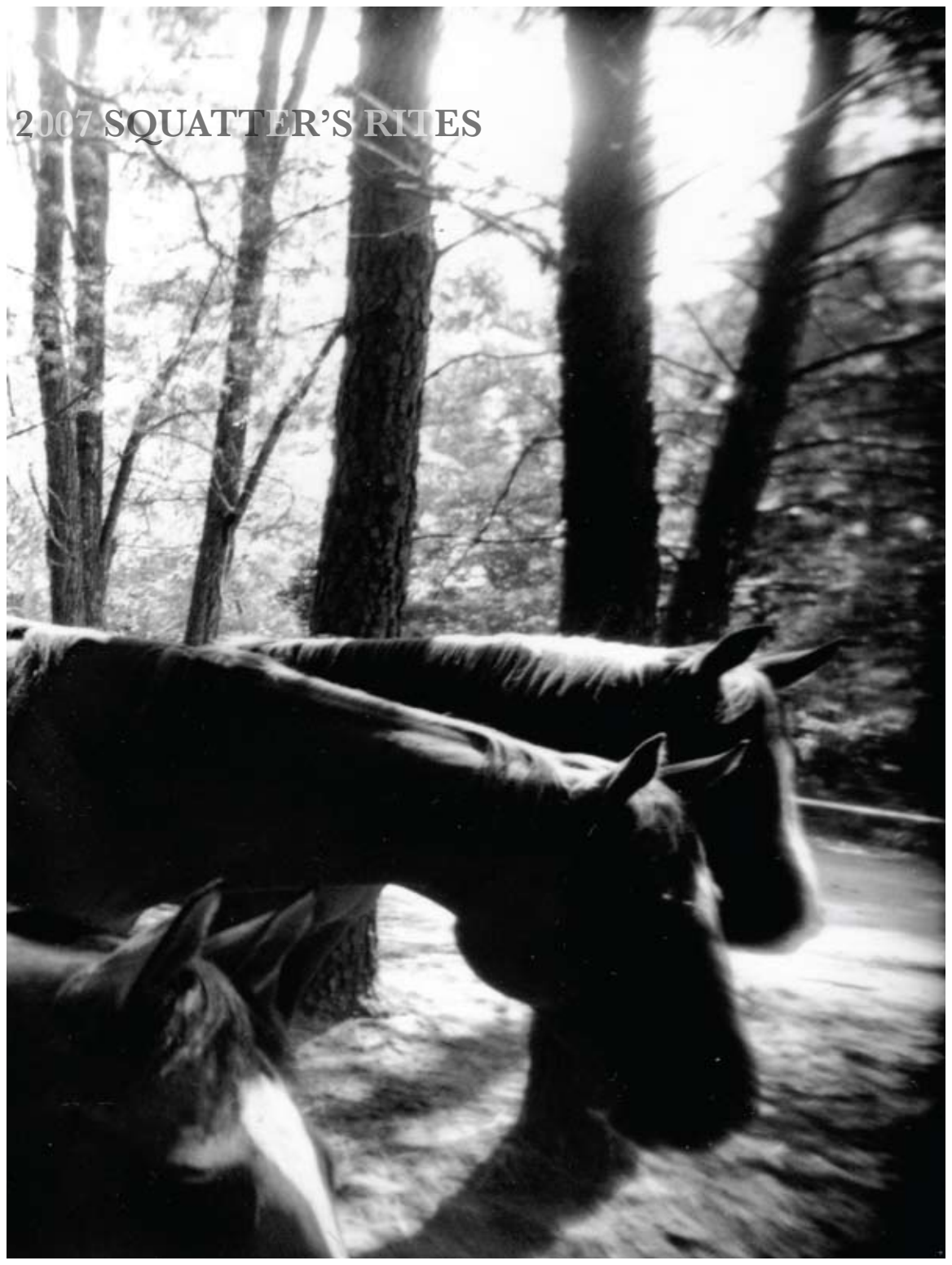


2007 SQUATTER'S RITES





Dear Enthusiastic Art Lovers...

Squatter's Rites has been released on unsuspecting members of society yet again for another year of brilliant works of poetry, short story, and visual art. Being Managing Editor for Squatter's Rites has given me a world of experience in everything from organizing to processing and evaluating each art form. The experience I take from this will go forth to the 'real world'. Everything I learned and read that's within this book is so much more than a poem, a story, or visual art; it's a dream that's come true. Creativity allures all and that alone has the power of inner enlightenment.--Tamela Harris

Having come on board mid-semester, I had not really realized the impact that this magazine has. Squatter's Rites allows everyone who is interested an outlet to express themselves in whatever form they desire. Being a photographer myself I understand the importance of self-expression and have quite enjoyed this entire process. My role as Layout/Art Editor has been quite enjoyable as well as a major education; who knew! I hope you enjoy what we have worked so diligently to bring to you all!--Erin E. Haynes

We now give you this year's Squatter's Rites 2007!

Staff:

Tamela Harris--Managing Editor

Erin E. Haynes--Layout/Art Editor

Ashley Greene--Judge

Leighanne Quinn--Judge

Elkin "Nanny" Brown & Cynthia Wyatt--Advisors

A Special Thanks to Claire Hampton for taking time to teach!

Nothing is as it Seems

Backwards, vile, secretive, debased.  
Nothing is as it seems  
Laugh on the outside, scream on the inside  
Love in the corner, but hate in open view.  
Nothing is as it seems.  
Everyone is cordial, yet nothing kind is said  
The vibe of discomfort and secrets lie in the air.  
Nothing is as it seems.  
Smile to the face, snarl to the back.  
Everything had double meaning  
Nothing is as it seems.

Katie Kile



Bernice Valdes

Untitled

You mean everything to me  
You are my life—my world  
You are my reason for living—for breathing  
I love you and I'm sorry  
I can't always be there

I'm sorry I'm not around to see  
All the cute little things you do  
To see all the bad things  
So I can tell you not to

There's so many things I'm missing  
And I miss you every day  
I wish I could make things better  
Make all of this just go away

I'm sorry for so many things  
I just can't explain  
Things you aren't old enough to understand  
Things I hope you will one day  
When you become a man

Every single thing I do is for you  
Even if sometimes it's hard to believe  
To give you a better life that I had  
Even if—just for a little while you don't

You are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen  
Even still it takes my breath away—just to look at you  
You are priceless—you are part of me  
You are truly the most precious gift I have ever received  
I love you and I'm sorry  
For not being there.

Ashleigh Edgen

## A Night to Forget

Adam C. Troutt

My name is Connor Dean Andrews. I am an American, fighting in the forces that guard my country and our way of life: I am prepared to give my life in their defense\*. I am twenty-two years old and I have seen many things in my life. There are many more things I still hope to see, and many things that I hope never to see again. Last night, or rather this morning, I saw something that not only do I hope never to see again, I will pray every hour until the day I die that I can forget.

The night started like so many others out here. I started at 2230 by changing into my cammies and donning my boots. I shrugged into my t-shirt, and then pulled on my S.F.T. Body Armor and covered it with my black fatigue shirt. I then sat in front of my mirror and pulled my black war paint from my bag of goodies. I began to carefully apply my war paint to my neck and face. Happy with the effect I make with my baldhead, black cammies and black paint, I got up and slowly, methodically gathered my weapons. I picked up my Cold Steel Peace Keeper I, with its seven-inch Carbon V blade, checked its edge, sheathed it, and attached it to my web-belt. I checked the clip in my black-coated .50 Desert Eagle semi-automatic pistol. After jacking a round into the chamber, I holstered the gun and tied the holster to my leg. I pulled on my watch cap, and then shrugged into my LBV. I took one last look over my rack, and then picked up my M4 with the night scope already attached, and walked out to meet my team. If I had known what I was about to be walking into, I would have walked anyway.

We loaded into the humvee for our forty-five minute ride to our drop-off. On the ride, I checked my gear one last time: two extra mags of 5.56 ammo for the M4; two extra mags of .50 ammo for the Desert Eagle; Cold Steel Peace Keeper sharpened to a razors edge. We got to the drop-off, turned off our radios, and made our way to the compound. This was to be a radio-silent mission. All communications would be made via hand signals we had all learned years ago, and will remember sixty years from now. We got to the outside wall of the compound, me at point, Lt. Bonham behind me, followed by CWO Hicks, with PO Waters as tail-gunner. Being point man, all my guns were silenced, and the idea was to get close enough for the knife if possible. At the wall, I peaked around the corner in a low crouch, saw one guard on patrol, and silently signaled the team to wait behind me. Walking quietly, with my guys watching my back, I snuck up behind the guy, grabbed his mouth with my left hand, and with my right I stabbed him in the neck with the seven-inch blade and severed everything from his spinal cord out. Even that wasn't as bad as what I was about to see next.

We made it to the inside wall, and again were lined up against the wall in order. We wouldn't make a move until we got the all-clear tap from the guy behind us. PO Waters scanned our six, and then tapped Hicks, who passed it up to Bonham, who finally gave it to me. Feeling that familiar tap on my shoulder, I turned the corner. Time seemed to freeze as I turned: all my senses seemed to be heightened. I distinctly recall feeling the sweat rolling

down my back; I can almost still feel the burning in my calves; the weight of the Desert Eagle on my leg; sweat stinging my left eye; the covers on my dog tags slightly pulling the hair on my chest; the cool breeze catching at my eyelashes; desert sand rubbing in nearly every crevice of my body. The most acute memory I have is a feeling that I have had many times, the peace that comes from knowing that if I was walking into a bullet I'd wake up with Jesus. With all this present in my mind, I turned the corner, and stared into a pair of eyes looking over the barrel of a Russian-made AK-47. That's all I saw: the eyes, the barrel, and the slide all the way back indicating a round in the chamber. Instantly there was a flash and a kick to my shoulder, and I thought I'd been shot. In less than the blink of an eye I realized the muzzle flash was from my gun, the kick from my M4. After this realization, came the realization that still haunts me. The jaws under the eyes that I had just been looking into weren't old enough to grow hair. God help me, I had killed a kid.

I haven't stopped praying in the last six hours that those brief seconds would be erased from time, or at least from my memory. I've been told I was in the right, that the kid had a gun in my face; he wouldn't hesitate to kill my kid sister given the chance, that kind of thing. I don't really know if I was right. I do know though, that right or wrong, justified or not, I did what I did, and I will live with it every day as long as I live. I will not let it hold me back from doing my duty, I will not let it dictate what I do with my life, and I will not let it rule any aspect of my life. Some may not understand this, some may not get why I do what I do, some may even criticize me, but I will continue to do what I do. Why, you may ask? I do what I do because I am a United States Marine.

\*Code of Conduct, US Marine Corps, Article I\*

Two-Faced Love

love brings two things to mind—  
it's a beautiful thing,  
however takes time  
you can wait day and night  
for it to come your way  
or maybe you're lucky  
and you get it in a day  
love can be a sad  
or a glorious thing  
one thing's for sure  
at times it can sting  
well, this is my love poem  
so I'll say what I may  
love sucks big time  
but I hope I have it someday

Tiffany Maghami



Caitlin Bush

Sleep

Goodnight my love  
So dear to me  
I'll see you one day not too soon  
When the new light comes anew  
You'll come back to me  
Bright and new  
So sleep my love  
No evil can ever touch you  
Above or below  
Good night my love  
'Til comes the morn  
So bright and new as you.

Gillian Farrar

Ending Lives

Everybody's decomposing gradually  
Somebody sacrifices vivacity  
Funerals occurring everyday  
  
Suicidal topsy-turvy teenages  
Anybody's elderly grandparent  
Anxiously awaiting extinction  
  
Criminals murdering guiltlessly  
Everyone eventually putrefies  
Everybody's decomposing gradually.

Bree McElrath

And the Nothing Remains

I walk the dark, I walk the shadows. I trudge along the black emptiness of thought, of pain,  
of contemplation.

I feel dread, the kind you feel when something is weighing heavy on your mind, and eats  
away at your hardened heart.

I can hear a distant voice calling me, but the sound is so faint, it may as well be the wind  
whispering in the bare, naked trees.

I feel as though my blood rushes through the traffic of what are my veins, yet it is sluggish  
and snail-like.

My heart beat is deliberate and yet it is out of control. Thumping and pulsing at an un-  
known, yet all too familiar rhythm.

So where to now?

The dark dust around me is silent, yet it calls to me. The night is empty, but it holds every-  
thing that is me in it.

The sky is black. The ground is black. The air I breathe is black. This place is too sad.

But why is it sad? Why does it scream a deafening silence?

Because my blind eyes see what my numb body is feeling.

If only you could understand me.

If only you could read my sacred thoughts.

If only you knew what kind of suffering is caused by such an enormous amount of nothing!

Nothing is what draws me, and nothing is what keeps me here. If it weren't for nothing,  
than anything could have happened.

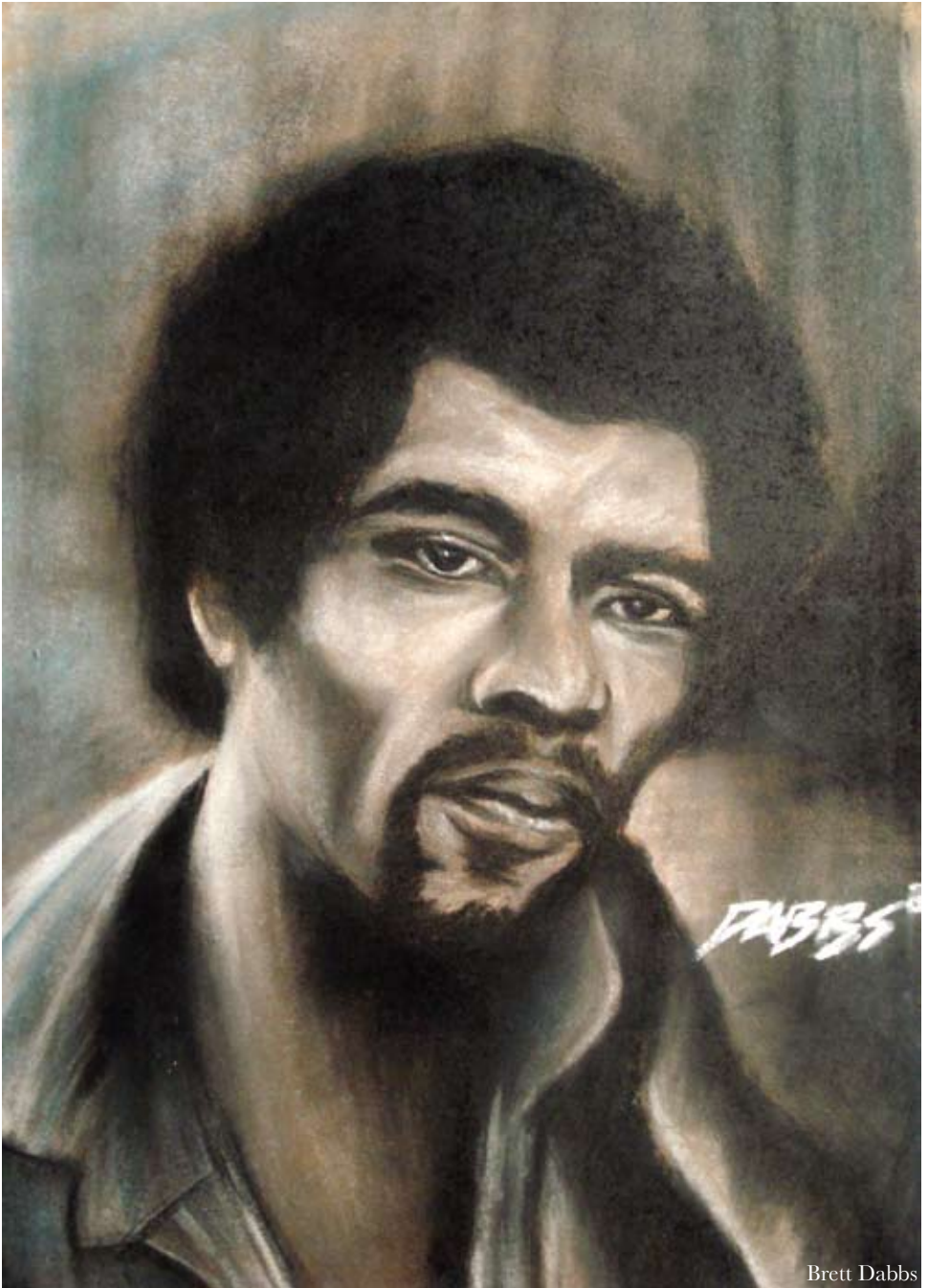
And that's what I long for. Anything. If you could give me anything, than nothing wouldn't  
be so dark and alone.

I feel pulled by such a pushing force. I feel shaken by such a subtle movement. I feel like I'm  
falling from being pulled up too fast.

And the dark gets darker and darker. There is so much black that even a gray presence  
becomes phantom-like.

I am poisoned by honey and made anxious by a whisper.

And only the nothing remains. Only the nothing that means everything, while anything,  
even a simple change, could save me.



Brett Dabbs

Coffee with Freud

One man  
Three parts.  
Just as the man who hangs with their hearts.  
Yet a different spectrum  
Different symbols.  
A phallic cigar  
Placed in the needing mouth of the ID.  
Head expanded, confused  
Torn between two.  
The tough shoulders of an ego  
Ears deaf from the screaming of the super.  
The S.E. illuminated in morality  
Separated from the profanity  
And stern like the state.  
The bearded man rambled on  
And I express no debate.  
I sip my espresso  
Only half listening.  
Glancing at the blonde in the short silk skirt  
Whose sleek smooth legs protrude from its heavenly base.  
Visions of a random meeting  
Quite fast followed by sexually explicit scenes.  
Noticing my ignoring neglect  
He snaps his fingers producing a jolting effect.  
In smiling German dialect complex.  
Stating in a proven point  
That all actions are inspired by sex.

David Burns

The Beginning of Life

The light fell through the cold glass window  
Illuminating the pale, wooden floor  
A mouse stirred in a corner  
Yearning for more of that delicious ray  
It began its journey

A baby coos in its crib a few rooms over  
The father, stout and burly, comes to comfort  
But it's too late.

The squeak penetrates the soothing melody of the crib  
Breaking the air of tranquility  
The father, enraged, grabs that hard, metal tool  
Like a jackal, stalking its prey, he leaps

THWACK!

The light fell through the cold glass window  
Illuminating the wet bloody, floor  
A mouse no longer stirred in a corner  
It finally tasted the light.

Marx Stephens

Courage to Love

Never had courage  
Never had love  
How can I find courage and love

I've prayed so long to the almighty above Asking for guidance to help me find love

February 15th I seen the light  
This creature he created in front of my eyes

He sees more than my hips and thighs  
It's my inner beauty that he loves

Smart, confident, and beautiful he say  
Those words I never believed until that special day

Tell me I give you courage  
And you found love

Not to soon  
Not to late

Courage to Love

LaKeisha Pope

Just a Word

Peace is just a word  
Yet, the action is immaculate.  
Our worldly civilization distracted  
Furious with boredom.  
And devastated by disagreements.  
What more could we want than peace  
To see the sickening genocides cease.  
Their guns plugged with patience  
To give the trigger finger a conscious.  
And the mourners a bereavement.  
Just one single day of peace  
Would allow love and understanding to increase.  
And lift this foggy haze of hate  
Giving us one final chance until it's too late.  
And we all end, ourselves.  
If violence begets violence  
Then peace begets peace.  
The world in a common alliance  
May seem a little extreme.  
But everything begins with a dream.

David Burns



Raymunda Solorio





## **Who is Asia?**

Asia is a man, a poet, a survivor!  
Asia is a Spoken Word Artist and has overcome a reality in his life that many can only pretend to fathom. His poetry is a rare jewel that comes alive to the listener. The audience will walk away with a sense of unity. I now give you an interview with Asia, the man, the poet, the survivor.

Learn more about Asia at [ibeasia.net](http://ibeasia.net) or [myspace.com/ibeasia](http://myspace.com/ibeasia)

### **Who is Asia?**

Above all things, I am a man of God. After that, I am merely following the path that I know I need to be on. Somehow, that path became poetry.

### **What do you use as inspiration?**

I can't explain where it comes from. I just feel blessed to have the strange ability to pay attention to my surroundings and then question it. That process usually leads to a poem.

### **You speak for everyone in your poetry, what do you hope they walk away with?**

My goal has always been that people, through my poetry, can find a way to look inside themselves- to sift through the best and worst parts of their makeup. I think that by taking that type of inventory, we manage to get closer to some sort of enlightenment. We live in a world where all too often we are told what to do, either consciously or subconsciously. I mean, think about it: the clothes we wear, the products we buy. Even in our careers, most times we are told which careers will make us more successful and so, inevitably, we choose those paths even if we are not 100% convinced that's what we should be doing. So the question is, are the choices we make something we have control over or were they already choices made for us without our awareness? But by having a better grip on who we are- by questioning our existence and purpose- we can better overlook the outer influences and make the right choices that leads to a healthier life.

### **Before becoming the phenomenal poet speaking across the country, what was once your profession?**

Lol. For six years, I spent my life working in corporate America as an executive trainer teaching people telemarketing techniques to sell credit cards. I made very good money doing it but I hated that job.

### **Who or what was your inspiration for speaking your words and influencing others?**

Trials and tribulations are what pushed me to poetry. First it was just an outlet to let out my frustrations (as most poets typically do). But somehow, after the numerous times people have come up to me about how grateful they were that I was able to reach them, it became a mission that I knew I had to now accomplish.

### **Who or what encouraged you to put your poetry in front of the public?**

I don't know. I mean, how do you explain waking up in morning just knowing that's something you have to do? I believe everyone has a passion. Some people follow it while others push it aside out of fear that it won't take them far in life. But bi-pass that fear and you'll be amazed how quickly you jump out of bed feeling more alive than you ever have before.

**Who are some of your favorite poets?**

Favorite poets in the spoken word community right now are:

Anis Moijgani (Seattle), Andrea Gibson (Denver), Sunni Patterson (New Orleans), Caheed (Miami), Jaylee Alde (Berkley), Lizz Straight (Tampa), Paul D (Tallahassee) and Amir Sulaiman (Atlanta).

**Which is your all time favorite poem?**

I have too many to name. It's like favorite songs- you listen to what you feel like listening to at the moment. I have stacks of other poet's CD's and stacks of DVD's from competitions and events. When I need some inspiration, I just start playing them all and get my fix (poetry is just addictive that way).

**Out of your own work, which is your favorite? Can you choose a favorite?**

From my own work, I don't have a favorite poem really. My downfall is that I am too critical of my own work to really feel they are complete. For some odd reason, I always feel something is missing so I never really find a favorite.

**What advice do you have for someone who wants to take up poetry? What about expressing that poetry as you do?**

My advice is to read "Letters to a Young Poet" by Rainer Maria Rilke. Old school classic. It says that you shouldn't question your own talent or skill based on what others say you should do. You don't need validation from other people to tell you something about yourself that you already know.

**What is your main goal in life?**

My main goal is to fight the good fight. I want to be able to lie on my death bed one day and look back at the life I led and know that I took it as far as I could. I want my life to be a testament- that it didn't go wasted. We spend too much time just going through the motion even when we know that all of us will end up dead eventually. So knowing that we all end up in the same place shouldn't we then go through life as if we have nothing to lose? I mean, if we were suddenly handed tons of cash with the rule that we have to spend it within 24 hours or it's gone, wouldn't we then do whatever we could to spend it all?

**What advice do you have for those who want to go after their dream?**

My advice is to first come to the realization that there is a difference between dreams and purpose. Dreams are something we want for ourselves. Purpose is something we do for the greater good of mankind. Now if somehow you can manage to find a way to make what you dream about line up with the purpose you're supposed to fulfill during your time on earth, then you have no choice BUT to pursue. No excuses. You can't be selfish and not follow it because then you are robbing yourself of a good life and robbing the world with the contributions you could make.

Dreaming of Reality

I am traveling though a tunnel.  
I see no light and the darkness is beautiful.  
I hear voices.  
I don't understand what they are saying but thats okay its not important.  
Nothing matters I feel no pain. I don't want this moment to end.  
I don't want to see the light. I don't want to understand the voices.  
I just want to travel though this tunnel of happiness.  
There are no judgments made.  
I see no stares of evil. But smiles of hope.  
Then reality hits me. I am awake back to the world of evil.  
I see the light and it is blinding.  
I hear the voices and they are screeching.  
I wish I could escape this torture I just want to get out.  
But there is no turning back.

Ashley Greene



Tamela Harris

Make Sense

Sleep peace in dark of night.  
Speak war in light of day.  
The birds won't tell when you lie.  
Your conscience will know the truth.  
Love when you heal of disease,  
But love is a disease of the heart.  
Sickened in the mind, body, and soul.  
Wicked desire that gives rise to discord.  
But when you sleep you are peace in mind,  
Yet your heart is still at war.

Katie Kile

Untitled

Falling, falling, falling  
forever from afar  
step into the darkness like a fallen  
star  
crawling, crawling, crawling  
out of the abyss  
wayward to the wonderful world  
I miss  
Bawling, bawling, bawling  
through the trenches I travel  
searching through the swamps  
as my stories unravel  
Calling, calling, calling  
from my fearful frights  
from my bed I leap as I search  
for the light.

Kim Gibbs

Untitled

Sometimes I sit alone in my room  
thinking about what I want to say  
because of you  
all my hopes and all of my dreams  
everything falling in between  
seems that the memories  
mean more to you  
than they do you  
with everything I lack  
and every time I see you smiling back  
I smile because I thought we would last  
just to know you're there  
but so far away

footfalls echo in the memory  
down the passage  
we didn't take  
towards the door we never opened  
always what could've  
or if I would've  
I've made some bad choices  
and missed what I wanted  
you moved on  
but I stayed trapped  
stuck in the memories  
of our past

Brittany Massey

In the Room Tonight

In the room tonight  
the child sleeps asound  
dreaming of only her happy life.

In the room tonight  
the shadows creep around  
the clock ticks away  
waiting for no one to sway.

In the room tonight  
the child wakes at a howl  
from the night's many frights.  
The shadows turn to creatures,  
the ticks turn into monsters.

In the room tonight  
the child is no longer there  
the footsteps can be heard running  
down the stairs  
crying for her parents, longing for the arms  
to keep her safe with care.

In the room tonight  
the child wakes with a fright  
only to see the sight  
she has been longing for her whole life,  
the sight of her parents  
holding her tight.

Mamie Parker



Cynthia Knapp

## CAPRICE

A long dark hallway filled with rotting corpses, you afraid to look down, you surrender to the dark, the darkness pulses through your veins, you scream, you panic only to realize it's just a dream or is it a reality you once knew.

Your awake now, remembering the powerful vision when you feel someone watching, you look over every corner of your bedroom, it seems strange somehow. You think your fucking paranoid and lye back down, your eyes slowly close.

Your back in that same hallway, your senses heighten, you smell flesh burning, you feel hot, your suffocating, you start screaming, it's your flesh that's burning, you start running when the rotting corpses grabs you, their not dead, oh shit their not dead.

You see a light at the end, you keep running, you want to wake up, but can't. You feel like you've been running for hours, the lights almost out.

Suddenly you rise up, seeing what is in the light standing right in front of your bed. Your worst fear magnified by a thousand.

Can you beat it?

Tamela Harris

Paradise

A walk in the sand,  
A touch of your hand,  
This is paradise to me.

A seven hour trip  
And a quick ocean dip,  
This is paradise to me.

A look at the map,  
A three hour car nap,  
This is paradise to me.

A fill up on gas,  
The state line we pass,  
This is paradise to me.

The smell of the sea,  
You here with me,  
This is paradise to me.  
The hot Florida breeze,  
The opportunities to seize,  
This is paradise to me.

A walk down the pier,  
An ice-cold beer,  
This is paradise to me.

You by my side,  
Watching the nights pass by,  
This is paradise to me.

Inseparable Lives

A lady in the water.  
A man loses his daughter.

A ghost walking down a hall.  
A crying man falls.

They are together once more  
a father and daughter gliding up to a heaven  
hand in hand  
and full of sorrow.

Tamela Harris



Leighanne Quinn

Untitled

We call her  
the Wolf spider  
the one who  
tucked me into bed  
most of the time.

The Wolf Spider  
who held my hand  
when I was scared  
sometimes.

Wolf Spider  
said good-bye to me  
with no pause—  
no hesitation.

I saw a wolf spider  
in the corner of the room  
Hiding—  
from me?  
I did not hesitate  
when I ground my heel  
into its body

I thought of my Wolf Spider  
and smiled.

Jennifer Allen

Routine Engagement

Perfect combination:  
Excitement and exhaustion,  
Cinnamon candles and sweat.

You couldn't be more beautiful  
Running away with my heart  
My resplendent thief!

Close my eyes  
To retreat to myself,  
Hold tight to the moment.

I know what to expect in sunsets:  
Farewell in a kiss to the head  
My sweet transient!

Jodi Ann Frye



George Hodges



Tamela Harris

TIME

Does stand still  
Or does it kneel  
Does time speed away  
Or stay to play

Can it travel? Can it stop?  
Does it come from you,  
Does it come from me,  
Or a clock?

Is time constant, is time old?  
Is it slow, is it new?  
Is it young, is it left  
Or is it right?  
Maybe dull, Maybe bright?

You may say time is  
Great, if you're not too  
Late to be on the high wire  
Of your desire  
But better late if it breaks  
In either case, you may say  
That makes time great

If time waits for no one;  
Will the stars turn black?  
Will the earth stop spinning?  
Will you ever come back?  
And if you don't you can not  
Say that time is living or deas,  
But if you do, you can let it be  
Said that maybe the mystery of  
Time is just all in your head.

Anna Hardy

## The Winds of Wrath

George Hodges

I had hated for so long that I could not remember any other emotions that I had ever felt. I did not know how long ago it had been, five years, maybe ten. I could not remember, but I did remember how it had begun. It had all started when the age-old conflict in the Middle East finally caused the United Nations to send peace-keeping troops to the area. The skirmishes, which had raged over the last seventy years between Israel and the Islamic nations, had finally come to a climax. The senseless bloodshed and loss of human life that had engulfed the area would no longer be tolerated by the united world. The neurosis of their religious differences had brought the world together, demanding a lasting peace for the region.

Fourteen nations sent troops to form a defensive barrier between the nations of Israel and the Islamic Alliance. During these first tense days, a Saudi Arabian Diplomat defected to the Commander of the United Nations forces with several secret documents he had smuggled out of his country. These documents proved that the leaders of Saudi Arabia, as well as Iraq and Afghanistan, had conspired together on the airplane attack of America on September 11, 2001, more than twenty-five years ago. When the United States confronted the Islamic governments about the conspiracy, the Islamic Alliance launched biogenic weapons against the UN peace keeping forces in a pre-emptive first strike. These weapons had been banned against their use through treaties signed by America, Russia and China at the end of the twentieth century. No one knew that these chemical and biological agents had been sold to other countries secretly. Within one hour of the attack by the Islamic nations, 150,000 troops died, their flesh melting along with their bio-hazard suits. The attack totally outraged the American people and not willing to wait on the predictably very slow response from the UN, the United States launched the first nuclear attack in eighty years. The atomic blast against Saudi Arabia obliterated half their country and killed eight million people.

In retaliation, the Islamic Nation launched a second biogenic attack against Israel. While the citizens of the Jewish nation melted into puddles of flesh, twelve nuclear missiles collided with the Middle Eastern World. The combined blasts of the nuclear attacks blew the biogenic material high up into the jet stream, which carried the deadly material all over the world. Thus began the destruction of the human race, and the beginning of my own story.

When the rumors of a world war started in the newspapers and television, I much like many Americans fled for safety. I moved my wife Sarah, my two young daughters and myself to our vacation home in New Mexico. It is in a very remote part of the state and Sarah thought it would be safer than St. Louis. When we witnessed the aftermath of the first biogenic attack on the UN troops on CNN, Sarah and I thought we would move into the cave that was a quarter mile up the hill from our vacation home. We moved supplies of food, water, blankets, medical supplies, a gas generator, fuel, and a short wave radio to the back of the cave. It was vast and would be ample room for the four of us. We sealed the entrance off with thick plastic sheeting and began to pray that we would be safe.

Over the next few days, Sarah and I listened to the news over the radio after the girls had gone to sleep. The cave that was now our new home was several hundred feet deep and in the daytime we would pretend to be spelunkers. It was safe enough to play in this adventure, because even though there were tiny crevices that went on for miles, the girls were too large to fit into any of them. That night, as Sarah and I lay in bed holding each other, the nuclear missile attack hit the Arabian desert. The thoughts of the millions of people dying made us feel ashamed of the cruelty humans could do to each other.

Steadily, the news reports were replaced with the Emergency Broadcast System. They advised everyone to seek shelter and stay there until the all clear signal was given. The next morning there was nothing but static on the radio. In front of the girls we put on our happy parent faces, pretending that nothing was wrong. We played Scrabble, UNO, Monopoly, and a few other old games that the girls had never heard of. The antique board games were new to them, as much as computers had been to us kids, but as the evening wore on Sarah and I gave each other silent glances of worry. After the girls fell asleep after dinner, Sarah and I made love for the first time in over a week. Once we had both been satisfied, we held each other silently for hours in the afterglow of our love. Sarah gently turned my face to hers and whispered "I love you Mark," and when I told her I loved her too, she cried herself to sleep. I did not know, that this would be the last time we spoke of our love to each other.

I woke the next morning burning with fever. My head spun and my legs struggled to let me stand. My throat was raw and I struggled to swallow water from the five gallon jug. The first thought I had as a parent was to look for the girls. I did not hear them (they were always such giggle boxes in the morning) and as I staggered toward their cots, I called out their names. When I got no answer from them, I pulled back the covers that lay over them, but the only thing I saw was two steaming piles of mush, and two small skeletons. I turned and screamed out for Sarah. When I lurched forward towards our love nest, I fell over the sleeping bags wrapped at my

feet and fell face first into what used to be my beautiful wife. Horror clamped the scream closed in my throat. I black out with the vision of my family's rotted faces frozen in my mind.

For several days my fever brought on strange dreams of bats and scorpions nibbling at my flesh. Much like some alcoholic's haunted delusions, I raised my arm to brush them away. Even my hand looked distorted, like it was blistered and stretched beyond its designed limits. Voices came to me out of the darkness, talking to me about the world outside. It was garbled and filled with static as my mind slipped into the blackness again.

I awoke in the dim twilight of the cave. I struggled to find the water jug in the darkness. In desperation to quench the fire in my throat I gulped the cool liquid, but as the water hit my empty stomach I suddenly got sick. The water and bile in my mouth burned me worse than the thirst itself. I tried again, but this time I poured the water in my hand and slowly sipped it. At first I tried to retch, but the new approach worked better this time, as I was able to force some of the liquid down. I don't know how long I had lain on the dirt floor, but my body could not absorb the cool liquid fast enough before I lapsed into sleep again.

When I awoke again, it was still dark outside and a sudden intense pang of hunger consumed me. The candles and generator had run out of fuel, but I managed to find the food locker in the dimness of the cave. I found a vacuum sealed ham and ripped at the pull ring, inhaling the meat that was inside. I ate until my body threatened to reject its new contents, and I sat in the darkness, willing it to stay down. As it settled, I slowly fell asleep holding my painfully full stomach. I awoke the next night feeling somewhat stronger and ate from the pantry again. I gulped water from the five gallon jug in huge gulps, letting it spill over my chest in desperation to consume the liquid. When my body's basic needs had been satisfied, my gaze drifted over to the twin cots where my two daughters still lay.

Tears burst forth from me in great heaving sobs. Hours went by and my anguish slowed into ebbs and flows, until I was totally numb. My body was spent, as if it had spent endless hours of toil. Later, after my strength had somewhat returned, I refueled the generator and started it. I was tired of the darkness and needed the light to bury my family. I turned on the radio in hopes of hearing another human voice to break the silence. Just before the sun rose over the desert plateau, I finished the solemn task of burying my family. I remembered the life that we had shared together, the triumphs and the tragedies of living, then suddenly cursing God for taking them to heaven to be with him. Exhausted, I walked back to the cave and drank water in long slowed drafts and lay down to rest. Just as I began to doze, a voice came over the radio.

“This is station KYWN with the latest update in world news. Estimates on death worldwide are more than seven billion. The Center for Disease Control released a press report that the plague virus has mutated because of the radiation fallout. The virus is no longer causing deaths, but it is causing multiple forms of cancer and deformities in the victims, but fear from the survivors is causing wide scale execution of the victims. Government officials announced today that as soon as the epidemic passes, they plan to reestablish order and start relief efforts. The Federal Emergency Management Agency also announced that Congress will remain in their bomb shelters until the all clear order is given by the Center for Disease Control.” I laughed and thought to myself, they would save themselves, as we die by the millions. I silently cried in the darkness, as the static from the radio lulled me to sleep.

The next evening I woke and my skin itched terribly. It had been more than two weeks since I had last showered so I roused myself from bed to eat and drink from the food pantry. I had decided to walk the quarter mile back down to the cabin for a long-deserved bath and a change of clothing. I also needed to get out of this dark cave before it closed in on my mind. I found my way down the twisting path quite easily in the dim moonlight overhead. The scrubby brush and twisted trees stood out strangely as I came up to our back porch. I opened the door and went to the bathroom to shower, stripping the sweat soaked clothes off my body. I had cut the power off when we moved up to the makeshift shelter up on the hill and there would be no hot water, but the cold water soothed my itching skin. I scrubbed my entire body with the soap, totally ignoring the skin and the hair piling up around my feet.

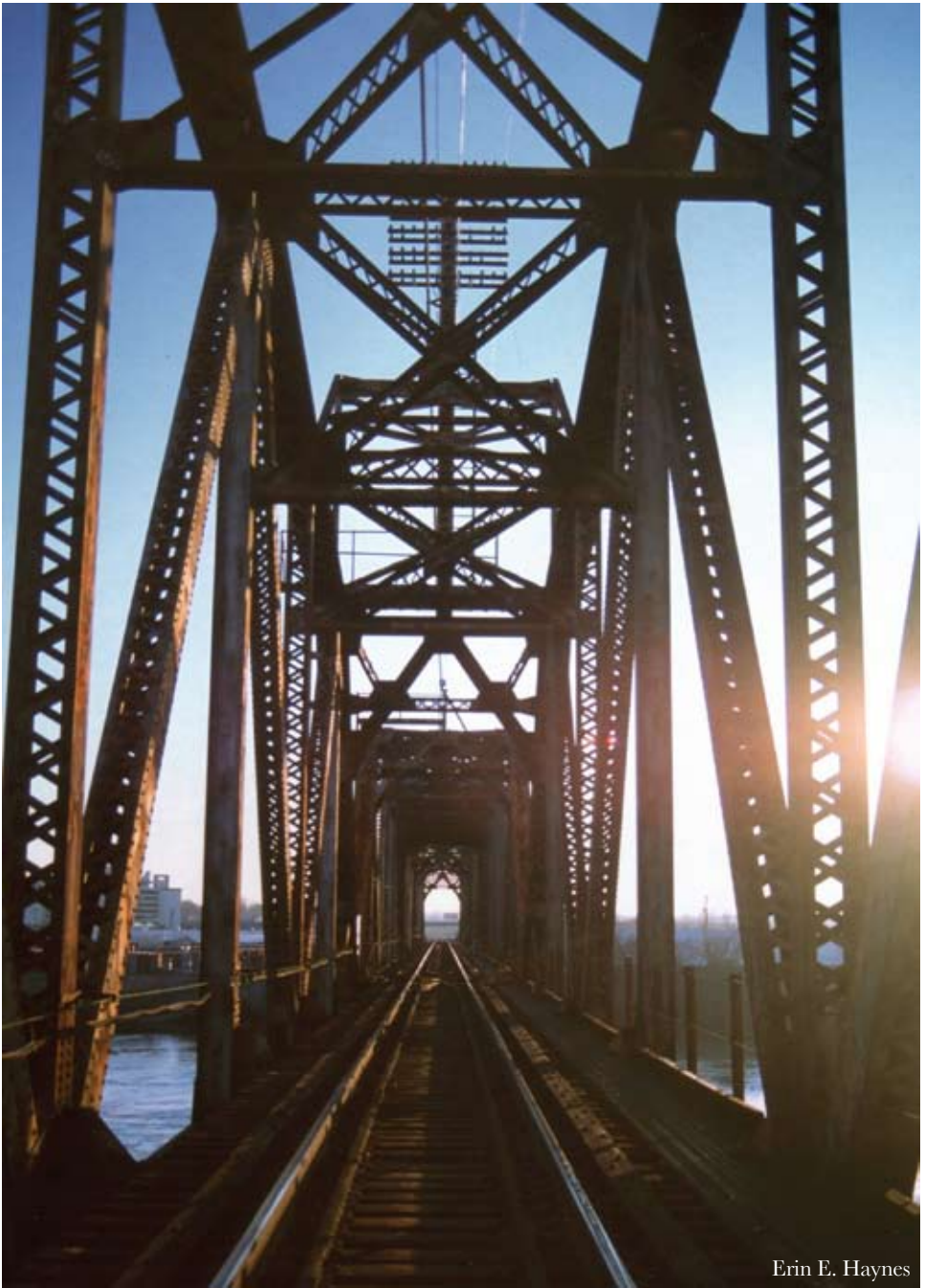
I finally was satisfied that I was clean, dried myself off lightly, and slid on some cut-off jogging pants. When I started to leave the bathroom, I noticed my reflection on the full length mirror on the back of the closet door. What looked back at me was not human. I thought I was still in the delusion of a fever, because I had grown to more than seven feet tall. I also had become totally bald and my head had become greatly enlarged, as well as my eyes. My pupils had grown to engulf my whole eyeballs, my nose had joined with my mouth and chin, forming a short snout filled with sharp canine teeth.

My hands had grown to the size of baseball mitts, with three inch black claws on the ends of my obscenely long fingers and my skin had become like roughened leather. The hallucination I had of being gnawed upon by cave dweller had not been a fevered dream but it had been real. My body had somehow absorbed their DNA because of the biogenic disease that had killed Sarah and my two little girls. It had not been enough that my family had died of this apocalypse, but I was spared to endure this horror as well. It was at this moment the hatred began to burn in my heart!

Now, years later, I sat atop a skyscraper in Atlanta watching a small group of people scavenging through a storefront searching for food. They always avoided the daylight, thinking the dark would protect them, but the night was like daytime to my eyes. My wings would not actually allow me to fly, but I could glide for hours on the updrafts around the tall buildings. A group of soldiers had shot at me once, but the bullets only bounced off my body. My scorpion skin was much like body armor at my size and their attack on me felt only like bee stings. The look of horror on their faces as I drove my poisonous claws into their bodies was like a narcotic to me. When I consumed their flesh, it did not quell the hatred in my heart, but it did fuel my body like nothing else could. When the hatred first sparked inside of me so long ago in those dark, sweetly sick stenches of the cave, I made a vow to myself that I would have my revenge on those left alive.

I dropped off the edge of the building and as the wind quietly whispered across my wings, I began to think of the passages I had once read in the Bible. While I lay crying in that dark cave so many years ago, slipping into madness, I had become the Angel of Death. I had vowed to cover the whole world in a lake of blood, My new life had taken on another purpose. As I focused on the figures below me in my near silent descent, another passage I remembered from the past said that “You always reap what you sow.....”

.....end



Erin E. Haynes

Untitled

Have you ever had a day when the sun peeks through...  
just to wink...at you?  
A day so beautiful you realize that the light is your  
Light shining through?  
Through the eyes that see hardships, hopelessness, and  
Indifference.  
It is when you look up at the sky so dull and so gray,  
as it was on this day,  
through the clouds you look up and you see its  
everlasting beauty.  
It is when you give the light of your soul  
that the reflection is then bestowed  
onto others around you and they know  
that this day is magical and holds  
a feeling of wondrous unknown.  
It was this day that my heart sang again.  
It was this day that my new life began.  
This day was the day my soul flooded with peace,  
No more fear, or fear of release.  
Letting go, that is the key,  
Having faith, hope, and tranquility.  
The elated feeling that envelops my spirit  
is one I have longed for, waiting patiently to feel it.  
My spirit is calm,  
I can breathe deeply again  
on this day, the day my new life began.

Amy Long

Salvation

Tears of joy climbed down my cheeks  
I got up, stumbled down the aisles.  
Bowed down, began to pray hopefully, mercifully.  
Got up, cried tears of happiness, looked  
at my family joyfully, and announced  
“I am now your sister.”

Heavenly Father

The Heavenly Father listens and saves  
with the ears of the sinner  
the might of his heart  
in the depth of the sea  
the height of the sky.  
in the light of day  
the dark of night  
to His children.

Thesla Gullet

Loving Someone You Can Never Have

I love you Mother  
But you'll never know  
Your heart is like ice  
Colder than snow.  
I will know one day  
Who you really are  
Maybe you'll shine bright  
Just like a star.  
You've left me here  
With a growing scar  
That stretches across the sky, moon, earth and stars.  
Let me go, Mother  
I'm now on my way  
I know that one day you'll have to pay  
For all the hearts you have broke  
I'll let the pain no longer soak.  
I'm glad that you're gone  
But I wish you were here  
As days turn into weeks, and weeks into year  
I believe one day I'll shed no more tears.  
So I'll keep waiting  
On you to love me  
To stop putting drugs  
So high above me  
This is our life story  
Two hearts that divide  
I'll meet you again on the other side.

Concetta Catalano



Cynthia Knapp



