Forces

Volume 2004 Article 34

5-1-2004

2004 Forces

Scott Yarbrough

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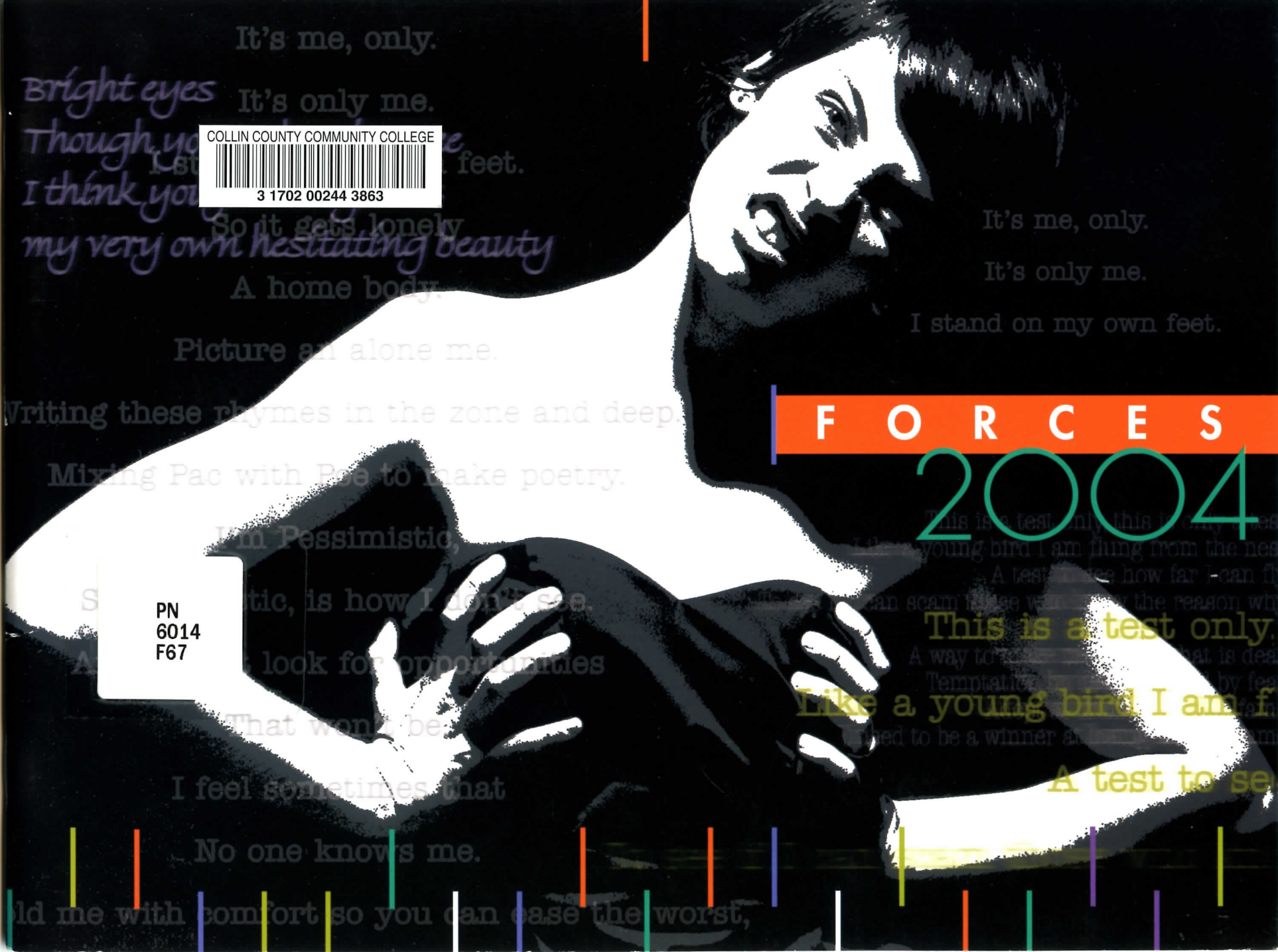

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Learning Resources Center
Collin County Community College District
CENTRAL PARK CAMPUS
McKinney, Texas 75070

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F O R C E S

is an annual student publication

sponsored by the Communications and Humanities

and Fine Arts Divisions

of Collin County Community College District.

76 Caprice Classic

Not rust colored paint but actual
Rust streaked down the side of
My very first car with the
tan dashboard cracked by sunlight,
Side mirrors big as kidneys which
filtered fear from other drivers' eyes
that I would move the sheer power
of my v-8 engine into their lane.
The squeaking chassis croaked out a rhythm
To keep time with the 8-track player
and teenage hormones in the
front and back seat of my 1-track mind
full frontal driving wasn't on my naked
agenda life is an adventure when
there's more under the hood
than behind the wheel
which was reaffirmed by my car at
every right turn where my horn would honk in
sheer audacity and desperation because
attention getters like that work every time
reflects my mind's eye rearview mirror who
remembers a face without fear and
dry river bed wrinkles where
laughter once ran like water
which flowed over iron bones
now brittle and rusty with
snap, crackle, pop
something always breaks
there's no warranty on kidneys and
I know I'm not a kid anymore
so stop reminding me I'm a little rusty,
this vehicle can still
get you where you're going!
I mean, so what I can't drive past groups of
neighborhood boys anymore with horn
honking, radio blaring and
blame it all on the car
that in its old age needs the attention

Shellie McCullough

shine

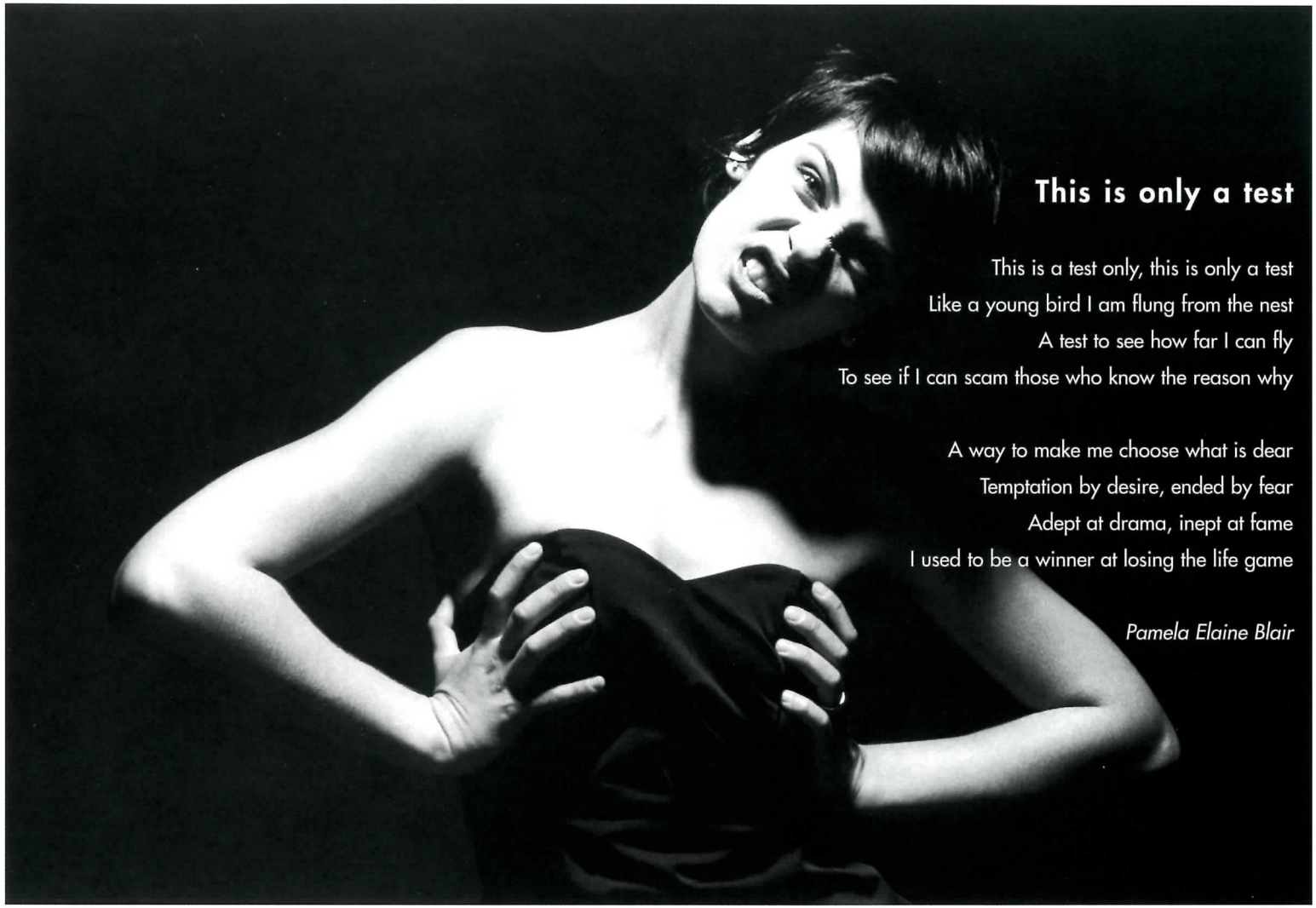
I would vote you into office
if you would only run
Run for office or run for the hills
You've got me either way

Bright eyes
Though you're hard to see
I think you just might be
my very own hesitating beauty

You're like a cowl covering me
Which no one else can see
I've grown used to this feeling
And I don't mind its being unrequited
Tagging along behind me daily.

Stepping on my heels and whistling
in my ear, mild rebukes that turn
my mouth up at the corners.

Claire Shipman



This is only a test

This is a test only, this is only a test
Like a young bird I am flung from the nest
A test to see how far I can fly
To see if I can scam those who know the reason why

A way to make me choose what is dear
Temptation by desire, ended by fear
Adept at drama, inept at fame
I used to be a winner at losing the life game

Pamela Elaine Blair

Miriana's Attitude by Andy Lai

3:27 AM

3:27 AM.
I'm trapped in a cloud of cheap bourbon and pine trees.
I've wandered in this place for days or years or half an hour.
My eyes burn with tears that ran out three beers ago.
I was trapped in the backyard for at least seventy-seven minutes.
3:27 AM.
At some point the screen door gave way under my misguided bulk.
The hinges cried out in agony, pleading for mercy not coming.
I'd stolen through the darkened kitchen
Tile catching pale strands of moonlight like ivory spaghetti.
Warped and squiggly and infinitely beautiful.
The bottle's neck nearly shattered in my white knuckled fist.
There was no one there to care.
3:27 AM.
The box had been full at some time before now.
Full of love and romance and hope and faith and trust.
Now it was almost empty.
It had been a secret treasure chest, now it was just a beat up shoebox.
3:27 AM.
I'd started with the letters we'd written.
Crinkling whispers uttered a thousand miles distant
Their melodious crumpling and tearing like a bittersweet cacophony.
The matches snapped and sizzled in an almost erotic flash.
My flesh came alive with the memories of kisses and embraces.
My stomach turned to stone, my tongue to ash.
The little flame kissed those pages with as much love as I kissed her.
3:27 AM.
I started up that bonfire and burned the bitch in blazing effigy.
I danced around it half-crazed with fear, hate, loss, betrayal, and a shot of vodka.
Ok, maybe two shots of vodka. Fine, it was the whole bottle.
In my midnight revels, I turned again to my tinderbox, ready to spend the last of its fuel.
The lumps that hung from my wrists pawed weakly at its contents.
There was nothing left. Instantly I was sober.
I danced a new dance, one fueled by desperation.
Stomping on the flames fighting back the ochre tide consuming all I loved.
3:27 AM.
I saved most of one picture.
It was all I had left and I cursed the man who first brewed barley and hops.
I found more tears, hidden somewhere in my shoe or fingertips.
I'd thought I'd cried every last one, but a flood poured out fresh and violent.
I cried, wishing I hadn't made those flames rise up from Hell.
When I used up all those tears I'd hidden, I just sobbed, cold and alone under the pines.
Everything was gone except this one picture. It would have to do.
It was all that was left.
3:28 AM.

Cameron Sells

inevitability

how could we begin again
when there was still
pain and death
and silence and war –
yes, war,
war so imminent
it belched and crowed
from tall, gray mountains
into small rooms
only big enough for
human hearts;

and peace could not
stop it, eradicate it,
nor negate the need for
war's thirsty greed –
sons, wives,
daughters, and husbands
decaying the ground
with shallow graves
and ruthless right,
today's heroes abandoned
for tomorrow's glory;

for who heeds history's
unending lesson of power,
snide treason, and blood
split for a smitten race –
blind as they be,
yearning for sweet promises
in autumn's dark gloom
under heavy apple tree,
creating a fearful enemy
out of the friends we
only now make.

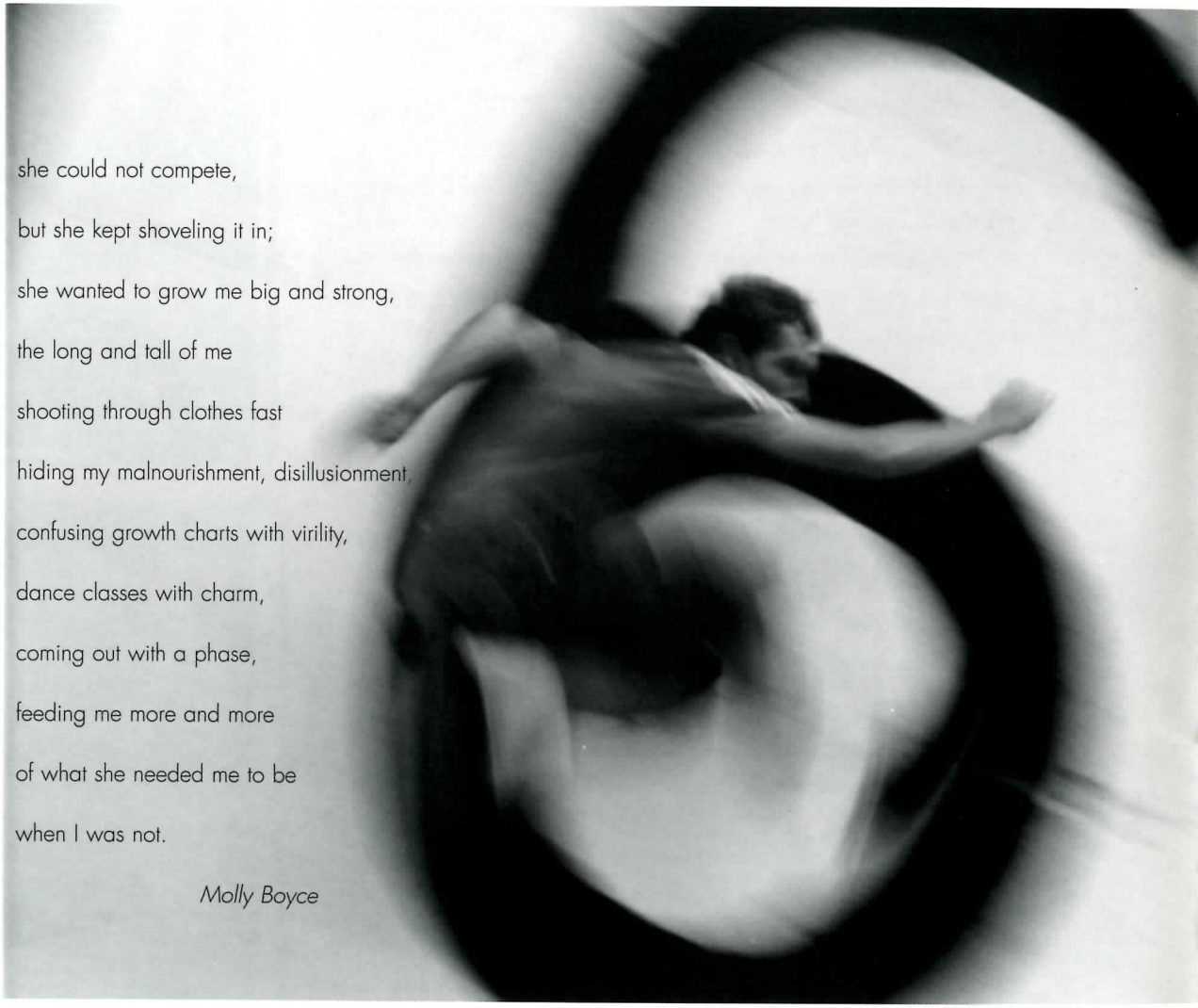
Molly Boyce

Untitled
by Sherry Dickson

simmer the pot

gruel it was, though she called it soup
with its thick spices and dark sauce,
and it stuck to my bones
the stuff that would grow hair on my chest;
she wanted to make me a man
from the inside out in those days
filling me up with platitudes, beatitudes
I would discard one day
for I knew better than she
what would enhance my nature –
a day at the park,
a good book,
a kiss on the cheek –
she could not compete,
but she kept shoveling it in;
she wanted to grow me big and strong,
the long and tall of me
shooting through clothes fast
hiding my malnourishment, disillusionment,
confusing growth charts with virility,
dance classes with charm,
coming out with a phase,
feeding me more and more
of what she needed me to be
when I was not.

Molly Boyce



Untitled by Sherry Dickson

Reflection of Innocents by Elaughn Green

THE ART OF NEGRITUDE-Personal Opinion Essay

by Sydney Portilla-Diggs

Not only was I ignorant of the meaning of the word but also I had no vestigial idea how the other children knew he was referring to me.

The original title of this essay was "Black like Black." However, after reading Henry James' *The Art of Fiction* and heeding his admonishment to write from experience, I renamed and rewrote the essay to reflect what I know best, the art of being black. You will notice throughout this essay that I refuse to submit to the more politically correct term of African-American. In my opinion, you cannot dare to call yourself an African-American unless you know exactly what tribe in Africa your family comes from. Since I do not know, do not dare to call me African-American. On a personal note, my family came to America from France via Puerto Rico and St. Croix. The other branch of my family is of German and American Indian descent. Obviously, someone in my ancestry came from Africa because when you mixed it all up in one family—I came out black. I digress—let me tell you about my first experience with the issue of race.

The race issue confronted me at an early age. I have a vivid memory of playing on the playground with a group of children. This was my first day in a new school; I was the new kid, and I was eager to please. An older boy ran past our little group and screamed out the word "nigger." Time stood still for me. I know many of you will find it next to impossible to believe this, but I had never heard that word before. Imagine my surprise when the other children informed me that I was the target of that hateful epithet. How was it, you may wonder, that I had never encountered the "n" word before? I can only state that my parents had never addressed the issue of race with me, and I had no idea that color was an issue. Color was no more significant to me than the differences in the clothing we chose to wear. Not only was I ignorant of the meaning of the word but also I had no vestigial idea how the other children knew he was referring to me. However, I know now that I was the only black child on the playground.

Because of this incident, my parents were forced to explain prejudice and racism to me. How do you explain prejudice to a child? How do you explain hatred? These are not rhetoric questions; somewhere out there, someone knows the answer because racism keeps rearing its ugly head generation after generation. My mother painted a grim picture of society; it resembled a tall ladder with equally spaced rungs. She explained to me that white people created this societal ladder to preside at the top and look down upon all people of color. Even some people of color, she told me, looked down upon other minorities. We, black people, were on the bottom rung of society. I have never forgotten that talk. I know now that prejudice can flow both ways.

Another aspect, I will attempt to address in the art of negritude is what is means to be black. Perhaps a better way to say this is to address the preconceived ideas of what black people should look like or sound like. Let me ask you this—what color is intelligence? What color is justice or freedom? What color is perseverance or determination? Or destiny? Or love? If you can answer these questions for me, I can attempt to answer what black is supposed to be. I can tell you this—I am not the keeper of the knowledge of all things black-related. I cannot and will not speak for the entire race. In addition, I will not condone the practice of calling some white man to the carpet and expecting him to answer for his race. I cannot say something "black" on demand like a trained poodle Black is not a language. I have no proof that I am black. I just am.

I also have an early memory of attending an elementary school in a suburb of Houston. In retrospect, I realize that it was an all black school. It was there that I learned I was not black enough. The other children didn't like me because I didn't act black. They laughed at the way I spoke and my use of

These are not rhetoric questions; somewhere out there, someone knows the answer because racism keeps rearing its ugly head generation after generation.

Although I didn't come to America aboard a slave ship or fight my way out of a ghetto, I wake up black every morning.

proper grammar. I've had my blackness measured by blacks and whites alike and was found lacking by both. Sadly, I watch as my own children experience the same treatment. At a college retreat, one of my daughter's white friends commented that my daughter was not really black. Was that meant to be a compliment? My daughter was highly offended. Even now, some of my black friends tell me that I am the whitest black woman they know. Was that meant to be an insult? There is something incredibly frustrating about having to defend my blackness to other black folks while dealing with the same racism they experience.

Once I dated a black man who didn't appreciate the fact that I had many white friends. He was convinced that if I fully understood the black man's struggle, I wouldn't befriend whitey. What did he mean by the black man's struggle? I decided to question my son to discover if and when he knew that he was black. He said his color was revealed to him in the first grade. Although his friend Jordan informed my son that he was black, my son let Jordan know that he was not black but brown. This became a consistent argument between the two boys. My son liked to play with Jordan because he had the coolest toys. Young Jordan (who I believe is a politician in the making) used his toys as a negotiation tool. He told my son that if he wanted to continue to play with the toys he would have to admit that he was black. My son pondered the proposal for a while and posed one question. Do you mean black like brown or black like black? Jordan confirmed that when he said black, he meant black. My son shrugged and conceded. Okay, I'm black.

I wonder if at that moment all the other white first graders were disappointed that my son was not more radical in his convictions. Or were the other black first graders morally outraged that my son "sold out?" Where did my son rate on the shades of blackness scale?

Did that moment of weakness in his racial identity resort in the forfeiture of the right to be called black? Had he been demoted to gray? This is what I know. Although I didn't come to America aboard a slave ship or fight my way out of a ghetto, I wake up black every morning. I fight for equal pay in corporate America. I fight to be taken seriously. I fight the stereotype. Here is a news flash. We are not all the same. I don't like watermelon, and I just learned to fry chicken two years ago. How can I prove that I am black without giving in to some stereotype? Why do I have to prove my blackness to other black people? If you ask me, that is the true black man's struggle, establishing a unique identity. Don't talk to me about the black man's struggle; I live it everyday.

The true art of negritude is to embrace your soul. From the moment I was conceived, I am who I was destined to be. However you add up my points on the shades-of-blackness-scale, there is nothing anyone can do to change what God has created me to be or the race I will pass on to my children. Don't question my blackness—find your own. Don't question who I am—find yourself. Don't categorize me—I am unique. In my soul, I know who I am. I am a black woman.

A BINARY DEFICIT'S *THINKING DISORDER*

Static Static Static Static Static Static Static Static Static Static
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Static *Maybe the rabbit ears need adjustment* Static Static Static Static
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Static *Buzz* Static Static *Wuz* Static Static *WAS* Static Static Static Static
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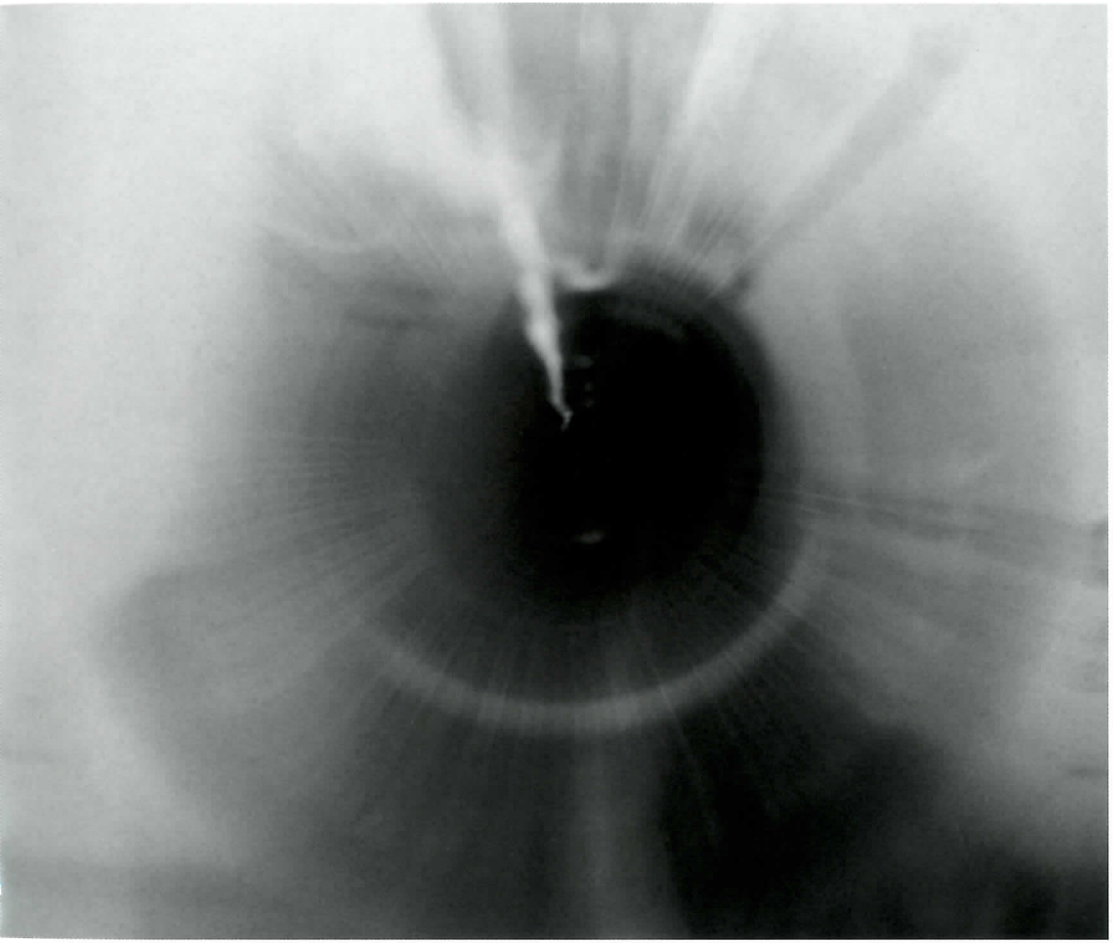
Greg Sherp



New Perspective by Paul Bellah

The REAL Story

I wrote this for the pro
Fessor is what I call him
Who attempted to understand me
Not even knowing me.

He thought he could heal me
With what he thought was insight
Not knowing he was simply
On the outside... looking in.

Yeah, he heard me talking,
So he must have been close to the window,
And I can see the breath mark that he made.
But between the wind and the bending of trees,
The words must have gotten muffled some way

Because it wasn't a slap I longed to give.
I wanted to remove him completely
From my memory.
I wanted to go back and erase
Every moment of his existence ...in me.

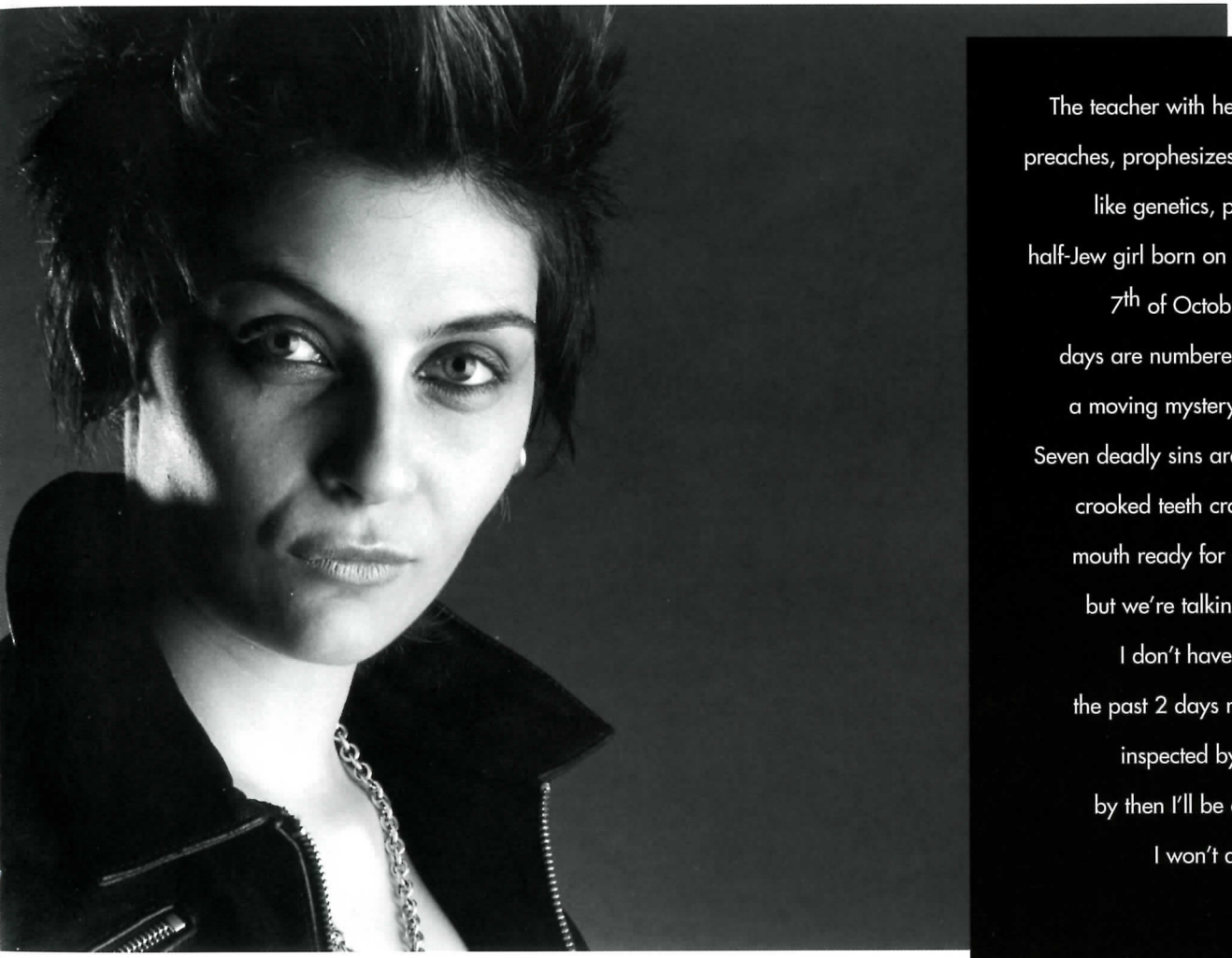
I cried at the thought of choosing
The biggest mistake of my life,
And when the phone rings, or
When the house is too quiet,
It's a never-ending dream in the night.

I cry, can't sleep, can't dream, can't hope.
I wish I could feel my soul.
It's gone, my cause, I am the effect
Of love found and forever gone.

I knew and was told,
And anything else I could think of
Turned me in the opposite direction
But that thing, um, um,
I forget what they call it,
Kept telling me we had a great connection.

It wasn't. It's not. When will it stop?
I'm dreaming, but I never closed my eyes.
To keep me, there should have been
A bolt of lightning,
From the biggest mistake of my life.

Anndria J. Webb



Rebel Portrait by Andy Lai

LUCKY #7

The teacher with her frazzled halo of hairdo heresy
preaches, prophesizes how numbers are not coincidental
like genetics, politics, or birthdays and me
half-Jew girl born on the same day as Heinrich Himmler
7th of October 1974 to the present my
days are numbered, enchanted celestial solutions,
a moving mystery like Mann's Magic Mountain.
Seven deadly sins are no accident of broken mirrors or
crooked teeth crowded to the front of teacher's
mouth ready for an argument against Algebra,
but we're talking Pythagorean theorems and
I don't have that kind of energy since
the past 2 days my diet is water and Dexatrim,
inspected by #7, expires in 2007 but
by then I'll be all teeth, Auschwitz thin and
I won't argue, it's no accident.

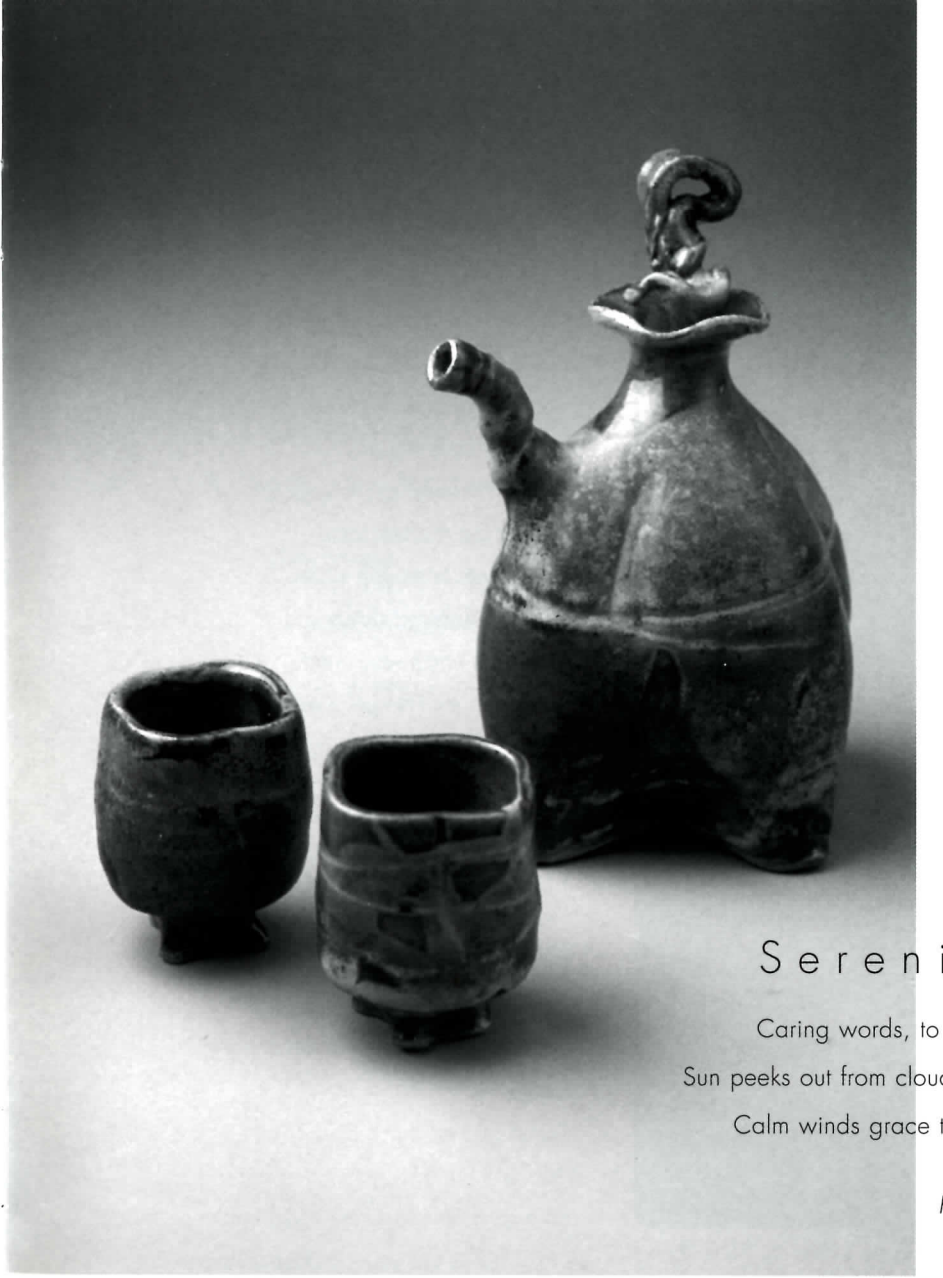
Shellie McCullough

The Sandman

In that hazy place between sleep and awake
When daylight retreats for the dreamer's sake
Where the heavy mists swirl with dark evening air
Where visions are formed, whether foul, whether fair
At a crossroads where living and dead tend to meet
There tiptoes the sandman on quick, silent feet
Neither evil nor good, full of truth, full of lies
He is gentle and harsh, always cunning and wise.
Some nights up to mischief, sending goblins and ghosts,
Lurkers and death, all those things hated most
He'll send you through hell, turn your world upside-down
Turning sweet, content smiles to whimpering frowns
Reminds you of things you have tried to ignore
Or makes you relive things you've been through before.
But on other evenings his humor is high
He'll send you a song in a rainbow-filled sky
Victorious battles, all the gold on the earth,
A well-deserved kiss, life of happiness, mirth,
Unpredictable friend, unforeseeable foe
Cannot trust him or fear him, for sand he will throw
Regardless of who you are during the day
It's time for the sandman to come out and play.

Charlotte Stevens

Untitled Series by Sherry Dickson



Sake Set by Clarice Dorst

Serenity

Caring words, to speak
Sun peeks out from cloud-strewn skies
Calm winds grace the deep

Kim Mladjen

Three Seasons of Eve
by Clarice Dorst

One Step Out of Time

I met Jess last week
Just another week
Splendor magnetic
Love automatic

I met Jess today
Heart, soul gone astray
Why could we not be near
No fewer than five golden tears

I meet Jess next week
Lone tear gone acidic
So far yet oh so near
Once conquered our own fears

One step out of time

Stephlan Nguyen Han

CENTRAL CAMPUS

the river

moody water,
still, passionate, and warm
touch of a kiss across the body
flow of emotion from a soul
eroding and uncovering
as it swiftly flows
back into the sea

at the edge,
that rippling, tripling rage,
that silent serpent of life
winding earth through me
cursing my destiny
down dark caverns
where the tide goes

on shallow bed
where reed and willow
sway their shadow's
sensual water sprite song
tangled in undercurrents
seductive and sweet
drawing me to its breast

Molly Boyce

House White by Nick Young

cherry willow

I don't remember how it died,
but I know it wasn't pretty.
I don't remember if it was
struck by lightning or
shot in the heart.
I remember the blossoms
pink I think or maybe white.
And they snowed down in
the every which way wind,
sticking to my little girl sweater
and piling up in drifts against
the chain link fence.

Does a tree have a solar plexus?
I swear I heard it scream
but it was low and drawn out.
Time is different for a tree.
Maybe that scream was just a gasp.
Damn him for that shot.
Damn god for that crack.
And damn me for never climbing
as high as its branches would hold me.

Claire Shipman

Blackberries

I pass by every day

The briar patch beckons me

As the warming air

Beckons the blossom

White flowers

Imprisoned by tangled vine

Thorned, twisted confinement

Protection for the seed

Blossom gives way

To a small knotty sphere

Red, on a jagged platter of green

Drawing from earth's bounty

Preparing the bounty of earth

The berry

Plump, reflective, black

Fruit of the tangled vine

My six-year-old hand

Reaches from my mind

To carefully pluck the treasure

And yet

My view comes through glass

My leather seat imprisons me

In today's reality

My mouth waters for Mama's jam

Beth Turner Ayers

The Tangerine

In the purpling gray of early morning

you photograph me bent over

my essays and coffee –

and frame the scene to give me later.

You sit across from me,

a pale shard of daylight

on your cheerful palate of fruit.

For days and days you have loved me

in my uneasy bittersweet. But this morning,

when you lift a piece of half-mooned tangerine

to my mouth and place it

between my lips, the clean scent

on your fingers wraps

around the citrus and seals my hope.

Dallie Clark

The Sistah Circle Has Curves

Rocky hips wider than any gulf of the ocean
Jazzy smooth silk with motion
Ebbing questions of who slept with Mac
Flowing answers with secrets of who slept with Pat

Maybe it's the bounce of our breasts
Conversations from A to Z
A cup of coffee or a mug of tea
One lump or two?
Just how much sugah can you stand?
Gurl lemme tell you what's up wit yo man!

Red lips drip vows loaded calories
One diet plan could break the circle sighs, of ooh baby please
Curly, nappy, hair braided, weaved or straight
And we wonder why we can't lose the weight

Bulging vulgarities, belly rolls and ripples
Gin and Vodka drunk from moist nipples
Backsides adorned with skirts too tight
As divas with stories we have earned the right

The curves of other mothers, sisters and aunts
A circle that binds us with all of its haunts
Sizes 8 to 22 small medium and large
The circle docks on Saturday with the help of a barge

We groove to music that can lull and lead
Our heads held high with our eyes on the tease
We don't hold back, we won't be put down
The sistah circle has spread from down to uptown

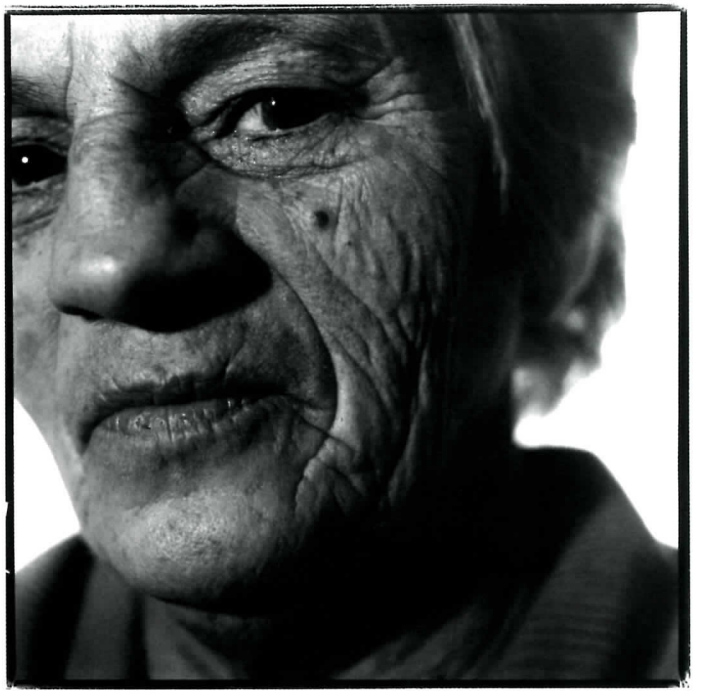
Prim, and proper even straight laced
Light skinned tone with egg on our face
Hershey hues that melt in the sun
Curves like a roller coaster that can make a man run

Pamela Elaine Blair

Kamakazi

It's me, only.
It's only me.
I stand on my own feet.
So it gets lonely
A home body,
Picture an alone me.
Writing these rhymes in the zone and deep.
Mixing Pac with Poe to make poetry.
I'm Pessimistic,
So Optimistic, is how I don't see.
And I don't look for opportunities
That won't be.
I feel sometimes that
No one knows me.
So Hold me with comfort so you can ease the worst,
Cause I'm constantly working.
Feeling worthless so for a purpose,
I'm permanently searching.
But it gets too tough,
And I can't bear this non-stop controversy.
Lord, have mercy on me!
Cause to you my vision's blurred,
But to me I see perfectly.

Miles Stoner



Francis by Nick Young

UNTITLED

The moon
Is an unloved woman.
Pools of hot tears,
Like acid, have burned craters
Into her face.
And my sadness, like hers,
Has brought me to this place.
I will be with her
Soon.

Sydney Portilla-Diggs

THE THIN RED DEPARTMENT STORE LINE

by Keith Tolleson

"No one can find those robot dinosaur things. This is our one shot, and if you can do this, you'll be the most amazing man ever."

I don't remember exactly when I gave up on preserving my dignity, but I do know that what I'm doing now is the clearest indicator that I have none left. There's no good reason for a 46 year-old man to be standing outside of a department store at 4:50 a.m. the morning after Thanksgiving, or at least no good reason that I can think of. My wife, on the other hand, had me convinced last night that, by standing in front of a mall in sub-freezing temperatures with 150 middle-aged women, I could become a hero; "No one can find those robot dinosaur thingies. This is our one shot, and if you can do this, you'll be the most *amazing* man ever."

For a brief moment I did feel kinda like I was serving a noble cause. Maybe it was a bit heroic. After all, my kid would be the only one on the street with an E-Rex, and I would be the envy of all the frustrated parents whose kids kept asking them why Santa brought Jonathan an E-Rex but not them. Maybe it would teach that jackass next door to work a little harder on giving his kids what they actually want for Christmas instead of spending so much time trying to turn house decorating into a damn contest every year. That's what a hero would do. Then I thought about what my father would say if I'd dared to call myself a hero in front of him. He'd say, "Boy, until you've had a bullet lodged six-inches from your balls and still managed to take out eight Krauts, you don't know jack shit about what it takes to be a hero." And then he'd show me the wound.

Over the years, my father had made it a point to let me know that I didn't know jack shit about a lot of things. In fact, just yesterday he told me I didn't know jack shit about carving turkey, jack shit about serving the right amount of gravy that goes with mashed potatoes, and jack shit about how to time my channel changing during commercial breaks so we didn't have to miss any of the football game. My wife finds it all very

amusing. I could probably do without it. But, with my father's words in mind, I decided that the acclaim I might get from waiting in line for an E-Rex was not worth risking frostbite only to get mugged by a group of soccer moms once I'd gotten the toy. That wasn't heroic, I thought, it was just stupid. When I told this to my wife, however, she was slightly less than understanding and proceeded to describe plans for me that involved kitchen utensils and certain parts of my body as an alternative. I set my alarm for 3:00 a.m.

So here I am, almost two hours into my stay on the sidewalk in front of Silver Brook Mall, with about ten minutes to go before Walker's Department Store opens for its big Pre-Dawn Sale, and I'm starting to lose feeling in my toes. I'm 35th in line, sandwiched between Jean, a wiry blonde woman who's well into her second pack of cigarettes, and Pat, a woman around my age whose girth looks to be gaining on her height. The two women became fast friends when, around a quarter till four, they discovered that they shared the same obsession for Beanie Babies. "Are you a collector?" Jean asked, smiling to reveal a tremendous gap in her yellowing front teeth.

"No," I said flatly. The woman frowned, and then continued the conversation with her new comrade. Clearly my usefulness to her has now been relegated to my acting as a target for her smoky exhalations. Luckily, my nose has been stuffed up by the cold for a good while, and I can't smell a thing. Unfortunately I can't say the same for my hearing. I've had the unique pleasure of listening to the life histories of both women for the past hour. It seems that, aside from their common interest in Beanie Babies, Jean and Pat both have three children, all cesarean deliveries, followed by hysterectomies with complications. Both also had appendicitis as teenagers, and their favorite TV show is *Wheel of Fortune*. Right now they're debating whether or not Pat Sajak wears a hairpiece, and I'm debating whether or not to get a handgun license.

With five minutes to go until Walker's officially opens, a manager comes out of the employee entrance to address the crowd. A stocky, balding man with a thick, black mustache and a unibrow, the look on his face is the same look natives might have as they watch lava from an erupting volcano rush toward their village. His voice starts shakily, but soon develops a sense of command as he proceeds, "Ladies and Gentlemen if I could have your attention, those of you who are here for the E-Rex dinosaurs please form a line to your immediate left once you enter the store. There is only a limited supply, and we want to keep this as organized as possible. IN THE INTEREST OF FAIRNESS, PLEASE DO NOT CUT IN LINE!" He puts extra emphasis on that last part because the crowd is starting to buzz and making a slight push toward the door. Pat's stomach pushes into my back and I get closer to Jean than I'd like to be, discovering in the process that my sense of smell isn't as dulled as I'd originally thought. The store manager crosses himself and ducks through the employee door. There's another small push as a woman toward the front mentions that someone is coming to unlock the front door. "Let go of my shirt!" another woman yells. This is about to get crazy.

The two women became fast friends when, around a quarter till four, they discovered that they shared the same obsession for Beanie Babies.

When the front door is unlocked, people begin to file inside in a fast, yet surprisingly organized, fashion. Maybe this isn't going to turn into the mayhem I thought it would. Behind me, Pat is getting restless, shifting her weight back and forth, and trying her best to see over me and around me into the store. Suddenly, a woman comes running from the back of the line and darts through the front door amidst a chorus of cries from the other women demanding she be stopped. Two more women from the back then pass by, headed for the door. This, apparently, is the sign that Pat has been waiting for. She sidesteps me and begins to make her move, but her new best friend Jean steps out and shoves her to the ground, effectively ending their short-lived companionship. Pat rolls onto her back grabbing her ankle and wailing, but no one takes notice. The crowd has turned to watch Jean who has suddenly made a break for the door. Sensing that any effort to police the line ended with Jean's vigilantism, a mad rush for the store ensues, and I find myself caught helplessly in a wave of hairspray and cheap perfume pushing me through the entrance.

I'll figure out what to do for the kid later. It'll be tough, but maybe I can still convince him that there is a Santa after all.

Once I'm thrust through the door, I almost slip on something and look down to see a small woman with glasses collecting the spilled contents of her purse. I pick up her compact, which was under my foot. As I hand it back to her, she looks up at me with the expression of a cat that's been thrown into a cold swimming pool, defeated and untrusting. Regardless, she takes the compact and I rise and look to the back of the room where I see the store manager standing on a giant E-Rex display surrounded by three or four other employees and a sea of grabbing hands. I catch a glimpse of Jean pushing another woman to the ground. The manager is in a panic. Having abandoned any effort to differentiate who was in line first, he and the other employees are now simply throwing E-Rex dolls into the crowd, hoping merely to survive the ordeal at this point. Women are practically climbing on top of one another, money in hand, in what is becoming a borderline riot. I once again see the absurdity of a 46 year-old man enduring all this nonsense for a toy, and I turn and head for the door. I'll figure out what to do for the kid later. It'll be tough, but maybe I can still convince him that there is a Santa after all.

Walking to the exit, I find more and more rational reasons to leave this store. Christmas has become too commercial; the boy would break the dinosaur on the first day; and, if he didn't break it on the first day, he'd be bored with it in a week. Besides, I wasn't much older than he is when I stopped believing in Santa Claus. Was I? As I reach the door, I think of my father again. I remember a story he told me a couple of years ago during the Christmas following my mother's death. He talked about the time I wanted a real cowboy costume, the kind with leather chaps and two six-shooter holsters, and a white shirt like The Lone Ranger's; "It was all you talked about for months. We had no choice but to buy you the damn thing." My parents ordered the costume from a catalogue weeks before Christmas, just to make sure it would get to the house on time. Then, two days before Christmas, they received a letter informing them that the company they'd ordered the costume from had folded, and no shipments would be going out. Rather than have me question the

existence of Santa Clause, my mother stayed up until 4:30 Christmas morning sewing the costume, making sure it was an exact replica of The Lone Ranger's. My father ended his story by saying, "Until you do everything you can to keep your kids' dreams alive, you don't know jack shit about what it takes to be a parent." I turn and walk to the back of the store.

The manager is still tossing E-Rex toys into the crowd as I make my way toward the melee. He appears to be on his last batch, and the fighting up front is becoming more and more furious. Mall security has finally arrived, but there's little they can do at this point. The police will be here soon, I figure, so I'd better work fast. I skirt around the edge of the crowd, trying to make my way behind the display where I hope to snag a doll from one of the floor-level employees. As I reach the linoleum walkway to the side of the display, I see Jean walking in my direction with an E-Rex in hand and a gap-toothed grin on her face. Looks like her brutality has paid off. She gets about five feet from me when out of nowhere a woman flies into Jean knocking her over a rack of corduroy pants and onto the floor. It's Pat, who's obviously gotten her revenge. The two women tussle on top of a pile of corduroy and broken plastic hangers until a pair of security guards break up the fracas and take them away cursing and spitting at one another.

Just as I'm about to turn back to the display, out of the corner of my eye, I see part of an E-Rex box sticking out from underneath the pile of pants. Jean hadn't been able to collect the toy while she was being led off by security, and it is seemingly buried deep enough to escape notice by the other women, who are still focused on the display. I manage to remain undetected as I collect the toy, go through the line at the cash register, and head home. There will be no mugging today. My boy will believe in Santa Claus after all. I do know jack shit about being a parent. And no matter what my father says about bullets, or balls, or Krauts; I got an E-Rex, and right now, I'm a hero.

Sonata Pharmaceutical: 1st Mvmt.

I'm staring at a bottle of Prozac flavored

Happiness

Generically Fluoxetine

In scoops of 10, 20, or 40 mg

Candy coated gel tabs that hold

All the answers

Blissful escape thanks to our good friends at

Geneva, Pliva, or Par

And happy little doctors dispense

Dopamine, Darvocet, Diazepam

Time releasing sad little worker bees

From their 9 to 5 miseries

Who minds living an empty life

With a Xanax powered smile?

Cameron Sells

F O R C E S F O R C E S

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