



*Aurora*  
Literary Arts Magazine  
Spring 2010

# Aurora

Literary Arts Magazine • Spring 2010

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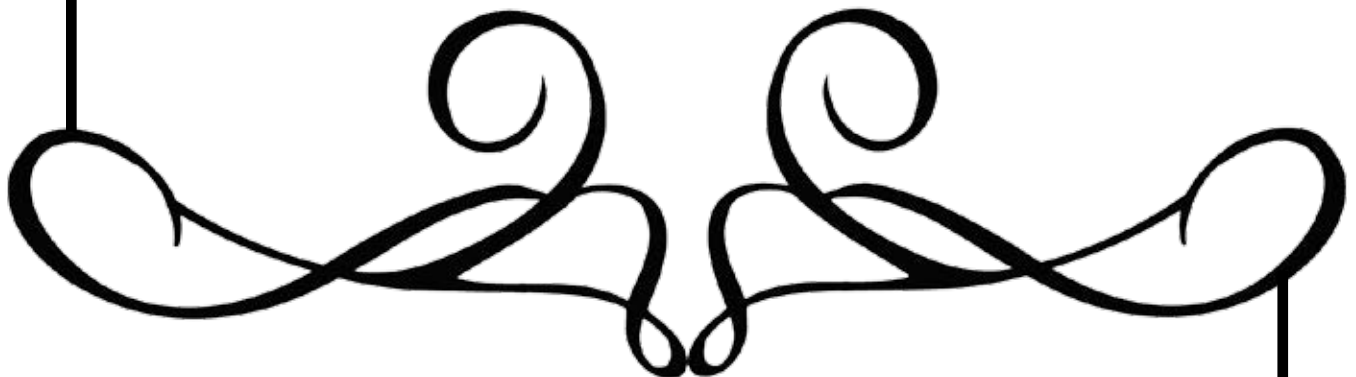
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Aurora provides a forum for original literature and creative arts. Submissions remain anonymous until a staff of readers complete the review process. The editor maintains responsibility for final selections in preparation of works for publication. Please address all correspondence and submissions to the editors. Submission guidelines and dates available upon request.

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# Editor's Note

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Some people set out to achieve greatness, and fall short of the stars. They land somewhere between heaven and earth, a rock and a hard place, success and utter failure. I myself have been stuck in the middle. The guilty catalysts of my personal demise—procrastination and chaos, but no matter what the shortcomings, one must keep looking to the stars. As Elbert Hubbard once said, “There is no failure except in no longer trying.” Big dreams are never achieved through the black hole of giving up. They’re achieved through perseverance, rocketing forward on the fuel of passion and ambition.

Writing is one category of expression that can provide a multitude of obstacles for the ever-dedicated author. Mental blocks, emotional turmoil, lack of grammatical know-how, confusion, and possibly every brain cell blanking out at the exact same moment, are just a few of the discouraging factors when setting out to create near perfection. Yet, not one of them is defined as equaling failure. They are just minor stepping stones on the road, not to nowhere, but anywhere your heart desires to go.

Aurora is one more stepping stone for great writers and artists. This collection of SMWC spirit and aptitude sets forth to inspire a community of tradition and compassion that spans the world. Aurora is a light to shine by when the stars are falling just short of reach. Aurora illustrates with vibrant color and diversity the greatness that is within each of us.

Take the time to embrace the beauty of Aurora just as you embrace the essence of The Woods. For just as one must journey through the woods to greatness; one must journey through life to reach the stars. If you always dream, you can never fail.

*Emily Thiesing, Editor*

Emily Thiesing, Editor

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## Coming Home

By Traci Latoz, (WED) Class of 2011

"The peanut brittle bubbled over onto the stove, and now she's having a spell," said Bob, gesturing toward the screen door and across the lawn. Antonio, who had invited himself into the kitchen, turned to see Marie stretched across the railroad tracks with her bare arms crossed in front of her body clutching herself and waiting for the evening train to arrive. "Jesus Christ. I better clean the stove," Bob said.

Antonio, a tall Italian immigrant, paused before picking at the cooling candy. "She'll come home. She always does." Bob shook his head and tossed the spoon into the sink, unsure what to make of his nose neighbor's prediction.

As he scrubbed at the hardened confection splattered on the stove top, Bob intermittently splashed a callused hand and washcloth into the sink and turned to steal glances in the direction of the railroad tracks. At twenty-five, Bob was a decorated WWII veteran with a construction worker's sun-weathered skin, short black hair trimmed straight across his neck, and tired blue eyes. He had married Marie only two years prior, shortly before purchasing a new 1953 Starlight two bedroom mobile home. The attractive and stylish couple shared high hopes of settling into a quiet and routine family life despite Bob being away on construction sites during the week.

Pink kitchen appliances and built in, dark-paneled nightstands, made the shiny silver capsule of a house trailer the talk of the neighborhood, drawing housewives and their husbands to the front door wanting a glimpse into a new "modern and portable" lifestyle. Marie, who was once happy to have visitors and lead them around like troops of gawking tourists at Hoover Dam, had, in recent months, begun delivering insults as she met would-be guests at the door. Antonio told Bob just the day before that Cicilia, his young wife who spoke little English, was greeted with the slam of the front door in her face for wanting only a half-cup of sugar. Since the baby died, nothing was right.

With the stove clean and the dishes drying on the rack, Bob flipped his Zippo open with one hand, lit a Lucky Strike, and blew smoke through the screen as he paused in the doorway. "I'm not going up there. Not this time," he said, momentarily forgetting that Antonio had excused himself to the patio set. Studying the heaving silhouette of Marie's sobbing against the evening sun, Bob flicked the top of the lighter back and forth, reluctantly allowing his mind to wander through the painful events of the last year.

The pregnancy was normal. Marie had six months of morning sickness followed by a baby shower in the Methodist church basement, and ninth month cravings for chicken chop suey. She gained the recommended twenty pounds, and went into labor the day before her due date. But, after ten hours of labor, and a difficult breech delivery, the baby suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. The silent, but breathing baby boy was rushed out of the delivery room before Marie could see or hold him.

Robert Ralph Sanders, named after his father, expired ten hours after birth. The doctor told Bob not to tell his wife. "I gave her something to help her sleep. I'll call in a minister in the morning," he said. Morning came, the minister delivered the news, and from the moment Bob heard Marie's wails echoing through the cold hospital corridors, the picture perfect life they had hoped for began to unravel.

In the following months, Bob had tried to make things easier on her. He insisted on dining out rather than expecting the home-cooked meals he had become accustomed to. He clumsily learned to do his own laundry, and chose a lower paying job at the site of the new hospital in Joliet to remain as close to home as possible. When her nightly sobbing stopped, Bob was hopeful he and his shapely brunette bride could begin again with long Saturdays spent shopping in Springfield and Sunday picnics with her parents.

But now, he was wishing for those solemn nights to return, in exchange for the embarrassing and exhausting evenings he had spent coaxing his troubled wife off of the railroad tracks and her insistence on pretending the baby had survived.



"It's the picture. Why does she want his picture on the wall?" Bob muttered to himself. He grabbed the framed photo off the paneled wall and flopped down onto the turquoise sofa that, like the pink stove, was the envy of the neighbors. The doctor told him the hospital took the picture as a matter of maintaining proper death records and providing the mourning parents with official documentation of little Robert's short existence. But, instead of leaving the photo tucked safely away with her grandmother's quilt and wedding veil, Marie had recently placed it in a gold frame and hung it on the wall in the cramped living room. The photo hung as if it were the first portrait of a bouncing and cooing 8-month old baby boy who was the apple of his doting mother's eye. Marie passed the photo several times a day, always stopping to gaze at it in case something had changed.

The other things didn't bother Bob as much. Buying tiny blue outfits, changing the sheets on the crib, and window shopping for red tricycles and sandboxes were all things that Marie had done while he was away. But, the black and white photo of the pale and lifeless baby glared at him every time he returned home for the weekend. "Marie, I dread coming home to that. I don't want to forget him either. But, won't you please take it down?" He had nearly collapsed to his knees and begged her the previous weekend.

Since the baby, Marie rarely looked at him in the eye, and hardly reacted when he spoke. His hopeful advances toward her were met with alternating bouts of tears and anger, resulting in long weekends and a cold silence broken only by the slamming of cabinet doors.

"Temperature's supposed to drop to forty tonight," said Antonio, tossing his head back and blowing smoke at the October Illinois sky. Bob nudged the screen door open with two quick jabs of his elbow and stepped down onto the patio. "She's going to freeze and it serves her right," he said, taking a seat across the green aluminum table from his neighbor. "Sometimes I don't know why I even come home."

Opportunities for spending the weekend in Joliet were plentiful. Young co-workers and friends had more than once invited Bob to stay at their shared apartments for weekends of bar-hopping, girl chasing, and poker games. Off the job, Bob was most comfortable in tan leisure pants and black loafers, entertaining male acquaintances with the war stories of a daring bombardier, and leaving young women swooning at the graceful mannerisms of a distinguished gentleman.

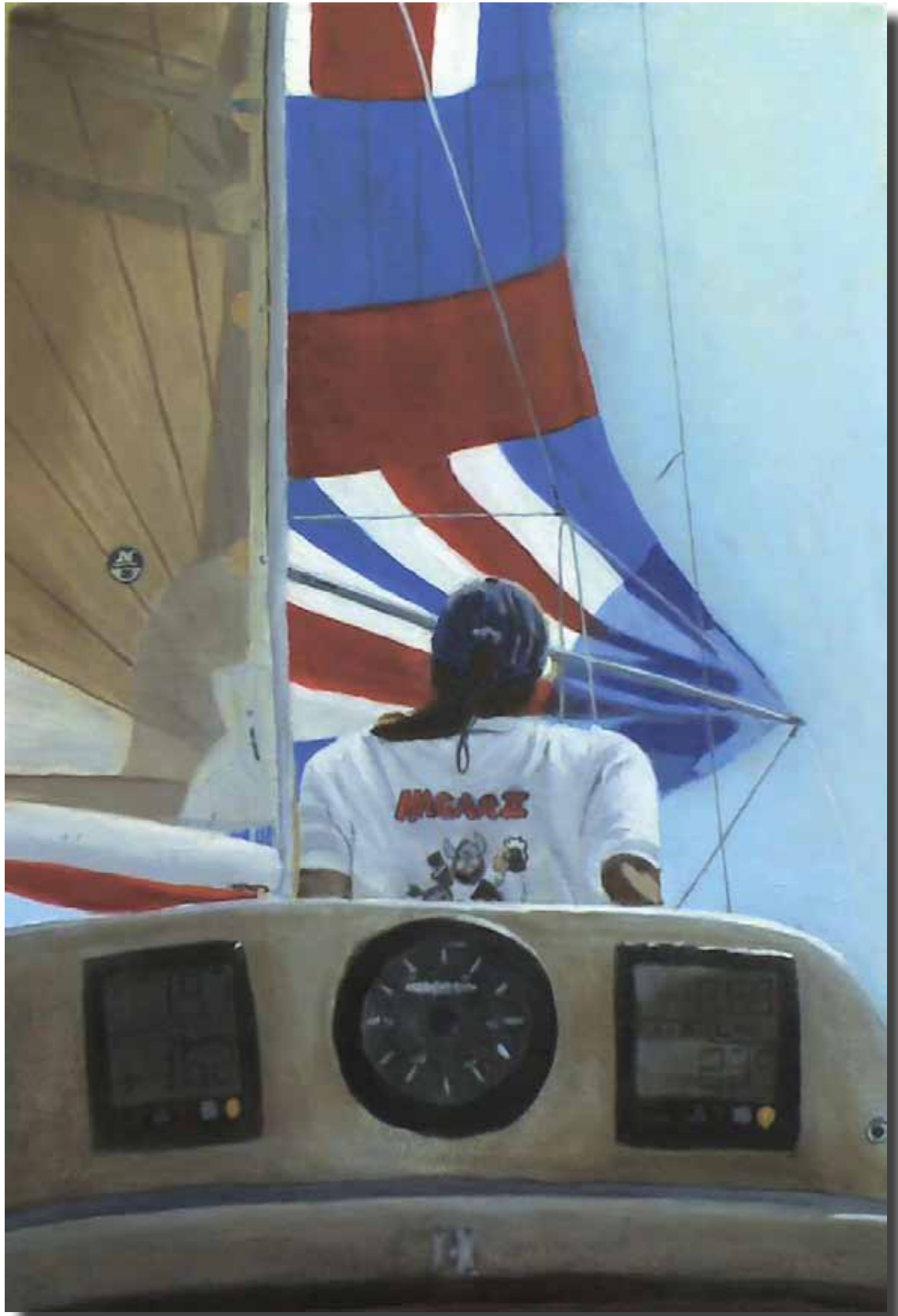
"Do you love her?" asked Antonio. "If you do, that's why you come home." Bob outlined a spot of rust on the table top with his index finger, contemplating the question and his friend's volunteered answer. "I'm going back tonight. I've done everything I know to do. I'll sell the trailer, give her half, and she can go to Springfield to live with her parents," said Bob. Antonio nodded and hung his head, before standing to walk home.

Bob stood alone on the dark patio kicking stray gravel back into the driveway. He tossed his worn, but favorite Air Force duffel bag into the trunk, and squinted to watch for movement on the tracks, relying only on the faint flickering streetlight at the end of the block. "Forget it. Forget everything," he said.

Marie didn't want to bury the baby alone. Instead, they sealed his ashes in Bob's silver baby cup with the promise that little Robert would be buried with Bob or Marie, depending on who passed away first. It was a decision Bob often rethought, wondering if he had been wrong in not insisting on burying little Robert, and closing the entire tragic event right then and there.

Bob sat tapping his fingers on the wheel, and listening to the truck idle. He propped his arm on the back of the black vinyl bench seat and turned to look behind him before backing out of the drive. In the headlight beams he could see Antonio standing at the water spigot which marked the dividing line between their adjoining mobile home lots. Bob drew his hand to his forehead and executed a well-practiced soldier's salute, before hitting the gas and driving off in the direction of Joliet.

Beside the spigot, Antonio sat picking at wild clover and drawing long drags off his cigarette. As he stood to stomp it out, the glimmer of approaching headlights rounded the corner at Olmstead Street. In the distant glowing beams, Antonio could make out Bob's figure hunched over the tracks, and extending his arm to Marie. Antonio grinned. "That's why you come home," he said.



*It Was a Good Day*  
Painting by Kimberly DisPennett

## **When I Fall Prostrate, In Great Joy**

by Sylvia Lewis, (WED) Class of 2012

When the Baptist Minister thunders  
a message of Thy Strong Salvation  
and sinners stream to the altars  
Then, Lord Jesus, before Thee  
I weep in great joy

When the veiled child is rejoicing  
confirmed in Thy Sweet Sacraments  
firstly receiving Thy Holy Eucharist  
Then, Lord Jesus, before Thee  
I smile in great joy

When the Methodist Reverend teaches  
Blessed Mysteries of Thy Holy Kingdom  
and the congregation understands the Truth  
Then, Lord Jesus, before Thee  
I sing in great joy

When the lady utters high praises  
dancing in the Spirit of Pentecost  
praising Thee in Sacred Tongues Unknown  
Then, Lord Jesus, before Thee  
I laugh in great joy

When the Messianic Rabbi bows  
at the Presence of Thy Holy Ark  
the Torah touched by eager hands  
Then, Lord Jesus, before Thee  
I kneel in great joy

When Thy People are together  
in the Blessed Unity of Thy Eternal Day  
worshiping in Heavenly Courts with Angels  
Then, Lord Jesus, before Thee  
I fall, prostrate, in great joy...



## An Interview to Remember

By William M. Welch, (WED) Class of 2013

Fritz Weidinger was born June 17, 1923, in Kolbermoor, Germany. His father Josef was a factory foreman and his mother Helga worked on a neighboring farm. Fritz said, "Life was hard, meals were scarce, and luxury was a completely foreign word." He recalled a time when he was around ten years of age, eating a meal of rabbit and potatoes with his mother and father. He heard a knock at the door. His father answered the door, and there stood two government officials. They entered the house and sat down at the table with them. They asked his father several questions. Fritz remembered one question specifically because they were so persistent on it: "Do you belong to the Nazi party?" His father replied, "No, I am not affiliated with any political group."

The men went on to tell his father all the benefits that came along with becoming a member of the party; furthermore, they attempted to recruit his father for the military service. Fritz remembered his father's becoming agitated and telling the men to leave. At that point, one of the men took out a pistol, placed it on the table, and said to his father, "How safe is your family, Mr. Weidinger?" Fritz stated, "At that moment I felt taken over by fear." The next morning a black Mercedes Benz pulled up, and his father got into it, and it pulled away. Fritz said his mother told him that his father had left for a new job and would be back soon. Fritz stated, "I had no idea that would be the last time I would ever see my father."

After his father left, life got harder. Money was impossible to come by, and his mother struggled just to keep food on the table. He reflected back stating, "I went to bed many nights with nothing to eat." In the fall of 1936 Fritz was thirteen years old. With daily life getting more and more difficult, his mother took him to Munich and signed him up in the Hitler Youth Program. He was sent to a camp where he was fed regularly, trained and educated. Fritz remembered being taught that Jews were bad and the enemies of the state. He was told daily it was the Jews' fault that the German people were starving and struggling. Fritz said, "I was so young and impressionable that I believed it. I actually wanted to believe it, and I still feel ashamed for being so naive."

As time passed, Fritz got in deeper and more caught up in the military. In May of 1940, at the age of seventeen, one month before his eighteenth birthday, Fritz enlisted with the German S.S. He said, "We were told that to be in the S.S. was a great honor and privilege." After his training period, Fritz was told he was going to be sent to Poland for duty. He remembered how he hated to leave Germany. Fritz boarded a train in August of 1940 bound for Poland; he was told he would be stationed at a POW work camp called Auschwitz. He stated, "I told my commanding officer that I wanted to fight for the fatherland, not guard prisoners." His superior told him that this position was indeed a battle, and he was on the forefront of a great change.

As Fritz looked out the window of the train car, he saw the camp off in the distance. He said, "There were six railway tracks that entered the camp and rows of barbed wire, and above the entrance was a quote, 'Arbeit Macht Frei,' which translates into, 'Work Brings Freedom.'" Fritz exited the train, walked through the gates and saw several one story buildings, fellow S.S. staff, and of course the prisoners. Fritz was shown to his quarters and left there the rest of the day. The next morning he was awakened by his unit officer. The officer said, "Get dressed. I will show you how it works here." Fritz said, "I remember hearing train whistles in the distance." As he followed his unit officer to the main yard, an open area where the trains came in, he saw a train sitting there with closed up box cars. One S.S. officer unlocked a box car and opened the door. Once the door was open people started falling out. The other guards were yelling, "Schnell, Schnell, Rouse, Rouse!" which means, "Hurry up, get out!" The Jews were pulled away from their families and sent to different areas based on their age, gender, and apparent health. The longer Fritz stayed at the camp, the more it affected him. He said, "Some of the things I have seen still haunt my dreams, like the visions of the Kapos, the prisoners who worked in the crematoriums, piling dead, emaciated bodies into the ovens for cremation." He went on to say, "The smell was stale and fowl. No matter where you went in the camp, you could not get away from it."





*The Sun in Hiding*

Photograph by Jacqueline Waltermire, (WED) Class of 2010

As time passed Fritz knew that if he expressed his opinion, he would be shot immediately. So instead, he began helping a group of prisoners. They were known for stealing food and other items, and distributing them among the other prisoners. Fritz stated, "I had a night watch, so I would unlock a barrack that was referred to as Canada." It contained food, liquor, shoes, clothing, and hygiene items. These items of course had been confiscated from prisoners as they entered the camp. Eventually, one of the prisoners thought it would win him favor by telling on Fritz. The next night as usual, Fritz unlocked the barrack door and walked away. Fritz was immediately arrested and questioned. He said, "All I could tell them when they asked me why, was to say, 'why not?'" They stripped him of his uniform, cut off his hair, and put him on display for everyone to see. At the age of twenty, Fritz was a prisoner inside a place he had grown to despise.

The next day he was sent to Dachau, a concentration camp in southern Germany. Fritz said, "I was considered a political prisoner, so I had it much better than the Jews. I did at least get to eat everyday." While at Dachau, Fritz was subjected to intense physical labor daily. He said he just kept reminding himself that he still had it better than some. He befriended a man named Stefan Wiencenty Frelichowski, a Polish priest also considered a political prisoner. Fritz said, "The priest was a good man. He helped me find my faith and keep it, even in the hell we were surrounded by." His friend Stefan died in February of 1945 from the typhus epidemic.

In April 1945, Fritz said, "I remember when the Americans came. We all heard the gunfire in the distance, and it wasn't long till the Americans came through the front gates." The American soldiers rounded most of the German guards up together and opened fire on them, killing around 250. Fritz said, "They were lucky they were killed because they were not meant to endure all the hell they subjected so many others to." Fritz had spent two years locked up in Dachau. He was pardoned of war crimes and left Germany two months after the war.

Today Fritz is 86 years old and lives on a farm in the United States. He never has returned to Germany. When I asked Fritz if he regretted anything looking back, he replied, "I cannot apologize for what I had fell party to. It didn't matter what side of the fence I was on because I was still a prisoner in one way or the other. I did all I could for the Jews, and it cost me two years of my life. But still I would do it again. It was the right thing to do."

## **Bubbles**

by Traci Latoz, (WED) Class of 2011

Little girl with bubbles  
Takes a breath and blows through the wand.  
Hundreds of tiny worlds swirl around.  
Chances to enjoy, explore, and discover  
Catch the breeze  
And quickly escape her.  
Reach for the bubbles,  
Don't let them go.  
When you want them back,  
There will be no more bubbles to blow.

## **First Time Fishing**

by Whitney J. King, Class of 2010

He casts his line in the water,  
Pulls up his trousers and sits in his chair.  
Looks up and smiles,  
Seeing his daughter.

“Over here Daddy,”  
He hears her shout.  
“Look at my fish,  
I named it Patty.”

She puts her fish in the bucket,  
And runs down the beach.  
Jumps for his arms,  
But he's just out of reach.

She falls on the ground,  
And starts to cry.  
“It's okay,” he says.  
There aren't any tears  
That a daddy can't dry.



*Beauty of Simplicity*

Photograph by Jacqueline Waltermire, (WED) Class of 2010



*Noire et Gris*

Photograph by Andrea Lynch, Class of 2010

## **Desire**

by Katie Nease, Class of 2011

I am overwhelmed by Desire.

She beckons to me.

“Set me free.”

I want to breathe smoke, to feel the noxious  
fumes burning the hairs down my throat.

I want to extinguish the smoldering tip in this skin  
I loathe.

She calls to me.

“Do it.”

I want to push the knife tip into my wrist, spill my  
red into the sink.

I want to make my own scars for once, deep and  
personal.

She sings to me.

“Destroy.”

I want to sink into the silent chaos of a plethora  
of little pills.

I want to sleep a dreamless existence, alone and  
unperturbed.

She whispers to me.

“Come now”

All I can do is obey.

## My Grandfather's Orchard

by Tzu-Han Tseng

My grandfather has been dead for almost four years. In Taiwanese' custom, the Taiwanese usually set an altar for the people who died and offer sacrifices every year in order to remember people who passed away. Then, in front of the altar, they will also put a censer with incense on it for worship so the smoke of incense will be everywhere in the house. I put my incense in my grandfather's censer and look through his eyes in the picture, hoping to read his mind. His picture is on the altar with a smile which I had seldom seen when he was alive, undisturbed and peaceful. I glance round the sacrifices which include a whole chicken which is cooked already, some snacks, desserts, flowers, some paper made to resemble money, and some fruits- especially oranges. Whenever I offer sacrifices to my grandfather's altar, I will think about his orange orchard on the mountain in Shui-Liu-Dong. I think this is because of the oranges. Maybe, I am not quite sure, or maybe that is the only thing I can think of when I think of him.

My grandfather was a very quiet man; I can even count on my fingers how many sentences I heard from him. "Go, go, who is the fastest one to reach the oranges?" he said in an encouraging voice with a smile, which is rare to see on his face when I helped him to pack and bag the oranges with my whole family. And this may be the only sentence I can remember of him. I never knew what he thinks because he had a straight face. I usually dared not look at him, like a student who is fearful to be called by the teacher and wants to hide her face. I still remember he always wore his navy blue rain boots to walk through orange trees with squish sounds. And the boots were all covered with the dirty soil and straw.

In the orange orchard from spring to summer, the orange flower will blossom on the mountain just as if the snow covered the land all around. The color of the flower is white and pure just like a wedding dress, so the meaning of the flower is sometimes considered a bride's joy. Thus, I sometimes think I should get married in the time that the orange flower is in full bloom. It looks like a lily but its petals are spread out and the fragrance is more delicate. It's hard to sense; I need to put my face very close to the flower then I can inhale the sweet orange smell. However, I usually suffer in winter, which is the time oranges can be eaten and my family starts to pluck the oranges from the trees.

It is hard work to me. I think that is why I do not like oranges so much because I only feel pain when I see them. After we finished plucking, my whole family would sit in the metal house and put the oranges in plastic bags in order to sell them in the summer for a good price. The price of fruits usually is the lowest when it is in season. The house we worked in was simple and usually shook like it would soon collapse, especially when the wind beats on it. The space was narrow and hard to move in, especially when my whole family was around. Twelve people, we all sat together in this small metal house. Then, we usually competed to see who was the fastest one to put the oranges in the plastic bag. Our hands moved like machines but we kept talking about how the day was. I still remember how the oranges and plastic feels. It is kind of rough and the oranges are covered with pale pesticide.

Squish! Squish! Squish! The sound is all over around the mountain from near to far and then I think this is how the orange flower transforms to fruit and how orange turns from green to orange because his boots sound was everywhere in his orchard. But he is not in this world anymore and the only thing he leaves is his orange orchard on the mountain. It is worth around US \$460,000, but soon my grandmother decided to sell it.

After offering the sacrifices, I burn the paper money as my offering to the dead. Then I hear my mom argue with my grandmother in a kind of anger, but begging, "I should have my part of inheritance! What? Why not? I am also your daughter, but why do you only give money to your son?" This is not the first time that I heard this argument between my mom and grandmother.

My grandmother did not give my mom any money but gave her a box of oranges. When we taste them, my mom says, "It is even sweeter and there is no seed! Isn't it amazing? Technology does improve a lot! Look! How juicy it is."

I could not agree more with my mom but sometimes I do wonder how come the fruit without the seed can have the next generation, and can I visit the orchard on mountain again or dose it already belong to someone else. I really want to have my wedding with orange flowers! I can feel the yelling in my mind. I still remember my grandfather insisting his orchard will take the important place from generation to generation, so how come it has been sold? But maybe my grandfather knows the answer, I guess.

The pity is we will have no chance to work in that house with my whole family anymore. But one thing I am pretty much sure of is that I will never suffer with oranges, never.



## **It Must Be a Lie**

By Tzu-Han Tseng

She gave me a call  
About his death  
Even though I did not speak with him,  
I still got a shock  
Like his death is a lie or trick,  
I said, "It's not funny; please do not lie to me."  
I became silence.

    "What's the difference?  
You won't talk with him even if he is alive."  
And a tear slowly falls down,  
What I did is refusing to believe;  
I know she is telling a lie.  
And what I can trust is  
My tears never lie.



*Self Portrait*

Wood engraving by Sarah Cole, Class of 2013





*The Theater*  
Fine art print by Cheyenne Plummer, Class of 2012

## A Sweet Storm

By Dianne Jensen, (WED) Class of 2011

I think maybe something happened to him when he was a Marine in Korea. I don't know that for sure, but I like to think when he was a boy, that there was some good in him. I guess I need to believe that, me being his kid and all. It seems to me that there would have to be something good and even beautiful in him for my Mama to fall in love with him. But then again, women always fell in love with my Daddy. He was a handsome thing, 6 feet tall and dark headed with eyes black as crow's and a smile that most always got him his way. Mama told me once not to ever marry a man who looked better than me. She said, "Marry you an ugly man, Baby. Then he'll treat you good." Mama wasn't pretty by most folk's standards. She was tall with big legs and thick ankles, glasses shaped like cat's eyes, and a round, soft shape. I reckon my Mama's life might have been different if she hadn't married Walter Sutton. She never had much hope that he would change, and God knows we were better off when he was gone, but as far as I know, she never thought about leaving him. When Mama makes a promise, she's true to her word, and I guess that included 'for better or worse.'

Daddy didn't pay much attention to me. He only really beat me once; mostly he took his frustration out on Mama. Sometimes I wonder if he would've treated me differently if I'd been a boy, but I guess I'll never know. What I do know is that he had a meanness in him. I know he loved liquor and Camel cigarettes and women, and whatever money he made, he managed to gamble or drink away. I know my Mama stood in line for commodity cheese and peanut butter. I know when I went to Peacock's store for candy, I waited around till nobody I knew was left in the store before I paid with food stamps. Daddy never had a solid job; he chased work the way he chased women, and tired of it just as quickly. Some folks said he was lazy, but I think it must've taken a whole lot of energy to live the way he lived. I think it was just the meanness boiling in him that made him so restless. I can't remember many times when Daddy was around more than a week or two at a time, but the year of my 13th birthday, he was there nearly the whole summer. That was the summer he fell in love with Ruby Peacock – and I guess I fell in love with her a little bit, too.

There was never any question of what I would do in the summer; Mama and me always picked cotton. Daddy sometimes went up to Detroit to the assembly plants and sometimes we didn't know where he went, but he never worked in the fields. Daddy said there was no need to lower himself to field-hand work when there was plenty of good work all over the country for enterprising gentlemen such as himself.

It was the day before cotton pickin' season and that meant barbeque tonight. Me and Mama picked for Mr. Roy Jones, and every summer on the last night before pickin', he put on a big barbeque for all the summer help. It was pretty much the same bunch every year: Roy and his son, Ricky, my Aunt Edna and her kids, Buster, Sherry Kay, and Little Bob, and me and Mama. We would be expected to sit still for Mr. Roy's talk about being hard-workin', responsible and honest, and then we got to eat all the barbeque, potato salad and watermelon we could eat. Daddy would usually go with us for a good, free meal before he headed to Detroit, and this year was no exception.

When we pulled up at Mr. Roy's, my cousins were just getting out of the car. Daddy whistled and said, "That Sherry Kay sure growed up good. Mmm, mmm, I'd sure like to get my hands on some of that."

"She's nineteen, Walter," said Mama, "and she's your niece. You ought to be ashamed."

"She's your niece, Lily. And nineteen is plenty woman as far as I'm concerned."

Mama shushed him as we walked around the side of the porch. Miz Donna was busy pouring lemonade into icy Mason jars and yelled at Buster and Little Bob to help Ricky shuck the corn.

"What can we do to help?" asked Mama.

"Well, Lily, you can slice that big watermelon if you don't mind." Then she looked at me. "Pearl, Roy and me was just talking about you."

"Me?"

"We was just saying that you are all growed up."

"Yes, Maam. I'll be thirteen in July."

"Well," Miz Donna explained, "Buster and Little Bob are gonna keep on pulling boles same

as always, but we think you and Ricky are big enough now to pick. What do you think?"

"Yes, Maam," I said, "I'll sure do my best."

Mr. Roy walked up just then. I liked Mr. Roy a lot. He was real brown and skinny as a fence post with a shiny bald head and a ready smile. He was real good to Miz Donna; he didn't want her to work in the cotton; he said she had enough to do just puttin' up with him. I always wished my Mama had a good man like Mr. Roy. He handed me a pair of brown work gloves. "See these here gloves, Pearl?" I nodded 'yes.' "I cut the tips out so you can get a better feel for the cotton. Before, you was pulling the whole bole, but we get better money for clean cotton. Pickin' it is harder; them boles is prickly and when you reach in for the cotton, the boles is gonna bite your fingers. They'll toughen after a bit, but they're gonna hurt for awhile."

"I can handle it, Mr. Roy." All the grown-ups laughed.

"I know you can, Pearl. But you also have to pay more attention than you did before. You don't want to get any trash from the bole in your sack. You have to watch what you're doing and keep that cotton clean."

"You won't have any problems with her," said my Daddy. "She gets her work ethic from her Daddy." Just then, Daddy looked up and his eyes got all soft and goofy-looking and he took a comb from his back pocket and ran it through his hair.

"Well, here she is!" exclaimed Mr. Roy. We all looked up to see Ruby Peacock coming around the side of the house. "Ruby will be joining us in the cotton this summer. Ya'll make her feel welcome."

Mama and Aunt Edna started whispering right away and I moved over to hear what they were saying.

"What is Roy Jones thinking?" asked Mama.

"What's he thinking with is more like it."

"That girl's never done a day's work in her life."

"You don't think she's got something going on with Roy?"

"No. She most certainly does not." It was Miz Donna; none of us had seen her walk up.

"Well, of course not, Donna," whispered Aunt Edna, "we just can't figure out why Roy would hire the girl. I mean, she's part of the richest family in town. If she wants to work, why doesn't she just work in their store?"

"He hired her because I asked him to. Ruby had a falling-out with her family. She was ready to get on a bus. The poor child's got no money and nowhere to go."

Aunt Edna's eyes were big as saucers. "What kind of falling out?"

"Well, that's none of our business, now is it?" As soon as Miz Donna put Aunt Edna in her place, she moved on with her pitcher of lemonade.

"Well," Aunt Edna harrumphed, "you can bet whatever that girl done had something to do with men; you can tell she's a little slut just by looking at her. Her family wouldn't disown her for no good reason, that's for sure. You'd think Donna would have the good sense not to want the little tramp around her husband."

"She doesn't seem too concerned," said Mama. "And since your Bob's at the garage all day and Walter's about ready to go up to Detroit, what do you say we have some barbeque and watermelon and not worry about it?"

"Sounds good to me," agreed Aunt Edna, "I've got my eye on that coconut pie."

It was a fun evening. Buster and Little Bob filled their Mason jars with fireflies. I ate till I was full as a tick, and then me and Ricky took the cane poles to the pond and fished till the mosquitoes were eating us alive. I noticed Sherry Kay and Ruby walking around the orchard. It seemed like they hit it off. Mama laughed and gossiped with Aunt Edna and Miz Donna. I was feelin' real happy when I crawled into the backseat.

"Well, that was a fine evening, don't you think?" asked Mama. "Walter, I reckon we should get you packed tonight, 'cause me and Pearl got to be at the north field early in the morning."

"Actually, Lily, there's no need to pack. I made a deal with Roy to work this summer."

"In the fields?"



*The Woods, My Home*  
Photograph by Elyse Marshall, Class of 2012

“Well, of course in the fields, Lily. You think I’m gonna be his butler?”

“But you don’t work in the fields. Do you even know how?”

“Well, Lily, you’re the stupidest person I know. If you can do it, I’m purty sure I can handle it.”

Mama lowered her voice, but I could still hear. “I know why you’re doing this, Walter. I saw the way you looked at that girl.”

“Damn you, woman! And here I was trying to spend more time with my family, but are you grateful? Hell, no! When have you ever appreciated anything I’ve done for you?”

“You’re making a fool of yourself.”

I wished Mama had kept her mouth shut. I knew she’d be in trouble when we got home. Sure enough, after I was in my room I heard it start. Mama only cried out once; I guess the first blow took her by surprise. I hurried into my bed and pulled the pillow over my head to drown out the sounds, but it was a long time before I could sleep.



Mama was quiet the next morning, but she looked fine. Of course, Daddy didn’t leave marks in places people would see. I was surprised to see Daddy up so early. He was cheerful on the way to the fields, but he sure looked silly dressed in dark slacks with a crease ironed down the front and a white short-sleeved shirt that showed his Semper Fi tattoo. He even had Brylcream in his hair; the bees were gonna love that. Mama didn’t say a word.

First day of pickin’ season is always my favorite, just for the newness of it. We chose our sacks and Mr. Roy set up the scale. Daddy picked morning glories for all the girls – me included – but he made a point to tuck Ruby’s flower behind her ear. Mama’s lips were set in a thin line all day and she didn’t talk to anybody, not even Aunt Edna.

Ruby Peacock stood out in the cotton field like a hot-house orchid in a garlic patch. It’s not like she did it on purpose; Ruby dressed the same as all the other field hands, but she might as well have worked buck-naked. Her full breasts and round buttocks strained against the rough fabrics of her work clothes. She tied her red curls back in a pony-tail, but they had a way of slipping out, framing her face in fiery ringlets, and even without makeup, her lips were so pink and full, she looked like she’d been stung on the mouth by a hornet. Aunt Edna said it was impossible to be around Ruby without thinking about sex.

I wanted to hate Ruby for Mama’s sake, but the truth was, I was drawn to her. Day after day, Daddy made a fool of himself flirting with her right in front of Mama, but as far as I could tell, she never encouraged him a bit. She mostly stayed close to Sherry Kay and she treated Daddy no different than she treated Mr. Roy, so I decided I wasn’t being too disloyal if I liked her. The truth is we were all attracted to Ruby that summer and it happened as naturally as sunflowers turning to the sun. She played with Little Bob, teased Buster, and talked baseball with Ricky. She wasn’t as fast as Mama and Aunt Edna but she worked hard and never complained.

Everyone loved her except Mama, of course. Ruby told the funniest stories about things that’d happened over the years at Peacock’s store, but Mama never laughed once. In the hot afternoon when the hours seemed to drag on forever, Ruby entertained us with her singing. Her voice was as clear as a mountain spring and she sang ballads so beautiful I forgot the heat. One day, Mr. Roy said Ruby ought to stick to the faster tempo songs because the faster she sang, the faster we worked. I paid attention after that, and I do believe he was right! One day she was singing “Paper Roses,” and as soon as she let loose on “Louisiana Woman, Mississippi Man,” we ‘bout worked ourselves to death! We sure had a good laugh over that. One day I was pickin’ close to Mama and I noticed that whenever Ruby was singing, Mama would hum a different song under her breath, just so she wouldn’t have to hear Ruby. That made me real sad.

Some days I would get mighty tired of swatting at bees and eatin’ dust, and I would lift up my eyes, search for clouds, and pray for a shower to send us running for cover. But as long and hot as those days were, I



didn't look forward to going home. It seemed like the more Ruby ignored Daddy's advances, the more he drank. Mama would hurry to get supper done 'cause if he got two drinks in him before supper, he got real mean. One night Mama had made fried squash, okra and corn. We had a big skillet of cornbread and some sliced tomatoes and green onions. I thought supper looked real good, but the whole time Mama had been cookin', Daddy had been drinkin'. He came to the table with a sour look on his face, "Squash again? I didn't expect steak or pork chops, but how about a damn meat loaf once in awhile?"

Mama spoke carefully. "I'll try to get some ground beef when we get paid."

I was holding my breath - waiting for Daddy to take a bite. Finally, he put a forkful of squash in his mouth and I let out my breath. Maybe it would be okay. Suddenly he cleared the table with one sweep of his arm. "That squash is greasy and salty! It ain't fit to eat!" Platters and bowls crashed and broke and our dinner was all over the floor. "How do you expect a man to work all day without decent food to eat?"

Mama looked as blank and lifeless as a department store mannequin. My heart was pounding and I was as mad as I was hungry. I knew better, but I spoke anyway, "That squash was fine. Mama is a good cook and she cooked this for us after she worked in the fields all day. And now, we'll go to bed hungry, but that's not Mama's fault, it's yours."

It was quiet as a tomb for a minute, then Daddy said, "You hungry, Pearl? You're so fond of your Mama's cookin', go ahead and eat it." I just sat there; I didn't know what to do, and then he screamed, "I said for you to eat it!" I started to shake and cry, but I was not about to apologize for talking back to him. I knelt in the floor and I heard Mama say, "Leave her alone, Walter."

"I said eat it!"

I started to pick up pieces of food from the floor. "No. Not like that. Don't use your hands. Lick it up." I was crying harder now and I could hear Mama crying, too and pleading for him to leave me be. I leaned over and put my face an inch from the floor, but I was crying too hard to try to eat. Just then, I felt his dusty boot on the back of my head, and as he ground my face into the floor, I felt blood gushing from my nose into the salty squash, and I heard my Mama scream.



July 21 was my birthday. It was a work day, but Mama said supper would be real special. Daddy was already gone when we got up. "Reckon where Daddy is, Mama?"

"I don't know, Pearl. I reminded him about your birthday, could be he's out lookin' for you a present." I thought it was highly unlikely.

It was the hottest day of the year. The morning passed as usual except that Daddy never did show up. Ruby gave me a bracelet that she made herself and Aunt Edna gave me a whole package of hair ribbons that looked like fuzzy ropes - all different colors. She wanted me to tie one around my ponytail right then but I didn't want to get them dirty. By afternoon, it was so hot that we couldn't even entice Ruby to sing. The sun bored into the tops of our heads and burned our backs. I fought sweat bees and red ants, and the taste of dust on my tongue made me long for a dipper of cold water. When I finally got to the end of the row, Mama was weighing in.

"Mama, it's so dang hot!"

"I know, Baby. Get you a dipper of water."

"I will. I've had a lot of water, though. I need to pee."

Mama laughed. "I'll go with you. I could use a break." We walked the length of the rows toward the corn, too hot and tired to talk. The rows of cotton and corn met in a 45 degree angle and in the little triangle between was a plush patch of lush grass with a half-dozen winter apple trees, nourished at the end of the one waterway. Mama said she'd wait at the end of the row and I went on into the corn field for privacy. It was even hotter



under the tall corn stalks, so when I finished I stepped through the corn to the outside to walk back, and what I saw stopped me in my tracks. Just across from me were the winter apple trees, and there underneath was Ruby. I wasn't sure what I was seeing at first – naked breasts, mouths, hands moving, bodies arching, moans, words of love. The heat formed a haze around them, reminding me of a painting I'd seen in an art book. I knew I wasn't meant to see, but I couldn't move. Suddenly, a hand grabbed my wrist and I was pulled back into the shade of the corn. Mama placed her hand over my mouth, and it was only when I looked into her eyes and gasped that I realized I had stopped breathing.

“Shhhh...”

She led me quietly to the end of the corn field and back into the cotton. When we were a good distance away from the apple trees, Mama put her hands on my shoulders. “You okay?” I nodded. “Did you get to pee?”

“Mama, I don't understand.”

“What don't you understand?”

“Ruby! What was she...I mean, what were they doing?”

“They were making love, Honey.”

“I know that. But that was Sherry Kay. Ain't a woman supposed to make love to a man? If she does that with a woman, isn't that bad? Is Ruby bad, Mama?”

“I reckon when a person finds a love that's good and tender and kind...well, I reckon that's always a good thing. Come on, we'll talk about this later if you want. We'd better get back to work before Mr. Roy wonders what's happened to us.”

I pulled my sack back over my shoulder, my birthday forgotten. Ruby and Sherry Kay were soon working alongside of us and when someone asked Ruby to sing, Mama said, “Do you know ‘Unclouded Day’?” Ruby sang with a joyful, clear voice.

“O they tell me that He smiles on His children there,  
And His smile drives their sorrows all away;  
And they tell me that no tears ever come again,  
In that lovely land of unclouded day. “

When Mama joined in, it felt so good – like something that had been broken was just mended.

We had worked most of the afternoon when I finally saw Daddy walking up the ridge, holding a big bouquet of flowers. Mama stretched her back and shielded her eyes against the hot sun. “Well, would you look at that, Baby Girl? Your Daddy did remember your birthday.” He didn't come our way though; he walked straight as an arrow up the ridge and over to where Ruby picked. With a good fifteen rows between us, I couldn't hear what was said, but I saw Daddy offer the flowers to Ruby. She shook her head and pushed the flowers away. By now, everyone in the field had stopped working. Ruby backed away and eventually dropped her sack, turned and walked back down the picked row, my pathetic Daddy at her heels.

Aunt Edna hurried to Mama's side. “Don't you go blaming Walter now, Lily. One look at that Ruby and you know she's trouble - a tramp, pure and simple. Walter will come to his senses, don't you worry.”

Mama stood taller and smiled. “This is not Ruby's doing, Edna. Walter Sutton is a piece of shit.” Mama reached for my hand and pulled me to the end of our half-picked rows. She stopped at the scales and dipped her shoulder, letting the canvas sack slide to the ground. “Roy, Pearl here is 13 years old today, and if it's okay with you, we're going to take off a little early and bake her a cake.”

“Well, I might be persuaded if you'd bring me a piece tomorrow?”

“A big piece, I promise. Thanks, Roy.”

Mama squeezed my hand and we headed home. I kept expecting her to cry or get mad, but she didn't. In fact, she didn't mention Daddy at all. We made my favorite, yellow cake with chocolate icing, and Mama decorated it with fancy pink candies. I helped make dinner, fried chicken and mashed potatoes, and just as Mama was putting the biscuits in the oven, we heard Daddy's car in the driveway. Mama closed the oven door, gave me a wink, and walked out on the porch, letting the screen door slam behind her. I stood by the door,



leaning as far as I could without being seen.

“Walter, you made a complete ass of yourself today and I’m sure you plan to come home and drink till you’re good and mad and then beat your wife till you get it all out of your system. Well, you and I both know that I’m not big enough to stop you. But today is your only child’s birthday, and you are going to allow Pearl to have one special day that is just about her. You can come in and enjoy a nice birthday dinner with us or you can leave and we will enjoy it without you.”

Daddy took a step forward and I saw both fists clench. “What did you say to me? Are you actually telling me I’m not welcome in my own home?” Mama stood her ground and lifted her chin for the first punch, right in the face. I had heard the blows before, but seeing it was different. I froze for a minute, long enough for him to get in several blows, but then I ran onto the porch screaming for him to go away, to leave us alone. Daddy looked up at me for just a minute, spat on the porch beside Mama, and walked slowly to his car. That was the last time I ever saw my Daddy.

I hurried to the kitchen and got a towel, soaked it in cool water and brought it out to Mama. He had always taken care not to leave a mark that people would see, but now Mama looked on the outside the way I suppose she had always felt on the inside.

“I’m so sorry, Mama. I should have come out sooner. I’m so sorry.”

“I’m sorry, Pearl. I should never have let him hit me a second time. But I’m done. I’m done being hit and walked on. We got us some living to do, Baby Girl, and we’re gonna do it in peace.”

“I don’t think it was Ruby’s fault, Mama, do you? The way Daddy acted, I mean?”

“Course not, Baby. Ruby was a star and I reckon it’s a star’s job to shine. Your Daddy is just always running after the next shiny thing. Don’t you worry, though, Pearl. We’re gonna be just fine. Now, let me up; we have a birthday to celebrate.” It was just me and Mama for dinner. We each had 2 pieces of cake and Mama said that was just fine because it was a special occasion. I don’t know if it was the heat or all the excitement, but I could hardly hold my eyes open, and I told Mama so.

“You go on to sleep, now. You’ve had a big day. We won’t even wash the dishes. Don’t think we’ll be in the fields tomorrow, anyhow. Hear that thunder? There’s a sweet storm coming, Baby girl, gonna cool things off and settle the dust.”

“It sure would be good to rest, but what about Mr. Roy’s cake?”

“It’ll keep. I’ll wrap him up a piece right now. Go on to bed.”

I fell asleep the minute my head hit the pillow. My dreams took me into dusty cotton fields where sweat bees and dirt daubers spelled out “Happy Birthday” and a naked Ruby and Sherry Kay fed each other cake decorated in pink candy. I chased Daddy down row after dusty row of bales picked clean, and once I almost caught up with him; I reached out to grab his hand, but then I tripped. I could feel myself falling toward the dust and a looming big, red ant hill, but when I landed it was into a soft, green meadow, right beside my Mama. A million fireworks lit the sky and the night air around me was fresh and cool and full of Mama’s laughter.





## A Jewish Woman's Poem

by Sylvia Lewis, (WED) Class of 2012

Modah Ani

I thank Thee, Messiah  
for Thou has safely brought me to a new day  
full of life  
full of possibilities  
eternal Hallelu-jahs arise from my Soul

Modah Ani

O Yeshua, my Everlasting Savior  
how gladly I spring into action  
at Thy rising, from Thy warm Sun's rays  
to praise Thee  
to thank Thee  
eternal Hallelu-jahs arise from my Heart

Modah Ani

My Kinsman Redeemer  
King of the Universe forever  
how I love Thee  
how I praise Thee  
how glad I am to be alive  
eternal Hallelu-jahs arise from my Love

Modah Ani

Modah Ani,

Yes, I shall praise Thee forever...



## Lula Mae Platt

(1921-1937)

by Toria Poore, Class of 2013

I used to ride the horse  
Through the open field of my father's land  
And rest beneath the shady maple  
Near my mother's garden  
Sing a lullaby until the sun fell asleep  
Then race to the end of the lane  
Where at the gate I met a boy  
We would steal into the woods  
Dance, laugh and love  
Until the sun awoke  
I told that boy my heart was his  
He took me literally I suppose  
For when I told him it belonged to another  
He cut the love from my breast  
Taking what had been promised his  
To have said to love only one  
Was a fault  
To forget that life goes on  
My life cannot go on

