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TYGR 1991: The Literary Magazine of Olivet Nazarene University

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FROM THE WRITER'S HOVEL...

Writing is beyond a gift, it is an adventure. A writer temporarily transcends the bounds of reality to embark upon a created world in the imagination. A writer never lies to himself, but experiences every line that is penned. The writer visualizes and feels the details to the point of truth.

My ultimate objective has been to deliver to our readers a taste of the writing talent at Olivet. I hope we may drink in the creativity without fill.

Traci Elizabeth Augustosky
Executive Editor

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK...

The literary magazine of Olivet has undergone a number of transformations in the past few years. This year is no exception. The community of writers at Olivet has come together with the objective of producing a professional literary publication. The transition has begun....
PRODUCTION STAFF

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"Poetry is the opening and closing of a door, leaving those who look through to guess about what is seen during a moment."

--Carl Sandburg
Monarch
Regal tapestries of black, gold and auburn
Rise up from your sleek, black frame.
Sovereign
You are broken, wounded on warfields
Or perhaps refused in love.
Highness
Every painful, twisted step is agony for your swollen pride.
You take flight and fall, take flight and fall, you stumble and
still you fight.
Wait, my lord. You are wiser than this.
Wait until your Creator moves you.
The challenge before you does not fashion your pain--
The griefs are multiplied only when you strain
To be happy, to be free.
Listen, your majesty:
Pain is simply the difference between
What is
And what you want it to be.
Roses are red
Violets are blue
I'm not getting through to you.

Sugar and spice
And everything nice

These words continue to hide my vice.

Baa, baa, writer, have you any lies?
Yes sir, yes sir, I am very wise.

Stabbing at this passive paper
With a bloody pin
Beating words into submission
Words that won't give in.
I find I can't twist their course
And express my thoughts
They won't be forced.

Once there was a little girl who had a little curl
Right in the middle of her forehead
And when she was good, she was very, very good,
And when I'm bad, I'm horrid.
PAINFUL

SWALLOWING

by Stephanie Burggraf

My mouth is moving
But the air is not flowing
You are not hearing
These words I'm not saying
And the hate that I'm feeling
Is steadily growing.

My frustration is building
This red hate is coursing
I'll soon be exploding
Unless I start saying
These thoughts that I'm thinking.

I see you are trying
Patiently listening
My bruised heart is sinking
"Forget it, it's nothing."
When Chaos roars like a sea in rage,
Fate becomes our prophetic sage.
We are gypsies in a distant land.
Temporal castles built in the sand.
Oh how time, we often flatter.
Vessels of clay still fall and shatter.
The emptiness of the pieces remain.
"Has the loss outweighed the gain?"
A silent fear covers the soul.
The raging sea has taken its toll.
Forever is eternal.

Angelic voices serenade,
As fragile roses fade away.
Mournful tears display lament
While deep inside, guilt repents.
A morbid calm fills the air.
Like winter's still, it brings despair.
Even beneath the winter's snow,
Springtime flowers begin to grow.
Somewhere on celestial shores
These flowers bloom forevermore.
Forever is Eternal.
GARDEN

(A Tribute To Arlington Cemetery)

by Traci Augustosky

The morbid stead of past beauty
echoes with sorrow.
The stones lament with agony in
remembrance of brother adverse to brother.
Union was to be preserved,
with dismemberment...
the expenditure of breath.
The garden of anguish
illuminated by twentieth century tinsel.
Blinding flashes
reveling children
Bellowing voices
Let it rest!
The garden is sacred.

HAIKU

by Traci Augustosky

one drop has fallen
softly effaced by a touch
countless shall follow
Beyond This Point
by Lee Hathaway

Clear sky and muggy disposition
Combine in a summer day intolerable
To staying indoors.
The beach! The beach!
I want to swim.
"Don't swim out too far,"
Cautions Mother,
"Ten thousand people drown every year."

Herds of humanity range the beach,
Glazing in the sunlight.
Distinguishing some friends,
I meander my way to them.
"Sand is coarse and ordinary,"
I charge.
"Let's move on to wetter raptures."

Cool water contrasts hot sand,
Resurrecting life in the mass
That had been domestic on the beach.
We splash around, shouting our joy.
I dive down and come up renewed.
"This is refreshing," I pronounce,
"But we must go deeper. You can't
Swim when you're touching bottom."

So I swim out further
And further and further.
I can hear Mother,
"Ten thousand every year."
I come to a sign:

**NO SWIMMING BEYOND THIS POINT**

I keep swimming.
Finally I stop, look back
Over my shoulder and call
to my former playmates,
"Join me?"
HARD TO SLEEP
by Dean Gebert

Outside—all is quiet.
People are in their homes,
In their beds,
Quietly restoring themselves.
They are the lucky ones.

Inside—all is quiet.
I am not in bed.
My body is beaten,
My head hurts from the day,
But I am awake.
It's hard to sleep
When someone close to you
Can't get up.

Second Opinion
by Dean Gebert

I asked
What was outside.
He told me,
"Nothing but the
Same sky
    ground and
trees as before."
I think I want
A second opinion.
Temptation

by Karen Johnson

The bulldog stands erect in the path
Mouth open, panting happily.
Suddenly, his legs stiffen, hackles rise
And he plants his feet, resisting
The coaxing whine from out of the darkness.
His Master's voice flows and
Speaks of courage and adventure,
Not...like...this.
He bares his teeth and growls
With a gleam in his eye.
He jumps forward into that slinking mongrel,
Wounding and sending him running.
Obscure Artistry
by Jeremy Childs

Premature sculptures, no need to finish.
Twisted wire art unfamiliar yet unblemished.
Water fountain ladies gaze with horoscope eyes.
Dollars on dollars waxed floorways of the period.

Leading Lady
by Jeremy Childs

I felt a faint breeze from a worn, red velvet curtain
that tumbled softly to a scruffled and dust-ridden stage floor.
I laughed and cried with real emotion
and brought forth more meaning to the lines.
I danced a dance that I had been taught and
listened as someone else sang a song from my lips,
but in my first awakened moment I was forced to play the role
I had learned better than any other actor
with only the aged face of reality as my leading lady,
but I kissed her nevertheless and faintly
I could smell makeup from the stage
and for certain could feel the dust I lay in.
1 November 1990

by J. Allen Small

Tomorrow calls
And I must answer her,
Even though I don't know where she's leading me.
So why are we forever weaving new ties
To bind us to earth?
Hearing only with ears...
Seeing only with eyes...
So many questions flash before me:
Where am I?
Why am I here?
Who is it that brought me to this place?
But no one answers
And so I wander, lost and alone,
while Captain Queeg at the head of his boat
tells the wicked sea of his wicked hope
And I can't tell if it is all a joke
Or some mad state of confusion.
I walk along a sandy beach,
Each grain a memory
In the hourglass of my life;
I pick some up, and the sand
trickles out between my fingers
As if to ask
"Can it ever be the same again?"
Man must constantly wander around
A martyred clown
In some endless state of confusion
And then there is November.
"Fiction is not falsehood, as some seem to think. It is rather the fanciful and dramatic grouping of real traits around imaginary scenes or characters. It may give false views of men or things, or it may, in the hands of a master, more truthfully portray life than sober history itself."

--Tyron Edwards
THE HUNTER MUST DIE

by Chris Turner

It was warm that November, and the battlefield was feverish. As the sun rose above the line of the horizon, I searched the woods from my strategic location for the victim of my pitiless art. Sounds echoed from the distant forest, and I heard the approaching footfalls beckon to my desires. I prayed it was not my imagination, because by bagging the first of the season I was assured of fame beyond measure.

My head throbbed, as if in ritual, to a beat heavy and strong, and my legs quivered with anticipation. It came into the clearing to my right, that resembled a shallow grave, and I beheld its beauty. The innocence in its eyes was overwhelming; my face lit with a grin of chaotic pleasure. I had seen that look many times before, but I felt a sense of urgency creeping within me. Panic-stricken, I let loose my wrath upon the fertile creature.

The look of horror on its face was sickening, and it satiated my inner need for tumult. It sprang forth, with a futile cry, and the chase began. Sweat pouring from my body, it felt as if my feet were being buried with each step. Going was slow because of the thorns that tore at my materialistic clothing.

Hours of tracking finally led me to what I sought. It was on the ground, rasping in pain, and I knew I had done the deed. My followers, the vultures, did the ritual of the circle in the sky above. As I looked into its face, tears came into my eyes, because it was smiling as if in total peace. It looked up at me and said, "For you, my child, I would die for eternity."

I fell on my knees in anguish, and wept bitterly for my sin. I saw the vultures, perched on dead limbs, and I wondered how many others I led astray with my pride.
COMMIT ONE TO ANOTHER

BY CATHY PASSMORE

They had come into the diner for the first time three years ago. I remember that because they were sitting right there the morning I told my boyfriend Eric I was pregnant. My eyes were all red and swollen from crying and the lady told me to take some Vitamin C because I looked as if I were getting a cold.

Since then, every Thursday morning at 7:30, they come in and sit in that same booth in the corner. The man always orders a black coffee and a Number 2; the lady asks for a menu, studies it and asks for yogurt, which by now she knows we don't have, and then she orders the same thing as her husband.

Dawn Ellen, the other morning waitress, thinks that they're having an affair. She says that no one could have been married as long as that couple seems to have been and still be in love and kissing on one another. I reckon she's right. My daddy left when I was ten for the lady who used to cut mamma's hair in town. Even Dawn Ellen's husband, Tigg, had had a fling with Barbara, the librarian in Delbert, and they have only been married for five years. Eric and I have been married two and a half years, so he hasn't had time to fool around with other women. Besides, I told him that if he did I would personally fix it so he couldn't fool around with another woman as long as he lived.

Even though Dawn Ellen thinks they are having an affair, I just can't bring myself to believe that. They talk about their children and God and he even leaves a 20 percent tip, which he probably
wouldn't do if he had a wife somewhere else to fess up to about where all of his money was going. One morning the man asked me if I knew Jesus as my personal Savior. I had no idea what he was talking about and I told him so. He gave me a little book and told me to read it and go to church and then Jesus could save me from my sins. I told him I didn't think that I had any sins to be saved from, but I thanked him for the book anyway.

About a month later I found the book under the couch in our trailer when I was looking for Eric Jr.'s blanket. While he took his nap, I read a bit of the book and it talked about how Jesus loved me and how to be a good husband or wife because God loved us; I decided that Eric and I should go to church so he could find out how to be a good husband.

I looked through the Yellow Pages to find a church to visit on Sunday. Our town only had a Catholic Church, a Methodist Church and a Kingdom Hall for those Jehovah Witnesses who come banging on my door every Wednesday afternoon. I found a Nazarene Church that was supposed to be "friendly" and decided that Eric and I should go there, even though it was an hour away.

I got up early Sunday morning and got Eric Jr. ready. Eric had been at the bar the night before until 3:00 a.m. and was too sick to come with us, but he promised to come the next week. I drove the hour and got there just as church began.

The singing was pretty and they even had a soloist. Then the minister got up to pray, and it was the man from the diner. He preached a sermon on love and commitment to God, the church and our families, and I thought Eric should have been here to hear this.

After the service I went back to see the minister. His smile disappeared when he saw me. He introduced me to his wife, who wasn't the lady who always asked for yogurt. I changed my mind about Eric coming to this church or any other church. I don't want him to get any ideas.
Within the tenebrous feeling of night there lurks an impliable wickedness, it starts and ends with the old man. He quickens the pulse and sends the blood scurrying through the veins up towards the brain where the thump, thump, thump causes an insane fury. I know I feel it when I see the old man, his frail body and weather-beaten brow, his evil eyes slanted with hints of the demonic. He is the utter semblance of iniquitousness, the fallen angel in human form, a wolf in wolf's clothing, bearing the mark of Cain transcribed through his very presence. He is a demon, but he can't be for such things don't exist.

I've been taught well. I've spent countless though provoking intellectually stimulating hours and years in the finest institutions and private colleges. I know the psychology of a normal functioning individual. I understand in depth the way he thinks, why he holds on to religious principles and the way he creates hope for himself out of something existant only in his own mind. I know people and I know that god's and devils simply do not exist! They can't, but they must. I know they must for the old man himself is a devil and that's why we drove him from this small village, the village where in the midst of tranquility I stopped to do my studies, the study of human behavior, the village where I first met and talked to the old man. The more I studied and listened to him, the more sickened and crazed I became. He claimed to be a descendent of the famed Druid priests who worshipped at Stonehenge. He would survive on the rotting flesh of the dead that lay buried in the ground and use them for ceremonial purposes. He would drink rain water found in gullies and dispense containers to catch the precipitation when it fell from the forgotten grey skies.

The old man's bitter strangeness and aura of devilish delights would awaken me in the still of the night. In my dreams I would see him digging for something in the earth. I could hear his long finger nails as they scratched and clawed their way through the ground;
suddenly his arms disappear into the dry grey dirt and pull up something! I could see it was a body. It looked like mine! He would start to put the dead lump of flesh on a blazing fire built on the side, he’d drop it then open his mouth just slightly, in a smirk. I would awake in a cold sweat, wired with intensity and teardrops of pure horror rolling from my eyelids. I could not sleep for I knew the old man was scuddling somewhere near, looking for me. Nights of sleeplessness, days filled with horror and the smell of rotting flesh brought me to the inevitable end of my search for peace. We must rid ourselves of the old man, we must drive him away, into the hills to a cottage in the woods where we would no longer fear his presence.

Early morning in October I rushed to Scott Harper’s cottage. Scott acted more or less as the law and mayor of this small village off to the west of Crown’s Berry England. I felt funny that day. The clouds were a moody grey but didn’t seem to move really; they just sat there in silence. Off in the distance I heard a faint cry of a hungry wolf, but that’s all I heard. No birds, no wind, as if the world had gone to sleep or it waited intently in its own silence for the cries of anguish it had grown accustomed to.

Upon arriving at Mr. Harper’s cottage I noticed a marble gravestone on his porch. It read "Scott Harper 1817-1849 October 15th." I knocked at the door but there was no answer, thump, thump, thump. I knocked thump, thump, no answer, thump, thump, the door seemed to unhollow itself upon my beating. I slowly turned the door knob and the door creaked open. I gripped my stomach and fell to my knees in consternation when I saw the sight. Scott lay on his bed, his sheets crimson with his own blood. Except for the head of his body, the flesh had been scraped to the bone and lain in front of some lit candles. His internal organs were wrapped in cloth and also lain in front of the candles in a design that looked like a cross. Or perhaps it was a broken cross, I couldn’t really tell. I stammered and fell out the front door; again I saw the gravestone. It was the old man’s doing, he knew what I was thinking, he knew I was bound for him, the gravestone he had made acted only as a sense of mockery towards me, me only.

Beyond the graveyard, there lay a small shelter, little more than a shack, that is where the old man hid. The old man with that cursed
smirk that slithers its way across his bloody lips tinted with blue and wrinkles his black eyes. As I approached him, as I made my way towards his dwelling of evil. I could hear a “chink, chink,...chink,” the sound of iron against a solid sheet of marble, “chink, chink,” I was in front of his door in what seemed like mere moments, as if God himself were speeding up the confrontation. “Chink, chink” An ominous roll of thunder crashed through the valley with unadulterated intensity as lightning illuminated the country side. Rain began to pour; I was drenched in a matter of seconds. My clothes clung to my body and held to every crevice on my cavity. My eyes were wide with a fury I couldn’t understand, something had possessed me—some dark and hideous thing within myself.

I leaned back and darted through the door, the same door that seemed to be separating me from the pits of hell.

The shack was small, but the room I had just entered looked like a grand pantheon. It was dark and behemothic. Thousands of candles lined the hard waxy floor, and the smell of a putrid incense pierced my nostrils as if it were hiding the smell of rotting souls. Silence...”chink..chink,” then I saw him sitting in the middle of the hall, on a stool chipping away at a marble gravestone. The flickering candles cast his shadows in every direction, it enveloped the hall and it seemed to enwrap my soul. I walked toward him, closer and closer. I stepped carefully, avoiding the candles, then I noticed the gravestone. The epitaph read “Alfred Higgens, October 15, 1849.” That was me, me! Suddenly my confusion, my ideals, my very presence ran towards the cliff of insanity. I looked at him. He said nothing, just smiled. No, he smirked. I jumped off the cliff. Through a dense fog within my mind's eye I could see the old man’s frail and weather beaten body knock over candles as it slid across the waxy, smooth floor. Then I saw myself throwing him. I saw myself, but my actions weren’t my own. I picked up the tombstone with my name engraved on it. I stood over the old man, tombstone in hand. I had a piece of iron grasped in my trembling grip. I smiled as I watched it drop on his head. I stepped back to avoid the splattering of blood, but there was none. The cracked skull released, instead, a black mucus or some unheard of thing with similar features. It bubbled and gathered itself into a pool and from the pool a black leech scurried across the floor.
It came to me. I tried to stomp it into non-existance, into the wax of this unholy place, but it attached itself to my leg. The pain spread throughout my body. I could feel the blood being sucked from my veins, and I watched in horror as the leech began to shape itself into the old man’s head. His mouth dripped with my blood yet I could still see that damnable smirk as the head began to form a body also.

I reached for the chisel that lay close beside me. I shoved it into the old man’s head again and again. I closed my eyes and bellowed in a terrified frenzy. When I opened my eyes, the only bloody mess that remained was my own. Flesh hung from my leg as it bled, my own handiwork. The old man’s body was gone and I saw no leech.

My sanity turned to dumbfounded logic. I wanted to rid myself of this unholy place as soon as possible, but as I stood “chink..chink..chink.” I didn’t turn around. I knew he could not still be alive, but I ran! My bloody leg ached and popped with every step I made but I ran. I ran long and I ran hard! Towards the entrance I ran, but it seemed to be getting farther away instead of closer. I could see it in the distance. Daylight shone through in columns but seemed to be engulfed in the darkness. I stopped to wipe my brow. I looked up again towards the door, my escape, and there he stood! The old man with a smirk on his face. He waited for me on the living side of hell. He waited patiently and contently...he waited. “Come to me my child, you are mine,” his raspy voice echoed through the dwelling like a death march, like the sound of thundering rifles after an execution, like the trap door from the gallows, like the slice of a blade on a guillotine, like my destiny, for I no longer believed in fate. “Nooo.” I screamed it with every ounce of my mortal being yet I knew it was true. I turned and began to run away. I fell to the waxed floor below me, gasping for air, for hope. I felt a presence. I looked and he stood there smiling...the smirk...the eyes.......

Those of compassion, those who believe in things of darkness, you know there also must be things of light. I ask for help, help me please. Help me find the light I once saw, guide me through this eternal darkness. I beg. I sit in a forgotten shadow of what I believe to be hell; I sit with the old man who is working on that same tombstone. He is nearly finished, “chink, chink, chink......”
"He is old enough to know," Aunt Gwen said sternly, but safely under her breath. The bustling continued about her despite her musing. Long pieces of sheet metal were being peeled from their resting stacks and situated on sawhorses inside the hollowed out machine shed. Hoses were being reunited with spigots; fires were blazing. A few of the uncles were preparing the device for slaughter, an old twelve gauge rifle, bought by the head of the clan back in the thirties; rusted as it was, it had never been replaced. Inside the house, a few of the aunts were adding the late ingredients to the soup hoping that noon would not arrive before they were ready.

Cold and stiff, the second weekend in November was as sacred as a national holiday in the Upton family. The last of the original twelve members of the John Upton’s who had remained with the earth gathered with their families to butcher hogs for winter supply. Three would have to be divided among the seven branched families that year.

The men would soon be shooting the hogs and tying them by their hind legs to the uplifted front scoop of the battered John Deere B model tractor. The swine would then be slowly submerged in scalding water, emerging to the sharp scraping of long blunt knives removing the outer layer of epidermis and singed hair. The men did their job dutifully as they sipped hot coffee.

The older cousins were included in the organic assembly line as the fat cutters. Each was instructed to take a strip of skin removed earlier and cut it into one inch square chunks. The younger cousins then carried the steamy buckets of fat and skin chunks to the kettle over a small bonfire. They were to stir the melting integument until the fat collected into lard and the frying skin floated to the top. These pieces of fried skin were skimmed off and saved as “cracklins,” treats for the end of the day. The lard was poured into ice cream buckets and
saved for the year’s baking.

Meanwhile the women were lining up along the horizontal sheets of metal sharpening knives and washing out the plastic ice cream buckets. As soon as the hogs were cut down from the tractor scoop, they would be cut into general sections — rump, chops, bacon — right down to the head which would be scraped of its meat morsels for headcheese, and the women would descend on the parts like vultures ready to devour the meat in endless sheets of freezer paper.

The women who had married the seven earth-bound brothers became farmwives, with many of the same roles as their male farmer counterparts — with the additional responsibility of producing and maintaining the family stock. As a group, they referred to themselves as “the Aunts”; individually they thought of themselves as pillars of convention. Each had succeeded in marrying into a traditional, stable family and had great hopes of instilling high values in her children; however, somewhere in the process their children stopped being children and began to live lives independent of the family.

Only four of the seven Aunts evolved an attitude that was an obstruction to the family; as the other three grew older, they redirected their interests into new frontiers letting their children go on their own, yet managing to keep up on the family news. But the four who remained, dictated direction to their children and judged the rest. Few met their standards. And fewer still met their approval.

Some of the offspring, generally referred to as “the cousins,” didn’t live lives independent of the family, which allowed the assertive Aunts enough leverage to regulate those lives, developed as they were, the way they wished. The Aunts became engrossed with their influential abilities; so much so that they deemed themselves guides for the family — and for each other.

Yet in each of the offspring, family held such a high regard that something in them forced them to return home often. Each time most were met with animosity: Why aren’t you married? Do you have a decent job yet? Do you still drink “occasionally?” I don’t suppose you are going to church, are you?
Each time the young ones would answer slowly, jokingly if possible, and move on. The Aunts had raised the cousins well — they were honest, hard-working people. Outsiders wondered at the achievements in the second generation: doctors, teachers, engineers, businesspeople. But the lifestyles of these good people didn’t match the ideals of the Aunts whose life work was that of marrying off the children into marriages just like their own.

The men brought in the scoured hogs and were preparing them for dissection. The women, knives and hacksaws ready, began to cut the carcass apart. Some working directly with the meat, others preparing the marking and packaging. The intermingled Aunts finally broke into conversation.

"Jules broke up with his girlfriend, just left her at the college; no explanation — that’s what I heard," Aunt Gwen gossiped as she busily cut freezer paper into foot squares. "I don’t know when that boy is going to make up his mind to find a good woman and marry her," she continued in the fragmented remains of her southern dialect. As simple as the family was, they took great pride in the education they had, speaking acutely even when together on the farm.

"I heard him," Aunt Lydia injected, "tell one of the cousins the other day that he wasn’t going to live ‘our’ way; he had decided what he wanted, and no matter what we, meaning the Aunts I suppose, said, he was going to live his own way.”

"I don’t know why it is so difficult for them to listen to what we have to say — after all, it’s for their own good. I make my Marie sit down and listen to me — it’s my right as a mother," Aunt Gwen stated firmly.

"That’s a little different, Marie is only fifteen; she still needs to be told what to think," Martha replied dryly, "I need a better knife. Does anyone need anything while I am up?"

"I could use some more coffee," Aunt Gert replied.

"Anything else? ... then I’m gone." Martha turned from the metal table and walked to the other side of the shed, inspecting the work of the others, especially her own children’s, as she went.
“Do you think,” Gert started slowly, “that there is something wrong with Jules? I mean, he could have some sort of psychological problem or something.”

“Gert, you always give him too much leeway. The boy is becoming a social deviant before our very eyes, and you think that a few visits to someone that will listen to his problems from his childhood is going to solve it all. Sometimes you really amaze me,” Gwen barked as she moved from her paper cutting to sharpen her scissors on the whetstone between herself and Gert.

“I just think that there is more going on in his life than he lets on when he comes home once a month.”

“I can imagine the trouble he gets himself into when he is away from the guiding hand of family and church,” Lydia remarked as she waited, knife in hand, for Gwen to finish with the whetstone.

“Oh, he is going to church — some all inclusive church in the city,” Gert defended.

“All Inclusive’ sounds like another way of saying ‘Believe and do whatever you want — we don’t care; we’ll support you,’” Gwen said satirically.

“I should think,” Aunt Lydia elaborated, “that his church background would have been sturdy enough to uphold his morals even when he left here.”

“I don’t really see a problem, but I hope that Jules wakes up to see that our way of life is the most assuring,” Gert decided bringing the conversation to a standstill. The women stood in silence.

“I’m back with the coffee,” Martha said laying the cups and thermos between the whetstone and the pile of butchered meat. “How have you all decided to sentence Jules?” she said smirking.

No one responded; no one even smiled.

But Jules Upton, listening quietly from the lower end of the metal make-shift counter, smiled as he contentedly cut the tiny chunks of pink skin and fat into triangles.
The Secret
At Aunt Jenny's
by Nicole E. Garrison

The air was stale; the night was chilly. My heart raced with excitement as we packed the car. I saw the glow in Michael’s eye when we pulled out of the driveway. Mom was nervous. Mom was always nervous, but not like that night. Her words made me sick at my stomach each time she opened her mouth. Michael didn’t notice. He sang to the radio and beamed with gladness. Mom and Dad were going on vacation and Michael and I were going to stay with our aunt, whom we had never even seen! The ride was long and I decided to take a nap.

I awoke to the jerk of our car. I opened my eyes to what seemed like the uttermost part of hell. “Aunt Jenny couldn’t possibly live here,” I thought to myself. There was a big house upon a hill about half a mile from the main road. As we got closer I could see the house more clearly. It was drak gray with black shutters. Stone surrounded the bottom of the left side of the house. “A haunted house indeed,” I thought. Huge trees and tall brittle grass were the only plantlife that could be seen from the human eye but who knows about the life we couldn’t see. We pulled the car up by the garage and unpacked. The sidewalk was old with many cracks bleeding through it. Mom set the biggest suitcase down and started to ring the doorbell, but was interrupted by a very beautiful young woman. This was my Aunt Jenny, the one who loved children my parents always said. Aunt Jenny grabbed a suitcase and motioned for us to come inside.

Mom led the way with Michael ending up the line as usual. Michael was always the last one to do anything or find out anything. Aunt Jenny’s house was strange. We toured past a kitchen, dining
area, living room, bathroom, a set of stairs, and to a dead-end where Aunt Jenny’s room was on the left and mine on the right. Mom gave me a long hug and a kiss and said good-bye to Michael, then headed toward the door. She shook with uneasiness as she said, “See you in two weeks.” I tried to smile as she closed the door behind. Aunt Jenny ordered us to unpack and get our things arranged. So that’s exactly what we did!

Aunt Jenny and Michael came into my room as I was putting away my last sweater. They suggested we all go into the kitchen and have some cookies and hot chocolate. I hadn’t eaten since dinner and I was a bit on the chilly side, so hot chocolate sounded great!

During our private little feast we had a very intimate conversation. Aunt Jenny shared with us why she never invited us over before. Aunt Jenny and her husband had only been within driving distance for two years because of her husband’s Air Force duties. He got killed in a practice drill she told us. Little Lori was their baby girl. Aunt Jenny had to give her up for adoption that very month. She couldn’t bare the thought of keeping her without a daddy. I was shocked that Mom never told us about this, but it was probably because I was only sixteen and Michael was fourteen. Another strange detail Aunt Jenny shared with us was about her basement. There was a door in the kitchen that led to her basement. Michael and I were forbidden to ever go near that door, let alone go down there.

It got late and we went to our rooms to get some rest. I couldn’t sleep, though. “Why wouldn’t Aunt Jenny let us go downstairs and why didn’t Mom warn us about her weird family?” The suspense was killing me and I got out of bed and started creeping down the hall to get Michael. As soon as my foot hit the first step, a loud creak echoed throughout the mansion. I was afraid Aunt Jenny might hear me so I slid back into my bed and shut my eyes tightly.

My eyes didn’t open until the next morning. The delicious aroma of sausage and eggs filled the house. Aunt Jenny made us breakfast. She told us to eat quickly and get dressed because we were
going to go out. We went to the mall and ate pizza for lunch. Aunt Jenny was sweet, but something about her gave me a strange feeling. I couldn’t quite put my finger on it, but Michael was involved too. He adored her. I could tell by the first moment he laid eyes upon her. She dressed more like a high school cheerleader than my mom’s sister! “Maybe I’m jealous,” I thought, but why should I be jealous? Michael is my little pest brother!

When we returned it was time for Michael’s basketball practice. His friend Dan came and picked him up. Aunt Jenny and I made spaghetti for dinner and washed the dishes. Time passed and I dried the last coffee mug. Dan brought Michael back, but Jenny insisted on meeting them at the end of the driveway. Finally, Michael and Jenny made their way into the house. Michael was very tired and Jenny looked rather rugged herself, so we all went to bed early. I couldn’t sleep though. I ran to the kitchen and started to open the door to the “forbidden room.” My hand would not pull it open, though. My pulse shot up so fast I almost lost my balance. My arm reached out to grab the door knob again and I clutched it with all my might. I threw all of my fear aside and with all of my strength I opened the door.

Darkness surrounded me from head to foot. Searching for a light, I stubbed my toe. Before falling I caught myself and found the lightswitch. Each step squeaked as I made my way down. The stairs curved and at the bottom of them set a freezer and a broken-down refrigerator. “How could this be harmful,” I thought. Then I ventured through the next door and found a room of Jenny’s past. There were pictures of my brother everywhere! No — I was mistaken. The pictures were of Jenny’s dead husband. Air Force weapons, a baseball glove, tools, and men’s clothing I gathered from several cardboard boxes. In the corner of the room was a little room enclosed with double stone. It had an iron door and a huge padlock on it. It resembled a boiler room, but even the greatest of crooks couldn’t break inside. It was almost as if this room was human. The longer I stayed in the room the more I felt evil. I dug up everything in the
boxes, but found not one picture or item from Little Lori. "And she loved children," the parents always claimed. An Army booklet I was holding flew out of my hand and the wind blew it across the room. The gust of air I encountered was like the breath of a monster on me.

I picked up the booklet and threw it in a box and ran up the stairs. While turning off the light, I thought I heard someone wail, but out of terror I slammed the door and ran to my room. I hopped in bed and wrapped myself up in the covers.

In the middle of the darkened night I was awakened by the crying of a baby. I had to get up. I crept through the hollow, stone hall, without making a sound. I marched right up to the kitchen and opened the door. I left it open in case it locked behind me. The closer I got, the louder the baby cried. I was afraid Jenny would wake up, but curiosity kept my feet in motion. Surprisingly, the padlock was broken and the door was ajar.

I approached the boiler room with anticipation. My back twinged as sweat drenched the delicate lace of my nightgown. Slowly I pushed the door open and started in. A cradle was inside with a black blanket hovering over it. I pulled the blanket back to find a baby, a dead baby and a tape recorder. Someone had planted this cruel joke on me. My soul couldn't comprehend how or why, but the joke was for me. I knew it.

I jerked around and started out of the room. Running fullspeed ahead toward me was Jenny! "My own aunt wanted to kill me!" I faintly said aloud. My aunt wanted my brother because he reminded her of her dead husband! I wasn't going to let her win, so I hurried to the Air Force box and grabbed the unloaded gun on top with all my strength!

I gave Jenny one quick blow to the head and her slender figure wilted to the ground. Feeling her pulse, I convinced myself she was dead. As the blood trickled across the cold floor, I cried like a newborn baby. Yes, I cried.
"Well, Mr. Turner, you seem to have survived this go-round. Let's hope you're as lucky next time."

Turner relaxed somewhat from his ramrod-straight stance in the middle of the classroom, falling limp into his chair. The classroom's silence was broken by a collective intake of breath, as each student wondered who the next victim would be. The professor noticed this with a sadistic grin. He walked back to his own desk, picked up the next paper off the top of a stack, cleared his throat and barked, "Mr. Williamson!"

Williamson slowly rose to his feet. "S-sir," he stammered. "You have chosen a somewhat different argument to defend in your paper -- quite original."

Williamson relaxed, as the professor was not known for being generous with his compliments. "Thank you, sir."

The professor turned around. "And one which I personally do not agree with in the least!" Williamson seemed to sink into the floor as the professor brought the paper closer to his face. He adjusted his glasses and began to read.

"Thesis: That prophetic signs in the Bible can be seen as indicative of recent events, and point to the imminent return of Jesus Christ."

Several in the class snorted. A couple of the girls rolled their eyes, and the less ambitious prepared to take a nap. This might take a while.

"Do you know my personal religious orientation, Mr. Williamson?" the professor asked.
The professor turned away as he continued. "A good argumentative paper is based on objective reasoning, and uses objective sources to back up that reasoning. It does not use the Book of Revelations!"

Williamson began to wonder if he could turn and sneak out without the professor noticing. He was ready to give it a try, but the older man turned back around again.

"These 'Biblical scholars' you have cited here are all Christian--what about trying to prove your thesis with scholars who aren't Christian, Mr. Williamson?"

"They didn't seem to agree," Williamson said softly.
"And so you only chose those who agreed with your thesis--in other words, you gave me a one-sided argument, is that it?"

Williamson nodded.
"Do you have anything to say for yourself, Mr. Williamson?"
"I was still right," Williamson muttered.

The professor looked up from Williamson's paper, which he had been preparing to throw in the garbage can. He hadn't expected a reply, but his incredibly acute sense of hearing couldn't be failing him now.

"What did you say, Mr. Williamson?"

Williamson swallowed audibly. "I-I was still right. Sir."

A few of the sleepers now began to revive; they smelled blood.

The professor walked up to Williamson and stared directly into his eyes. "Would you care to repeat that again?" he said dangerously. The veins in his neck were bulging.

"I was still right, sir!"

A few of the girls shrank back, expecting an explosion.
"And what basis do you have for that argument, Mr. Williamson?"

"On the basis that the Bible is the divinely-inspired Word of God. Sir."

"Mr. Williamson, your personal religious quirks are not the basis of a logical argument. Neither are the assertions of a group of hysterical maniacs who died two thousand years ago! In this class we deal with logic. *Pure* logic!!"

The professor walked back to the front of the classroom as he continued with his tirade. "This is a real world, Mr. Williamson. A world that was not created in six days, but which was built over the centuries by men who had freed themselves from the illusions of the past. Do you know what illusions I'm talking about, Mr. Williamson?"

Williamson shook his head.

"Illusions that men come back from the dead and return to rescue the faithful believers. Illusions that deities take any concern for humanity, or that they exist at all! I do not believe that anyone besides man decides his own destiny. I believe what I see with these"--he pointed to his two eyes. "I believe in reality! Arguments which can be defended by logic, not by what you feel."

He turned to the class. "The final defense of any sound argument is logic. Not religion! And that's exactly what you lack, Mr. Williamson, logic! You cannot use religion as your final defense. Do you understand, Mr. Williamson?"

The professor waited for Williamson's response, but there was none. He turned in the student's direction, and saw that all that was left of Williamson was a pile of clothes on the floor.

"Now how did he get out of here without his clothes on...?"
"Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened."

--Winston Churchill
A Learning Experience?

by Pamela Maxfield

My first night on the floor, I was a witness to a shocking and upsetting event. Debbie Kline, the nurse in charge of our wing that night, raced down the hall, calling every nurse aide within the vicinity to her side. The four of us were to gather around the bed of Violet Whorley, an elderly woman in room two. Violet had been unable to void for a number of days, so Debbie had been ordered by the doctor to insert a catheter. She needed us to hold Violet down as she struggled to complete her task.

Violet stiffened her body, refusing the degrading object. She began to fight, kick my arms forcefully, and flail her arms frantically back and forth in front of her body in hopes of warding off the intruders. I felt myself tremble uncontrollably as I heard her cry out, “Please stop.....Please leave and let me be left alone.” She accused the nurse of violating her and infringing upon her privacy. She shook her finger wildly at each nurse aide who was present, shouting, “This is all your fault. I had to go, but you wouldn’t take me...YOU are to blame!”

An unknown force seemed to thrust a double-sided dagger into my bosom, twist it, and yank it out vehemently as the patient screamed, “You can’t do this to me. Please don’t do this to me. I don’t need this. I have always been normal...I have never been abnormal before in my whole life...”

I looked away, concentrating on the small red dot on the beige wall that transformed into a tiny tulip, but her words echoed endlessly within the inner chambers of my soul.

“You are evil people! I used to be a nurse and I was never as mean as you...I was a good nurse!” She willfully dug her fingernails into my arm as she ended her sentence.

The nurse tried to calm Violet by reminding her that the procedure was necessary for her own well-being. Violet rejected this explanation, once again blaming the people in her room for placing her in this tragic situation. Suddenly, she began yelling excitedly, “I’ve got to go...please, please help me...”
My spirits lifted. The ordeal was finally over! I felt like I was being rescued after being trapped under the hefty cargo of a wrecked plane for several days. She really doesn’t need it! I started to lighten my hold on Violet, expecting her aide to come forth and help her to the bathroom, finally bringing an end to her torture and humiliation. However, I then noticed the expression on Debbie’s face. She looked up for a long second, sadly shook her head, and returned to her task. I stared at her in disbelief. She wasn’t going to do anything! She planned on allowing this woman to suffer. I couldn’t stand it. A lump formed in my throat and my stomach tied itself into a hard, twisting knot. I felt my eyes fill with tears as I turned away, to remain strong for the sake of my troubled patient.

A hush fell over the room. A long awaited sigh escaped Debbie’s pursed lips, her face aglow with perspiration, as her shoulders heaved in relief. “Okay, Violet, I am all through. You’re going to be all right. Just relax and try to get some sleep,” she uttered softly in a voice used to sing a baby to sleep.

As I rose from my chair to exit the room, my clammy hand at last releasing its grip on the patient, I turned my head to obtain a final glimpse of Violet. I fought with the dull ache inside that urged me to scamper to her bedside. I longed to hold her as a mother does a child and whisper soothing words as my free hand stroked her hair. I hurried from the room and forced myself to concentrate on my neglected duties.

The next three hours passed quickly and when the clock read 10:58 p.m., I began to walk toward the locker room. As I searched for my time card and clocked out, I thought of the past eight hours. Well, I had made it one whole day. Would I make it to the next night? The whole week? What about the summer? Even more importantly, did I still aspire to become a nurse? Although these questions raced through my mind, their answers were not there. My dad had always accused me of being too sensitive for the career of a nurse. Maybe he was right. I knew that I would have to do some serious thinking about my future: I would have to find out for myself.

As I walked out of the door and stepped into my car, a vision formed in my mind. I was back in room two. Violet slowly faded away and an image of my mother seemed to replace her. She reached out to me from Violet’s bed, her tear-streaked face begging me to take her with me. I started to the car and raced home.
**HELL ON EARTH?**

**BY WES WILSON**

While in possession of free will, souls travel beneath the surface of the earth. Flashes of dark red and orange seem to absorb the light, which causes their eyes to squint to focus on the surroundings of this place. The odor of burnt meat floats in the air, burns the nasal passages, then settles like a heavy fog in the lungs.

The echoes of howls and screams overwhelm the area to such a point it can't be escaped. The rise in temperature can be felt as the hot air causes the pores in the skin to open, releasing sweat in an attempt to cool the body off. This only serves to increase the humidity and heighten the stench of the air. No, this is not Hell where lost souls are doomed to suffer in torment for eternity, but the Red Room in the Ludwig Building of Olivet Nazarene University, where students go to let out their frustrations from the enormous pressure of college life.

The flashes of dark red and burnt orange are not the flames of a tormenting hellfire but the outdated color of the floors and walls. The dark red carpeting has become dull because of the unrelenting abuse of hundreds of students. Carelessly spilled coke and food lands on the carpeting every day, and are stepped on and fused into millions of individual fibers, where they remain forever. The orange block walls are no longer smooth as the architect had planned. Now they are mutilated from the carvings of bored students trying to create pieces of immortality.

The echoes of howls and screams are not of pain, but of pleasure. In a booth on the left hand side of the room, an intense Rook game is in progress. After every trick is played there is a wild uproar that sounds like a barbarian battle cry. In another corner someone picks up a small die and tosses the spinning cube on the table. There is a loud cheer. Evidently someone has landed on a wedge in a Trivial Pursuit game. Another cheer is heard for the right answer.

In the midst of all the commotion and screaming some college students create a getaway from the fast-paced world around them. Most people might think that in the midst of these crazy circumstances is not where students should relieve their stress. But this might just be one of the most important places on campus.
What's In A Name?
by Scott Johnson

For one who is a lifelong Nazarene, church camp is the setting for many first dates and first kisses.

And so it was for me. At the age of 12 or 13 I thought it was time to find a girlfriend, and what better place to find one than at church camp? So when junior high camp commenced, so too did my search.

But it was not until Wednesday night -- halfway through camp week -- that I finally found her. She had pretty blue eyes, nice blond hair, and besides I'd heard that she liked me. So I got up all of my courage and sat next to her during the movie that night after service.

As the movie progressed I put on my best move, slowly going for her hand. First our shoulders touched, then our arms. After 15 minutes of touching arms I thought it was time to take the plunge, and so I did. I held her hand. She held my hand back.

I did it! I had a girl friend! I suddenly felt like I had grown taller, wiser and more mature.

At the same time I felt like a little kid; the tingles raced up and down my back and my heart was beating faster than before.

After the movie was over we both had some free time, so I invited my new love to go for a walk. It was a nice night out, but in all honesty I was too nervous to notice. As fate would have it we ended up behind the camp chapel by ourselves. We talked for awhile, then it happened: THE KISS.

I wasn't exactly sure what to do. Our lips were touching, but where do you put your hands? How long does the kiss last? These things were complete mysteries to me. We tried to figure these things out together, both of us acting as if it were old hat for us.

I was feeling like quite a man at this point, and so I decided to introduce my new love to my friends. I was so proud that I could have busted the buttons off of my shirt!

I came upon a group of my friends and announced, "Boys, this is Donna." I must have introduced Donna to about ten people before she finally pulled me over to the side and talked to me.

As she pulled on my arm, I could see that she was not the same girl I had been kissing just a few minutes before. She had this look in her eyes that seemed to be saying, "You are dead!" I could not quite put my finger on it, but I realized then that somehow I had really messed up somehow during the course of our evening.

I took a deep breath and asked, "Did I do something wrong, Donna?"

With a very calm voice, she explained to me that she had never been so embarrassed in her entire life, and that she could not believe that I could be so dumb! Then her voice became angry as she told me that her name was not Donna but, in fact, Rhonda.

I had been introducing my new-found love by the wrong name all evening! Needless to say, my relationship with Rhonda was now, well, over. As a matter of fact, she did not say another word to me for the next four years.

A tragedy, you say, and this is true. However, an important lesson was learned through all of this.

When love is in the air, follow your heart...but make sure you know her name before you kiss her.

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"A man who is in love with learning is a man who is never without a bride, for there is always more...the poor peasant, the hunter, or the fisherman may have knowledge that scholars are struggling to learn..

--Louis L'Amour
Once Upon A Time, There Was Time

By Professor Juliene Forrestal

One thing I never lacked as a child growing up in the country was a list of possible activities for a summer afternoon. If I could find a companion or two, swinging through the hayloft on rope was a favorite choice. Or there were always minnows, tadpoles, and crayfish to be caught down by the creek.

But if no playmates were available and I couldn’t find an interesting book, I would ride my bike up the gravel road and pay a call on Liz.

I can’t remember how I came to call her Liz. My parents had been very particular about my addressing grown-ups as “Mr.” or “Mrs.” But somehow she was always “Liz” to me. She had come to live with her older brother Will when his wife died, and the two of them led a quiet existence in the old farm house on the hill.

Liz was a bit plump and rather shapeless, but in an agreeable way. She looked like she had the kind of lap that would be a comfortable place to sit and snuggle. She wore her hair braided and then wrapped in a big loop around the top of her head. I sometimes wondered what it would look like, unbraided and free, down the back of her nightgown.

Of course, I never saw Liz dressed in anything but a faded house dress and a clean apron. She wore thick elastic stockings, the same kind my great-grandmother wore, and low-heeled, sturdy, black shoes that laced almost to her ankles.

The house always had a fruity smell, but the sweetness was
mixed with a noticeable scent of mildew from the ancient basement and rubbing alcohol from Will’s medical supplies. Because of the spreading shade trees on the front lawn and the eaves overhanging the windows, the house was rather dark and pleasantly cool, especially to a child who had just ridden uphill on an old bike in the afternoon heat. The well water Liz offered me tasted so much better than the water people in town had to drink. And sometimes there might be a cookie or some amber-colored candy, the kind sold by the veterans. But refreshments were never the chief attraction for me.

The greatest pleasure was to hear the wonderful stories Liz would tell. While I sipped the last half of my water, she would talk to me about her childhood and what it was like so many years ago. My favorite story was about her dog, Watch, and the time he saved her life.

She and one of her five brothers had left for school early one winter morning, hoping to have time to play in the snow along the way. Watch came with them, which was his usual custom. The drifts that morning were especially impressive, some as deep as six feet, and they had a fine crust of ice on them so that walking over their surfaces was easy.

But the crust gave way in one spot, and Liz and Harold fell through several feet of snow. They were trapped at the bottom of the drift and could not get a sure enough footing in the soft snow to climb out.

After a long, cold struggle to escape, the children remembered Watch. He had followed them from a distance and wandered off in search of the sights and sounds that are of particular interest to a dog. They called out for their pet, and soon he was at the top of the snow drift, looking down at Liz and Harold.

Harold was smaller than his sister, but by extending his hand toward the opening in the snow, he could put himself within Watch’s
reach. The clever animal grabbed Harold’s coat sleeve in his jaws and pulled him out of the hole. Dog and boy together were then able to pull Liz out as well.

How I wished I could have a dog as brave and intelligent as Watch! Or that I could walk to school on a snowy morning and have a real adventure! It was wonderful to discover that an old woman was once a girl like me who had enjoyed the things I enjoy. I never ran out of questions to ask Liz about her childhood — and she never seemed to tire of answering them or telling my favorite stories again and again.

I hadn’t thought of Liz for a long time. Then one day I was looking through a shoe box of old photographs and found among them a picture of Will and his wife during the early years of their marriage.

Suddenly I remembered Liz and the many times I had visited her. And I thought about the way she always seemed pleased when I came to the door. She was never irritated by the interruption in her routine, nor was she ever too busy to sit and talk to me and make me feel important, though I was only a child.

I thought, too, of my own daughters, growing up in a neighborhood where all the adults — even grandparents — seem to have a job and an overburdened schedule. There is no older person within walking or biking distance, no one at home on summer afternoons who can be a special grown-up friend.

My children, like so many other children today, don’t know the delight of having a hospitable adult share with them unhurried stories of times past. And I wonder about how much else they, and we, are missing in the rush of busy days when no one has time for a leisurely afternoon of shared memories.
Luke opens his second chapter with the birth of the Holy Child and continues with the activities that were connected with his life to the age of twelve.

It was the time of the Passover. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus traveled from Nazareth to Jerusalem in the company of many others. Jesus slipped away to the Temple while his parents busied themselves elsewhere after arriving in Jerusalem.

The day had been tiring and the journey back to Nazareth seemed long. “Supposing” Jesus to be with them - Mary and Joseph saw no need to check - they assumed He was with them. A whole day passed before they realized that he was not. The Holy Child of God had been taken for granted! They had forgotten Him!

Turning around to go back to Jerusalem and after three days finding Jesus in the Temple, Mary exclaimed, “Son, why have you dealt with us this way? We have looked for you sorrowing.”

Jesus replied, “Why? You should have known that I would be about my Father’s business.”

Mary and Joseph did not understand his words! Mary, the handpicked maiden of our Lord, forgot momentarily that her son was indeed the divine Son of God. He had a mission! And his parents had taken him for granted - assuming that he was in the company of travelers.

All of us have sometime allowed the Holy Son of God to become common - have taken Him for granted - assumed Him to be present with us.

Anything we take for granted we are getting ready to lose. Remember God doesn’t share His love with anyone else or anything else.

Mary and Joseph lost Jesus when he became a common member
of the family. If Jesus was the Savior of the world, He still was! If He had remained the most important one, He would have never been left in Jerusalem. Jesus was lost because his parents became too busy with other things. Isn’t that a familiar excuse that we hear all too frequently? It is easy to lose the “cutting edge” during busy times.

Well, Mary pondered the things that Jesus said to her. A holy hush engulfed her being when she realized again that this twelve year old boy was the Son of God.

Remembrance is Holy!

Check to see if Jesus is a part of you and your activities. Do not assume or take Him for granted or make Him common. Should this be your lot, start anew and afresh. Two anonymous pieces of poetry come to mind as we think of beginning again.

I wish there were some wonderful place
In the land of beginning again
Where all of our heartaches and
All our mistakes could be laid like a shabby old coat
    at the door
And never put on again.

I came to the desk with a quivering hand
The lesson was done.
“Dear teacher,” I said,
“Do you have a new sheet for me?
I’ve spoiled this one.”
And for the old sheet stained and blotted,
She gave me a new one all unspotted
And into my sad eyes smiled
Do better now, my child.

I came to the throne
With a trembling soul.
The old year was gone.
“Dear Father,” I said
“Do you have a new leaf for me?
I have really messed up this one.”
And for the old leaf stained and blotted,
He gave me a new one all unspotted
And into my sad eyes smiled,
Do better now, my child.
MIDDLE CHILD
by Sue Williams

Middle child son
Uncertain, shy,
Reluctantly stands to recite his verse
In third grade competition.
Dressed in tough skins and vulnerability,
He begins slowly;
He falters—repeats—then stops.
His lip trembles, eyes cloud, and tears
expose the little boy behind a tough-guy mask.

Distanced by twenty rows and a chasm of helplessness,
I sit watching, praying,
Why failure, Lord?
His teacher coaxes,
And he begins again.
He speaks timidly without expression,
But he finishes.
I hug him and say,
I'm proud of you, son.
You showed courage.
His eyes reply,
I failed.
with no bandaid for his hurt,
I leave my son and cry;
I feel the sting of parental pain.

After school that day,
My son bursts into the house,
Blue eyes dancing, transformed.
"Mom,
My teacher gave me a first
Because I didn’t quit!”
I whisper,
Thank you Lord.
Then I kiss him.
He quickly turns, grabs his football,
And hurries out
Ready to whip the opposition.
Frozen ground
Protects the roots below
From winter’s cold.
Broken relationships
Blast my fragile spirit.

Frozen heart
Shields the real me inside
From chilling hurts.
Wrapped in an icy exterior,
I hibernate within.

Spring warmth
Thaws the cold earth crust,
Renews life,
Melts my hard ice heart.
And I am vulnerable once more.
Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the Forest of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?