I stood at the edge of our dormant garden.

Without hesitation I looked high in the northwestern sky and there it was, *bigger-than-life*, my grandpa would have said.

The most spectacular comet I'd ever seen. Well, it was the only comet I'd ever seen, but it was still spectacular with its blue-white tail, as long as the moon was wide. I blinked a couple of times, but it was still there, so detailed it could have been a photograph taken through one of those high-powered telescopes. I didn't pinch myself to see if I was dreaming, but the thought did cross my mind.

It wasn't moving, at least not that I could see. How close to Earth did something like that have to be before you saw it move?

I didn't know much about comets. There were pictures of course, and information on the phenomenon in the library. Somewhere I'd

read comets consisted of ice and chunks of rock and metal. I also knew the debris tail had more to do with solar winds than the direction the comet was traveling.

I don't know how long I stood there. When I started shivering with the cold I hurried into the house to find my coat. I shrugged the bulky garment over my robe as I ran into the bedroom.

"Gary." I whispered to keep from disturbing the girls. "Gary, wake up, you have to see this." I shook his arm.

"What the—" He came up off the bed like I'd hit him, his fists clenched, ready to do battle. He always reacted badly when he was surprised awake. I often wondered if that was a result of having five younger brothers.

"It's okay, honey. I didn't mean to startle you. Put on some clothes." I tossed his pants and shirt at him. "You have to see this."

"What's wrong?" He shoved both feet into his pants legs and stood pulling them up.

"Nothing's wrong. You need to come outside and look at something with me."

He sat back down and slipped on his shoes. "Outside?" He took a good look at me and frowned. "It's the middle of the night. What were you doing outside?"

"You'll never guess. Come on." I practically dragged him through the house. He grabbed his coat off the hook as I pulled him out the door.

"Hurry." I was half-afraid the comet would be gone and took a quick look up. "There," I cried when I saw it, and pointed toward the sky.

His reaction was about like mine. He blinked and turned to me. "Wow. How did you know it was here? Did I miss hearing about it on the news?"

I shook my head. "There wasn't anything on TV."

"Then why did you come outside?"

"I can't explain it. I just walked out and looked up. It's beautiful, isn't it?"

He put his arm around my shoulders. "Yeah. I wonder why no one's mentioned it."

"I'm sure it'll be all over the news tomorrow."

It wasn't though, not on television, the radio, or in the newspapers. Gary and I seemed to have been the only two people who'd seen it. We were baffled. Something as unusual as a large comet sighting should have made

headlines. This one didn't seem to be worth mentioning. I concluded that comets weren't so unusual after all.

We watched for it the next night, sure it would be there. I'd checked the sky a couple of times before dark, thinking I might catch sight of it during the day, but even the moon failed to make an appearance.

Once the sun went down, we checked the sky every hour or so. Two o'clock came and went. Still no comet. I was beginning to suspect we weren't going to see it again. How could something stationary in the sky one night be out of viewing range 24 hours later? It should have taken days, not hours, for a comet to fade from sight. At four o'clock, I gave up and went to bed.

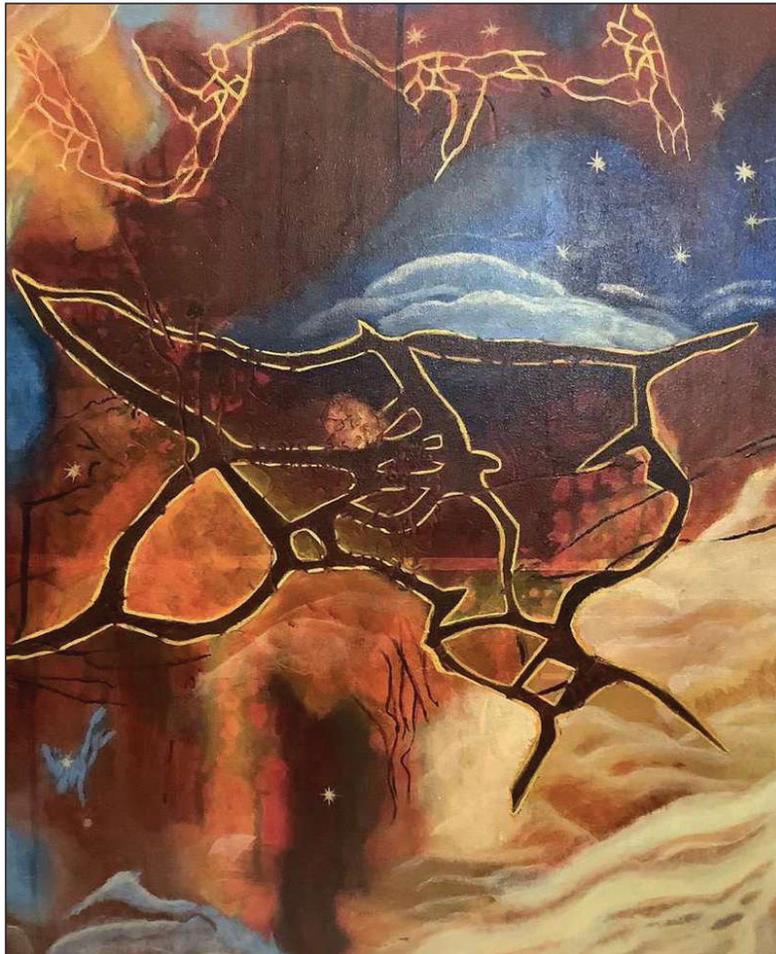
Time passed. We moved to another town, opened a business, and added a daughter, Faye, to our family. The comet became old news—something you wondered about occasionally, but less often as the years went by.

Then Halley's Comet visited Earth after a 75-year hiatus. *Our* comet came to mind as we looked at the famous but faint astrological object through binoculars. Halley's Comet wasn't particularly impressive.

When Hale-Bopp made the headlines, we anxiously waited to see it. Hale-Bopp was touted to be the largest comet seen from Earth in over a century—bigger than Halley's.

Of course, it had to be bigger than Halley's. Our comet had been much larger than the comet of Mark Twain fame, and so bright you could see every feature with the naked eye. If Hale-Bopp was bigger than our comet, it was going to be spectacular.

Finally, the day arrived—or the night. This time Faye shared the event with us. Our farm owned a ridge top with an open view to



Nebulous

Michelle Pugh
Irwin
Crowder
Bronze
2D Art

This painting was an experiment in the uses of color, space, and line.

Pugh is currently working on her associates in art and design.

the north perfect for stargazing. We set up lawn chairs, and waited for the comet's eleven o'clock debut above the horizon . . . and waited.

We were speculating that we'd gotten the time or day wrong when Gary pointed to a spot above the horizon. "Is that it?"

Faye and I squinted at the pale smudge Gary indicated.

I shook my head. "It can't be."

"I think it is. Faye, hand Gary the binoculars."

I was still shaking my head. "Honey, I can barely see it."

"It's definitely a comet," my husband said from behind the magnifiers. "And I think it's a little bigger than Halley's. Here, take a look." Gary handed me the glasses.

I looked, and there it was, the largest comet to be seen in a century—not. "It doesn't even compare with *our* comet."

I passed the binoculars on to Faye, afraid she'd be disappointed after the build-up I'd given Hale-Bopp. She wasn't, though. She peered through the lenses and said, "Wow,"

[Continued to 12]

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reminding me of her Dad's reaction to *our* comet so long ago.

"It doesn't make sense."

Gary looked over at me. "What doesn't make sense?"

"That." I pointed to the smudge in the sky. "*Our* comet was four, maybe five times larger than this one, and we didn't need binoculars. You remember what it looked like don't you—how big it was?"

"I remember." He shrugged. "I don't know what to tell you."

Hale-Bopp faded from the news, and comets, once again, faded from my mind.

Another decade passed. Most of us now had internet access in our homes. I don't know what made me think of *our* comet after all those years. Maybe it was the movie *Armageddon* that rekindled my curiosity. Regardless, I realized I had the tools to find out exactly what we'd seen that night.

Excited by the prospect, I sat down in front of the computer and googled '1971 comets.' And there it was—a cherry red, 1971 Mercury Comet. Apparently, you needed to be more specific when googling comets.

I spent hours researching them with no luck. One article even mentioned that 1971

was a slow year for comets all over the world. They should have been standing in my backyard. I could have shown them a comet that would've knocked their socks off.

Every couple of years I check out comet sightings. I keep hoping *our* comet will be mentioned, but I doubt it will ever happen.

Some people who know the story believe we saw a UFO. Others were sure it was a sign from God meant only for us. I've even been told we were lucky enough to look through a hole in the fabric of time and were seeing into the past or maybe the future. None of them seemed to think we'd seen an actual comet.

I'm left with numerous unanswered questions. What woke me in the middle of the night? Why did I feel compelled to walk into my backyard? Were we the only ones who saw it?

I'm glad I shared the experience with Gary. If he hadn't seen the comet too, I might have eventually decided it was nothing more than a vivid dream.

I guess my biggest question is, do I really want to solve this five-decade old mystery? Maybe not. ❧

Sartin and her family live in Barry County, Mo., where she has a handcrafted jewelry business, and is a traditionally published author of three novels with two more in the works. Her novel, Heartstone, took third place in the 2023 international Kiss of Death competition for mystery and suspense.

The Night Sky

Lexi Judy
Carl Junction
High School
Bronze
B&W Photography

I was out with my family looking at the moon and I thought it would be a good photo even though it took me a while to take.

Judy attends Carthage Technical Center. She loves to take photos and hopes that someday she can just take photos for fun.



HUNTED

Hunter is missing. We left the marked trail hours ago, snaking our way through the dense Ozark mountain underbrush, calling his name over and over. Now, all I can see is an ocean of reds and yellows stretching endlessly in every direction.

"I've seen this tree before," I say, my voice scratchy.

Isaac glances over his shoulder. "What?"

I point at a half-rotten tree to our right. Fern fronds are curling their way out of a knot in the center of its trunk. "I remember this tree. It looks like it's sticking its furry green tongue out, mocking us." Defeated, I sink into a crouch and pull my almost-empty water bottle from my bag.

Isaac sighs. "We can't stop here."

"Why not?"

"Come on, Allie, we're losing daylight."

We're losing daylight... Those three words cause my heart to thud against my ribs. "What are we going to do? We'll never find Hunter in the dark!"

I jump up and run through the brush, calling "HUNTER WHERE ARE YOU?" Thorns snag on my clothes and pull strands of hair from my ponytail.

"Allie! Wait!" Isaac calls.

He catches up to me quickly and grabs

my shoulders, spinning me around. "Where is he?" I sob.

"I don't know."

I peer up at his face. "Do you think he's hurt?"

Pain flickers in Isaac's eyes.

This is all my fault.

Isaac and Hunter are best friends—they do everything together, so when Isaac suggested the three of us go on a hike, I was happy to be included. Isaac went slow for my sake and as the day wore on, Hunter had grown bored of our pace and wandered ahead... alone.

"Don't worry. We'll find him." His voice wavers slightly and I'm not sure if he's trying to convince me, or himself.

"What do we do now?"

Isaac glances at the darkening sky. "I know you're not going to like this, but we're going to have to start making camp for the night."

A shudder passes through me at the thought of sleeping outside. Isaac rubs his hands up and down along my arms. "Can you find some sticks and I'll look for a place to make a shelter?"

I nod and start scanning the ground, picking up small sticks from the forest floor. Even though the sun is setting, the air is still

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Lindsey Hobson
Diamond
Community
Honorable Mention
Fiction
Short Story

Hobson is a member of SCBWI, an active critique group, and her state and local writers' guilds. Her debut middle grade novel, The Girl in the Window, will be available in April 2024, followed by Dark Skies in spring 2025. She also had a nonfiction piece in the January 2024 issue of Highlights magazine.



Mr. Mooney

Hannah Allen
Joplin
Quill Staff
B&W Photography

I have always loved learning about space and the atmosphere. This is one of my favorite pictures I have taken of the moon with my iPhone through my telescope.

Allen is studying digital media marketing and has goals to work with big companies and their marketing strategies.

[Continued from 13]

heavy and my shirt sticks uncomfortably to my back.

Tiny insects buzz around my ears and I swat at them in vain. Then, suddenly, they're gone. I breathe a sigh of relief before realizing the entire forest has fallen silent, like someone hit the mute button.

From somewhere behind me, a stick snaps. "Isaac?" I whisper.

No answer.

I stand perfectly still and try to control my breathing. A rock clatters across the ground, coming to rest against the heel of my shoe with a soft thud. I spin around, scanning the woods. "Isaac this isn't funny!"

A large, dark shape moves quickly between two trees, heading in my direction, its eyes flashing red against the deepening shadows of the forest. I scurry backwards, until my body connects with something soft that grabs a hold and doesn't let go. I slap frantically at my captor, my hands connecting against skin with a satisfying *WHACK!*

"Ow, Allie! What are you doing?" Isaac yells as he grabs my flailing hands.

My breath is coming in ragged gasps. "Something is following me!"

"What?" He looks behind me. "I don't see anything."

I look around. The woods seem to be alive again with nighttime noises. *Was it just my imagination?*

Isaac peels my fingers from the sticks I am still clenching in my fists. "Come on, I'll get a fire started."

I follow him to a clearing where he has already stacked firewood in front of a large moss-covered boulder with a hollowed-out area below it.

I sit on the hard ground and try to concentrate on the fire Isaac is building, but every few seconds I find myself searching the woods for any sign of the shadowy figure.

"Are you okay?" Isaac asks. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

"I... I don't know what it was. It was dark and stocky, like a bear. But it moved

A Real Scorcher

Brad Stout
Neosho
Community
Bronze
Digital Art

In the midst of extreme temperatures a few summers ago, I sat down with my laptop with only one word in my head: "Hot!" The result was this blistering image.

Stout is a publication designer, photographer and arts reporter who has worked in various roles for newspapers and magazines in Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas and Australia.

He was previously a member of The Crowder Quill's Spring 2012 staff.



gracefully—almost like a cat. And it had red eyes. You believe me, right?”

“Did you say red eyes?”

“I know it sounds crazy...”

“Did it make any noises?” Isaac interrupts.

“No. Why?”

“It’s nothing.” He says.

“Isaac! Tell me!”

“Okay, okay. My grandpa used to tell me about a creature called the Ozark Howler. Supposedly, the Howler has glowing red eyes and a shriek-like howl that will turn your stomach upside down.”

I can feel the blood draining from my face. “Do you think that’s what I saw?”

“It’s just something my grandpa told me on camping trips to try to scare me. Besides, Hunter and I have been looking for the Ozark Howler for years and haven’t even found a footprint.”

I pull my knees up under my chin and wrap my arms around my legs. Now that the sun is down, the temperature has dropped considerably. The fire finally crackles to life, the flames chasing the darkness away.

Isaac scoots around beside me and wraps an arm around my shoulders. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have told you that.”

“Do you really think it’s just a le—”

My words are cut off by a shriek that sounds half wolf howl, half elf bugle, and completely terrifying. I feel Isaac’s arm tighten around my shoulder.

“Hide!” Isaac hisses in my ear as soon as the shrieking stops. He crawls forward and shovels dirt over the fire to smother the flames, then crams himself into the shelter beside me. The moon is almost full. There’s just enough light to make out the creature slinking toward us.

I grip Isaac’s sleeve, twisting the fabric in my hand. My heart races as I realize we’re trapped between a rock and a creature with razor-sharp claws.

What have we done?

Isaac laces his fingers with mine and he squeezes my hand. Another shriek fills the air. I resist the urge to cover my ears with my hands so I don’t have to let go of Isaac. After several long minutes, the shriek ends and we

sit side by side in silence.

“Do you think it’s gone?” I whisper.

“I don’t know. I’m going out there,” Isaac says. As his head emerges from inside our hiding place, something huge leaps from the shadows.

I watch in horror as another creature sails across the smoldering campfire, colliding with the beast in midair, and knocking it to the ground with an Earth-shaking thud.

Are there two Howlers?

I yank Isaac back into our shelter as the snarling bodies roll end over end across the ground, moonlight glinting off sharp, white fangs.

With the beasts distracted, I see our chance. “Let’s go!” I hiss.

Isaac’s nod is almost imperceptible in the darkness. He takes my hand and we ease out into the night, careful to stay as far away from the fight as possible.

Just as we near the edge of the clearing, my foot rolls off a wobbly rock and I step painfully on the side of my ankle and pain shoots up my leg. “OWW!”

I immediately slap my hand over my mouth, as if I could shove the sound back inside. But it’s too late.

The creatures pause, their heads swinging toward us in unison. Before we can move, the larger one lunges, then falls to the ground as the smaller one sinks its teeth into its neck.

We watch, frozen, as the wounded animal staggers sideways, then bolts back into the woods.

The champion turns to look at us and my body tenses, ready to run despite my throbbing ankle. But instead of charging, the beast tilts its head back and lets out a single, sharp...

BARK!

“Hunter?” Isaac says from beside me. He drops to his knees and the animal runs straight into his outstretched arms. “I thought I lost you!” He says into the dog’s fur.

After a few moments, Hunter pulls himself away from Isaac and comes to stand in front of me, pressing his head into my thigh. I drop to my knees and wrap my arms around his neck, whispering “Good dog.” 🐾

One of my favorite things about writing is how the author can put their own twist on an old story. This story was inspired by the Ozark Howler legend... with a twist ending!

YOUNG, DUMB LOVE

Alexandra Olson
Joplin High School
Bronze
Fiction

I wrote this story about teenage love, the dangers of sticking with the love of your life you met when you were young, and dumb. This story is based on my real feelings for one of my good friends, and I still can't decide if I should love him or move on.

Olson has been writing short stories since the 3rd grade, always trying to improve her writing. In 3 years, she's developed over 50 stories and 4 movie ideas, from romance to sci-fi and horror. She has the biggest dream that nobody would probably dream of being the best-selling author in the U.S.

// "Are you scared?" he asked.

"A bit."

"Why?" he said, turning the wheel of the car left. The rain poured on top of the car, almost putting me to sleep.

"It's your family, Roman."

"It's not like we're dating," He glanced at me and pulled into a 4-way intersection. I shifted my legs to the window and drifted into my seat, watching the raindrops fall on my passenger side window, and answered him, "Yeah."

We pulled into the driveway of his family's home and carried out the cherry pie I had baked for Thanksgiving dinner. He knocked on their door as I hurried along behind him. The wind from the cool rain made me shiver, and finally, the door was answered. A middle-aged lady with dark brown hair greeted us,

"Hii guys"

"Hii Vicky," Roman said while hugging her, leaving me awkwardly on the side. He stepped into the house, letting me meet the stranger.

"You must be Alex," she said with a smile. I shrugged off a gentle, soft grin.

"That's me! And are you-"

"I'm Roman's 2nd oldest sister, Vicky," she cut me off.

"I would give you a hug, but.." I said while lifting the pie to show her.

"Awh, it's okay, don't worry, welcome in," she said, opening the door wide for me. I smiled and stepped in.

"Thanks!"

I walked around, glancing at everything, trying to find my way around.

"Follow me into the kitchen. We'll put your pie there." She called out and took the lead. I followed her into the kitchen; it smelled of warm turkey and mashed potatoes.

"You can put it right there," She said, pointing to the empty spot on the counter. I pushed the pie onto the counter and looked at the black and white checkered floor.

"I love your guys' floor." I looked up at her, realized what I said was stupid, and stopped talking.

"Aw, thanks! I suppose it looks pretty."

"I just like 80s-styled floors. Makes it look more fun and homey," I added on to my stupidity.

Roman walked into the kitchen and saw

me. "I got to get ready. Do you want to hang out with me in my room, or can you survive out here?"

"I'm good." I rolled my eyes at him. He exited the kitchen. Then, an older lady with dark brown hair tied into a bun, wearing a black shirt with blue jeans, walked in. Vicky introduced me to her, "This is Alex!"

"Oooo! You're the lucky girl! Isn't it? ?" She asked me, with a big smile on her face. What? His girlfriend? Did Roman tell them I was his girlfriend?

"Oh no, just a friend," I said nervously. She looked at me up and down, and her smile faded into an "Oh, that's okay, I guess" smile.

"I'm Roman's mother, Eleanor. Come, get comfortable." She showed me the bar stools outside the kitchen against the wall with an opening bar. It was white, with marbled grey countertops, matching the checkered floor.

"Do you want anything to drink?" she said while grabbing a cup of coffee.

"No thanks! I'm good." Vicky joined me on the bar stools. She watched her mother fiddling in the kitchen and leaned to me.

"You're the first girl he's ever brought around." I looked up at her, and then his mother popped into the conversation, handing me a cup of coffee. My hands folded around the warm white cup, grasping for the warmth from the cold rainy weather.

"It's true. And he's only talked about you," his mother said. I looked at the coffee, swirling like my stomach, with warm, comfy butterflies.

"You like him? Don't you?"

"I care about him, sure. But it's unethical. We will be gone from each other, stuck in our dreams. It's hopeless, and better to stay friends. He'll meet someone who deserves him and start a family, make the life he wants, and I'll be figuring out my own life." I sighed and looked at my cup, slowing the swirl as the butterflies died in my stomach. His sister placed her hand over mine, "Love fights through cold, fire, and rain; it never dies or flies away," she quoted.

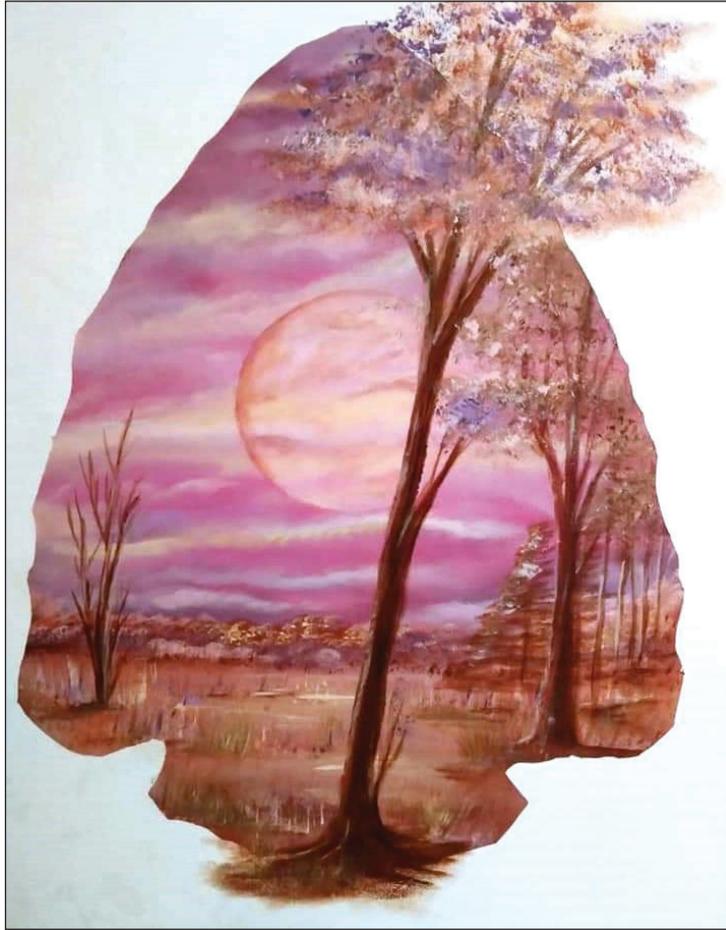
"He doesn't even like me," I rolled my eyes, giving a hopeless smile, squeezing the cup. They glanced at each other and giggled. Heavy footsteps came down the hall, and Roman appeared behind me.

"When will everyone be here?" he asked, placing his hand on my shoulder, resting without pressure.

"5:30," his mom said. He glanced at the kitchen clock reading 3:58. He paused, thinking, and patted my shoulder.

"Come, I want to show you something." He pulled my arm like an excited kid out of the house, opening the door for me into the car as the rain fell. He started the car, pulled out of the driveway, and started our adventure. We didn't talk the whole ride. I looked out the window, watching the rain race to the bottom. He pulled into a forestry walk trail, abandoned and old. The flowers bloomed from the sunny days, hydrating from the cold rain. Grabbing the umbrella from the seat behind him, he opened the door for me and gave me the umbrella to share. We walked, feeling the cool air flow between the fabrics and our skin. We walked into the vine-hidden tunnel to a bench with more vines in front of it, blocking the view. I sat on the bench as he opened the vines to reveal a beautiful city. The flowers bloomed around the border of pink, yellow, white, and light blue, pouring shiny raindrops over it. He sat by me on the bench, leaving a space between us. I pulled Reece's candy package (Roman's favorite candy) out of my purse, breaking it open and splitting it between us. He looked at me and, saddened, resting the Reeces in his hand. I looked into the view, watching the rain click as it hit the puddles, rippling out to the edge and unraveling the black plastic wrapping from the chocolate peanut butter cup. We ate our peanut butter cups in silence, watching the rain fall. His hand shifted slowly to mine as mine collided with his. The things you do to me.

We returned to the car, and he drove us back at 4:40. I watched the rain fall as always. We walked in, meeting 4 new guests, more of Roman's relatives. A much older lady, assuming Roman's grandma, 2 more mid-30-year-olds, possibly his two other sisters, and an older gentleman with similar features to Roman, representing his father. Everyone



Under the Native Moon

Dawn Kimmel
Granby
Community
Bronze
2D Art

This represents those individuals who identify with the land and how it reflects that which the sky communicates.

Kimmel is a Crowder alumni, a mother and proud member of her elite family of creative and loving individuals. She is a Bob Ross enthusiast and adheres to his "Happy Trees" motto, as such, she only paints landscapes.

greeted each other, and did my best to say my hello's. We all started to gather around the family table and began thanks.

No matter how soft the mattress was, the pillows sinking me in, I couldn't sleep, nor could Roman. We breathed in silence. I felt the ice-fresh toothpaste on my tongue from brushing my teeth early after our flavorful feast.

"Do you want to get out?" He rolled over to me, looking at me, breaking the silence from the day.

"Sure," I told him. We pushed ourselves out of bed, putting on the quickest outfit of pj's, and ran out the door. We drove to a McDonald's and stared at the bright menu screen.

"What do you want?" He looked at me.

"M&M McFlurry," I smiled. He continued the order, and I looked at the car before us. The car plate reading: LT6-78JK. He pulled up to the front, paying and receiving his order. We pulled into the parking lot and ate our McFlurries, watching the rain droplets race down the windshield. He relaxed back into the chair, looking at me, examining me.

[Continued to 18]

[Continued from 17]

“What?”

“You’re so beautiful.” I stayed silent and shoved another bite of McFlurry in my mouth. I rolled my eyes, ignoring the tears already forming. “Stop,” I told him.

“Why?” he said, pushing back. I didn’t answer.

“Why are you always mean to me?” I closed my eyes, shutting out his questions. Me? Mean? Look at you! You break my heart every day; you make me remember we can’t be together. No matter how long I’ve loved you, I can’t be with you. My questions filled my mind, and I almost broke out into tears.

“Are you okay, Alex?” He noticed me breaking. He brushed my hair down by my cheek, lifting my crying eyes to look at him, pulling me into a hug. He placed his hand under my chin, kissing me when I backed

away. “Roman,” I told him.

“Alex, I love you,” he pleaded. I sucked up my tears, squeezing my teeth, and sighed.

“Roman, I know you don’t love me.” I broke. More tears fell. He stayed silent, and I avoided his look. My tears couldn’t be held in, and they all started pouring out. I mumbled under my breath,

“I wish you did..” I looked down at my feet and pushed the door handle open to escape the moment. I walked into the pouring rain and crossed my arms, grasping my last warmth. He ran out and followed me.

“Alex,” he called out for me. He grabbed my hand and looked deep into my eyes, pushing away the wet hair from my face.

“I know you can’t trust me; I don’t know why you can’t. But that’s okay. I know you think you love me more than I ever could. But

[Continued to 19]

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Suzanne Johnson
Neosho
Community
Bronze
Poetry

*Reflections on what
goes on behind the
scenes in people’s lives.*

*Johnson is a 70 year
old new Crowder
employee after trying
retirement on Social
Security. She loves to
write.*

What do you see when you look at me?
Just an old lady sitting contentedly,
Remembering yesterday happily.
Is that what you see when you look at me?
What do you see when you see me?
Loved ones and memories all long gone,
Just an old lady sitting and rocking,
No one to bond with sitting and talking.
Is that what you see when you see me?
What do you see when you see me?
Do you see the total disengagement?
Do you see the lack of conversation,
The patent refusal of observation,
Of the denial of others in communication.
Do you see all this when you see me?
I’ve lived a life you’ll never know.
Of dreams that died so long ago,
From lack of love to make them grow.
All people saw was working and raising,
Not surprising, it’s all I had,
I guess in the long run not so bad.
Do you see this when you see me.
When people see me all alone,
They think that’s how it’s always been,
And they’re right for all my prayers,
For a different way were never answered.
They assume I had no earthly dream,
Of a love to share meant just for me.
Do you see this when you see me?

What do you see when you see me?
Do you see the tears shed privately,
For a long-held dream that would never be.

The knowledge the years have gradually
granted.
The feeling of being totally disenchanted.
To know in my soul that I wasn’t worthy,
Of a love that so many find so earthly.
Do you see this when you see me?
I know in my heart my time is past,
I fell in love with love, not meant to last.
And now I can plainly see, that no one will
come to be with me,
To love, to laugh, to make me feel real,
Instead of a broken, thwarted fantasy of life
lived to the full.
Just the dregs of dreams so dull.

What do you see when you see me?
Do you see that I know instinctively,
The only flowers I’ll ever get,
Will be on my on the casket they take to my
grave
Do you see what really makes me brave?
For keeping on going, in spite of it all,
For not giving up when oceans of tears,
Of loved ones unfaithful,
Of the lonely years
Ask yourself as you lay me down dead,
Did you ever once get inside of my head?
So, what do you see when you look at me?
Did you ever see the person I wanted to be,
Or just the shell that people could see.

No, you didn’t see me.

[Continued from 18]

no matter how much I've helped you, you've made me feel the love a woman could never give me. I will do anything to be in your life, even if I'm not dating you. I can't live without knowing you, okay?" he said, with tears forming in his eyes. I've seen many men cry, old boyfriends, my father, but I've never seen him. An emotion other than sarcasm and bad jokes is the only emotion I've seen from him. I pulled him closer to me, crying even more.

"Alex, I dream about us. I will give you your dreams. I'd do anything for you. I love you." He pulled me close from my upper back, crying into my arms. Roman, you're breaking my heart more. I want to be with you so bad, but it just can't be. We slithered to the ground of the rainy puddle world. I looked into his eyes,

"I can't have you give up your dreams for a low life like me," I told him my last excuse.

"We'll figure it out." Life with Roman? It sounds just about too good to be true. After all, it's just young, dumb love; even though so many things were pushing me back, I finally told him,

"I love you too, Roman." ❧



Joy to the World

Melody Burton | Anderson | Quill Staff | Color Photography

It is a family tradition to go and see the Christmas lights in the area. iPhone 13 with auto settings.

Burton is aspiring to become an inspiration for her children to always strive to become better for the ones you love.

MY ROCK

The low desert in the heart of summer is a sweltering beast at best; however, the year I turned nine an inferno claimed the rocky sands that surrounded me. The days were long and sticky, with the moonlit nights just as balmy. Although uncomfortable, I considered the heat my friend. The intensity of the sun's rays pierced my skin and burrowed deep within my soul, always chasing away the arctic temperatures trapped inside me.

North, away from my mother's stagnant decaying doublewide, off the pavement rested a silent entrance. Under the choppy canopies and over twisted gnarled roots of the shade trees, lay a dirt path that trailed up into a neglected canyon. The gorge, littered with dying shrubs and massive sleek rocks to sunbathe on, seemed to spiral upwards towards the fragmented clouds and beyond. Lengthy and wild the ascension to my rock; but the peace I would claim there will eternally remain worthy. The locals called this place Lost Road. As a child, I never understood the meaning of the name. Why call such an oasis lost?

Looking back now, it is rather poetic; for I was and still am a lost soul.

Nevertheless, I would retreat to my sanctuary as often as I could. The pass so familiar, I could trudge through a rainstorm blindfolded to my rock. Once there, laying on the heated surface of the solid mineral jutting out from the soil, I was untouchable. Unrestricted, I could read until the sultry sun retreated behind the circling mountains. I could howl my anguish to the wind without a creature disturbing me. Or whisper my ambiguous wishes to the universe. Alone, upon a dusty canyon peak, I could be free.

My rock is why I write. As a refugee on that stone, immersed within pages of fairytales, I found my forever escape. So, I write to recreate the liberating emotions my rock gifted me. I write to once again unleash my pain. I write to comfort my lost soul. I write to return some of the peace I was granted on that cliff's edge. Above all, I write in hopes that one day, my words may be someone else's rock. ❧

Megan Schlotz
Cassville
Crowder
Bronze
Nonfiction

As an aspiring writer, I hope my words can touch someone's soul the way I intended. Thank you.

Schlotz is a first generation college student. She wishes to obtain a college degree in English literature and become a fictional writer for an assortment of genres.

THE TRAVELER

Susan Eschbach
Cassville
Community
Bronze
Fiction

The story was inspired by events in my home town, combined with my insatiable love of science fiction. If I could find a place like the one in the story, I might be gone for a very long time.

Eschbach is the author of two published science fiction novels, A Trial by Error and Man on the Fringe. Her writing career began in elementary school with a 4-H newspaper column, and continued to develop through multiple jobs.

Dan pulled into a parking space near the door of *The Traveler*, one block off Cassville's downtown square. Most towns had ordinances specifying where bars could locate. Many of them made little sense, like prohibiting them from locating near a church. Maybe people worried the lure of alcohol would overpower the lure of the local pastors.

As a consultant advising small town councils on zoning ordinances, the stupid and worthless ideas small-minded people could come up with never ceased to amaze him.

He stepped through the door, drinking in the dim, calming atmosphere and claimed a stool at the bar, several seats away from another patron. The bartender broke off his conversation with the man and strolled over.

"Welcome to *The Traveler*. I haven't seen you here before. I'm Tom Guthrie."

"Dan Carson. I'm helping the city council with zoning ordinances."

"Ah." Tom nodded knowingly. "Quite the flak over rezoning the flood zones."

"A real headache. You'd think businesses would get tired of being flooded out, but no one wants to do what it takes to avoid it."

"Well, this is a good place to escape from all that. What can I get you?"

"Old Fashioned."

"Comin' right up."

Dan glanced at the clock behind the bar—three o'clock straight up. A colorful assortment of liquors lined the wall, and one shelf held an impressive assortment of imported beers and ales, several with names he didn't recognize. Next to the clock, a monitor flipped through changing scenes from the security cameras. The bar must have a bunch of them. He wouldn't have expected that much trouble in a small town.

Several of the scenes showed bizarre landscapes that couldn't possibly be from the wooded hills surrounding Cassville. Maybe those weren't views from security cameras. Must be one of those devices that showed interesting landscapes from around the world.

He pulled out his cell phone and flipped through emails, but had a hard time accessing the Internet. Figured.

"Hey, Tom, don't you have internet in here?"

"Not consistently, I'm afraid, and phone signals get lost as well. If you go outside,

don't go past the end of the walk."

Strange warning. "Why not?"

Tom's mouth tightened as he shot Dan a look out of the corner of his eye. "You're new here. Easy to get lost if you stray from the bar."

He'd spent the last month mapping every inch of the town. Not likely he'd get lost. He started to argue, then caught another glance at the clock behind the bartender.

"Hey, your clock is stopped."

Tom didn't even bother to look. "Nope. It's as right as can be."

After spending the day arguing with members of the city council, this seemed like a battle he'd rather avoid. He finished his drink, dropped a dollar in the tip jar, and got up to leave.

"Best wait a while." The man farther down the bar didn't look up from his own drink.

"Thanks, but I'd like to get a ways down the road this afternoon."

The man glanced up at him and shook his head once. "Best wait, but suit yourself."

Small towns were known for quirky characters. Next time, he'd find a different bar. He opened the door and stepped outside into blistering heat and sunlight so bright he had to shade his eyes. Where the hell was his car?

Wait—the *buildings* were *all* wrong. Giant skyscrapers with some sort of mossy covering towered above the tiny single-story bar. Cassville didn't have any buildings taller than three stories. You couldn't hide something like that from any part of town. And why was it so hot? It had been a comfortable October day when he came in. He looked up, but the sunlight was so intense he couldn't stand to look at the sky.

He'd only had one drink, right? What was in it?

With little other recourse, he walked back into the bar. "Tom, what the hell did you put in that drink? I'm hallucinating!"

"Just a typical Old Fashioned. What did you see?"

"Skyscrapers, with some kind of fuzzy stuff on the outside."

Tom nodded knowingly. "*Prusa*. That's prokyote, an energy-producing moss they use on their buildings."

The monitor showed the scene outside exactly as Dan had seen it. For the first time,

he noticed the tiny lettering at the bottom of the picture and the word *Prusa*. Then the picture shifted to a desert scene, and the word *Bandar* appeared. He must be dreaming. He shook his head to clear his mind and turned toward the door again. If he went back outside, maybe he'd wake up.

"I wouldn't go out there, if I were you." A man sitting with a woman at the back of the bar spoke up. "Damned unpleasant place."

No problem. In a dream you can stroll through a desert and not be bothered. He opened the door and was struck full-force by a blast furnace wind.

"Shut the door!" someone hollered.

He staggered back to the bar and collapsed on a stool. The clock on the wall still showed three o'clock. The scene on the monitor shifted again—*Korina*. The camera looked out over a cliff with dwellings carved into the sides of steep, rocky, peaked mountains.

The door opened, and a creature strode in—scaly, bi-pedal, with a raised ridge across the back of its head, yellow eyes, and scaly lips. It took a seat at the bar between Dan and the next guy.

"Korinan ale."

Without batting an eye, the bartender pulled a bottle off the shelf and popped off the cap.

The lizard-man glanced at Dan. "Haven't seen you before."

Unable to construct an intelligible answer, Dan finally croaked, "What the hell is going on?"



Bridge to Paradise

Sierra Wilson
Anderson
Community
Silver
Color Photography

I took this photo while in Florida. I named the image "Bridge to Paradise" because this bridge leads to the ocean. I like how the palm branches seem to be calling the viewer to walk up the bridge and see where it leads. Samsung S22+ camera

Wilson enjoys taking photos and writing poetry, and she hopes to inspire others to be creative.

An odd, raspy, clicking sound came from the creature's throat. "Tom, you haven't told him yet?"

Tom shrugged. "Until you walked in, he wouldn't have believed me."

Undoubtedly, whatever the bartender told him, he still wouldn't. Sweat dripped down his face, and it wasn't from the heat outside. The view on the monitor shifted again. *Rindar*. Mounds of domes filled the view, stacked in overlapping patterns like rounded brickwork.

The door opened, and a blue feathered creature waddled in. "Hey, Tom. Give me a

[Continued to 22]

[Continued from 21]

rundy-and-likan mix.”

Birdman hopped to the back of the bar and joined the man and woman sitting there. The man stood and pulled back a chair, replacing it with a perch on a round base. Though birdman wore pants, his feet were bare, three thick toes with talons. Feathers ruffled as he climbed onto the perch.

The bartender poured his drink and took it over to the table. “Peck. Haven’t seen you in a while. What’ve you been up to?”

“Had to make a series of hunting trips to get stocked up for the cold season. Wife’s got a new batch of eggs that’ll be hatching soon. Lots of mouths to feed.”

“Congratulations. Well, you’re due for a break then.”

“That I am.”

When Tom got back to the bar, Dan decided he’d had about enough.

“I’m out of here.”

The bartender glanced at the monitor. “Better wait a while longer. Yours will be coming up soon, though you’re welcome to stay as long as you want.”

“My *what* will be coming up soon?”

“Your planet, of course. Haven’t you figured it out yet? This bar is stuck in a space-time vortex. It just keeps spinning around and around. Eventually, it’ll come back to where you came from.”

The clock still said three o’clock, and his cell phone had died long ago. “How long have I been here?”

Tom scratched the scruffy beginnings of a beard. “Not quite one revolution.”

Dan threw up his hands. “And how long is that, exactly? Your clock doesn’t work!”

“Clock works fine, it just never changes, because time stands still inside the vortex. When you leave, it’ll be the same time you came in. Makes a nice little respite for folks. They can come in here, stay as long as they need to get a break from life back home, and when they leave, they haven’t missed anything.”

Enough was enough. Dan bolted for the door and yanked it open. As it swung, he had to grab the handle to keep from falling into open air below him. He managed to get one foot hooked back on the threshold just as the lizard scuttled over to help pull him the rest of the way in.

“Careful.” The lizard made sure he had a solid footing inside the door before letting go. “Always check the monitor before you go out. On this planet, the bar floats in the air.”

Dan staggered back to his barstool. “Have I got time for another drink?”

“Oh, sure.” Tom reached for the bourbon.

“Make it a double.”

The lizard slid onto the stool next to him. “I’m Riga, by the way. First time can be a little unsettling, but once we get used to it, most of us quite enjoy it here.” The lizard reached out a clawed, four-fingered hand. Dan reached out to shake it, though not with his usual firm, confident, grasp.

“If you go past the end of the walk, you end up on that planet until the bar comes back around. Some of us have vacationed on the other worlds in the circuit, though.” Riga winked, his vertical eyelid sliding closed and an intermittent hiss pulsed in his throat. “Without our spouses ever being the wiser.”

“Better finish up that drink.” Tom jerked his head toward the monitor. “Yours is up next.”

Dan downed the last couple of sips in one gulp. With so much adrenaline surging through his system, he didn’t even get a pleasant buzz from it.

The view on the monitor shifted to a street, and he could see the corner of the courthouse in the center of Cassville’s downtown square.

Without our spouses ever being the wiser. Or bosses either. Maybe he’d become jaded in his attitudes. He hadn’t taken a vacation in years. It might do him—and everyone he worked with—some good.

“Tom, if I stay another revolution, you sure I can get back out and it’ll be the same time and day I came in?”

Tom nodded. “As long as you’re in here, there is no time.”

“And I could go to another world, and find the bar again later, and still end up where I started?”

“Yup.”

“Is there a place with good fishing?”

Tom threw his head back and laughed. “*Doria*. It comes up next. Forested world with lots of rivers and streams. The natives are humanoid, easy to get along with.”

Dan grinned. “Sounds like just what I’m looking for.” 🌀



Florida Keys Sunset

Latonia Bailey
Neosho
Quill Staff Adviser
Color Photography

Bailey, coordinator of the Digital Marketing and Photography programs, enjoys contributing to the contest each year in various categories.

This photo was captured on a pier in Key West while visiting the Florida National Parks. Samsung camera on auto.



Crater Lake Summer

Cashton Wheeler
Carl Junction High School
Bronze
Color Photography

Wheeler is a junior and has a passion for travel and nature photography.

I was traveling through Oregon for the first time and stopped by Crater Lake. It was the middle of summer, but somehow snow was still there. The snow, tree, and sky framed the photo in my mind, and I captured it on my iPhone 8.

LOVELY GARDEN

*Lyriq Bartley
McDonald County
High School
Gold
Fiction

*I was inspired to write
Lovely Garden by a
past relationship I had.
The Garden represents
my blind love and
loyalty and how it
controlled me. Writing
this helped me work
through and cope with
my feelings of loss and
regret, leading to me
better understanding
myself.*

*Bartley mostly writes as
a hobby. He has done so
since the 7th grade and
still does as a junior in
high school. One day, he
hopes to be a successful
author.*

** Scholarship recipient*

The calm oasis stretched out as far as the eye could see, lush groves of willow casting shadows down on the plentiful floral meadows. Thin branches danced together in the breeze, moving as if they were a singular entity.

Plain dirt paths cut through the meadows, meeting together and splitting off in a vein-like pattern. Hobbling along these paths was a young man with sandy blonde hair and turquoise eyes. He wandered the oasis, watering the flowers as he passed them.

The man hummed to himself as he happily explored the vast garden that surrounded him. Every day he found himself there, yet even without anything else for him to do but tend to and enjoy the embrace of his sanctuary, he never grew bored.

I'm so lucky he would tell himself as he rubbed his throbbing right leg. *I could be living on barren land, but I'm fortunate enough to be surrounded by such beauty and wonder.*

Walking with a limp, his footsteps sounded like the beating of a heart. His leg was hurt during an unfortunate incident. When he first entered the garden, the man didn't understand the responsibility he had. He enjoyed the comfort and pleasure but neglected to return the care given to him. In an act of rage, the garden nearly took his ability to walk.

An important lesson was learned. If the man wouldn't care for the garden, then the garden wouldn't care for the man. Ever since that day, the man dedicated himself to tending to his home. In return for his displays of love and affection, the garden would supply the man with anything he could ever need.

And so, he tended to the garden every day, slowly transitioning from a state of fear to a state of gratefulness. He was grateful to be cared for, grateful to be needed, grateful to serve a purpose. This state he found himself in lasted years. It wasn't until he came across a disturbing discovery that the man understood that the garden was not his friend.

After spending a whole day caring for the flowers and the trees, the man decided to rest near a pond. He lay down by the edge of the pond, closing his eyes and enjoying the rays of sunlight breaking through the leaves above. It was quiet and peaceful, the perfect day, or so it seemed.

Laying there, the man began to hear odd sounds. He could hear a familiar soft voice

speaking to him— his voice. "Run!" it told him. "Run and never turn back!"

"Who's there?" the man called out as he scrambled to his feet. "What do you want?"

"The water—" the voice urged, "come to the water."

Cautiously, the man inched towards the pond, peering into the water. Waiting for him was his reflection, gazing back up at him. He tilted his head from side to side. The reflection did the same. The voice had stopped speaking to him, too. Was he just imagining it?

Before he could think of any more questions, the man heard a low rumbling throughout the garden. It was speaking to him, telling him to get back to work. After taking one last glance at the pond's surface, the man grabbed his watering can and hobbled back towards the path.

The man tried to find the pond again the next day, and again the day after that. He searched for it for weeks, but to no avail. It felt almost as if the pond had been moved somehow. The garden certainly wasn't giving him any help, so the man decided that it was up to him to figure out what was going on. He would venture out further than he had ever gone before and re-discover the talking pond.

During his journey, the man could feel that he was being watched. The garden was acting differently than usual; it had been ever since it last spoke to him. Something was wrong; the man could tell. That's why he had to venture out. He needed to figure out the root of the garden's change in behavior.

Trees and flowers turned to face him as he passed, a handful of them beginning to wither away. Despite the man's care and love for the garden, it was starting to crumble away.

Noticing this, the man tried to move faster. He went as fast as his crippled leg would take him. He could hear the rhythm of his footsteps growing louder and quicker alongside his heartbeat and breathing.

After hours and hours of hiking, he could finally see it. The pond was just on the other side of the meadow. He stumbled forward, reaching out towards the water.

"No," the same voice from before wailed as he came closer, "why are you here?"

The man continued advancing towards the pond, a child-like grin on his face. He found it, and he wasn't just imagining the voice before.

"Stop!" the voice shrieked. "You don't



Lightning

Kaitlynn Howell
Pineville
Crowder
Gold
Color Photography

Howell is a student who loves photography and nature. Those two go hand in hand together. She plans on going to MSU to major in photojournalism and minor in psychology.

I was experimenting with my camera and decided to turn down the exposure and now I have a few amazing photos.

know what you're doing."

Stopping at the edge of the pond, the man leaned forward so he could see his reflection. This time, it wasn't a mirror image. It was still him, but instead of being filled with joy, he had a look of terror on his face.

"What are you?" the man asked excitedly. "Why do you look and sound just like me?"

"I..." the man's reflection paused, looking over the man's shoulder to see the garden's decay creeping toward them. "I am you," it told him. "Or, at least, I was."

The man's face showed a mixture of confusion and wonder. "What do you mean?" he asked, leaning closer to the water. His reflection sighed, shaking its head and looking down.

"It'd be easier if I just showed you," it said as the water began to swirl around, showing the man images of times long since gone.

He could see himself, chatting and laughing with friends. There were five of them, two women and three men. All of them were around his age.

Then he saw himself again, this time reading in his town's local library. He had piles upon piles of books stacked on the desk in front of him. He could remember now. He used to sit there every day and read for hours on end. How had he forgotten in the first place?

The pond showed him countless more visions of the past. He used to have a life outside of the garden. He would go to class and work and play games. He wasn't just a caretaker; he was a friend, a son, and even a

role model to some,

Finally, the pond showed him one last image. It was the day he had sold his life away. The garden wasn't something that simply existed eternally, it was raised by the man's own two hands. He had started with a single sunflower, but that quickly turned to more sunflowers and daisies and tulips. Flowers turned to trees, and trees turned to forests. Before long, the man had lost himself in his love and dedication for his garden, forgetting who he was and who was in control.

Once the picture of the man and the sunflower disappeared, there was no more reflection for the man to look at. He had finally found himself within the hell he had created. After years of serving his garden, it was time for him to leave.

If only it were that simple...

The man had learned the truth far too late. He turned on his heels to run away like he should have done long ago, but there was nowhere to go. The wither and decay had reached him.

A foul stench radiated from the rotting ground. Crumbling flowers merged, forming into outstretched arms reaching for the man. A loud, high-pitched scream echoed throughout the garden as trees collapsed and wildlife faded away.

He tried to fight it, but there was nothing that the man could do as the garden grabbed ahold of him. The gravel beneath his feet turned to dust as the earth swallowed him up, burying him inside of his lovely garden. ❧

Part of the World

Joselyn Lopez
Springdale, Ark.
Crowder
Gold
B&W Photography

For my birthday, I had the opportunity to take a trip to Europe. As we visited many parts of Europe I captured some beautiful parts of the world.

*Canon EOS Rebel
Camera T7 EF-S 18-
55mm IS II*

*Lopez is a nursing
major and likes
photography.*



Unspoken Heights

Jenna Wells
Carl Junction High
School
Silver
B&W Photography

I took this picture while I was out taking a walk. I wanted to capture the abandoned building while also getting the sky.

*Wells wants to pursue
photography and
many other forms of
art. She enjoys taking
pictures of nature and
memories.*



A NEUTRAL LIFE

I regret living life in neutral –
simply doing what's been asked,
rarely accelerating to explore the future
or reversing to examine the past.

I ought to have stopped more frequently –
along life's spiraling road,
to feel the heavenly caress of the breeze
and the sun's warmth melting the cold.

I've taken so many things for granted –
during this kaleidoscope of hours,

I've missed the delight of everyday miracles
from blissful beaches to perfuming flowers.

So many blessings I've overlooked –
family, friends, food, good health,
but it is on these precious marvels
I should have measured life's wealth.

By idling so quietly in neutral –
I missed the journey's essential part,
both of my eyes were focused on the road
when I should have looked more
with my heart.

I wrote this poem about how we often focus on certain goals--and how these goals can sometimes keep us from seeing the really important things in life. We get so tuned in on the destination that we forget about the journey.

Billie Holladay
Skelley
Joplin
Community
Gold
Poetry

Skelley enjoys writing. Her work has appeared in various journals, magazines, and anthologies. She has also written twelve books for children and teens.



Little Havana

Amber Davidson
Carl Junction
Community
Silver
B&W Photography

This photo was captured on a recent trip to Little Havana. This vibrant neighborhood was full of culture, community, art, and delicious food.
iPhone 11

Davidson has been teaching for 13 years and currently teaches art and photography at Carl Junction High School. She loves to travel with her family and students. She often uses inspiration from her travels to inform her work in painting, photography, and mixed media.

DEFINING DISABILITY

Ahuli Dewolf
Cassville High
School,
Silver
Nonfiction

I felt driven to write this because I felt as if more people needed to hear the truth about what it means to me, as well as others, to be disabled. Being disabled is an experience just as it is to live, and it is unique and beautiful amongst adversity one might face.

Being disabled is more than one may think. Disability is more than the placard on your rearview mirror; more than the sign on a building dictating that you are allowed to exist in one space. Disability is being more than the caricature of the little blue man in a wheelchair. Nonetheless, disability is definitely being put in a box.

It seems as if you are either in a wheelchair, or you are not “really” disabled. If you are not visibly disabled, you are not “really” disabled. If you are a disabled woman, visible disability or not, you are just a “lazy, silly girl”; and again, you are not “really” disabled. If you are not palatably disabled, you are shunned; stared at endlessly by those who refuse to understand. If you are lower-support when it comes to needs, you are not “really” disabled. Either you are fully incapable of doing basic tasks or you are simply not disabled. Do not believe that disability confines you to the box that is societal categorization, though. Disabled people categorize themselves much differently depending on the person; disability is not a binary. Disability is a descriptor for someone who may struggle with daily tasks or just can’t do them at all. Disability is not something that someone can define unless it pertains to them. It is an ever-changing word throughout the entire disabled population. While the definitions may vary from person to person, the term “disability” still has a pretty consistent meaning across those who are disabled. However, able people do not have an opinion on what the word means, because they have not experienced it for themselves. It is similar to watching a show

and discussing it; if you have never watched the show, you do not know what the people around you are talking about, and thus you will not be able to weigh in on what happens in the show, or disagree with what happens in it. Disability is not just being in a wheelchair or nothing at all; it is a spectrum, and that spectrum should be respected.

Another facet of the disabled experience is being seen as an accessory for those around you to look appealing. If you need support for your disability, you are seen as a chore by others. You become to them something that must be dealt with rather than just a person who needs help. Oftentimes you are seen as a defective object; an annoyance. When you ask for help, it is sometimes seen as rude, or that you are asking something strenuous of that individual. After something like this happens, you are then seen as an obstacle. If you are not able to be plated in a way that is “quiet” and “out-of-the-way” to these kinds of people, you are seen almost like a wart on a very ugly woman’s face: unwanted but unable to be rid of. For a lot of your life as a disabled person, you are seen as a bother to be around, almost like a burden to those around you, and it will bog you down. Nevertheless, disability isn’t all negative things. Disability gives you another outlook on life, especially if your disability is degenerative and disables you later on in life. If you are disabled later on, you come to realize that you have taken everything for granted. Even with this, however ironically, the disability soon grants you the ability to look at the world in a more grateful way. Being disabled presents a new way of looking at the world, one that is filled with beauty even with all of the bad that may come alongside it. Disability makes you begin to take every moment as it comes to you, good or bad.

At first, the realization that you’re missing out on everything hurts. You will dwell for hours and days wondering what you did to become so isolated and unhappy. This feeling will eat you up, and for a while, this is what it is to be disabled. After a while of thinking like this though, you begin to somehow see a light appear at the end of the tunnel. Although, you realize that the pain has begun to blind you from that light; it has always been there, you just never noticed it under the shroud of your depression. With the realization that things are meant to be enjoyed in life, your

Ghost Town Sadness

*Cashton Wheeler
Carl Junction
High School
Gold
B&W Photography

I was traveling through Arizona on a dirt bike trail and spotted a ghost town. I drove out and saw the ruins of a sad ran down town.

Wheeler has a passion for travel and nature photography.

*Scholarship recipient



CLIPPED

In the small, weather-beaten town of Eldridge, where the wind carried whispers of a thousand secrets and the sun rarely dared to break through the thick canopy of clouds, lived a young man named Ambrose. He felt confined by the invisible chains of societal expectations and the weight of his family's legacy.

Ambrose was an enigma in Eldridge, where tradition clung to the cobblestone streets like ivy on ancient buildings. His family, proud and stern, expected him to follow in their footsteps, continuing the legacy of a prosperous merchant. Yet, Ambrose's heart yearned for something more, something beyond the mundane existence dictated by his lineage.

One gloomy afternoon, as raindrops tapped a melancholic melody on his window, Ambrose sat by the dusty fireplace, tracing the lines of a faded family portrait. He felt the weight of his ancestors' stern gazes, as if they were silently judging his every move. The walls of his home echoed with echoes of expectations, and the stifling air seemed to imprison him.

Driven by a deep yearning for freedom, Ambrose found solace in the ancient tales whispered by the town's elders. Legends spoke of a mystical dream that granted those deemed worthy the power to escape the earthly shackles and soar through the

skies like a majestic crow. It was a dream that beckoned him, promising liberation from the chains that bound him to the mundane.

Night after night, Ambrose closed his eyes, hoping to be transported to this ethereal realm where he could spread his wings and escape the relentless torment of his reality. In his dreams, he envisioned himself as a crow, soaring above Eldridge, free from the expectations that tethered him to the ground. The wind carried him to unseen heights, and the moon witnessed his silent rebellion against the destiny carved by others.

One night, as the moon hung low in the sky, Ambrose's dream took an unexpected turn. Instead of flying alone, he found himself surrounded by a flock of crows, each one with eyes reflecting the same longing for freedom. They moved in unison, a dance of liberation under the vast expanse of the night sky. Ambrose felt a profound connection with these creatures, understanding their desire to be more than mere animals confined to the whims of the world.

As the dream unfolded, a mysterious figure emerged—a wise old crow with eyes that held the wisdom of centuries. It spoke in the language of dreams, revealing that the power to break free from the chains of earthly existence resided not in wings, but in the courage to redefine one's destiny. Ambrose

[Continued to 30]

Terrin McIlvaine
Neosho
Crowder
Bronze
Fiction



experiences become tender. When you are shown love rather than hate, you begin to crawl into its warmth as if you were a scared kitten that has been called out to; cautious even though you are craving what is being offered. Slowly, you begin to realize how precious and

beautiful life really is. Life as a disabled person is almost like Ipomea Alba, it only blooms at night – so seeing its blooms feels rare- when it does bloom the flower is beautiful, tender, and should be cherished before the beauty comes to a close just as all things do. ♡

The Ruin of the Coastal Monarch

Max Mitchell
Joplin
Community
Gold
Digital Art

Inspired by the digital Concept Art by FromSoftware and the Dark Souls game series.

Mitchell is an aspiring conceptual and storyboard artist.

[Continued from 29]

listened intently, absorbing the ancient wisdom that echoed through the dreamlike realm.

Awakening from the dream, Ambrose felt a renewed sense of purpose. The yearning for freedom had transformed into a determination to shape his own destiny, to be more than what the town and his family expected him to be. Inspired by the wisdom of the dream, he began to explore avenues that defied the conventional expectations surrounding him.

In the quiet hours before dawn, Ambrose would venture into the town's forgotten corners, seeking knowledge from the whispers of the elders and the pages of dusty tomes hidden in the local library. He discovered the tales of individuals who defied societal norms, forging their own paths despite the odds. The more he learned, the more he realized that the power to be more than a man lay not in the dream itself, but in the courage to pursue one's true calling.

As whispers of Ambrose's nighttime explorations reached the ears of the townsfolk, Eldridge became divided. Some viewed him as a dreamer, a fool chasing illusions, while others saw a young man breaking free from the chains that bound their own aspirations. The tension in the air mirrored the clash between tradition and the desire for individuality.

Ambrose's family, staunch defenders of tradition, confronted him with the weight of their expectations. Yet, he stood firm, fueled by the vision of a life beyond the confined boundaries of Eldridge. The

struggle intensified, and the town became a battleground where Ambrose fought not only for his own liberation but also for the freedom of those whose dreams had long been silenced.

As the conflict reached its peak, a storm gathered above Eldridge, mirroring the tempest within Ambrose's soul. Lightning illuminated the faces of the townsfolk, revealing a tapestry woven with threads of conformity and rebellion. In the eye of the storm stood, his gaze unwavering, a reflection of the crow from his dreams.

In a climactic moment, the storm unleashed its fury, and rain cascaded down, cleansing the town of its prejudices and expectations. Ambrose felt a surge of power, not from the dream, but from the realization that his journey was not just about personal liberation—it was about inspiring others to embrace their uniqueness.

Eldridge transformed as the townspeople, touched by the courage of one man, began to question the rigid boundaries that confined their dreams. The once-muted whispers of rebellion grew into a chorus of voices demanding change. Ambrose became a symbol of hope, a testament to the idea that one could be more than society deemed possible.

In the end, Ambrose's journey was not about escaping his town or family, but about breaking free from the limitations placed on his spirit. He discovered that the true power to transcend lay not in the dream of flying as a crow, but in the ability to redefine oneself and inspire others to do the same. As Eldridge embraced a new era of individuality and acceptance, Ambrose soared not as a crow, but as a man who had become more than the sum of societal expectations—a beacon of freedom in a world once bound by tradition. ❧

I thought of making this story because as humans we want freedom in anyway shape or form we want to be free.

Mcilvaine is a story in himself. His mind is endless and there's no stop to it. He doesn't know what he wants to do or be but he knows he will be know.

Will I Ever Have a Family of My Own

Tyler L. Dallis
Community
Monett
Silver
3D Art

Dallis majored in art and design, as well as theatre.



[Left]

Connections are valuable in everyday life. I am not much of a sentimental person when it comes to physical objects, but I collect memories of the people closest to me. I am creating a mental Rolodex of experience, people, things, and events from my life.

MOVING AWAY

Everything changes now
Nothing will be the same
Gotta make it somehow
I'm only keeping my name

My home will become a holiday
My life a distant memory
All packed up and sent away
And I'll beg 'remember me'

Let's ruin all my favorite places
They won't be mine for long
Fall out of my good graces
Tell me all the ways I went wrong

Take the cliff-edge rush
Take the high dive
Take the fleeting blush
Before the moment arrives

A new adventure, a new story
A new life unfurling before me
So take the weight off my shoulders
It's fun getting older
When no one can tell you you're wrong
My sins won't follow me there
Consequences will not chase
Life is one big dare
I will not know their disgrace
Letting go of who I used to be
Forgetting the fear
This will be me
As I find my new frontier
The child inside me cries
She isn't ready yet
Neither am I
In my arms
I watch her die.

Atlas Imhof
Riverton High
School
Bronze
Poetry

*I started with the line
"Let's ruin all my
favorite places/they
won't be mine for long."
Soon no one will know
who I am, so I can ruin
my own reputation for
today.*

*Imhof is currently is an
active member of the
Rams Writing League,
hoping to have their
debut novel published
by the end of 2024 and
to one day produce and
direct films based on
their favorite movies.*



Turret View Great Wall

David Frisbie
Neosho
Community
Color Photography
Bronze

*We travel to Southeast
Asia rarely, yet always
enjoy the terrain, climate
and scenery. This view
from inside a turret
was shot in near total
darkness. I experimented
with the flash, hoping
to illuminate the gritty
interior.*

*Frisbie is a writer and
photographer. He has
won awards in several
juried competitions.*

FOR EVAN: I CAN ONLY IMAGINE

Kim McCully-
Mobley
Community
Aurora
Bronze
Nonfiction

This was a tribute to the son of a good friend. He was also my student at Aurora High School. We lost him in a tragedy that literally rocked our community early this year. We will move forward to protect his legacy of kindness and share his love for nature and the Ozarks.

McCully-Mobley is a local teacher, adjunct professor, grant writer, storyteller, motivational speaker and freelance writer. She holds degrees in journalism, English, and education.

One Town. One Team. One Heartbeat. Those just aren't words on a page. In Aurora and the surrounding communities of the rural Ozarks, we live it. Every single day. Those words are written on our hearts.

We come together to celebrate milestones and to console one another in times of heartbreak. It seems like we have had more than our share in recent years.

We love hard and when something happens to one of us it happens to all of us. We are friends; we are family. We are friends who become family. We stand in the gap.

Tragedy struck us again recently when we lost a beautiful 16 year old boy. He was a delightful young man with a promising future. I have watched Evan Boettler grow up the past 16 years and it has been an incredible honor to do so.

In his room, there is a Super E cape his Aunt Krista made him one Christmas. The boys got capes. The girls received aprons. To most, Evan was a superhero. His smile could light up any room. A plaque in his room summed up the things he believed in: Superhero Rules—Be Strong, PROTECT, Be Brave, Fight For Justice, BE FAIR, Share, Be Yourself, LISTEN, Be A Good Friend. I can say, without a doubt, he lived by those rules.

Ultimately, he lived by those rules because he comes from good stock. His family has always lived by those rules, too.

When his dad and I taught together, he and his sister, Sikenan, would ride the transfer bus over on our half-day Fridays. They would come to my room to visit “Mrs. Movley”... and I would always try to have treats, toys or quarters to give them. One day, Evan and I had dipped into my chocolate stash and his dad called to see if I would send them his way because they were going somewhere to eat. I could join them if I wanted. I had been given orders not to load them up on sugar, but, well...you know. I had a hard time hearing him that day.

As we were skipping down the hallway, I looked down and Evan had little bits of chocolate all over his face. I spit on my shirt tail and started frantically wiping him down. He didn't like it one bit, but went along with it at my insistence. When his dad asked us what we had been up to, I started talking and Evan wouldn't make eye contact with anyone. He

didn't want to get me in trouble. Another time he told me about seeing my friend, Nurse Patty Rone, up on her roof with a chain saw. From that day forward she became “Chain saw Patty.”

To take you wayyyyyy back to the 1980s, when I returned home to serve my community as editor of my hometown paper, I was asked to do a story on a young boy who was known as an “international clogging sensation.” I walked up the street to meet him and his family on the city hall lawn at a fall festival, probably around 1988. He would have been about 10. Little did I know the impact this young boy was going to have on my life.

Fast forward to early winter of 2007, I had popped into a potluck in the home-economics room on the west end of Aurora High School. There were few seats remaining, but I saw two smiling faces in the back. Marcus Reynolds, our art teacher, and Brad Boettler, who was teaching shop classes, patted the seat between them.

The friendship that unfolded that day is history and the Three Musketeers were reborn. It was a remarkable way to brainstorm and combine hands on ideas about art, culture, projects and writing. The next few years were pure joy as we planned, dreamed, worked and solved problems together.

Brad, his wife Kari, and their entire family have been by our side for every milestone, wedding, celebration, heartbreak or setback ever since I can remember. They are always the first ones there and the last ones to leave. They instinctively know what you need, what to do and how to help you when you are at a loss to even help yourself.

The outpouring of love for them in this community and beyond in recent days does not surprise me. They are easy to love, hard to forget and incredible to have in your lives. I have always thought having Brad or Kari involved in any project improves our reputations and paves the way for nothing but success.

Like most of you, when word spread about the loss of their gorgeous son last week, I dropped to my knees. I felt like the wind had been completely knocked out of me. The pain was incredible and remains close to unbearable but, nothing like that of a parent or immediate family member.

We have all felt so helpless, wanting so badly to fix it or take the pain away. We have

all scrambled to find big and small things to do that might make them feel better or show them how much they are loved.

Grief. It is often raw, messy, difficult and complicated.

We don't get to escape it in this life. But it is proof of great love and good memories. There is no magic time line or formula for it. Everyone wears it differently. I don't think it ever goes away. Time might sometimes change it a little.

And the grace of God will sometimes help us channel that energy into other directions to help preserve, protect and memorialize the legacies of those who have impacted so many lives. They are already doing just that by starting the memorial fund in Evan's honor to pave the way for scholarships, grants and opportunities to help others and celebrate the outdoors where he loved to be.

God's word tells us he is near to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. He is our refuge and our strength in times of trouble. I hope we can continue to love and support the Boettlers and each other. Prayer changes things. I know first hand that the love of a community and prayer can work miracles.

I told someone that this tells us what really matters in this crazy life. All that really matters is loving each other, serving each other and knowing where we are headed. The Boettlers and their family members (Garouttes, Bowmans, Wendlers, Brownings and others) have taught us how to love and serve.

In honor of Evan Boettler, my sweet student who told me he loved my stories, I am going to continue to tell them. He has always reminded me of my own son and his presence allowed me to relive some of my best days.

I am also going to make sure I chase a few sunsets, find my old fishing pole, walk through the woods to listen to the crunch of the leaves underneath my feet, gather up a few pine cones and give everything and everyone the very best I have because that's what that sweet boy taught me for the past 16 years. Aristotle said "In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous." Evan Boettler found marvelous things about nature and was always quick to share them with us.

Isaiah 40:31 says "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and now grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." In time, we will get stronger, we will have hope and we will eventually soar with the eagles.

There is a song by Mercy Me called "I Can Only Imagine." The lyrics say: I can only imagine, what it will be like when I walk by Your side. I can only imagine what my eyes would see when Your face is before me. I can only imagine. Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel if the song is about Heaven? and looking up at Jesus. I don't want to be angry. But I yearn for a time when we will have all of the answers and there will be no more sorrow.

When I think of Evan right now, I think of him smiling with the angels, his grandparents and others who undoubtedly met him at those pearly gates. I think of him at the feet of Jesus asking questions and learning all about the wonders of the universe. I think he is wearing those black socks, white crocks and hunting, fishing, hiking and kayaking for all eternity holding a place for us with all those adventures until we can join him someday.

I can only imagine. ❧

Sunset

Carlito Johnson
Blytheville, Ark.
Color Photography
Crowder
Honorable mention

I thought this was just a nice relaxing picture to show you that even Neosho can look great at the perfect time

Johnson is studying general studies. After attending Crowder, he wishes to attend University of Arkansas.



MADE FOR SORROW

Terrin Mcilvaine
Neosho
Crowder
Honorable Mention
Poetry

*A story of a woman
with love still in her
heart.*

*Mcilvaine has a
mysterious mind with
crazy thoughts.*

In the shadows of a life well-worn,
where pain has etched its tales,
I stand, a young woman, weathered,
yet resilient, as strength prevails.
Battered by struggles, a hundred storms
weathered with grace,
Allegations hurled like daggers,
each leaving a lingering trace.
Bullied, a lone soul in a tempest of disdain,
Yet within, a flame burns bright, undeterred
by the pouring rain.
For I am more than the scars
on my weathered skin,
A symphony of resilience,
a melody that rises from within.
In the mirror, I see a reflection
of battles fought,
But also the victories,
the lessons subtly taught.
A mosaic of survival, pieces held by grit,
A canvas of endurance,
where every struggle is fit.

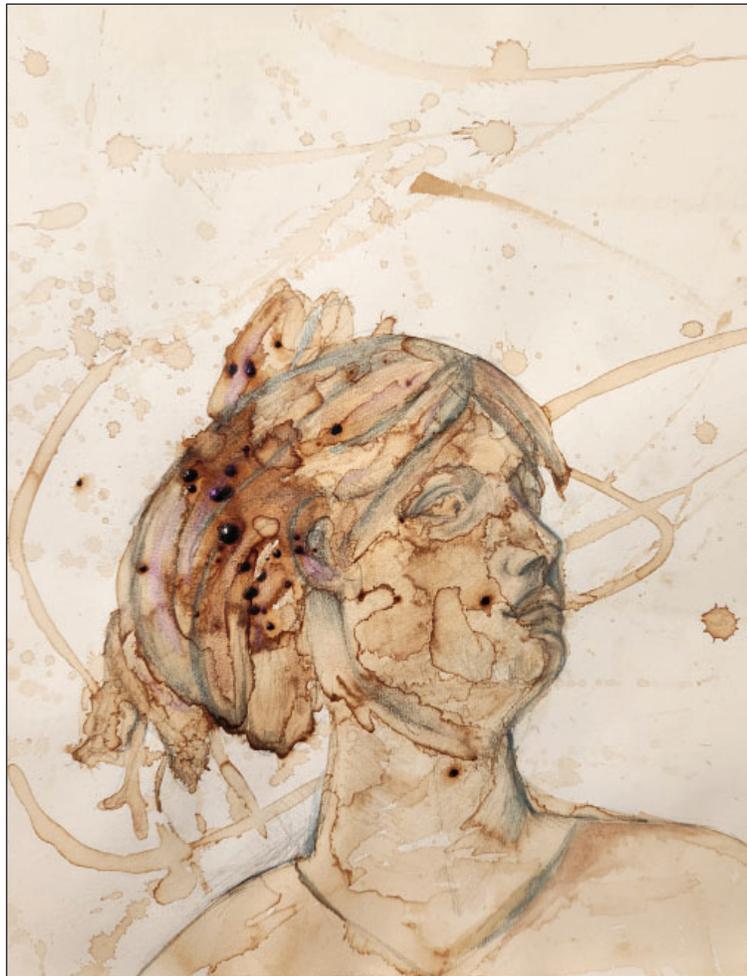
Through the darkest alleys,
I find my own light,
A beacon of joy, dispelling the shadows
of the night.
I've danced with demons,
wrestled with despair,
Yet, in the depths of adversity,
I find courage to repair.
For happiness isn't a stranger
to my weary heart,
It's the companion that refuses to depart.
I see beauty in the fractures,
the mosaic of my story,
In every trial, I find strength,
in every scar, there's glory.
Life may have battered,
but I choose to embrace,
The resilience that smiles through every trace.
So, here I stand, a testament
to the power within,
A young woman, scarred but happy,
finding beauty in life's din.

Coffee Maiden

Eden Stewart
Neosho
Community
Honorable Mention
2D Art

*I wanted to create
something by chance, so
I spilled coffee and let it
go from there.
Pencil, coffee,
watercolor*

*Stewart started making
art at a young age. She
took art classes in her
youth at the Walton
Art Center, earned a
bachelors degree in
ceramics, and taught
several years at different
art centers.*



GHOST

Jason was a problem, no doubt about it, Andy and Lois Wade had been warned about him in advance. No foster home had kept him over a few months, but somehow they had hoped this time it might be different. Well, there he sat on the porch, sullen, always sullen, demanding that his caseworker be called to come get him. He called the country “A bummer”, in fact so were they. If they had only had more time to reach him, but the worker would have to be called and Jason would leave. They had heard the animal howling at the deserted Taylor farm, and Andy had convinced Jason to walk with him to see what it was. Lois had promised to call the caseworker as soon as they got home if he would go, so he went, grumbling along behind Andy as they walked through the hay field.

The Taylor farm was a disaster. The house had burned years ago and the barn leaned at a crazy angle. Sun filtered through cracks in the wall making patterns on the floor. As their eyes adjusted to the light, a movement in the back of the box stalls attracted their attention. There sat possibly the strangest dog either of them had ever seen. Large erect ears looked like radar scopes or a cartoon character who had been scared by something, and its long body was covered in matted hair. Jason was laughing now, the first time in the six weeks he had been with them. Andy couldn't believe the excitement in Jason's voice as they watched the dog slowly walk toward them.

“We need to find a brush! You have one, don't you Andy? I bet it's hungry, can we feed it? If I stay with you can I keep it?”

“First to the veterinary, if it hasn't been reported missing I guess it's yours, but you have to take care of it. Deal?”

“Deal!” Jason carried the dog less than happy dog as they walked home. It was sullen but accepted being carried. Dr. Parsons had been the local veterinarian for years and knew about any local lost or found animals. He escorted them right into his examining room and began to check the dog. “It” was a “She” and she was what was known as a Skye Terrier, a rare breed not usually found as a stray. She was young and in excellent health but thin, probably from hunger and worms. With treatment and a quality food, she should

be fine. Oh yes, she was microchipped with a number that could be checked. He suggested for her comfort the mats should be clipped off, that would be \$50.00 please and his office girl could clip her tomorrow. As they left, Jason was lost to anything but the dog, holding her close, he picked at the twigs and leaves in her hair suddenly declaring, “I don't want to cut her hair, I'll brush it if I had a brush.” The police had no reported lost Skyes and a stop at the pet shop equipped them with a brush and a book about Skyes Terriers. Jason cuddled the Skye in his lap and read on the ride home. By time for dinner he had finished the entire book and quoted from it all evening. Did they know, in their native Scotland, Skyes were hunting dogs and were equipped to “go to ground” into tunnels after badgers and other animals? Did they know Skyes often are aloof and wary of strangers, that they were lucky to catch her? Did they know that Skyes were owned by rich and poor alike and one accompanied Mary Queen of Scots to the guillotine? Did they know he was going to name her Ghost because she looked like she had seen a ghost? Then smiling from ear to ear, he gathered Ghost into his arms and still talking, went to bed. Andy and Lois sat stunned. It was hard to believe a dog could make that much difference in Jason. This might be the miracle they had prayed for. What if someone claimed her, could Jason deal with that? They had to look for the owner, but maybe he would never be found. It took almost a week to brush Ghost, but when she was finished and finally bathed she was beautiful. Lois took photos. There was some question about who got wettest during the bath, Jason or Ghost. Jason slowly began to change, he talked and laughed and showed a remarkable sense of humor and Ghost became completely devoted to him, following him everywhere he went. She loved Jason deeply and they spent long hours together wandering the fields and exploring the woods, and during that time Jason also learned to love. Jason and Ghost left early in the morning loaded with peanut butter sandwiches, planning to spend all Saturday exploring. The cool day made walking a pleasure and they wandered farther than ever before. Jason thought how lucky he was, he finally had a home and his best friend Ghost to love and share his life with.

The wild sow had found a sunny spot and

[Continued to 36]

Venita Henson
Neosho
Crowder
Silver
Fiction

My life has revolved around my wonderful Skye Terriers for a long time and I marvel at the love and loyalty they show for those of us who live with one. Ghost was written about such love as only a boy and a dog can have for each other.

Henson has been a life long resident of Neosho and is a nontraditional student. She has attended ceramics and sculpture classes at Crowder for many years beginning with Janie Lantz.

Red Panda

Ezekiel Murray
Carl Junction High
School
Bronze
2D Art

Coffee painting was new to me but similar to any monochromatic watercolor painting. This painting was an eye-opening experience in the sense that it gave me a grasp on my level of understanding when it came to different values and how they can create texture.

Murray is a junior, plays trumpet, runs for cross country and track, and is a part of National Art Honor Society. He hopes to attend a very good college after high school and then plans to start a business.



[Continued from 35]

stretched out, slowly drifting off to sleep as the sun warmed her body. The piglets played around her for some time before boredom sent them in search of further adventure and they were more curious than afraid as Jason and Ghost came closer. Jason had seen pigs before at a distance but now here were six small, cute piglets wandering alone in the woods. Surely they must be lost to be here. Maybe he could catch one and take it home to keep for a pet. He had no way of knowing they were wild or how dangerous a sow, wild or tame could be when defending her young. While curious, Ghost had never seen nor smelled anything like them before, but ancient quiet instincts told her there was danger here and she hung back slightly, growling deep in her throat. Her ears flicked back and forth, trying to locate the source of her uneasiness. One piglet didn't run, it actually walked right up to them, but when it felt Jason's hands gripping firmly around its middle it let out an earsplitting squeal. The sow was instantly awake and on her feet. Amazingly fast and agile for her size, she covered the distance to her babies in an instant. The squeal from the piglet hid the sound of the approaching sow until she struck Jason from behind, knocking

him down and ripping the back of his leg. The piglet went flying and began squealing with new vigor when it struck the ground. As the sow again turned toward Jason, she was met by thirty pounds of fury. Ghost had been investigating another piglet when Jason screamed in pain. She loved her human and nothing would hurt him and not pay for it. Instinct from hundreds of past generations told her to grab the throat to dispatch this monster but as she tried, the sow hit Ghost with her snout throwing her to the side. Jason had regained his feet and when he saw the sow throw Ghost, he grabbed a club and began to beat her over the back. Spinning, the sow charged, again knocking Jason's feet from under him. He fell, this time striking his head on a large rock and as darkness closed over him, he heard Ghost attacking the sow again. She was no match in size or strength but her human was in danger so she kept attacking, each time being roughly tossed aside.

Finally it was quiet, Ghost lay in a limp, bloody pile close to Jason. The sow stood glaring at them for some time before gathering her frightened piglets to her and grunting off into the brush. Ghost opened her eyes, slowly and painfully she dragged her body to Jason. Whining, she licked the blood from the face of her beloved human, laying with her body pressed against his, her tail thumped against him a few minutes and then was still.

When Jason regained consciousness Ghost was barely breathing, tenderly picking her up he carried her home, promising her she would be okay. She woke once and licked his arm, wagged her tail, and drifted away again. Some time on the way home, he felt her breathing stop. Jason buried her by himself in their favorite spot in the woods. He wanted to be alone with her this last time. Andy and Lois had waited at the house when a car arrived and a man introduced himself as Tom Adams. Jason had called him the week before, telling him about finding Ghost, the microchip, and that they were told his name was recorded as Ghost's owner. He could tell Jason loved her and did not want to part with her, so he wanted to see what kind of home she had there before making the decision to take her home or not. CH Adam's Princess Fiona has

A BRAVE ROAD TRIP

What was supposed to be a fun trip to watch my favorite professional baseball team turned out to be a complete mishap. We had planned it for weeks. My parents and I were going on a beach vacation with a stop along the way to watch the Atlanta Braves in their new stadium, Truist Park. This would be the first time I had been to a Braves game since they relocated from Turner Field to this new top-notch ballpark. I was beyond excited to get on the road, so I could see my favorite player, Ronald Acuña Jr, in action again.

Summer had begun, and a ten-hour drive was in store for the Bearden family. It started off as an effortless, relaxing ride through little towns and big cities. We made the most of our long trip, stopping at beautiful campuses like Ole Miss and Auburn, with lush greenery, timeless red brick buildings, impressive sporting facilities, and thousands of students filling the streets. All weary of getting back on the road, we trekked on, eagerly anticipating the great experience ahead of us. But that's when it all started to go downhill.

"Why did the ETA just move up an hour?" my dad asked, who was currently driving. Confused, my mom and I stared down at the car's navigation screen. "The GPS must have given us the Atlanta time from our time zone, and now that we crossed into Eastern from Central, it changed our arrival time," said my mom. "No worries," my dad said,

"We'll still get there in plenty of time." Luck was on our side, as we had planned to get to the ballpark with enough time to watch all the pregame festivities.

However, we had not planned to get stuck in a traffic jam due to an unfortunate wreck going into the city on the interstate. Car horns honking, lights flashing, people out in the road—it was complete and utter chaos. With cars stopped for miles and a fierce gust of wind blowing through my hair, I sat nervously praying that it would be cleared up in time for us to make it to the game. The cloudy Atlanta sky looked menacing, like it was encasing us on the roads for an eternity. However, the daylight began to break through into a beaming sunset with the pale tint of orange encased in the vibrant golden rays. The warm summer air was filled with the hope of a diehard Braves fan.

After the longest half hour of my life, we finally began moving again. Filled with excitement, I began celebrating, and I checked the time to see if we would make it by the first pitch of the game. My dad weaved in and out of traffic with intent, and we finally made it to the parking garage with a few minutes to spare. Not knowing where to go, we simply followed the people in Braves jerseys as we worked our way to the alluring new ballpark. We hurried through the line, sprinting through the gate and were finally able to relax in our seats, just in time to hear the umpire say, "Play ball!" ❧

been kidnapped and dumped after the ransom had been paid. When Tom heard how valiantly Ghost had defended Jason, he agreed that she must have loved him very much to have given so much for him. Thanking the Wades and Jason for their kindness, he left mumbling about Ghost and Jason and love. The months went by slowly for Jason. He missed the time he spent with Ghost wandering in the woods alone together. Visiting her grave often, he mourned for her but wouldn't talk about her to anyone. He had his own private memories and didn't want to share them with anyone. On a particularly bright day in early spring, Tom Adams again arrived. Jason knew he had come to see about Ghost months ago, after she had been killed, but what could he possibly want now? Talking for a few minutes, Tom again

thanked Jason for loving Ghost and giving her the best months of her life, he then turned and went to his car, fumbling in the back seat a few minutes he returned carrying a puppy, not just any puppy but a Skye Terrier, and handed it to Jason.

"I know Ghost would want you to have him. He is her grandson, and he needs a boy like you who knows how to love a dog." Jason held the puppy stiffly for a few minutes but as it covered his face with wet kisses he tightly gathered him into his arms. Thanking Mr. Adams, he turned and walked away talking to the puppy. "Just look at those ears. You look like you've seen a ghost, so I guess that's what you're getting named. Just let me tell you about your grandmother, she was the greatest....." ❧

Brock Bearden
Texarkana, Texas
Crowder
Honorable Mention
Nonfiction

This entry is a descriptive narrative I wrote about my experience while traveling from Texarkana, Texas to an Atlanta Braves baseball game in 2022.

Bearden is a sophomore originally from Texarkana, Texas but now plays baseball at Crowder for the Roughriders. He is planning to transfer to a Division I program to attend school and continue a collegiate baseball career.

ONE COUNTRY, TWO OPINIONS

Sausha Miller
Carthage
Crowder
Silver
Nonfiction

This is an essay over two very well known opinions. Two opinions that affected so many like you and I. This essay came about from an assignment that led me into a deep research that went beyond the assignment.

The thought of politics is something that wasn't taught to Miller, and she thought politics would never be useful for becoming a nurse. Politics did teach her new things to carry with her as she finishes her adventure.

Lincoln Monument

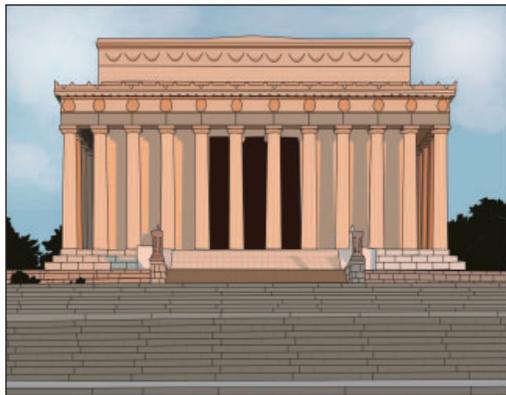
*Evelyn Hudnall
Carl Junction High
School
Gold
Digital Art

Forty-six presidents have guided this country, all having led this nation with expectations of improving the country. Every president has had their own views of what this nation needed to improve and grow for generations to come. Each president chooses which battles to fight and which battles to let sit idle for another day. Being elected to be president is a huge honor and responsibility, requiring the weight of responsibility on their shoulders for their term. Then it will be handed to the next president for them to guide and adjust for the nation to thrive. Out of forty-six presidents, I will bring the attention to only two. The 36th president of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, and the 40th president of the United States, Ronald Reagan. More specifically: Johnson's acceptance speech and Reagan's "A Time for Choosing" speech. Highlighting the views of these two presidents and what they declared the utmost importance of the nation at the time of their election, along with ways they intended to fix such issues for the nation.

Lyndon B. Johnson gave a memorable acceptance speech on Aug. 27, 1964. In this speech, you hear Johnson declare that "every American has the right to be treated as a person." Johnson talks about the other side

of what we know as the American dream, the dark side for those that have not had the luxury of fulfilling the American dream. Johnson tells America in this speech exactly what he wants for each and every American. "Most Americans want medical care for older citizens. And so do I. Most Americans want fair and stable prices and decent incomes for our farmers. And so do I. Most Americans want a decent home in a decent neighborhood for all. And so do I. Most Americans want an education for every child to the limit of his ability. And so do I. Most Americans want a job for every man who wants to work. And so do I. Most Americans want victory in our war against poverty. And so do I. Most Americans want continually expanding and growing prosperity. And so do I." Johnson had the same goals he believed most Americans also had. He wanted to eradicate poverty and improve the quality of life for all people. These goals all would lead Americans to the "Great Society, a place where the meaning of man's life matches the marvels of man's labor." Johnson believed with his liberal views, the federal government should have a definite duty to social problems and there would be a way to eradicate poverty and improve the quality of life for all Americans. Hoping that Americans have the fullest life they could hope for by starting programs that would give children a decent place to live and an education. Programs that will protect our lands and the air we breathe. Johnson believed we had the resources and the knowledge and all that was left was the need for courage.

Ronald Reagan gave a speech on behalf of the Republican candidate Barry Goldwater that is known as "A Time for Choosing" on Oct. 27, 1964. The Republican party targeted Reagan as a candidate after the dramatic increase of donations after his speech. The views, although the opposite of Lyndon B. Johnson, were from a conservative and republican view of the nation. Reagan took the laissez-faire approach when it came to the goals, he believed were the most important for the nation; protection for the nation and increasing the economy. The laissez-faire approach would let things take their own course with minimal government interference. Supply economics aids to bolster an economy by implementing policies that will lead to an increased supply of goods and services and subsequent economic



This piece was an assignment in my graphic productions class. It was time consuming and had many steps but at the same time it was simple to do with the right techniques.

Hudnall has completed countless portraits and sketches while learning and growing along the way. She has been experimenting with other forms of art such as painting, pottery, weaving, digital art, and is constantly pursuing new ideas.

* Scholarship recipient

growth. The approach is referred to as Reaganomics. The economy would be run by individuals and companies; the private sector. To help stimulate the economy Reagan would make many tax cuts. Reaganomics created an effective growth in the economy in the United States. Reagan stated, "This is the issue of this election: Whether we believe in our capacity of self-government or whether we abandon the American revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves." Reagan knew that man could govern himself better than the federal government could govern man. Reagan also had views on what the founding fathers wanted for this nation. "The full power of the centralized government, this was the very thing the Founding Fathers sought to minimize. They knew the governments don't control things. A government can't control the economy without controlling the people. And they know when a government sets out to do that, it must use force and coercion to achieve its purpose. They also knew those Founding Fathers, that outside of its legitimate functions, government does nothing as well or as economically as the private sector of the economy."

Reagan wanted to take the federal government out of the day-to-day life of the American citizens and allow them to do as they pleased with their money. For man himself and the nation to be truly free to do as he pleases with his money and to run the economy, the nation must be at its strongest form and refuse to back down or surrender to the war at hand. Reagan firmly believed that this great nation needed to fund more into the federal military for the protection of all the rights and all the luxuries we have in this life. "You and I have the courage to say to our enemies, there is a price we will not pay. There is a point beyond which they must not advance. Winston Churchill said, 'The destiny of man is not measured by material computations. When great forces are on the move in the world, we learn we're spirits- not animals.'" (Reagan, 1964). Reagan knew that the utopia that was promised by the opposing party would be one that came with a great price. That price would be the accommodation of the enemy. The price would be us living with the enemy breathing down our backs and always being a



threat until one day with too much hope and no sound evidence that they would "forget their evil way." With freedom so fragile, Reagan was going to drive this nation to a strong military, a strong economy and a freedom that was stronger than ever before.

Although Johnson and Reagan are both well-known and beloved by many in the nation, they had their own views on how to better bring the "American Dream" to all the nation and citizens under their leadership from the seat as President. Both coming from a Democratic party they may have shared many of the same ideologies for the nation to thrive, but Reagan transitioned to identify with the Republican party bringing with it ideologies that were from opposite views but nonetheless just as important of the views from the Democratic party itself. Each president will bring different views and different ideologies to the position of the Presidency in hopes to make this nation stronger. The hope for the "American Dream" will bring with it many problems in the nation and economy: Whether that be through who is running the economy, the rights to the people, the jobs available, the assistance provided from states and federal government or even the military and the amount of funding or protection that comes from within. We will stand behind our nation during our time and we will thrive with the guidance of our president and each and every American will come closer to the "American Dream". Let all the presidents to come have a clear mind and the will to guide this nation to its ultimate greatness. ❧

Lower Fox Creek School

David Zacharias
Pittsburg, Kan.
Community
Honorable Mention
B&W Photography

Completed in 1882 in the Flint Hills, the building served as a one-room school until 1930. I felt shooting this building on B&W film helped capture the essence of a 19th century prairie school house.

Transitioning from film to digital photography, while still dabbling in both, Zacharias' work traverses the variety of genres from landscapes, portraiture, abstracts, and occasional street photography.

Page, Arizona

David Zacharias
Pittsburg, Kan.
Community
Silver
Digital Art

*A fan of landscape
photographer Isabella
Tabacchi, I decided
to go back and work
on a photo I had done
earlier and apply some
of her techniques using
extensive dodging,
burning, luminosity
and color masking to
achieve a different look.*

*The original photo
had cloudless sky, so
I imported this one
from another of my
landscapes to get the
final product. Nikon
D7000, shutter 1/320
sec., 35 mm, f/9, ISO
400*

*Transitioning from film
to digital photography,
while still dabbling in
both, Zacharias' work
traverses the variety of
genres from landscapes,
portraiture, abstracts,
and occasional street
photography.*





PEACE TO DECEMBER 3RD

Diana Enamorado
Carthage
Quill Staff
Poetry

Enamorado is a first-year student who hopes to one day be a pilot for a major international airline. She spends her free time reading, listening to music, and doing homework. while also writing various works of poetry.

A call log,
Full of missed answers,
Regret relentlessly digging its claws,
into unspoken thoughts.

Now remains a grieving heart,
With love that has no place to go.

A lifetime will pass,
One privilege stripped away
But as the passage of time breezes through,
Old wounds will come to heal.

This is a piece that I dedicate to veterans who have lost their battle to mental health. In honor of a very dear friend of mine who struggled with their battle, I hope that this piece can bring peace to those who have had family members pass away.

Now

Steve Wilson
Anderson
Community
Bronze
B&W Photography

I have a goal to obtain that one picture that defines me or a belief or a goal. Eagles near or in Stella or Roaring River park are a challenge.

Local photographer who strives to capture the moment. Whether in portrait, landscape or life, that moment in time will continue past our life. That moment can be reviewed/cherished by future generations.

