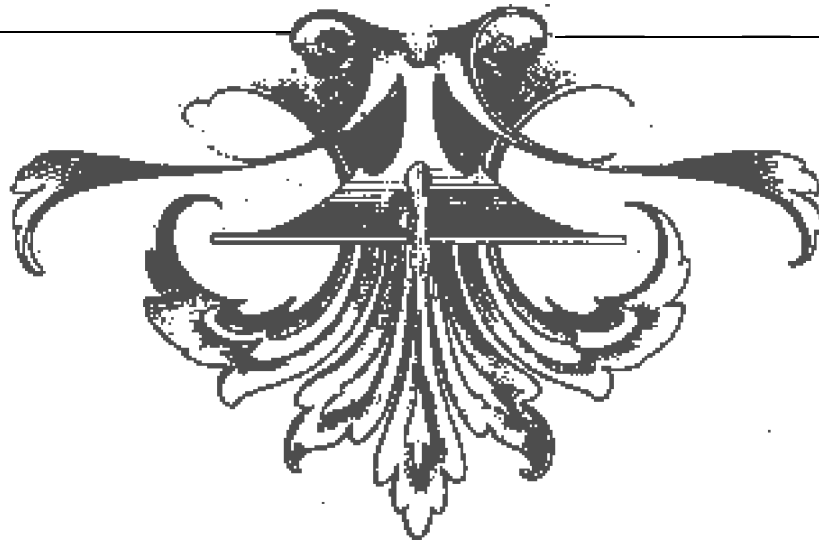


Mementoes 12



MEMENTOES

ISSUE XII

**THE LITERARY JOURNAL OF
QUEENSBOROUGH
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

The City University of New York

2004

BAYSIDE, NEW YORK

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Foreword

Mementoes, now in its twelfth issue, is comprised of stories and poems submitted by students in Queensborough Community College. Its objectives are to serve as a literary journal for the students of Queensborough Community College, to promote the cause of creative writing at the College, and to provide a forum for the creative work of the College's student body.

Appreciation is acknowledged to all students and members of the Writers' Club who have made this project feasible through their enthusiastic involvement and receptiveness. Appreciation is also expressed to the Office of Publications for producing the magazine in its usual professional and competent manner and particularly to Ardelle Donohue, who oversaw the production of the magazine in all its stages from the original manuscripts to its final finished form — and to the Office of Printing Services.

It is *Mementoes'* sincere hope that the current issue, while providing aspiring writers on campus with their initial publishing opportunities, will also provide the reader (the indispensable component in any literary process) with a genuine source of aesthetic pleasure and stimulation on matters of timely interest and concern.

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ON STAGE

JUSTIN CONWAY

In a big, acoustically enhanced room, four feet above the crowd, my fears fade away. As I stand on stage in the night at CBGB's, I am at the heart of New York City and the epicenter of rock culture, but it feels like home. The walls, layered with dingy posters, give off a musty smell that holds memories of the rock bands who had previously performed. Groups like Metallica and The Ramones who had once played here with dreams of a record contract have left a bit of their personality behind in the expectations of the spectators. With a peer through the dark, smoky air, the eyes of fans make contact with mine as if they were gazing upon a trophy and a warm feeling comes over me as I prepare to play.

There is electricity in the air and anxiety mounts to the buzz of idle amplifiers in the background. The roar of the rambunctious crowd diminishes with the introduction of a soft drum beat and guitar rhythm. The bar to the back right side of the room, draped in neon alcohol advertisements empties to form a gathering before me. As a continuous drumbeat hooks the listeners in, the melodic voice of the lead guitar speaks to the crowd. Some close their eyes as they listen to its story. I can see their thoughts open in my catacomb memory and as we run through the halls of my mind, we share a vision.

Soon, the bass guitar kicks in and adds a deep vibrating glow. The power of the instruments can be felt in waves as the notes are played. I feed off the energy of the audience as they begin to move to the music and adrenaline pumps through my veins. As I approach the microphone with my guitar in hand, the spotlight warms my face like the sun on a clear day and the stage, heavily colored with audio equipment, feels empty. The tension built by the ascending melody taunts its climax and, for the crowd, the anticipation is almost unbearable.

Suddenly there is a short rest in the music which gives way to the thundering entrance of the entire band. The pressure has released two hundred fans who have joined each other in uncontrollable gesticulation. From the stage they resemble an ocean moving to the beat of my music. This is the moment that makes all of the practice and preparation worthwhile. Soon, the room gets hot from all the movement and everyone is sweating. The air is muggy and the smell resembles that of my high school locker room after wrestling practice. The crowd, consisting mostly of teenage males, begins to take off their shirts which are drenched from perspiration. Similar to the patriotism of my fans, I am totally immersed in the rhythm of the music. Even though I am exhorting large amounts of energy for a long period of time, it only gets easier to play. The stage has taken over my body and I feel no pain.

Most artists have verified experiencing this physically numbing feeling while performing on stage. Some marathon runners experience a similar feeling called "Runner's High" (Scott Talley) after running numerous consecutive miles. Flea from the Red Hot Chili Peppers once tore a gaping hole in his thumb while playing the bass during a show and did not realize it until he saw it. When he finally did notice, he filled it with Crazy Glue and finished the show. The unparalleled euphoric feeling of playing on stage is absolute.

As the show nears an end, I can look back to the beginning of the night and recount specific instances in which as a performer, I was able to bond with hundreds of people through the lyrics to my songs. I know from watching their reactions that a majority of the people listening to my music understood it and will remember the experience for the rest of their lives. In this way, the stage has made me immortal.

As Oscar Wilde observed, "The stage is not merely the meeting place of all the arts, but is also the return of art to life." It is strange to think that so much depends on the stage; after all it is just a large, wood box for the musicians to stand on. However, it is a vital instrument used on centering the audience's atten-

tion on the performers and for me, it is the earth under my feet. During a performance my goals are met and my other needs are irrelevant. My full attention is given to my music and the emotion of the audience. The stage enables me to express myself the way I want to and to share my music with other people. If home is the place where you feel you belong, then my home is on stage.

MY FINAL DESTINATION

CAROLYN CRYAN

There are only five of us living in my spacious home located in the quaint neighborhood of Breezy Point. You'd think it would be safe to assume that we would all have enough personal space and could get away from each other when we need to be alone. Well, you couldn't be more wrong. The refuge of my decent-sized room simply doesn't cut it. As soon as I begin to relax, the unavoidable interruptions come flooding in. There's always the plausible chance of hearing an irritating screech of "CA-RO-LYYYYN," darting up the stairs, or the persistent tapping of my little sister's knuckles, begging for Spanish homework assistance. The phone will ring with a sobbing friend pleading for advice, or my older sister will barge in, plop down on my bed, and dive into a detailed recitation of her daily adventures. I can no longer count how many times I've snuck out of the confines of my incommodious house and escaped to my sanctuary, the beach.

The old, splintery, comforting bench is only three short blocks from my house. I love the walk. It's along a path to the beach, so the familiar salt water air is always present. Sometimes it provides a light aroma, a calming, dilute smell. But when there's a strong breeze, the air carries the striking, potent scent of the ocean and along with it comes the foul yet strangely reassuring stench of fish.

Since I only make the trip to the bench at night, each walk is accompanied by a different pattern of glowing lights. Although it's easy to forget, the small town of Breezy Point is part of New York City, which unfortunately entails pollution invading the air and inhibits the beautiful stars from being clearly viewed. However, on rare nights the stars are bright and brilliant and coat the entire sky. I usually make the whole trip with my head tilted back, eyes glued to the sparkling radiance. I've never been good at finding the well-known constellations, so I find my own designs in the array of stars. I've found elephants, unicorns, and even a

leprechaun when I stretched my imagination to the extreme.

About three hundred stars have names. They were named between five hundred and two thousand years ago. Most of the star names in use today came from Arabic names. These days, all stars are named for the coordinates. I've never known any official names, so I pretend I'm an astronomer and name the stars after my friends and, sometimes, enemies, making up stories as I go along.

The brief, relaxing walk is simultaneously filled with anticipation. As I near my destination and round the corner, I try to figure out what "number" I'll be. Half the reason the bench serves as such a safe haven is because of the supportive people who share it with me. It's not only my asylum, but that of my best friends who similarly lack peace and quiet in their own homes. Sometimes we go there to get away; sometimes we go there because we want to be there for a companion who needs to get away. As I approach the bench I try to make out the profiles and shadows in the dark or strain my ears to hear the scraping of a sneaker on the pavement or a hint of laughter from a friend waiting at the bench.

On a weeknight in the winter the bench attracts less of us. We've all got different schedules for school, work, the gym, sports events, art classes, and whatever else. Everyone's busy, but we all make as much time as we can for the bench. Whether it be just to sit and talk for a few minutes all bundled up and let the cold, sharp, refreshing air clear our minds, or play mind provoking games like "word association" or "would you rather?"

In the summer, especially on weekends, there's typically a whole crew of us. We meet at the bench and split a case of beer, either before we go out to a party, or at times even make our own party. Beer is a tool which takes our minds off things. The first few sips are always the best. It's strange how a drink that tasted so gross just a few, short years ago somehow tastes so good now. Supposedly, if parents allow you a few sips when you're younger, you don't want it when you get older. It didn't work this way with me. The cold fluid running down my throat feels so good on a

warm summer night. It tastes perfect.

We fight over who gets to actually sit on the bench, and who has to sit on the coarse cement or the rough, glassy sand surrounding it. The six, formerly strong, sturdy wooden planks have weakened into five and a half frail boards. The wobbly foundation consists of four basic, undersized legs that offer little support. The previously shiny coat of impressive grass-green paint has faded into a chipping washed-out green color with marks and nicks all over it. To an onlooker, the random words carved into the aged wood is gibberish; to me they not only give it character and have humorous meanings, they offer remarkable, ridiculous, spirit-lifting memories: "Beware the Alien Dinks! M&M's for life. ROYGBIV UNITE! FiGhTiNg LePrOcHaUn was here, Fairy#3=ultimate champion." Dave Feddern, Chief of Breezy Point Security, admitted to me that the department is looking into replacing the 18-year-old benches due to complaints. I guess an onlooker, a beach goer, a jogger, a dog walker might say to themselves, "Ugh, that should be replaced," as they pass the bench on their way to bigger and better things. But to me, the bench is my final destination and I wouldn't change a thing about it.

THE SEA

MIKELL CZERMENDY

It is the source of all life on this planet. It can flow or it can crash, it can create or it can destroy. It is indiscriminate, it is nurturing. It is the most awesome force on this planet. It is water. It is the sea. And it is only the sea that comforts me when words and gestures fail. I am an Aquarius, the air and water sign of the zodiac. I have loved water for as long as I can remember, and many of my fondest memories involve it. I love the pool, I love the shower, I love a bath, and I love the beach. But there is one place . . . one beach . . . that stands above all others in my mind. Breezy Point. Situated at the end of the Rockaway Peninsula, it boasts over five miles of relatively pure and uninterrupted sandy beach. "Pure": it defines that beach in many ways, and that beach has given me some wonderful memories.

William, my best friend since before our ages were measured in years, rents a summer house in the Breezy Point district. A few years ago, he invited me there for the first time. On the way up we listened to music and talked, all the while I was thinking "It'll be nice to go to another beach besides Jones for once." I remember the first time I was there. The air smelled of sea water, though it was far more prominent than what I had smelled before. The air was saturated by it, thick as soup with the smell, and I loved it. We rode some bicycles about ten minutes south from the house to the beach. It was a very small beach, with very little distance between the wooden boardwalk and the ocean. The sand was darker here when wet than on other beaches. I remember the first time I put my hand into the wet sand and felt its smooth and relaxing texture. But nothing was so relaxing as the sound of the waves. There weren't many people there that day. It was still early in the summer, around the third week of June, so many people hadn't come yet. There was no prattle, no chatter. No children running, no teenagers playing football. Only the sea. Even the birds were quiet. I remember seeing a

huge flock of birds about fifty yards from me, just standing there. "In summer," as Dorosh, an observer of the scene points out, "Breezy Point is best known for its nesting population of the endangered Piping Plover. Here, one can observe the state of these curious birds surviving against trying odds. The balance of nature weighed against human needs is always a complex issue. Take the time to observe, enjoy, and marvel as you trek along this shoreline." And marvel I did, as suddenly, for no apparent reason, the entire flock of plovers took flight. The sound of their rapidly beating wings filled the air with a rush only nature could provide and as they flew off, the sound faded . . . and I heard the sea again.

Since then, I have gone up with Will every summer, and have enjoyed it more every time. Two years ago, August of 2001, was a time I will never forget. Will and I had just finished catching the afternoon waves, the biggest of the day, with our surfboards, and were heading back to the house to wash up. We noticed Will's parents weren't home, so after we took our showers, we went out to the beach, where Will said they always liked to go in the evening. We walked, rather slowly, enjoying the cool air blowing over us, smelling that wonderful sea water smell. We reached a fairly large mound of sand, maybe 15 feet or more at its peak. We climbed over it. Will saw his mom on a beach chair about 200 yards out and went to get her. I simply stood in awe of what I was seeing. About a half-mile away stood a small bridge with two large towers supporting it at either end. I'll never forget how perfect it was as the sun, bright orange-red, still pushing its light through the sparse clouds before it, was setting, and it fell right in-between the two towers of the bridge. Only nature could have drawn such a gorgeous picture. The sea breeze in my face, the smell of salt in the air, the waves gently falling onto the shore . . . and the sun setting in all its glory . . . I felt alive . . . I felt free. I made my way down the sand mound towards the shore. Closer to the water, I saw a rock that seemed strangely out of place. I picked it up and moved it around with my hand. Later, I found out it was schist, "likely derived," according to a scientific expla-

nation, "from metamorphic and igneous rock of terrain of the Highlands region, probably from Manhattan. Schist samples commonly display garnet crystals." Those garnet crystals shined from the sun's fading light. I tossed the rock into the sea, never to see it again.

Nature is beautiful. Few people can deny that, and those who do don't know what they're missing. Many would also know what it's like to feel so close to it—to feel free. "All cells," an authority on the subject notes, "contain microchannels of water that make possible the traffic of materials and information concerning cells. In the brain cells, water is essential for nerve impulses to be generated and transmitted. In the heart muscles, it makes it possible for them to contract, and so let the heart beat. In the bowel, it allows digestive and absorptive functions. In the lower cells, it catalyzes all detoxification processes. In the kidneys, it carries toxins into the urine. In the cartilage, it protects the ends of the bones in a joint, and so, prevents arthritis. Indeed, no life processes are possible without water." Maybe that's why water calms me the way it does. The human body is over 75% water. Maybe when I stand there, smelling and tasting the air, feeling the sand run through my fingers, watching the waves creep up the shore, hearing the soft and gentle music they make . . . maybe I want to go home . . . return to the water . . . return to the sea.

A SERIAL CONNOISSEUR

JASON DEIDA

He's a flavor charmer
a master of the tongue
in a sea of spices
he takes on arms
veins in basil leaves
leave juice of taste
soft hands murder a lemon
and make it bleed
upon a tenderloin steak

You can see his eyes glimmer
as he pours wine on the brown flesh
The fire jumps up as
does the burning in his chest
no different than a killer
leaving his victims in forms of art
with every stroke of the blade
his heart jumps off the charts
Purple and Green limbs
could make a man cry
but not this serial connoisseur
he cuts with a smile
and the height of his passion
comes from peeking out his five by eight window
watching for the silent cheers of the
craving people

13 WAYS TO GET OVER YOUR EX

ROSA GRINNARD

I

If you were in love
One of joy, pain and distress
And if that love suddenly went away
You have to get over your ex
One way that's sure to work
Is to find another lover

II

Finding another lover is easy
But overcoming lost love is hard
This situation in life is tough
Like trying to swim in an ocean,
With a truck tied to your legs.
Another way to prevent digression
Is to work out your aggression.

III

Anger never really solves anything
It can bring more pain
While you throw things
And curse the sky
You'll also be crying
Which is why, the next thing
I suggest is to get some rest

IV

Getting beauty sleep is a great idea,
But you can't sleep your troubles away.
If I did that
I wouldn't wake up, till 2008 in May!
Enough about me, let me help you.
A fourth way is to get a clue.

V

Face the facts, he doesn't love you
He was mean to you
Hell, he deserted you
I know this hurts, but keep it in mind
So that you don't go back to him
Hey! I know, go shopping!

VI

Shopping is wonderful
Buying new things, feels so good
But the bills later don't,
So don't buy on credit.
You can also try keeping busy.

VII

To mend a broken heart, keep busy
Write a poem, read a book, see a movie
Do something fun for a change
My personal favorite solution is baking

VIII

Bake a pie, cakes and cookies
Make a dinner, invite friends over
Wait a second, I should not suggest this
Mainly because I did it
Trust me girl, these extra pounds
Are thanks to this step.
So try having a party instead.

IX

Throwing a party
Is my best idea yet,
A singles' party, at the local hall.
Mingle girl, wear your best outfit.
You may end up with the man of your dreams
Or a one night stand
If this doesn't work
Try a makeover.

X

Cut your hair, buy the sweetest perfume
Get a dress that looks painted on
Let your ex see what he's missing.
This step is good, but I know one better
Get revenge via letter.

XI

A letter may seem childish
But it helped me get through the pain.
With each stroke of the pen
A tear did fall, once the letter is done
No more tears at all.
After you write it, throw it away or burn it
Since I'm on the topic, get rid of other memories too.

XII

Throw out that teddy bear,
And that first pink rose tucked in your Bible
Put his green t-shirt
In a green trash bag
Leave the memories in the past.

XIII

I hope I helped you a little
I know your pain is bad
Girl, just be happy that your pain and love
Didn't result in a marriage and a baby
Cause that's what mine did
Never forget you are beautiful, and you deserve to be happy.
Don't let no man take your sunshine,
And put clouds in your way.

MY SON FLIES

TANJA JIADI

I enjoy going to Pre-K through the brown eyes of my four-year-old son. My heart skips a beat every time I see him coming home from school. His smiling, happy and enthusiastic face returns my fear back to a dark, shallow corner of my past. I remember my Pre-K days being horrifying, dreadful and frightening. I felt like a bird with clipped wings and trapped, unable to fly in a small, square, dimmed classroom.

Today was my son's first day of school. I didn't know who was more nervous, him or me. As we were standing and waiting by the classroom's door, a huge gust of panic stormed through my heart and disappeared instantly when I heard the warm, soft, friendly voice of his teacher. The classroom was small and filled with many books of different children's authors: Dr. Seuss, Margaret W. Brown and Eric Carle caught my eye. On the floor was a brown wool knitted carpet giving warmth and coziness to the classroom. The small wooden tables and chairs were the perfect size for small children. There was a welcome sign and numerous paintings of children from previous classes.

It was my first day of school and parents were not allowed in the classroom. It was a small room with huge tables made of metal and aged, worn wooden tops and the chairs were so big that our feet could not touch the floor. The floor was covered with icy cold, green tiles. They were so shiny that you could see your reflection. There was one bookcase there with thirty one volumes of Lenin's work and Karl Marx's profuse writings. I was educated in the former Yugoslavia, a socialist country that worshipped Communism like a believer who worships the Bible.

Everything changed when my son's teacher walked in. She was wearing a soft, light navy, long dress and she had a huge smile on her face. Her smiling, blue eyes were reassuring us parents that the children would be very well taken care of. She explained the school system, the Pre-K program, what the kids would be

taught and what was expected from them. She also said that kids should wear comfortable clothes. She was sitting on a rocking chair, with a brown bear in one hand and one child after another sat on her lap, introducing him or herself to the class. At the end his teacher said that the new students would be her new family.

As my teacher walked in I saw darkness surrounding her. Her black hair was piled high on her head and she had a pointy, long nose. Her attire was a clean and pressed black shirt and black shirt. She presented the image of a witch and instead of a black cat and a broom, she held a long, narrow wooden switch. She said: "Maxim Gorky is the father of socialist realism and Soviet literature." I will never forget these words because I didn't understand them or even know how to pronounce them correctly, but they frightened me. We were like soldiers rising when she would enter the room, not speaking before she told us we could, and never allowed to think for ourselves. Our school uniform was simple: white shirt, blue dress and a hat with a crimson five points star that had a golden trim about it. A star that I learned to hate with passion as I got older.

My son came from school today and said: "Mom, you know what? Today we were singing "This Old Man" and "Itsy Bitsy Spider." The rest of the day I was listening to his clear, melodious and proud voice as he was singing it. Another day he told me a story that his teacher read to them, a story of a hungry caterpillar written by Eric Carle. In this story the hungry caterpillar was eating an apple, a pear and other foods. It reminded me of my son's hunger for knowledge. His mind is like a sponge, drinking thirstily all the knowledge that is unselfishly provided.

Karl Marx once wrote: "Under capitalism all of society will be structured to serve the interest of the people in power." Our innocent minds were clouded by the teachings of Karl Marx and Red Army songs like "We Will Fight to the Victory" and "White Army, Black Baron." If someone by mistake said something that was not of the teacher's liking or something against the system, beatings would occur. With a fierce rage she would hit the open palms of a frightened child while our eyes were closed. We weren't allowed to watch. Our ears heard the crying, sobs and

then silence of the child. And when I would hear that silence, also I would hear somewhere deep inside my thoughts the buzzing of the bee, desperately trying to escape through the closed windows.

It is another bright day in my son's life. He was rewarded with a sticker from school because he knew how to spell and write his first and last name. As I proudly displayed the sticker on a refrigerator, I could not help but say a silent prayer. My son reminds me of a bird who flies with wide open wings. He flies into the clear blue sky of tomorrow.

ALEX

LORI LUSTIG

That September I went back to my old neighborhood to teach. Down the block was the market where I had shopped as a kid which was now a chain drugstore. The Five and Dime, where I once bought clandestine packs of makeup, vinyl albums, and packages of underwear, was now a national discount store. Where once I had bought hot dogs at the Kosher Deli, Pizza Hut now sold mass-produced pizza. Only the optician's office, where the world first became clear to me, remained essentially unchanged. Hanging in the one cabinet behind the counter was a pair of gem studded, white plastic cat-eye shaped frames that were twenty years out of fashion when I was twelve . . .

I was assigned the room that used to be the lounge where teachers were allowed to smoke. Today there is no smoking in any public building and especially not in the school. When the current wave of immigrants swelled the population of the school past the banks of its classroom capacity, my class was moved there. I did my best to make it look like a classroom. The custodian arrived with two of his laconic helpers and after an hour of grumping and complaining there was a green blackboard in the front. The custodian's helpers were supposed to move the desks and chairs in, but after drinking two of my diet cokes they decided they were hungry. We moved them ourselves--- a nine-year-old on either side of each desk.

"Stop pushing, I'm going as fast as I can!"

I'm not pushing, you're pulling too hard!"

"Watch the door, watch the fire extinguisher, watch the corner, It's ok, we can pick up the stuff that fell on the way back."

The calendar got mounted, the makeshift bulletin board appeared with crayoned pictures and carefully composed paragraphs copied neatly in the best handwriting. An alphabet chart appeared over the newly attached green blackboard. Milk crates precariously perched upon each other housed the class library.

"There, it's not so bad, it looks just like a classroom, only small-

er," the principal enthusiastically sighed, as she stuck her head in at the closing bell. We just looked at her, suddenly speechless. But she was right, it had all the trappings of a classroom and no one could mistake it for anything else.

Alex arrived the next day, I told him to take his seat, once in English, twice in Spanish. I told him to face the board and stay in his seat. He looked confused and did nothing for a moment. Alex had never been in a classroom before.

"What do you think this book is about?" I asked the class.

"He come to my house and I feel happy," the small bright face in the back called out, as he jumped up knocking over his chair.

"We raise our hands when we want to say something, and stay in our seats," I reminded him. "Who comes to your house?" The picture on the cover was of a big yellow school bus.

"El bus, el viene a mi casa hoy, y siento contento," Alex tried again, this time in Spanish. His hand shot up knocking the girl next to him off her seat.

"In English we say, It comes to my house," I corrected him. "And try to raise your hand carefully."

"It go to your house too, teacher? How come you no tell him to come before. I so sad, but today he come—I happy."

"I'm glad you are happy to be in school, I am happy to be here with all of you," I said, thinking I was a liar. I was sorry the lazy days of summer vacation had come to an end.

I read the story and asked the students to write some sentences about it. Alex enthusiastically filled his page with intricate drawings of school buses coming and going but with no words. I asked him to read the story to me. He gave me an animated recounting of the story, but none of his sentences corresponded with the print on the page. Alex could not read or write. Not an uncommon situation for the students in a class for the learning disabled. What was uncommon was his lack on consternation. When asked to write, he scribbled pictures enthusiastically; when asked to read he spat out sentence after sentence with great assurance.

Alex was in the nurse's office when I picked the class up after

lunch. He had been pushed down and there were band-aids on his knees. The next day, it was his elbows that were patched when the lunch hour was over. The third day, Alex was not with the rest of the class when I went to collect the students in the schoolyard. He was not in the school nurse's office either. He was standing with the assistant principal when I passed the office on the way back to the classroom.

"Here, you take him," he said as I approached, "and tell the Special Education supervisor to start the referral process, he obviously doesn't belong here."

Wherever there was trouble, there was Alex. If a bookshelf was going to knock over anywhere in the classroom, Alex would be under it. If something spilled, Alex would slip on it. If there was a crash, a boom, a bang or any other calamitous noise, the next sound you would hear would be Alex crying. It got so that I went nowhere without making sure Alex was an arm grab away. If I need to use the bathroom, I had Alex stand outside the door. Better he should know that I too had bodily functions than to allow chaos to fill my thirty-second absence from the classroom.

At open school night I learned Alex's story. Alex's brother had lived in this country for almost a decade. On his first trip back to Mexico, he found his mother too depressed to care for the eight-year-old Alex. Alex roamed the house, receiving neither food nor personal care on a regular basis. He had never enrolled in school, so the brother brought Alex back to live with them.

Slowly, Alex became civilized. The Special Education supervisor refused to move him. Alex went to the Kindergarten class at recess. There he got to play with the puzzles and blocks he had never seen before. I got out the letter cards and the primer books and Alex learned how to connect the English letters to the word and ideas he was so eager to produce. And Alex learned to stay seated in a chair, to raise his hand carefully, to respect other peoples' property and personal space, and all the other school skills.

The following September, Alex was back. Things were going pretty well. Alex was reading, not on a fourth grade level, but

pretty well for someone who had less than two years of formal education. On health screening day the gym teachers and parent volunteers set up eye charts, scales measuring sticks and other standard screening devices. The whole school navigated through the obstacle course of health examinations. There are two kinds of eye charts, one with letters and the other with E's. The second kind is for children who cannot name the letters yet. That is the line where I found Alex.

"He knows the letter names," I told the gym teacher.

"I had him on that line, and he couldn't tell me one," she sighed.

So I brought Alex right up two inches away from the chart. There he read every letter. But as he stepped back a few feet at a time, successive lines of letters disappeared for him. By the time we reached the twenty-foot mark he could not distinguish even the top letter. I peered through my glasses at that point and was disturbed to see many of the lower lines seemed quite fuzzy. Perhaps there was something wrong with the chart. The next three kids on line read everything perfectly and I went upstairs thinking both Alex and I need appointments for a professional exam.

I got mine within a week. Note after note went to Alex's home. I ordered special lenses, the insurance paperwork was delayed, the frames I wanted were delivered late, but still I was seeing clearly within a month. Alex was squinting from the first seat in the first row. I left messages on Alex's brother's answering machine. I had the guidance counselor send a note. I reminded Alex daily that he needed glasses. Nothing worked. Then one day I left my glasses on the ever-present large pile of paper work on my desk. "Nobody" accidentally knocked them on the floor causing a lens to pop out and the frame to bend slightly. There was nothing else to do but mutter something about "everybody" being more careful, while inside my head I heard my mother's voice saying "Why weren't they on your face?" At lunchtime, I brought them back to the optician. While I waited for him to mend them, I told him the story of Alex . . .

"I want those," Alex said pointing to the white cat-eye shaped, gem studded white plastic frames that I had first noticed twenty-five years ago.

"Let's see what the eye doctor has to offer us," I answered as I showed Alex to the special chair where his vision was assessed.

Before the last tray of the lunch hour was emptied, before the last basketball of recess was stored away, Alex's new glasses had been ordered. A week later we went to pick them up and as we walked the half block back to the school Alex pointed out the S-T-O-P on the stop sign, he saw an errant ball roll across the street, he marveled at birds flying twenty feet ahead. The world suddenly was full of minute details.

OK, I admit it, I paid for the glasses, but not too much. The optician gave me a rock bottom price, less than I would have paid for two movie tickets and an extra large popcorn. My good deed was not particularly unusual. In the two decades I have taught I've known students who received sneakers, jackets, food, toys, and, most tragically of all, a funeral from some anonymous fairy godteachers . . .

Several summers ago I stopped into a pizza store in the next town for a quick slice and a coke. "You don't remember me, Mrs. Lustig?" the bespectacled young server asked me. I thought for a minute. "I'm doing good now, Mrs. Lustig, maybe next year I'll take some courses at the Community College," Alex reported. We spent a few minutes catching up on our lives and eating pizza. Then I left. It took me a moment to adjust to the bright sunlight. As I waited, I thought about white plastic, cat-eye shaped, gem studded frames and how clear the world looked through corrective lenses.

WALK SLOW BOYS

NATASHA REY

Walk slow boys
Feel that bright sun
Sprinkling kisses on your face
Trees to hug and protect you
Breathe deep
So deep
Your lungs feel like they are about to burst
Open your mouth
Taste life

Listen to the birds calling your name
Breeze pulling you in different directions
The road of life you are walking on is long
Enjoy it

Take those fishing poles
And catch everything you can on the way
Fill up your bucket
Till it is overflowing
Fill up your heart
With new and exciting adventures

Stop and see
Does your road have any kinks or curves?
Gather some nuts
Admire the flowers in bloom
Smell them
Laugh, and laugh, then laugh some more
Laughter is such good medicine
It will warm your heart
On those cold lonely nights

Boobos happen on the way
Nothing you can do about that
But patch them up and keep going
You boys are strong

You'll be fine
Keep going
Watch out for those forks in the road
Detours that take you backwards instead of forwards

Walk slow boys
Explore every nook and cranny of that road
Head held high
Make it yours
Own it
Mamma will be watching
Make me proud

I LOVE YOU SO MUCH THAT I . . .

RUTH REYNOSO

I love you so much that I . . .
I wish that I'd be able to make
A clean cut along your back,
Open it, expose your spinal cord,
And lick it so slowly,
From the neck to the tail bone.

I wish that I could wear your skin,
Like a live leotard.
I need to be that close.
I wish I could warm my cold hands
With the warmth of your entrails.

I wish I could eat your heart.
I love you that much. Sex is not enough.
I wish we could merge, so hug me tighter!
I want to feel what it really is to be you.

I wish you could kill me.
I wish you could bring me back to life.
I love you so much that I . . .

MASTER SEXUAL SUICIDE

RUTH REYNOSO

I mount on the patent leather spike heels.
I hide under this short black wig.
I powder and glitter my body.
I hide for a second, behind this shiny black lace.
And I pretend I have power,
When I transform these men to a pool of drool and sweat.

The stage is my drug,
the lights and the smoke.
I love to hear how the drum really rolls
When they beat on my bum;
This body they crave,
but instead they drink rum.
They're sick little critters,
I'm the boot and the stomp.

Look at my thong, how far does it go?
And my perk handful pearls,
Would you say they're like Jello?
They may jiggle yet still firm.
And my legs . . .
Why do you stare at these ladders of flesh?
They won't help you get to that pleasure chest.
Instead they will choke you on the way to the nest.

I'm a weapon of sex.
A deceitful handgun
you got at a buy-and-sell with a bullet of gold.
My dance of a million dollars,
Lo and behold.
Trigger me with a look,
With a minute, with some cash.
Trigger this Master Sexual Suicide.

AUGUST 15TH

JOHN VOYIATZOGLOU

I ran up to the churchyard
My grandmother's stainless peeler in hand
The whole village was buzzing
and running around
laughing
smiling
Carrying buckets of onions
Sacks of potatoes
the freshest of cucumbers
and the reddest tomatoes
Men in their cleanest jeans
and short sleeved white shirts
unloaded barrels of wine from the backs of pickup trucks

I saw my grandfather pass
a rusty blade in hand
I followed behind him
tugging at his filthy apron
We walked down a path
to a large gray stone
embedded in the ground
There were a few men there
sweating and smoking
and four or five goats
screaming and crying
I recognized one
It was Katina
whose milk was my breakfast,
whose bell, my alarm
Grandfather patted her head
lovingly and firm
grabbed her curled horn
and slit her white throat

ON THE LEDGE

MICHAEL URBANO

"Can I get a grip or will I survive?
I'm feeling as if I was on a ledge ready to slip
and perpendicularly frozen in time."

Forget it, yes forget it, forget all the diabetic poetic feelings, I've been brainstormed, forget 'um all! Just pass me the blunt. I want to get high. See, for young teens in Queens in 1993, it was never too early or too late to spark some trees.

Growing up in Jackson Heights, Queens, I was predominantly in the streets hanging out with my peers. There is a code of the streets and at an early age I was exposed to it. Eventually this upside down broom-looking boy from Hampton Street would retire from his traditional nightly manhunt games around the block, and no longer be investing in his summer car washing dreams at the water hydrant. Yes eventually this broom of a boy would be swallowed up whole by a monster, a monster that preys on young inner city lives, the streets.

As far as I can remember I was about twelve when the necessity of money was revealed to me. Being too young for working papers resulted in placing my current financial success in the hands of street smart hustlers from around my way. They saw my ambition and decided to direct it towards their benefit; they had faith in me, but only in what they could make me do. Too bad, I see the big picture now, maybe if I would have then the bond that was built would have never been brought into existence. Anything from stealing clothes from Macy's to Bloomingdales to delivering packages, to cashing out stolen credit cards was how we the young bucks paid our dues.

There were about seven to ten of us young bucks. We were about the same age and had mostly the same aspirations, give or take one or two. We were all friends and at the same time rivals. Some eager to blow up or in other words attain street

respect by high crimes and lots of money would hang out more with the tough criminal type guys. Others, more laid back or just more hapless, would spend more time gambling, getting high, and starting petty time troubles. Guess where I fit in, I was that type of kid that would try anything once, I just wouldn't let anybody know until I thought it was time.

Went on, the days did. To this day I wonder what day it was that my certainties became "yesterday." Being around all that violence and stress led me to experiment with drugs like marijuana and alcohol. I even tried these before lighting a cigarette. I hated those. At first we would get high just to get a couple of laughs or maybe to ponder things a sober mind wouldn't. This casual fun lead to a love, addiction, and abuse of marijuana. I used plenty of justifications to shut down my integrity and my screaming conscience.

Yes, drugs, crime, and an ignoramus mentality together with an inconceivable beast-like environment tried to swallow me whole. I'll give it to them; they did a pretty good job for about seven years. But thanks be to God who intervened and delivered me from the claws of the beast. A beast who was angry at me and hated my soul for living. He wanted me subject to him, a slave in a hole. Again I say thanks be to God of the heavens, the redeemer of my soul. For the Almighty has shown favor to me.

Delivered from the effects of this almost tragic tale, I've learned a lot and understand why I had to go through what I did. My past has lead me to a place of peace where I encourage the youth into a righteous way of living. New York City teens have few role models and they develop many bad ones for lack of the good ones. I dedicate some of my life to instructing and listening to young people in my community. "For issues of life are found in a cavity unseen, yet our youth is highly deceived in a fast way of getting greens."

WHITE WITH FEAR

ISMAIL WARD

As I approached the door, I could feel my heart in my throat.
The butterflies in my stomach wouldn't settle down.
All of these answers and questions raced in my head.

I was swatting bullets.
Frozen with fear.

At least I looked good in my shiny suit.
My breath was as clean as the wind.
I felt like I sucked the life out of this tic tac.

I smelled like a pinetree.
My face was as smooth as an egg.

I swallowed my tongue.
I approached the door as slow as an ox.

Alright on my toes, here I go.