

ACCOLADES

The 2011 Santa Fe Community College Student Writing Awards



Table of Contents

Accolades

The 2011 Santa Fe Community College Student Writing Awards

Poetry	3
Winner	
My Father Planted a Silver Maple by Christa Swanson	3
Runners-Up	
excerpt from Sami by Audrey Powers	4
Live and Love by Gabriel Tafoya	8
Honorable Mentions	
Mema's House by Erin Brooks	10
Narcissus by Erin Brooks	11
The Bible's Friend by Richard Scott	12
I Too Am Waiting by Judy Mosher	13
Eight Lines by Mayluva Dupree	16
embryos of absence by Leia Barnett	17
The Gray Cube by Louis Dominguez	18
Death Comes for the Archaeologist by Leah McLeroy	19
Personal Essay	20
Winner	
Penitent by Kendra Peterson	20
Runners-Up	
A Montage of Kindness by Audrey Powers	22
A Special Day by John M. Romero	25
Honorable Mentions	
New Beginnings by Daniel Chavez	28
The Bath Tub in Heaven by Barbara Robidoux	32
I Am 28 Years Old by Jessica Karin Michaels.....	34
Precious Stone by Grace Lucero	41
Fiction	44
Winner	
The Battle of the Unseen Realm by Michael Armer	44
Runner-Up	
Healing from True Love by Amanda Fresquez	47
Honorable Mention	
70% by Susan Dugan	49

Academic Essay51

Winner

Flannery O’Connor: Religion and Faith in “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by *Shari Brown*51

Runner-Up

Fear: Transforming Our Values by *Frances Boyd*56

Honorable Mention

Elements of the Iconic in Bicycle Times by *Eric Reinach*60

The Santa Fe Community College Student Writing Awards are given out annually. All students enrolled in at least three credits in either the Fall or Spring semesters are eligible. Interested students submitted their work, which was then judged by a group of judges selected from the staff at SFCC. The places were determined on the basis of the judges’ rankings. In addition to being published in Accolades, the authors were invited to give a public reading at the SFCC Student Writing Awards Celebration. Winners and Runners-up also received monetary prizes funded by the GROW SFCC Foundation. Special thanks to the GROW SFCC Foundation for funding these prizes.

The Student Writing Awards exist to celebrate the diverse voices of SFCC students and to recognize the already-present talent of these still-developing writers. This recognition also provides encouragement to the writers to continue their pursuit of original written expression.

The Winner and Runners-up in each category are also eligible for the GROW Richard Bradford Memorial Creative Writing Scholarship. The scholarship was initiated by Councilwoman Rebecca Wurzburger, Michael McGarrity, and Charmay Allred in 2010. It is named for novelist Richard Bradford (1932-2002) who is best known for his 1968 novel Red Sky at Morning which celebrated the distinct natural and cultural character of Santa Fe in the form of the fictional town of Corazon Sagrado. Though he was not born in New Mexico, Bradford had a deep and lasting connection with Santa Fe and resided there until his death.

The Student Writing Awards are directed by Daniel Kilpatric. The following people were essential to making The SFCC Student Writing Awards and Celebration happen: Shuli Lamden, Colleen Lynch, Lucia Lucero, Justine Carpenter, Jenny Miranda, Kathy Romero, Deborah Boldt, Elizabeth Good, Collected Works Bookstore and Dorothy Massey, Lauren Camp, Casey Frank, Meghan McGarrity, Emily Stern, Barbara Woltag, Meg Lenzer, Deni Javas, Margaret Peters, Julia Deisler, Bethany Carson, and all the students who entered but did not receive an award.

Poetry Winner

Christa Swanson

My Father Planted a Silver Maple

My father planted a Silver Maple
The summer I was born
At the brand new house on Champlain
The year Hitler marched into Austria

The summer I was born
Right in the middle of the back yard
The year Hitler marched into Austria
And Caryl was still alive

Right in the middle of the backyard
Every year it grew a foot
And Caryl was still alive
We shared the bedroom

Every year it grew a foot
One side of the leaves was fuzzy
We shared the bedroom
We could see it from our window

One side of the leaves was fuzzy
The war ended. Caryl died
We could see it from our window
The seeds had little wings

The war ended. Caryl died
At the brand new house on Champlain
The seeds had little wings
My father planted a Silver Maple

Poetry Runner-Up

Audrey Powers

excerpt from Sami

Before Her

i.

Movement of a people
from one camp to another
and yet the Japanese are
unable to bomb due
to the spirit of Tagituk.

ii.

Remnants of an airplane
lie on the Mayuwaaq,
buried by large rocks
after the Russians
bomb down a U.S. plane.
Intestines of people lay
strewn over the tundra.

iii.

The U.S. Army comes
to bury Hazmat materials.
Fifty years later
signs are posted
stating, "Do Not Pick Greens!"
Fifty years before
Annana's like ants,
wearing traditional dresses,
carry pots, pans, and snacks
for the days of gathering greens
for the following winters when
there will be no vegetation.

iv.

Can you hear the ice coming in?
Can you hear the ice breaking up?

v.

Sugar Shack opens,
where Apa makes pies;
coffee is served
while a grandfather punches out
the postmaster's dad over the
loss of a Checker's game.

vi.

Apa becomes a U.S. citizen in 1956.
She recounts of a time when
her best friend teases her about
her slip showing.

vii.

The grandchildren pull their apa on a sled,
counting the many layers of traditional dresses,
and pulling and pinching her saggy skin.

viii.

Girl twins are born,
one dies at birth
and the other at the age of fifteen
(swallowing pills?)

ix.

Apa catches the coughing blood disease,
is removed from the village, and sent to
Seattle for sixteen months.
Her father gets another girlfriend
that hits him over the head
with a glass bottle while
blood streams down his face.

x.

A clan-mother shaves the children's
heads from the lice infestation
that came to remain.

Before Him

i.

Left alone, at the age of four
while his parent s went out to drink.

ii.

Being raised by his aunt,
smelling tapioca pudding
through the screen door,
he loses his marbles
down the street.

iii.

Having to stand at the window
of Catholic School
he shoves books outside.

iv.

Joining the U.S. Army
for what else is there to do,
Sent to Vietnam,
he learns that dog is really
man's best friend.
As a scout dog handler
following the U.S. flag
sniffing out mines, bombs
and other potential threats,
his life is saved over
and over again.

v.

Learning to make bombs out of shit,
he remembers seeing body bags
stacked on top of other body bags.

vi.

After Vietnam, he returns
and is stationed in the
Extreme North where
the house of rainbow lights
dance.

vii.

They meet at a bar
in the North Pole
two sisters in college
two buddies in the Army
trying to set each other
up with the opposite pairs
a backward switch to the
way it really ended up being.

viii.

This was the beginning of Them.

Poetry Runner-Up

Gabriel Tafuya

Live and Love

Miniscule sapling, frail and weak
Swayed by the wind, no lips to speak.
Hands are held but no words uttered
Just comprehension without a mutter.
Dependent on its circumstance
Eluded by current romance.

With time and effort now a plant
More knowledgeable, with language to chant.
Eludes tragedy by being flexible
It bends, not breaks, its weary soul.
Still not aware of world around
Adorned with majesty abound,
Dwelling in earthen decadence
Trying to be strong through resilience.

Now next comes, as science shows,
A fertile tree will someday grow
Rooted deeply in the earth
Gathering its own nutrients from the dirt.
Independent as it once craved
To do as it wills, nobody's slave.
It now knows of the surrounding world
And sees both beauty and atrocity unfurled.

Its end is near its journey done
Too weary now to feel the sun
Life no longer permeates through
That hollow shell now misconstrued.
Silenced now in oldest age
Taking the last bow on life's stage.
It loves no more though love once strong
Brought life and now has gone so wrong.

Thus is the cycle, sad as it seems
A cycle escaped only through dreams;
To live and love and learn to cope
With immense pain and loss of hope
Only to end up silenced alone
When love no more can find you home.

Poetry

Honorable Mention

Erin Brooks

Mema's House

In the afternoons, while the heat
pressed against our lungs and our
backs stuck to all the chairs, we ate
Klondike bars.

I opened the heavy door of the green chest freezer
with both hands, sunk my head into the
swirling cold, found the package of
Klondikes under the vegetable medley
and above the strip steaks.

We sat together at the small square wood
table and unwrapped our hard square
foiled Klondikes. The chocolate shells
snapped into pieces when we took our first
bites and the ice cream melted through our
fingers onto the grey printed backing
of the wrappers.

Honey, get me a co-cola,
she said, when our paper towels were stained
from the chocolate and the corners of
our mouths were sticky and sweet.

Poetry

Honorable Mention

Erin Brooks

Narcissus

She used to plant daffodils
wearing white Keds.

I remember the sound
of her metal spade
slicing through earth,

the careful scooping
of her hands in gardening gloves,

black bits of earth scattered across the sidewalk—

and running over
to sink my bare hands

before she covered her bed
of treasures with pine needles,
asking,

when will the flowers come?

Poetry

Honorable Mention

Richard Scott

The Bible's Friend

The Bible and Science are not enemies you see,
On things we can test, they totally agree,
The earth is round the Bible has taught,
Man once thought it flat, and that you could fall off,
Suspended in space as the scriptures unfold,
Not upon Atlas as the Greek's stories told,
Galileo discovered the weight of the air,
This fact in the Bible was already there,
The oceans have currents; each star has a song,
Dinosaurs are there with their tails that are long,
Much more science can be found in this book,
My challenge to you is just take a look.

Poetry

Honorable Mention

Judy Mosher

I Too Am Waiting Homage to Lawrence Ferlinghetti's "I Am Waiting"

I too am waiting for my ship to come in
and Lawrence, I am waiting
for a rebirth of wonder
and also of wisdom
and I am waiting
for the American Dream
to be rewritten from fantasy
to a non-fiction exposé
so instead of longing for
the latest i-touch, i-pad,
i-want designer clothes
we soberly, practically accept
the truth that the
Emperor's clothes are an illusion
and we listen to ourselves
for the wise voices within
and refuse to run this
gerbil wheel of
impractical, unsustainable
lifestyles of waste
and I am waiting
for a mass awakening
that we are just
lilies of the field after all
and wisdom can be reborn.

I too am waiting for the real arrival
of the next millennium
not the one we just celebrated
with Prozac-laced pacifiers in our mouths
quietly sucking more of the same
in exchange for avoiding

the Y2K catastrophe
and I am waiting
for a golden sunrise to bring
unmistakable light to a new day
and I am waiting
for our awesome humanity to awaken
to use our brilliance, compassion and
resources to better our world for
all who live here
and for a rebirth of wisdom.

And I too am waiting for Americans
to remove our 3D glasses
as we watch the spun stories
on the nightly news
and I am waiting for the boomers
who brought us peace and love in the sixties
to stoke their pot-bellied stoves
fueling fire once again
and I am waiting
for a resurgence of flower-power
to finally stall the engines of
runaway capitalism so that
no one is exploited by their charades
and wisdom can be restored.

And I too am waiting for the next full moon
to cast an unmistakable glow
upon our impressive youth
and I am waiting
for their counter-culture passion to
Twitter them awake to
see the shortcomings of dumbing-down
I am waiting
for their Facebook to spread the message
of social change, where we have
smart people
instead of
smart phones and smart cars
I am waiting
for our youth to stand beside one another
on terra firma
as they do in cyberspace

and I am waiting
for us to know them by their acts of kindness,
their rejection of bullying,
as well as by their tattoos, facial jewels,
and purple pointed hair
as we walk together
toward a rebirth of wisdom.

And I too am waiting for the next solstice
to shed an invisible net over the planet
so when Christians, Hindus, and natives
awaken they feel their ties with
Muslims and Jews and we all
see that we are wasting precious
resources, time, and energy
fighting each other because
all humanity has a seat at the table
set for a real tea party,
if wisdom could prevail.

And I too am waiting
for the good people of this planet to
offer no life support to this dying economic
beast constructed on exploitation
native people, blacks, poor, youth, and now also
the middle class
and for wise action to prevail as we
repair, reuse, and restore our
material possessions instead of
buying the illusion that
we must have the latest model
and I am waiting
for the oppressed to finally inherit the earth and for
a human network of generous kindness to sustain us
and for wisdom to finally come.

And I am waiting for justice to prevail
and for our amazing earth-based humanity to
protect life itself over profit for the few
and I am waiting to see the Renaissance of possibility
which will grow wonder and wisdom from this rich, new soil.

Poetry

Honorable Mention

Maylva Dupree

Eight lines

That was what she did
She ate lines
Why, dear God, must you get high?
She said the 'caine made her able
To walk and see the stars
Strange, I thought it was
She could not see the stars
She created from her own genius
Two sons, by brothers

Poetry

Honorable Mention

Leia Barnett

embryos of absence

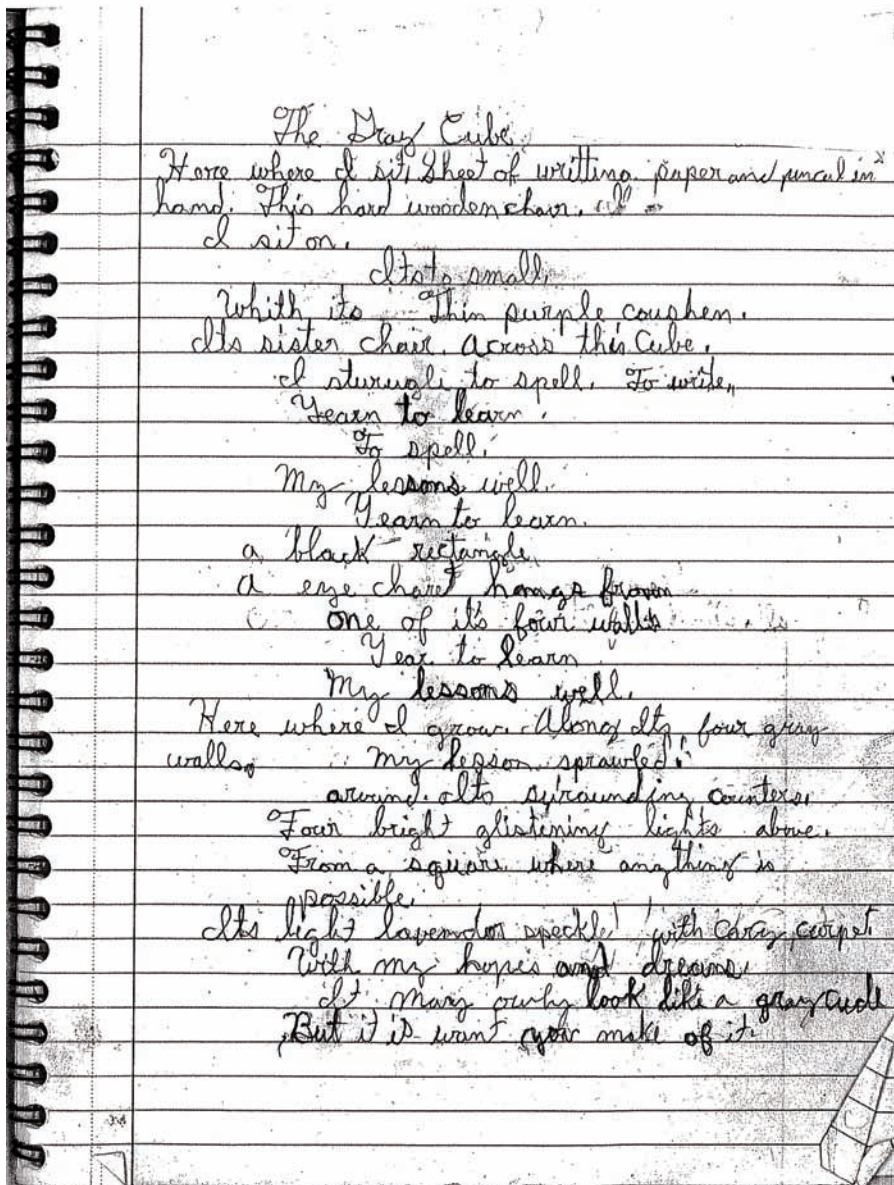
embryos of absence,
his soft, labored breath-of-sleep,
startled white light of dawn,
barking dog echoes
through the corridor of morning,
pale glow of
warm bodies,
dressing in silence,
one shoe,
then the other,
waivers of departure,
alone,
the frame of a frosty windshield,
ribbons of breath,
gray mountain arches,
his folded hands round my hips.

Goodbye was never enough.

Poetry

Honorable Mention

Louis Dominguez



Poetry

Honorable Mention

Leah McLeroy

Death comes for the archeologist

her wide oval eyes
took an ash bath in the heat
a dip into rock

effigies of screams
sting in her calcified eyes
reflect in full pools

of Pompeian baths
cold spectral mausoleums
in the tepid air

where ponds of bodies
gleamed in feverish leisure
before the hot rain

Personal Essay Winner

Kendra Peterson

Penitent

Nothing will return my grandmother and the very thought of that finality has a tendency to push me into a self-induced abyss whose vortex knows neither family nor friends when pulling me under.

My earliest memories are of a speck of a town just east of another speck that would be bypassed altogether had it not been for the presence of water on an expanse of red earth bisected only by a merciless interstate. There, the off ramps and cattle guards were the only indication that your destination was near and even then an inevitable trek had to be made over the dirt roads gnarled by hardened mud and the remnants of a long gone driver's determination to escape in one way or another. My mother would steer with ease around such obstacles while my brother, sister and I would peer through the windshield in anticipation of our family gathering as we took inventory of all the vehicles dotting my grandparent's driveway. An hour and a half drive was the norm in those days and between listening to eight tracks and my sister's vehicular antics involving watching money literally float away as she held it out the window in awe, we'd arrive, our arms bogged down by packages. They were, of course, immediately dispersed as we were bestowed upon with only the sincerest of greetings and the warmest of hugs with the last always being my grandmother's. I remember her hands, though wrought with what seemed like incessant labor, were the softest and strongest of any I've ever known. Her laughter would fill the room and she'd greet me with my nickname, "ama' sa' ni" (Navajo for "grandmother") and she'd hold me tighter than the last time. Stories would be shared, food would be eaten and the sun would begin its descent while magnifying the eddies of motes in the back rooms of a house built of necessity and love. The cleanup process would begin, with my mother always at the helm and I would sit on my grandma's lap as she told me about the latest neighbor to get under her skin or her mishaps involving hair dye that she had applied and forgotten about while preparing for the days fete. The stars would arrive far too soon and as my grandfather stoked the fire and plumes of piñon would waft through the living room, I'd reluctantly crawl from her rocking chair and fight back tears while asking my mother why we couldn't spend the night. With a final embrace, we'd walk out into the cold and before I felt it hit my face, I'd run back in for one more goodbye and another "I love you, grandma." The traverse over the twists and turns to the first "big" road was the worst in

sense of turbulence; my stomach and heart ached as I looked out the back window of our trusty pickup and watched my grandmother's frame grow ever more slight with our progression. She'd stay on the porch and we'd exchange waves until one couldn't see the other and even then I saw her hand once more as I closed my eyes for the arduous journey home.

I wasn't there the day she died. I had seen her not long before, but dementia had clouded her perceptions and my need to find independence had incurred the same effect. I held her hand for what I didn't know was the last time and when it came time to let go, I looked down only to see our interlaced fingers perfectly mirrored.

Personal Essay Runner-Up

Audrey Powers

A Montage of Kindness

In a “Monk Without a Robe,” by Mike McIntyre, the main character had a mid-life crisis at the age of 37. This man had a good job, marriage, etc., and “lost it.” Then he went on a spiritual journey. McIntyre writes, “Kindness is strange, but never long a stranger.” What he was about to find was kindness from people he’d least expect it from. For example, he crossed paths with a woman/man logger (he-she), named Diana, the truck driver who offered McIntyre a ride and a McDonald’s cheeseburger, and Linda, a single-mom, with kids that offered him a place to stay. Reading this essay helped me reflect on my own past experiences, of being caught up in the foster care system, going in and of hospitals and institutions, group homes, being homeless, and living in and out of street shelters. It is easy to focus on the negative experiences and harder to remember the kinder moments. Even though I didn’t have the ice-cream sundae with a cherry on top lifestyle like McIntyre, I was able to find kindness from people I least expected, especially people whom I assumed wouldn’t be kind based on my own preconceived ideas.

Some of those preconceived ideas I picked up or assumed from earlier memories were that white people were superior to Alaskan-Natives like me. I was brainwashed to believe *larlurmakens* (white bearded men) spoke English better than us, and they were placed in different classes from us. In contrast, as an Alaskan-Native, I remember feeling like we were like those pink, ugly, squishy worms that landed on the pavement after it rained in Anchorage, Alaska. In addition, I remember being shoved in the snow, and being told to go home and eat our whale blubber, that we were poor, dark little homely things, that we didn’t speak English “good” enough, that our parents were just drunks, and that we would never make it. All these thoughts set up an atmosphere in which I feared white people, the cop cars, the strangers in the hospital, and the funny marked cars with the social workers that would come to “steal me.” Inwardly, I believed that white people were cold, impenetrable, glass walls, and that everything they had was special, things we weren’t allowed to have. It seemed that they made the world move, so we had to move around them and it was a rare experience to think that they could be caring.

So then who could imagine a person or persons willing to drive around at night to offer Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwiches to young prostitutes so that they could warm up or get to safety? Who could imagine a

nun that takes in only the unwanted of the unwanted, or a white lawyer named Nancy whom I thought would act like all the other social worker, doctor, or staff types?

A pale woman, in a plain-blue suit, sat on a plastic chair in the middle of a cold, gray, green-bluish room of an adolescent unit of the Alaska Psychiatric Institute.

“What do you want?” Nancy asked me.

“I never want to go back,” I said in a very serious tone.

“Then it shall be,” she responded gently. I never had to appear in the courtrooms, to face my parents or look them in the eye. Nancy always began and ended our meeting sessions with a hug. Why would this stranger, lawyer-type woman want to hug me? She always would tell me, “I want you to go to college.” I didn’t even know what college was. As Native students, we were separated from the “whites.” It was thought that because we came from the villages or assumed that we came from the villages that we couldn’t speak English “good” enough to go to college. Later in life, I understood that Nancy was a child’s advocate lawyer/or a guardian ad-litem. She was one of the first people to advocate successfully on my behalf to get me out of a very dangerous situation. Nancy did not act like what I thought she would act like and hugs were so rare in that hospital.

After leaving the hospital, I went to meet Sister Arlene Boyd, the director of McCauley Manor. Prior to meeting Sister Arlene, I imagined that nuns were like those nuns depicted in “Sounds of Music,” nice, gentle, singing, and kind. The intake process was a chance for Sister Arlene to assess if there was any last chance for me to live with my family. The temperature in the room shifted as a gray, claustrophobic fog settled in over my mom spewing hot lava rocks, hateful words blurred out in my memory. Sister Arlene, pinkish-red in the face, invisible smoke fuming out her ears and mouth, rose and shouted, “Leave and don’t you ever come back here!” My parents got up to leave. Seaweed from the shore got tangled up inside my chest and throat. The fog has lifted and the temperature in the room settled back down. Next, I received a tour of the house.

Standing in the middle of a large silver-like kitchen, I asked, “May I have a glass of milk?”

“You don’t have to ask for milk here,” Sister Arlene responded, “This is your house, You live here now!”

How could a “white” lawyer or a Catholic nun be kind to someone they didn’t even know? How could these two women have such soft ocean waves in such contrast to spewing, red-hot lava rocks? Even though I had been bombarded with racism and prejudices, and even though I assumed the racisms and prejudices based on ideas of differences of how white (larlurmakens) and Yupiks were, these two women showed me that “Kindness is strange, but never long a stranger.” Even though I may have

had a lifestyle filled with thorns from bushes, while McIntrye had more beautiful roses as part of his lifestyle, like McIntrye, I was shown kindness by people whom I'd least expect it from and I continue to receive this same type of kindness and encouragement today making these qualities easier to reciprocate.

Personal Essay Runner-Up

John M. Romero

A Special Day

A student intern wheeled me in my black-seated, purple-framed manual wheelchair to a place in Studio J behind a row of television monitors. Multi-colored cables were looped on the monitor tables and snaked onto the floor. There was darkness behind me and bright light focused in front of me, on the place where they were taping a few scenes.

I was completely engaged, taking in the busy environment of Studio J and saw puppeteers wearing headset microphones, kneeling below the camera's view, holding up their puppets as they said their lines. From far, I noticed the camera booms were placed at the edge of the staging area. The cameras focused on the people and puppet characters that were following the day's script.

After watching a scene, I felt a gentle tap as soon as the director loudly called, "Cut!"

Looking to my right, I saw a red, furry puppet hand on my shoulder.

"Hi John," I heard a familiar, squeaky, high-pitched voice say.

"Hi, Elmo," I replied. In awe, I touched the top of his furry head.

I looked below Elmo. A large, African-American, broad-shouldered man kneeling on the side of my wheelchair was operating Elmo. I recognized the puppeteer from doing a great deal of research on "Sesame Street". I felt I already knew him. I knew he was the author of the book I had read and brought with me for him to autograph, *My Life as a Furry Red Monster*. I knew he had created his first puppet from his father's coat lining when he was ten, and had entertained the children of his mother's day-care in Baltimore, Maryland. I knew when he was only in tenth grade, he got his first puppeteering job on a children's television show. I remembered reading that when he was seventeen, he was invited to the 1979 Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade to puppeteer on the "Sesame Street" float. Five years before I was born, he had become an official puppeteer on "Sesame Street". Here was Kevin Clash, now also the "Sesame Street" producer who had invited me to Kauffman Astoria Studios, in Queens, New York, where the wonderful magic of that children's show takes place. Because of his generosity, I now see television in a whole new way.

When I wrote my letter to the Outreach Coordinator for the "Sesame Street Children's Television Workshop" seven months before the trip to New York, I did not really expect I would get permission to see an afternoon taping of a "Sesame Street" episode of season forty. Mr. Clash

had reviewed my letter requesting a behind-the-scenes experience as part of my career research in children's television programming. Kevin Clash told the Outreach Coordinator if my parents would take me to New York, he would allow me a V.I.P. tour to see how the cast and crew produce one of the most famous children's television shows.

My parents were always with me, experiencing the same things, and I wanted someone else to share their perspective with me. I asked my parents if they would please "stay back" at the set, and let Kevin take over. They agreed.

"John, would you like to meet a cameraman who has worked here since the beginning of the show?" Kevin asked in his own deep voice. Kevin stood up to his six-foot height, and took Elmo off his hand to lay him over the handle of my wheelchair.

"Sure," I said, excited and ready to see anything Kevin had to show me.

Kevin wheeled me over to meet Frank Biondo who sat behind his camera in front of the set's playground area. He was a gray-haired man wearing sneakers, jeans and an un-tucked shirt. Frank was friendly and immediately, I felt comfortable talking with him. He welcomed me to the set and showed me his camera controls. In a quiet, gentle voice, he proudly told me he had worked "Sesame Street's" camera one since 1969. Frank explained that a sheaf of white paper underneath one of his controls was the final script he used to plan his filming for the day. Frank also told me that when the red light on the monitor of his camera was on, he was shooting a scene. I sat silently beside Frank; watching at the same time, his black and white monitor and the actual scenes unfolding on the set.

After Frank was done taping, Kevin pulled a colored monitor near me so I could review with him the final cuts that would next go to the editing department. Kevin was with me as I sat fascinated for about two hours on the edge of the set behind the cameras. He shared with me that day the action of the many people involved in taping, correcting errors, and finally, keeping parts of an episode about Big Bird breaking his wing, called "Wing in a Sling".

When the filming was over for the day, Kevin gathered the puppeteer cast around me for a souvenir photograph. Several cast members, wearing their Muppets on their hands and arms, spoke to me. I recognized many of them, but not all of them. Connecting the human faces to the Muppets gave me more insight about who did the work below the cameras. After the photo was taken, Kevin quizzed me about which puppeteer operated which puppet. He was impressed that I knew most of the names of the puppeteers.

Almost all of the cast and the film crew left the studio. Kevin introduced me to Carroll Spinney, and Erik Jacobson who had stayed

behind to give me a tour of Studio J. Caroll Spinney, who performs Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch, was still wearing the lower half of Big Bird's pink and orange costume legs. He also still wore, strapped to his chest, the small T.V. monitor he uses inside the 8-foot-tall, yellow-feathered body of Big Bird. As he patiently led me and Kevin through the lighting equipment and cables to the back of the studio, I noticed Caroll's natural voice sounded much like Big Bird's voice.

Kevin wheeled me to the corner in Studio J to show me the show's famous nest, steps, and trash can. Kevin placed me behind Oscar's trash can to show me the mechanism Caroll uses to open and close the lid. Suddenly, Caroll switched from sounding like Big Bird's character, and growled in Oscar's gruff voice,

“Get out of my trash can!”

He told us he wanted me to hear his voice Oscar even though he was not holding the green puppet at the time.

Next, Kevin wheeled me over to where Eric Jacobson was sitting on a director's wooden folding chair. Eric looked like a teenager and was casually wearing a light blue t-shirt and jeans. He had the Grover Muppet on his hand, spoke to me in Grover's voice, and posed with me for a photograph. Then Eric put Grover away in a special cabinet where all the other Muppets had been stored earlier. When Eric returned to us, Kevin interviewed Eric so I could learn more about which characters Eric played. I learned Eric had taken over many of Frank Oz's characters. Besides Grover, he also performed the Muppets, “Miss Piggy”, “Animal”, “Bert” and “Guy Smiley”.

At the end of the studio tour, Kevin told me he had some gifts for me and a special surprise. He asked if I would wait for him in the hall outside Studio J. While I waited for Kevin, Leslie Carrara-Rudolph, with her puppet character, “Abby Cadabby,” entertained me and made me laugh. She spoke in Abby's whispery, little-girlish voice.

I was amazed when Kevin brought me a gift bag of various “Sesame Street” plush toys, and a sheet of paper autographed by many of the show's cast. I thanked Kevin for allowing me the opportunity to see first-hand all that goes into the show before it airs.

The extraordinary experience that day allowed me to see the multi-team effort in the production of an award-winning children's television show. Now, watching television, I have a better appreciation for scripting, filming, lighting, directing, editing, and coordinating of people to run a show. The crew, cast and the people who play the “Sesame Street” characters shared their expertise with me in friendship. Because Kevin Clash was welcoming, and a thorough guide that day, I now have a fresh perspective when I watch any television show, and am still interested in television production as a career.

Personal Essay

Honorable Mention

Daniel Chavez

New Beginnings

When I was 10 years old, my parents decided to move from our trailer in downtown El Paso, TX to Socorro, TX. There was a lot of crime and poverty in downtown El Paso. All my friends lived in the same trailer park that I lived in, so I hated the idea of leaving my friends and starting new in a different place. I'd grown accustomed to the city life. Living in the city was exciting for me, and I didn't want to move to a hillbilly, boring, ranch style neighborhood. There was nothing I could have said or done to change my parents' minds to stay where I considered home. I felt that my parents didn't consider my thoughts, or respect my feelings in what I wanted or what was best for me.

Living in downtown El Paso gave me and my friends a great sense of freedom. My friends and I became extremely close with each other because with so many trailer parks, apartments, and residential neighborhoods nearby, my friends and I would protect our turf. We would play tricks and vandalize other neighborhoods, and we would certainly make sure that wouldn't happen to our trailer park. Sometimes we would even steal from people's homes or vehicles. We had access to public transportation, so we would go to downtown businesses and vandalize those buildings too. These types of things are what kids in the city would do for fun. Since I was the youngest kid in our group, I was pressured to follow what the 13, 15, and 17 year old guys wanted, and that was to vandalize along with them. Those guys made me feel like I was part of a family that respected me and my thoughts. This is what I knew growing up in that type of environment, and I didn't want to change my life that I was content with.

My parents purchased half an acre of land and a double wide trailer in the Socorro district of El Paso, TX. This district is only 20 minutes from the edge of El Paso, TX, but in that close proximity, Socorro was isolated from the city. There was nothing out there except for cotton fields and acres of empty land. Every weekend my family would forcefully take me with them to clear tumbleweeds from our land. We couldn't move in yet because we still needed our utility services to be connected by the district. I had a bad attitude every time I was forced to go this desolate land. There's nothing out there but flat land, dirt, and tumbleweeds. Every time

we drove from the busy, well-lit, streets of El Paso, and into the deserted, isolated, streets of Socorro, I felt immediate depression as if my life was coming to an end. Since I didn't have a choice of working on the weekends at our new land, I pulled tumbleweeds out of the ground, and I dug drenches out to the irrigation ditch with a sour attitude.

"Mom, why do we have to move here? There's nothing out here for me to do except for clear out tumbleweeds for the rest of my life," I said irritably. "Son, give it a chance. Once we move out here, you'll make lots of new friends, and you won't be pulling weeds for life," she said calmly.

I didn't respond because there was no point in me giving my parents a hard time. It still won't change the fact that I'm bound to my parents for another 8 years of my life. After that I'll move back to the city, and I'll never have to deal with this desert environment again, I thought to myself.

One morning as I walked to school, my neighborhood friends stopped me and confronted me. The eldest boy said, with a menacing tone, "Hey, vato, where have you been for the past few weeks? Me and the homeboys wanted you to join us to tag the Glenwood apartments, ese. Those vatos from Glenwood tagged some of our trailers Friday night, and we needed you to help us get back at them."

"Oh shit, man, I didn't know, but I didn't have a choice to go with my parents to the place where we are moving to," I replied fearfully.

"You know vato, if you don't start acting like one of us, and protect your barrio, then you might as well move to your new barrio, because we don't like strangers in our hood, ese." So then they left me alone and I didn't see them until the following week.

After the neighborhood kids confronted me on my way to school, I realized they weren't my true friends. So I avoided any contact with them for the rest of the week. That following Monday on my way to school the gang stopped me again. Out of nowhere without any warning all five of the guys jumped me and attacked me. They threw me to the ground and kicked me until they grew tired. They said nothing to me while they pulverized me, but I knew I'd become a stranger to them. After that beating, I would avoid the main route to school, and I would sneak to the back of my trailer, and I would scale a ten foot fence to the other side. Then I would make my way through a narrow muddy ditch that was surrounded by bamboo trees and hundreds of prickly bushes, and made my way through other neighborhoods to get to school. Luckily, I never was noticed by any of the opposing neighborhood kids, but that was because I would wear baseball caps and hooded sweaters to try to cover my face. Since I was the youngest kid in my neighborhood, I was lucky enough not to have them at my school. Their school was five blocks further than mine, so at least I had the peace of mind of not dealing with them there. That was routine for the next month before we moved.

I spent one whole month avoiding my former friends, and finally it was time to move to my new home. I felt relieved to start a new life, but I still wasn't pleased with leaving the city life. Once my family and I settled in our new place over the weekend, I started feeling anxious about what type of kids lived in the neighborhood. I hoped I wouldn't have the same problems as I did with my old crew.

I started school that following Monday after we moved in to our new place. I had to walk to my new school which was half the distance from my house compared to my old school. When class started, I noticed that kids in that school were relaxed and joking around with one another. That was a good change from my old school where everyone was trying to claim their dominance over people. During recess I noticed everyone would meet outside on the soccer field and play soccer. I'd never played sports before, so I just stood there watching everyone play. After a week of living in our new environment, I didn't mind the peace and quiet of the isolated neighborhood. Usually, I'd be tagging or breaking into other people's homes because my old crew would make me, but in Socorro everyone in the neighborhood would leave their homes open as if crime never existed in the world.

As I walked to school that following Monday, a neighborhood boy stopped me and asked me, "Where did you move from?"

"I'm from downtown El Paso," I replied.

"Well, welcome to the neighborhood. I'm Carlos."

"I'm Daniel." And he shook my hand.

"Hey Daniel, I've noticed you standing alone watching us play soccer. Do you want to play with us during recess?" he asked.

"Sure I'll play, but I've never played the game before," I said nervously.

"No problem," Carlos answered encouragingly, "I'll teach you to play soccer so just meet at the soccer field."

"All right," I replied enthusiastically.

By the time we had our conversation we had made it to school, and it was time to get to class. When it was time for recess, I met up Carlos at the soccer field and he introduced me to everybody. Apparently everybody plays soccer in this school, I thought to myself. The game started and Carlos was explaining the rules and concept of the game while we played. I was lost for a while until I finally had a chance to kick the ball, and as soon as I did, something in me clicked and the game didn't seem so foreign anymore. Carlos noticed me chasing after the ball and dribbling it past people. He told me, "Daniel, you're a natural at this game. I've never seen anyone pick up the game as quickly as you did. Are you sure you've never played before?"

"I'm sure. I've never even seen the game on TV before."

“It doesn’t matter. Would you like to play on a soccer club team with me and my older brother?”

“If you think I’m good enough, sure.”

Since that day, I became obsessed with the game of soccer, and I began playing with Carlos and his brother in our neighborhood and in their club team. It turned out that not only did I love the game, but that I was pretty good at it. I felt a sense of freedom and all my team mates looked up to me because of my soccer abilities. I’d never had this type of friendship before where I could talk to someone without being afraid of being judged, or to have friends think of me as a wimp or be bullied into doing things that I wasn’t comfortable with. I was afraid of leaving behind what I knew and those that I knew. I always thought living in the city was what I wanted, but now that I lived in a peaceful and friendly place like Socorro, I could appreciate new beginnings with different changes. I finally met true friends that are respectful and caring towards me. I didn’t realize that my parents all along were thinking of my best interests, and they knew that if we would have stayed in the city, I might have gone on the wrong path. I now appreciate them being so patient with me while we moved because I now realize that change can be a great thing and no matter what, I should be positive about any new adventures.

Personal Essay

Honorable Mention

Barbara Robidoux

The Bath Tub in Heaven

The old claw foot cast iron enamel bathtub rested in the same spot for fifty years. Aunt Mary was the first to try out the tub as soon as inside plumbing was hooked up to city water in my grandfather's house. After that, every Saturday night we all knew Mary was soaking in "heaven" as she called it. She said it was her reward after working hard all week.

The bathroom was a very small room at the back of the house and the tub took up three quarters of the space. Mary made the room cozy with printed wallpaper of clouds and angels. She placed plastic flowers in vases around the room, even roses on the back of the commode. The tub was planted there in the midst of heavenly glory. Even the rumbling of the Boston/Maine passenger train which passed by very close to the house twice a day couldn't move that tub. The water might slosh a little but the tub itself held its ground. We were all accustomed to the house shaking and the noise of the train over the years became a part of our lives. The passing of the train was a time keeper we could count on.

Aunt Mary was the fifth born of eleven children. We all lived in my grandfather's house at one time or another. The story goes that he won the house in a card game during the Great Depression. An Italian immigrant with eleven kids in the 1930's, he needed a stroke of luck to survive. Today the house still stands on "Goat Hill" in that small coastal town of Beverly, Massachusetts.

Mary always dyed her hair black, black and she wore red lipstick red as sweet marinara sauce. For years she worked as a barmaid at the Anchor, a local fisherman's bar at the bottom of the hill. But eventually she got fed up with the drunken patrons and took a job in a shoe factory down by the river. It was only a short walk from our house on Goat hill to her work at the United Shoe Factory. The money wasn't as good as she made at the Anchor but Aunt Mary soon established a side business of her own. She had a head for numbers and it was only natural that she be a bookie on the side.

Friends, family and co-workers were her best customers. They knew they could trust Mary. In thirty years of bookmaking, she never wrote down a number. She kept every number in her head. Horse races, sports games, whatever, the bets were safe with Aunt Mary.

Mary was also psychic. Her sister Pierina said it was because she was born in the caul; that's a veil over her face. Pierina the oldest of the sisters saw Mary born. She said the embryonic sac covered her face when she came out of Nonna's womb and she watched the midwife remove it.

Mary was a compulsive bingo nut. Almost every night, except Sundays, she and several of her girl-friends attended bingo at St Margaret's parish hall in Salem. "The Girls", all women in their mid and late fifties would arrive early at the bingo hall and play poker until the "Early bird" bingo games began.

Inevitably, someone would ask Mary to read their fortune in the cards and she would. She used a regular deck of playing cards and never charged for her services. But one night she foresaw the death of her sister Margie's husband. She was stunned and could not find the words to tell what she saw. She never told a soul about her vision until many, many years later. Sure enough a week after she foresaw his death, Johnny Marino was killed in an explosion at the chemical plant where he worked. After that Mary refused to read cards. She stuck to poker and bingo and of course she played the numbers.

At age sixty two Aunt Mary was diagnosed with bone cancer. Six month later, she was dead. On her death bed she told her only son Tony to go to the Gloria food chain store and play her numbers. Tony did as he was instructed and when he returned to the hospital, Mary had passed away.

It was left to me and my cousin Kathy to clean out Mary's apartment. Tony was so distraught over his mother's death, he refused to help. That was OK. Kathy and I just listened to music on AM radio and we went to work. We had been cleaning and packing for the better part of Saturday. I was exhausted.

"Why not?" I asked myself. I got the idea to go to heaven for a little while and take a bath in Mary's tub. I poured the water nice and hot, even found a bottle of Mary's favorite bubble bath "serenity" and I undressed. Before I stepped into the hot tub, my foot rubbed against a black tin box wedged under the side of the tub. Curious, I pulled the boxes out and opened the lid. Inside I found \$30,000 in \$100 bills.

Aunt Mary, a child of the Great Depression, had no use for banks or safe deposit boxes but she did believe in heaven and a hot bath.

Personal Essay

Honorable Mention

Jessica Karin Michaels

I am 28 years old. I grew up in Maryland and have lived in Western New York, Boulder, Colorado, San Francisco, Seattle and now, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. All of the places that I've lived have offered something extremely unique. I feel very lucky to have had the exposure of all of these different places. I've been thinking over the past several days about which place is the most different in comparison to Santa Fe. I was sure that it was Maryland. I even sat down to write a list of reasons why and I came up with reasons that were just plain boring. And then my mind lit up with imagery of The City by the Bay, San Francisco. In my opinion, there is nowhere in this entire country that compares to the uniqueness of San Francisco. I feel equally the same about Santa Fe. Both cities have some major things in common. For example, they are both named after Saint Francis of Assisi, both were ruled by Spain, each city has a very large gay community that is accepted and supported, love of the arts and the incredible art communities, the yummy taco trucks, breathtaking scenery and both are huge tourist destinations. Still, there could not possibly, in all the places I've lived, be two more opposite cities than SF and SF.

I am definitely a girl of adventure, variety, house music, and excitement. San Francisco was all this for me and so much more. It was my city of dreams. It gave me a sense of freedom and made me purely happy. It catered to a certain aspect of my personality, one that I really enjoy. A wild woman with too little time to possibly do all of the fun things a city like San Francisco had to offer. I lived there for 9 months as well as traveled there over a dozen times. I knew some great people that took me to all the hot spots. And then an interesting chain of events happened and only a few short months later, I landed in Santa Fe, a city that I had also frequented in the past because my mom has lived here over 9 years. I used to travel to visit her from Boulder. Santa Fe is a city I never envisioned myself living in. Actually, I was pretty adamant that I would never live here! It's a place that caters to the another side of my personality. One that is more calm, quiet, reflective and a bit more uneventful.

Let me first begin with some facts about the size, population, location and climate of each city. This will begin painting a picture in your mind about some of their differences. San Francisco is located at the tip of the San Francisco Peninsula. It also includes large portions of the Pacific

Ocean and San Francisco Bay and has an elevation of a whopping 52 feet. Its highest elevation is Mt. Davidson at 925 ft. Santa Fe, which literally means “Holy Faith” however, lies in the high desert. Its elevation is 7,260 feet. Altitude sickness is common because so you might not be able to enjoy that extra margarita if you’re travelling from sea level. It is nestled at the base of the Santa Fe Mountains, part of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains (Spanish for “Blood of Christ”) which is a sub range of the Rocky Mountains. Santa Fe’s highest peaks include Truchas Peak at 13,102 feet and Santa Fe Baldy at 12,622 feet. In 2010, Santa Fe turned 400 years old making it the oldest state capitol in the United States. Santa Fe has a population of approx. 75,764 in a 37.4 square mile area. The city and county of San Francisco has the population of 815,358 people in a 46.7 square mile area. If you include the surrounding areas of Oakland and San Jose, there are 7.4 million people. Santa Fe has four, well-rounded seasons. It has over 300 days of sunshine per year. San Francisco is noted to have 260 “clear” days per year. It is well known for its fog, cool breezes and mild, year-round temperatures. “Indian Summer” which occurs at the end of summer and goes into early fall is its warmest time of the year. Within the city, many microclimates occur. Choose where you live wisely. It’s a difference between a lot more sun or a lot more fog. Santa Fe receives snowfall, usually from November through April. “Ski Santa Fe” offers skiing and snowboarding only 30 minutes from the city. Monsoon season, expected in July and August brings heavy rain and beautiful thunder and lightning storms. Now, let’s move into some things that really stood out to me that Santa Fe and San Francisco could almost be two, separate planets in our Solar System.

One of the biggest differences that I have experienced is attention to our Earth and recycling. I have, all my life, been a bit of a recycling Nazi, recycling any and every thing and making frequent trips to “special” recycling sights. I’ve actually felt pain and guilt inside for throwing things away that I know are recyclables. San Francisco is absolutely, the most wonderful city when it comes to recycling and being “Green.” It has earned a reputation as “the City that Knows How,” for the way it protects the health of its communities and environment through the many policies and programs that it has initiated. When I lived there, recycling was a huge part of our routine. When our kitchen closet was full of paper, bottles and compost, we would take it down to the garage and throw it into the recycling bins. They emptied them daily. It was interesting to see different containers get added for different things to recycle. For example, a little box was mounted on the wall for old batteries. I have lived in Santa Fe for a year now and I still can’t understand its recycling method. Maybe it’s just too simple in it’s almost non-existent routine. San Francisco would take passionate offense to Santa Fe’s ways. I argued with my mom for months

and months about it! So wait...I can't recycle my cardboard cereal box, or the plastic container that my pudding was in? I couldn't believe it and couldn't accept it. Why can't I recycle a #5 in the form of a container? After months of fighting it, getting upset and feeling angry, I have finally given in. I deal by numbing myself. I feel like a heartless robot every time I throw away any plastic and paper. I cannot believe that it's not a priority here. How can people not care? It is known that only 30% of Santa Fe households recycle. And what about businesses? I watch what happens every time I work. The bar trash can is filled to the top with empty glass bottles. Where do you think they go every night? Right into the dumpster. Stacks of cardboard boxes are thrown into the dumpster, too. I even think I saw a certificate "recognizing" my work for being active in recycling! I've honestly never experienced anything like this. San Francisco has an amazing website – www.sfenvironment.org. It is packed full of information about where to recycle and how to properly dispose of just about everything. Basically, the "when," the "what," and the "how" of recycling in the city. There are 8 categories of City Programs including titles like "Toxics Reduction," "Urban Nature," and "Air Quality and Transportation." Now, I live in a city that doesn't even require emissions testing on vehicles. The contrast of San Francisco's advanced programs of Earth-care compared to Santa Fe's attempt at working to engage its community to take a greater responsibility for improving the city and environment is astonishing. San Francisco is doing it, has taken action and is making a difference. Their recycling organization reminds me of a power train, flying down the tracks, steam pouring out of its smoke stacks and rearing ahead with power and momentum. While Santa Fe's "programs" are like a set of deserted railroad tracks, old and cracked, unused and abandoned. I will tell you this: I do not recognize the person I've become here in Santa Fe when it comes to recycling. In the past year, I have learned to quickly toss recyclables. I've learned to move on mentally. What else can I do when the reality is that I truly do not have a choice?

Another huge contrast that exists between Santa Fe and San Francisco is the variety of food. I am a lover of food! I am getting excited just thinking about the overwhelming number of options San Francisco offers. The variety of food in The City is like a never ending path of discovery. I have often wondered how many days I could eat at a different restaurant in a different part of town tasting different cuisine. Surely it could be a year or two of going to different places. The most unassuming places are goldmines. Some are open until 4 a.m. And you are walking into a show. I often felt like a member of the audience watching a play unfolding before me.

I lived in a district called "The Fillmore." I love to walk, especially in San Francisco. Walking almost daily around my old neighborhood really

allowed me, in detail, to get to know the food that I was surrounded with. The cuisine changed many times throughout these walks. One of my favorite places was called “Fresca.” They served outstanding, Peruvian cuisine. I loved the sangria’s, the beautiful presentation and the combination of flavors. On nice nights we were able to enjoy our sangria’s outside. It was lovely. There was a pub, a Mediterranean restaurant, gourmet pizza, a string of hard-core, authentic Japanese joints, and even a diner that requires their employees to wear those old-school, silly diner outfits. There was a wine and cheese bar, an over-priced taco stop, a fish company that was always packed, a very upscale and modern Indian restaurant with beautiful glass decorations hanging from its ceilings, and the most wonderful French patisserie and cafe. Please keep in mind that San Francisco is 7 miles by 7 miles. That is not very big. Somehow it still felt huge when it came to food. And let me tell you, San Francisco delivers.

The city is a mix of culture, broken down into different districts. Once you eat in Chinatown, it is difficult to walk through the door of a “Chinese” restaurant anywhere else. Honestly, what is better than authenticity, especially in food? Japan Town is full of noodle houses mixed with delicious sushi. The Mission District offers traditional Hispanic and Mexican choices. Or if you’re in the mood for upscale fine dining that leaves you floating on a cloud afterwards, The Financial District will knock your socks off. I had a wonderful time adding to my list of special places I discovered. I assure you, there was one for every mood.

Here in Santa Fe, things are very different. Santa Fe culture is very, very traditional. Therefore, it is full of traditional Mexican and New Mexican cuisine. Living in Santa Fe puts you on the hunt for the best chile and burritos. The authenticity of the red and green chile in Santa Fe and in New Mexico is unmatched with any other place. I love watching Rudi, the food prep guy at my restaurant make red chile. He begins with whole, red chiles, onion and a lot of water and turns into a glorious pot full of homemade, New Mexican red chile. The color is a deep, rusty red. I've had customers order little bowls of the green chile and eat it like soup.

Here in Santa Fe, I find myself looking to find the best, overall flavor Mexican cuisine. There is a little sprinkling throughout the city of different restaurants. In the summer, I love going to Coyote Cafe for cocktails and great appetizers. The Tea House is funky and it has a great location and good choices in food and beverage. Yet, I still often find myself bored. Santa Fe lacks quick, healthy variety. And when a new restaurant emerges, like the new noodle house, Shibumi, it's really a big deal. Variety of food in Santa Fe is almost incomparable to a place like San Francisco. When you’ve experienced the food of a city like that, even the excitement of a new place in Santa Fe feels flat. They are two different worlds. And in some major ways, truly seem to represent different planets in our solar

system. Santa Fe, NM and San Francisco, CA are both extremely culture driven. Through the observation of their cultures, the past is revealed. Much of which I feel is then revealed in its cultural cuisine.

Finally, one of the biggest differences that separate “Planet Santa Fe” and “Planet San Francisco” is the skyline and architecture. The architecture and design of Santa Fe is unlike any in the United States. It has earned its nickname, “The City Different.” Santa Fe is thought by many to be the most charming capitol in the United States. It was founded in 1607 by Spanish conquistadors and later became headquarters for rulers of the northern most colony of Mexico, when that nation won its independence from Spain. It became part of the United States in 1846, and became a state in 1912. Santa Fe has retained and maintained its Mexican and Spanish appearance. The beautiful mountains are sprinkled with pink and sand-colored, Adobe style homes. When the sunlight shines on them, the feeling is one of a magical place. The shadows that are cast onto the Adobe walls appeal to a wide variety of artists. It is safe to say that Santa Fe is an inspiring place. The look of Santa Fe is by design—local authorities in the early 20th century declared that all buildings, even new ones, must conform to the historic “pueblo” or “territorial” styles. And thus we have it – “the most charming place” in the United States.

When you drive into Santa Fe, there is no skyline. There is no grand entrance to the oldest and most charming city in the US. You could easily continue down I-25 and never know a thing about its charm. Just another little town in New Mexico, one the least populated states in our nation. You cannot do that with San Francisco! San Francisco demands an applause! Its entrance is grand, grand and beautiful. Whether you’re entering over the Bay Bridge or the Golden Gate Bridge, for those few minutes you’re on them, it feels like flying. I’ve often asked myself how a man-made structure can be so beautiful?

When The Golden Gate Bridge was completed in 1937, it was the longest suspension bridge span in the world. It has become one of the most internationally recognized symbols of San Francisco, California, and of the United States and has been declared one of the modern Wonders of the World. The Golden Gate Bridge is possibly the most beautiful bridge in the world, not to mention the most photographed. I myself take absolutely any opportunity I get to capture images of this world-famous wonder, even if it is just with my cell phone, as I look up above my head at its massive, valentine-red colored suspension cables.

The Bay Bridge offers a spectacular view of The City By The Bay. The sun sparkles on the Bay and off of the beautiful buildings that create San Francisco’s unique and well-known skyline. As you enter the city, you are welcomed to the most diverse city in our nation. Welcome to my city of dreams. I wondered how all of the buildings came to be placed where

they are. It's as if a puzzle was continually being pieced together. The end result was building on top of building, creating districts and neighborhoods full of character. Like a patchwork quilt, piece by piece added over time.

San Francisco is also known for its Victorian architecture, the most famous being "The Painted Ladies." The term Painted Ladies has been used to describe groups of colorful Victorian houses. There are neighborhood after neighborhood full of beautiful, Victorian houses. Some are now apartment buildings and businesses. I cannot think of a thing more distant from the adobe-styled homes of Santa Fe. There is no comparison of the unique light we have here in Santa Fe with the light of sunrise and sunset in San Francisco. Unless you're looking from a distance at the city, it seems to get lost in the design and color. I am routinely stopped by my sub-conscious to observe the way the sun is hitting the front of an adobe. I study with admiration.

San Francisco and Santa Fe are without a doubt, two of the most visited cities in the United States. When visiting one of these two cities, you are looking for a certain feel and most definitely, a certain kind of experience. The tourists that travel to Santa Fe come here and tell me that they feel a deep connection with its land. They talk of childhood experiences and memories. They come here specifically for Indian Market weekend and buy thousands of dollars-worth of Santa Fe's phenomenal silver and turquoise jewelry. Santa Fe is home to some of the country's finest jewelry makers. Many Texans come here for a mini-escape. Even folks from Maryland take a weekend getaway to Santa Fe! (I hear Southwest Airlines offers cheap deals on airfare). People are seeking a feeling of culture here in Santa Fe. They come to reconnect with the land, maybe to themselves. It's almost as if they hang their "other" selves in the closet for a bit and embody a Westerner while they're here. They try to handle our chile but often request it on the side.

San Francisco is a place you go for not only its history, dynamic culture, world of food, amazing music and festivals, you go there for adventure. You go there to almost "lose" yourself for a bit. It's almost like "what happens in SE, stays in SE," with a more open and free-loving twist. It is a place where you are easily accepted and not looked upon as crazy if you go out of your house with face-paint on and a long, purple furry jacket. People assume that you must be on your way to a show, or a party held in Golden Gate Park.

I can recognize myself as a person from a different planet while living in San Francisco. I believe I embodied the vibe of the city while I was there. I was also at a very different place in my life. Some of it was amazing and some of my experiences I don't remember as fondly. I now embody a softer version of my old ways, which Santa Fe supports. I often feel myself moving faster than the city does and quickly remind myself of

where I am. I like to think of this as a break, a break from the “big” world out there. It’s a more simple spin on life being in Santa Fe. In some ways a little too simple for a girl like me. I am looking forward to mapping out my future including a balance of both worlds. I’m hoping to align these two planets to create adventure, opportunity, excitement and diversity in my life. I do believe that that comes from a combination of who you are and where you live. San Francisco could be a bit much for me now. Luckily, I have the personal experience from the wonderful cities of San Francisco and Santa Fe to help guide me. I feel full of information and rich in culture. For now, I will quietly embrace my much-needed rest and reflection in the fresh air at 7,260 feet high, gazing out at “The Land of Enchantment.” I am truly blessed.

Personal Essay

Honorable Mention

Grace Lucero

Precious Stone

My windshield wipers squeaked rapidly as they swept raindrops off of my windshield. I continued on driving, unaware of my destination and oblivious to the passage of time. All I knew was that I would be leaving once and for all. I began falling asleep at the wheel so I decided to pull over and call it a night, I took my next left, crossing an orange cattle guard.

I awoke the next morning to the sound of pounding on my window. Anxiously, I looked out to see what was happening. I recognized my cousin Billy.

“Billy,” I said opening the door and tackling him to the ground.

“You look hung over or something, what the hell’s wrong with you?” he said.

“I left him, I had to,” I cried.

“Come on, I’ll make you some breakfast,” he said in a disappointed tone. I followed him to the house passing cattle along the way. They gawked at me, and I yelled at them. “Stupid cows, get lost!!”

As I walked into the house, I felt the strong presence of my grandfather, and the hair on my forearms stood up straight. Tiny butterflies gracefully flew around in my stomach. I remembered having that same feeling every time I heard of my grandfather’s arrival. He’d been gone seven years, and the place still reeked of old spice and burnt tortilla. I sat on his chair, and it took me back to a wonderful time in my life, a time when I saw the world as a beautiful and safe place. I remembered how he would rock me to sleep on that chair and how comfortable and secure I felt when he was around.

“I told you not to marry that son of a bitch. Now come and eat your breakfast,” Billy shouted. I walked into the kitchen and grabbed a cup, and poured myself some coffee. I sat at the table while Billy placed a plate right in front of me.

“It’s strange that I ended up here because I didn’t even know where I was going,” I said, piling scrambled eggs on my plate.

“Well it’s a good thing you’re here cuz God only knows what happens to women who sleep in their truck,” he yelled. I picked up my spoon and shoveled some hash browns with red chile into my mouth.

After breakfast I washed the dishes and took a walk to clear my head. I slowly inhaled the scent of pine and exhaled looking up into the clouds so bright. All that I could hear was my feet as they scraped themselves across the dirt.

“Why God? Why me?” I shouted. “Answer me damn it, answer me!” I begged, falling to my knees. “Answer meeee!!!”

In the distance ahead I could see our family’s private chapel and rushed inside. Walking in I respectfully kneeled in front of the altar closing my eyes, bowing my head, silently praying. “Forgive me father, it’s just I don’t know what to do! Grandma and grandpa made life look so easy!” Tears came rolling down my face and I did nothing to stop them. I began feeling better, I pushed myself up with the palms of my hands and stood up. As I opened my eyes, I found a stone on the floor in front of me. I kneeled down to carefully pick it up and discovered that it was a perfect shaped heart, smooth on one side and rough on the other. I rubbed my thumb across it several times.

Confusion and anger entered my soul like never before and a feeling of hopelessness carried consumed my entire being. I wanted an answer not some stupid rock!!!

Back at the house and depressed, I began peeling potatoes for supper. I turned on the old record player that grandpa used to play, so that he could twirl me and grandma around the kitchen. For some odd reason, I remembered the time grandpa tried to cheer me up after I fell out of the tree house. Billy was the one who called grandpa, while my cousins laughed hysterically. As soon as they heard grandpa coming, they ran like the cowards they were. Grandpa carried me in the house saying, “How’d you get to be so strong and beautiful, my princess.” I remembered the fear I experienced thinking that my leg was broken, and I wondered what it would be like to be a cripple. I sulked for a moment, and then said “I’m not strong.”

“You sure are, and don’t ever let anyone take that away from you,” he said. I began rinsing the potatoes and I heard Billy’s voice.

“Khoo coo coo coo!! Khoo coo khoo coo,” Billy called as he walked into the kitchen.

“You heard me screaming didn’t you?” I said, ashamed and defensively.

“Uha, I think everyone in the entire state heard you. Ha ha ha. I brought some Tequila, a margarita’d probably do you good.”

“Hey, remember when we were kids, and I fell out of the tree house?” I said.

“Yeah, why?”

“Grandpa knew what he was doing when he said that I was strong.” Billy had a puzzled look on his face. So I explained.

“Grandpa wanted to prepare me for life’s challenges.” I reached into my pocket and pulled out the rock to show Billy. As I looked at the rock I realized its significance.

“It signifies strength and love, the two necessities grandpa always said we must carry with us in this life.”

My flight to the ranch takes me back to a special time in my life, a time that was spent with my grandfather. The stone has become my security blanket, and I still keep it in my pocket today.

Fiction Winner

Michael Armer

The Battle of the Unseen Realm

He was not a repulsive man. Indeed, he was considered by the naive to be tragically ravishing. No one would see him as such if they truly knew him, for he had his flaws. For instance, his silence: he never spoke a word to any human. To humans, no word he spoke, but he had a raven. It was a raven unlike any other. It was to this and one other alone that he spoke.

The raven was sizable and ominous. It knew things no man ever knew. It was neither male nor female, for it was immortal—immortal, that is, not quite dead, but less than alive. None could have said that it was so, but all knew. Everyone sensed its presence; they felt its damnation.

The raven was many things to the man. Many roles, many purposes it served. It had served the man for a long time, and it did things that the strongest heart would shudder to hear of. Yet all of its exploits were directed toward the same goal: to gradually, by degrees, rend asunder the heart of the one they loved—the only other soul to whom the man spoke.

They loved the same, the man and his raven. They loved him greatly. Many have made the mistake of saying the man had raised him, for he and the raven had taught the beloved many things he needed to know in order to live. Nevertheless, their greatest desire was to destroy him. By destroying him, they would prove their might. They would make every man and beast in every crevice of this pathetic earth fear them; control was their twisted and vile life ambition. Even they knew it was a morbid reality; even they felt grief that this was their chief end. It is impossible to explain, but it was so.

They have nearly accomplished their goal. Yes, their joy is contagious, they are elated that they have come this far and that the end is near! Even now they are working to finish. Always are they vigilant; they never close their eyes. They work so that one day they may rest. They work so hard, so relentlessly, so they may be relieved from their anguish. All the while, they suffer, for the one they love resists them. He knows them not, but he feels them work against him, and he fights them. They are two spirits: the man and the raven as one, and the one they love as the other, and they fight in realms unseen to the human eye. They fight until the death. And yet the man and his raven mourn for the sake of the one they afflict. They long for their work to be finished, for they have toiled for seventeen dark, unhappy years.

First, they showed the beloved how to fear. They put his life in

danger, they put the lives of those he loved in danger, and they showed him many things that could afflict him. He feared those things. He feared greatly, but he fought. He ran to elders for consolation. The elders gave him tools to repel what he could not see. Yes, the man and the raven taught him how to fear, but their beloved learned how to overcome fear.

Second, they showed him how to hate. They planted seeds of discontent in his heart, and they grew. He blamed everyone but himself for his trials. He hated the things that happened to him. He hated people. He hated actions and their consequences. He hated life itself. They taught him how to hate, but he fought once more. He went to higher wisdom for help, and he learned how to forgive. Since he learned to forgive, he learned once more how to love. Yes, they taught him how to hate, but he defeated his own hate with love.

Finally, they taught him how to doubt. They showed him that he could not trust many things in his life. He listened to them eagerly, and he learned willingly, though he could not know he was being deceived. He doubted everything, including the higher wisdom that had saved him so many times before. He doubted the higher wisdom so it could not show him how to trust. Then he doubted people. He doubted that anyone really loved him, and he could not bring himself to trust others with his secrets. He doubted Love. He wondered whether loving anything was worth the adversity he was suffering. Most of all, he doubted himself. The man and the raven told him he was weak, and he believed them. They told him he should not exist, and he believed them. Yes, he embraced the idea that he should not exist. It soon became everything he lived for. When he doubted himself, he remembered how to hate. When he hated himself, he remembered how to fear. The man and the raven rejoiced, for now they were in control. They could penetrate his defenses, and behold, it was only a matter of time. They would soon be able to finish their work.

On a desolate night, they visited him. They were driven by their purpose. They were motivated by their malice—control was within their grasp. The beloved was weak. He had run out of hope, he had nothing to cling to. He wanted nothing more than for his tribulation to end. He knew not what to do, so he doubted, he hated, and he feared. Then they were there, and they deceived him. They seemed to give him hope, though they were only capable of despair. They seemed to offer him rest, though they knew they could only offer suffering. They offered him a solution. When there was nothing left for him, they gave him a way out. The final lesson they taught him was how to love pain. They taught him how to hurt himself to distract his mind of the things he hated. He learned well. Yes, this lesson he learned the best of all. He loved pain, he valued it above all else. He sought refuge in pain, he looked for respite, and he received it. He did not care what it did to him. He longed for the

path away from his troubles. He could not see anything else.

They knew it would not be difficult to finish. They had laid the final foundation. They left him for a time, so that he would continue to weaken. All they had to do was wait until he grew to hate himself yet again. Then they would strike again. They would deceive him with their last, cruelly conceived solution, and their work would be finished. All was right in the world.

And so now they stand on the unseen realm. The beloved finally knows them. He sees them and quakes. He perceives them and reveres their supremacy. They face each other, searching each other's eyes. Each is imploring the other for mercy, but alas! It cannot be given. One must prevail. There is no other way. They wait until the time is right. The man stands tall. His eyes are a deep scarlet, almost black, for he has seen the hideous creature that is Hate itself. His face is pale as the moon, for he feels no compassion; his heart is cold. His hair is dark as midnight, like the secrets that he forces the beloved to protect. The raven is posted on his shoulder, calm, intelligent, and strong. It waits for his command, eager to finish the work. The beloved stands alone. There is no one to protect him, and though he is silent, he begs for mercy—or that the man is swift in his action. Darkness—not the lack of light, but the absence of hope—surrounds him, yes; it even smothers his heart like a fog blots out mountains from existence. He desires no more than to understand the man's and the raven's hearts. He beseeches the night with the groaning that foreshadows death, “Why me? Why must I suffer?” Perhaps if he understood he could drive them out.

Fiction Runner-Up

Amanda Fresquez

Healing From True Love

Days dawned to fill her skies with clouds to make the heart believe she will never feel the depth of the soul to whom she loved. She bled tears of death for her life no longer had meaning. She breathed every breath hoping it would be her last. Her selfish desires only brought more pain and evil. Not one living creature can obtain enough knowledge as to why love attacked her so painfully. Love shall be as a flower blooming on a spring day, not of a burning flame slowly eating away at the flesh.

Her bedroom windows open only to soak away at the curtains and still no reaction. As the lightening brightens the black sky and the thunder roars to put fear in all the servants eyes, all began to believe it must be the end of the world. Lights go out and she stays still staring away in silence. The Yelling from the other side of the locked door kept the woman at ease. She has nothing and wants nothing more.

Incapable of hunger, her skin had formed against her bones more so as the days past on. Her pale face disappeared with the white silk sheets and her big, blue eyes turned as red as tomatoes from exhaustion. She lied in bed, but couldn't shut the eyes of the lost soul. Weeks flew by with no food or water and she cared no longer of the next step that awaited her weak body.

Waiting away on her death bed, she slowly shuts her eyes from the pain that lied deep within her chest. Not wanting to feel the heartache, she acts out the desire of a lonely child which craved the end of a fever. She gags her way knowing that once the illness was over that would be the end of suffering. Dry heaves is what she got, but she didn't want to stop there. Her breaths were getting shorter and tears flew down her cheeks like rain. She sat up as her eyes lost sight to the color in the room. She falls hitting her bony face against the hard wooden floor. It got silent. All she can hear was her heart thumping against her rib cage. She began to feel numb all over her body and the taste of her salty blood filled her mouth. She gasps for air as she reaches out for the hand she once believed was there. Is it too late? For the first time in months she weeps like a baby searching for her mother. She lies on the floor crying with anger and agitation.

"Oh God!" she cries out and then wonders off in disbelief. Lying on the icy cold floor, this woman awaits her time of death. A whisper joins the loud silence of her plugged ears, but she could not make out what they were saying. Fear follows her next reaction. "Who's there?" She hears laughter and begins to shiver with fear! "Oh God Help me!"

“Don’t do that,” the voices yell out!

She screams out, “I know you’re there! All the times I called out to you with no response I’m willing to overlook! I’m scared and I’m cold! I have nothing, but a friend once told me when I have nothing else to give and nobody left to love me, not even then will you leave me nor forsake me.” The screeching from the demons grew with rage and the woman’s ears opened up for her to hear the thunder storm coming from her open windows. She finds her way to her knees with the little strength she built up from her worn out muscles and cries out hysterically as she slowly picks up her shaking hands to beg for forgiveness. Blood falls down from her mouth overflowing like water from the brink of a damn. The louder she prayed the more anger was yelled out by the demons. The ambrosia of healing filled her nose as she began to feel hope. She lost the fear on her way to recovery and came to realization that the only way to go when hitting rock bottom is up.

‘I can do this! I can make it through!’

“Jesus!” The woman cries out and the little devils vanish with horror. The woman feels free from sin, free from the evil that hardened her heart to true love: Jesus!

There was no choice but to laugh loudly with such joy. The pale color in her face disappears with the light of God. Such energy to life feels her soul and she gets up to run out of the bedroom. In every step she took toward the gateway to fresh air, this woman felt stronger. She pushes the double doors to her old garden and the clouds stop the rain only to vanish from the clear blue sky. The servants run outside in confusion as to what just happened that made this girl capable of movement much less enchantment. Their expression of mystification changes to enthusiasm as they notice the extreme storm had stopped.

The young woman cries out with such faith, “I can do all things! I can do all things!” She falls to her knees crying with such passion. One of the servants runs to assist her onto her feet, but she refuses to get up. “What’s going on? Are you okay?” She looks at the servant with such innocence, “I can do ALL things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Fiction Honorable Mention

Susan Dugan

70%

70% of his bones were broken in the fall. He was still alive but shattered physically and emotionally. Relatives said, “Thank God he’s a baby, so he won’t remember.” I say, “He will always remember.” I say, the fall will be imprinted on each and every cell of his tiny body for a lifetime. The healed fractures will be evident in an x-ray or MRI. They will be underlying all his living days. His fears will be touched by them; his behavior will be predicated upon them. In a way, his life will be built on a broken foundation. I believe even before we are born, we know if we were wanted, loved and cherished. We sense these things in the womb. We know if we are coming into a happy world or a sad world. I use the word “sad” to include all the meanings it infers.

On December 29, 1983 James George Symington arrived between the legs of Georgia LaChappell to the arms of Jimmy Symington, an 18-year old boy from Erie, PA. Georgia was 15, scared and screaming. Jimmy was inebriated from a night of celebrating or avoidance. I’d call it avoidance. He hadn’t seen Georgia for 9 months. They met at a friend’s party and got friendlier in the friend’s bathroom. This baby was a result of that friendliness. Georgia hadn’t laid eyes on Jimmy since that night and never had a chance to tell him he was to be a daddy.

And a daddy he was. At first, Jimmy was amused with the baby boy. People said he looked like Jimmy. Jimmy liked that until the baby would cry. And baby James did cry. He cried night and day. He was a fussy baby, beautiful, tiny but difficult. I think he felt the stress and fears from his little mom, Georgia. I bet he knew things weren’t looking so good for him and mommy. Within weeks of James’ arrival, on a bus trip to St. Mary’s Hospital in upstate, in the cold night air of Troy, NY, his father lost interest in the infant. He stopped coming by, he stopped looking for sex from Georgia and he walked away from their world - until Thanksgiving Eve 1985. That night Jimmy showed up at Georgia’s sister’s apartment in the smelly high-rise by the Hudson River. Jimmy was daddy again. He held James and talked baby talk to him. He swung him by the arms as the toddler squealed with delight. Jimmy wanted to be a family now; he wanted to have some turkey and gravy. He wanted some lov’n. Georgia was quiet, unresponsive, nonplus. Her sister Jenny was leery,

almost to the hostile. She called Jimmy, “Daddy Stranger.” She laughed at him as he spouted off about his job floor managing at the Watervliet Arsenal on Broadway. Jenny asked questions. “What’s a floor manager? Some jerk who manages the floors,” she quipped. Jimmy was insulted. He got defensive, started using the “f” word. Georgia got quieter. So did the baby. Jenny said it takes a big man to swear and act like a child. Jimmy pushed the table a few feet. Jenny yelled back, “Wow, what a big daddy.” Jimmy pushed Jenny; she laughed in his face. He pushed Georgia who was standing by James, holding his hand. Jimmy grabbed James; pulled his arms hard, started dragging him around the room. Jenny stopped taunting him. Said he should go. “Get the hell out.” “Stay away from us. I’ll call the police.” Jimmy started kicking her as he pulled James’ little arms. Jenny tried to grab the baby. Jimmy pushed her to the window, banged her head on the glass. Jenny forced the window up and yelled to the street, “Police, help, help!” She shoved Jimmy at the window – he wouldn’t let go of the baby. Jenny used her body and pushed as hard as she could. Jimmy bent, tipped, fell through the opening dragging the baby with him. They both fell to the pavement to the sounds of a hideous scream from above. Jenny looked down. All she saw was James on his side, making small baby cries to the street. She ran down the back stairs behind Georgia to the baby. People gathered, cars made their noise, sirens wailed. The baby was moving his hand. There was lots of blood, and it was daddy blood. **A hundred percent** of daddy’s bones, body, brain and organs were broken.

Academic Essay Winner

Shari Brown

Flannery O'Connor: Religion and Faith in “A Good Man is Hard to Find”

Flannery O'Connor is by definition a Southern writer and by admission a devout Catholic. Her brief life and relatively small body of work are riddled with Christian tenets, yet she manages to avoid saturating her writing in religious dogma. In her short story, “A Good Man is Hard to Find”, O'Connor seamlessly blends themes ubiquitous in all her work: comedy, religion, and faith to create a stark and gruesome reality. Even still, her writing manages to satisfy both literary critics and the religious community alike. Flannery O'Connor's abiding voice ensures that she will remain an unprecedented and truly unclassifiable writer.

Born March 25, 1925 to a long line of southern Roman Catholics, Mary Flannery O'Connor attended grammar through high school in traditional Catholic learning institutions. When Flannery was twelve, the O'Connor family relocated briefly from their hometown of Savannah, Georgia to Atlanta, and finally to Milledgeville. Not long after their move, Flannery's father was diagnosed with lupus and died shortly after. Flannery O'Connor attended the Georgia College for Women, where she wrote for and later edited the college newspaper, *The Corinthian*. She also contributed satiric cartoons for *The Colonnade*, another college paper (Balée 24). Upon graduating, O'Connor went on to attend Iowa State's prestigious Writer's Workshop. After spending a short time at Yaddo, an artist's colony in New York, and then with friends in Connecticut, O'Connor was diagnosed with lupus, the same disease that killed her father. Forced back South, Flannery O'Connor spent her remaining years on the family farm, Andalusia, in Milledgeville with her mother. Her writing continued to flourish until her death on August 3, 1964.

O'Connor repeatedly dismissed herself as an intellectual. She would even advise her friends to be wary of such “interleckchules,” as she called them. In a correspondence to a fellow writer, Granville Hicks, she wrote, “I'm not an intellectual and have a horror of making an idiot of myself with abstract statements and theories” (Coles 111). She had an aversion towards the “thinking people” of the day. Critics that over-analyzed the natural and metaphysical world, as well as her writings, often overlooked the real underpinnings in her work. In a letter to her friend she wrote, “I do hope that you will get over the kind of thinking that sees in every door handle a phallic symbol and that ascribes such intentions to

those who have other fish to fry . . . My Lord, Billy, recover your simplicity. You ain't in Manhattan. Don't inflict that stuff on the poor students there; they deserve better"(Coles 117). Flannery O'Connor identifies with the Catholic theologian Blaise Pascal and agrees that one should believe in the "God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and not of the philosophers and scholars "(Coles 112).

Flannery O'Connor's writing was influenced both by the South in which she lived and her Catholic lifestyle. She said, "I write the way I do because (not though) I am a Catholic. This is a fact and nothing covers it like a bald statement" (Ellsberg 75). Her foremost concern is the apathy of human beings towards their religious duties. Her personal life was also a testament to these values. While living with her close friends the Fitzgeralds, her firm commitment to the Catholic Church was never compromised and they did not miss a day driving Flannery into town for daily mass (Galloway). O'Connor's characters are often placed in situations that allow them the opportunity to receive grace, thus reaffirming their faith in God. Faith is a prime element in her writing and she takes pride in involving the reader in the character's acceptance or rejection of God. In a letter, Flannery O'Connor explained, "All my stories are about the action of grace on a character who is not very willing to support it" (Coles 155). O'Connor believed that humans naturally resist grace because the nature of grace is to transform the self and change is a painful thing for humans to endure (Renner). In correspondence to a friend who had decided upon leaving the Church, O'Connor wrote, "Faith is a gift, but the will has a great deal to do with it" (Ellsberg 156).

Passing judgment based only on Flannery O'Connor's religious views, one might assume her work to be preachy and Puritanical. However, there is a comical undercurrent in her writing that is clearly visible in her short story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find." In the first half of the story, O'Connor characterizes the grandmother, like she would one of her cartoons for *The Colonnade*. She is a caricature of the idyllic Southern lady, wearing a straw hat adorned with violets, a navy and white polka dot dress with lace trim around the collar and cuffs, white cotton gloves, and purple violets pinned at her neck. Compared to her son Bailey, in a Hawaiian button up, and her daughter-in-law in simple slacks and a headkerchief, the grandmother believes "anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady" (O'Connor 227). In the car ride to Florida, she points out a "cute little pickaninny" standing in the doorway of a run down shack and remarks at how picturesque the sight is: "Wouldn't that make a picture, now? . . . If I could paint, I'd paint that picture" (228). The grandmother is a cliché. She reminds us of an old lady that we have become familiar with, often portrayed in popular culture as oblivious but of no major harm to anyone. Later when the grandmother

and Red Sam are discussing “better times” in the diner, outside the children are watching a monkey stuck up in a chinaberry tree, carefully picking fleas off its body and eating them. This is an exemplary illustration of the type of satire so frequently present in Flannery O’Connor’s work. For all the gentility the grandmother thinks she possesses, O’Connor is inadvertently comparing her to the monkey, satisfying himself to a meal of fleas. The grandmother’s views of reality are immensely distorted and she is blind to her self-righteousness and piety. She is naïve to the irony that she is actually the diametric of what she strives to portray in her empty actions of prim politeness.

Opposite on the spectrum is *The Misfit*, the outlaw of the story. We are introduced to him in the first paragraph when the grandmother refers to the newspaper article informing the public that the convict is on the loose. We officially encounter *The Misfit* halfway through the story, after the family’s car has been violently hurled into a ditch. Based upon *The Misfit*’s actions, we could easily view him as an existential nihilist; his killings of the family have no reason and are executed without remorse. In response to the grandmother’s questioning of why he doesn’t pray (and ask forgiveness), *The Misfit* replies, “I found out the crime don’t matter. You can do one thing or you can do another, kill a man or take a tire off his car, because sooner or later you’re going to forget what it was you done and just be punished for it” (O’Connor 235). Because this is a religious work of fiction, we know that Flannery O’Connor does not mean for this statement to be taken as an existentialist assumption. In fact, *The Misfit*’s words mirror Flannery O’Connor’s own views on sin: “Sin is sin whether it is committed by Pope, bishops, priests, or lay people . . .” (Ellsberg 136).

Throughout their dialogue together, the grandmother repeatedly tries to convince *The Misfit* to turn from his deviant ways and recognize his “good blood.” Although the grandmother talks a good talk, O’Connor uses *The Misfit* to further reveal the extent to which her life has been controlled by religious dogma. *The Misfit* admits that he has done wrong, but his actions do not feel wrong to him; He enjoys these deviant acts and chooses this life for himself. (Renner) Although he consciously makes these choices, *The Misfit* is not an assured person. He does not remember his wrongdoings which put him in jail: “I call myself *The Misfit*,” he said, “because I can’t make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment” (O’Connor 235). Furthermore, he shows uncertainty by not being able to commit himself to believing in Jesus: “I wisht I had of been there,” he said, hitting the ground with his fist. “It ain’t right I wasn’t there because if I had of been there I would of known. Listen lady,” he said in a high voice, “if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn’t be like I am now” (236). He admits that if he had been able to witness Jesus’ resurrection, he would not be the criminal he is. *The Misfit* is, ultimately,

unwilling to accept faith. He is neither a nihilist nor a moralist. He recognizes that grace does subsist but chooses not to accept it (Galloway). We come to realize that this derelict antagonist actually understands more about original sin and right and wrong than the grandmother ever has.

Like many of O'Connor's stories, this one too ends in violence. Her use of violence is a tool used to strengthen the dramatic effect of imposing grace on the protagonist. When the grandmother reaches out her hand to touch her adversary, The Misfit becomes frantic and shoots her three times in chest. He then utters the most memorable line in the story: "She would have been a good woman, if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life" (O'Connor 236). For the grandmother, it took death for her to recognize God's divinity and grace. It was not until her final judgment hour, seconds from being shot, that she realized the implications of her pseudo-Christian lifestyle. Even the Misfit, hardly knowing her, recognizes the grandmother as a fundamentalist charlatan, but that she has the potential for good just as he does (Renner). The Misfit identifies the grandmother's distorted ideology and metaphorically implies that her potential for good would have been limitless, only if the threat of imminent death loomed over her as a staunch reminder to "be good or else."

Since 1955, when "A Good Man is Hard to Find" was first published as one in a collection of short stories, there has been much discussion over the true meaning of the story. The answer lies at the poignant moment when the grandmother's head clears and she reaches out to touch The Misfit on the shoulder. As she does this she exclaims, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" (O'Connor 236). It has been suggested that the grandmother has simply become confused and mistook The Misfit for her son Bailey, since at this point The Misfit is now dressed in Bailey's own shirt (Walters 31). However, I believe this gesture provides us with a deeper meaning than that. In this moment the grandmother humbly recognizes that by some ambiguous nature both her and her enemy are connected. She forfeits all judgment and sees the wayward Misfit as a fellow child of God. The grandmother is finally ready to accept her fate and God's abounding grace.

Flannery O'Connor's unerring views on religion provide the backbone for this violent yet thoughtful short story. In her introduction to "A Memoir of Mary Ann" she wrote, "Most of us have learned to be dispassionate about evil . . . But good is another matter. Few have stared at that long enough to accept the fact that its face too is grotesque, that in us the good is something under construction" (Ellsberg 142). The grandmother is sneaky, selfish, and cowardly and is by no means an ideally virtuous character. What she is though is human. Although we are quick to judge her character, we have all known someone like her, or perhaps are like her ourselves. If we let ourselves, we can identify with her weaknesses. Who

would not strive towards the straight and narrow if faced with impending death? O'Connor makes the point that although the grandmother was not untarnished, she ultimately redeemed herself and achieved a state of grace at the high cost of her life.

On the surface, one could easily view Flannery O'Connor as simple and label her as conventional, but a closer look reveals a more complicated woman. She was a devout Roman Catholic in a time when many of her contemporaries were anything but Christian. She maintained a keen and often witty understanding of the world and herself up until her untimely death; Above all she remains a tremendous and unclassifiable writer as shown in her powerful work "A Good Man is Hard to Find." Naturally, no one can give justice to her writing better than she and O'Connor wrote in one of her many letters: "When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal ways of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock — to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the blind you draw large and startling figures" (Walters 32).

Works Cited

- Balée, Susan. *Flannery O'Connor: Literary Prophet of the South*. New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1995. Print.
- Coles, Robert. *Flannery O'Connor's South*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980. Print.
- Ellsberg, Robert, ed. *Flannery O'Connor: Spiritual Writings*. New York: Orbis Books, 2003. Print.
- Galloway, Patrick. "The Dark Side of the Cross: Flannery O'Connor's Short Fiction." *Books and Blog by Patrick Galloway*. 2006. Web. 8 April. 2010.
- O'Connor, Flannery. "A Good Man is Hard to Find." *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing*. 6th ed. Kennedy, X.J. and Dana Gioia. Boston: Longman, 2010. 226-236. Print.
- Renner, Stanley. "Secular meaning in 'A Good Man is Hard to Find.'" *College Literature* 9.2 (1982): 123-132. *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Janet Witalec. Vol. 132. Detroit: Gale, 2003. From *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 6 April. 2010.
- Walters, Dorothy. *Flannery O'Connor*. Ed. Sylvia E. Bowman. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1973. Print.

Academic Essay

Runner-Up

Frances Boyd

Fear: Transforming Our Values

The massive destruction at the center of New York City rocked the foundation of America. The event was 9/11 in 2001 when terrorist invaded America and caused the deaths of 2,976 people in the World Trade Center. The transformation of many values in America began this day. People started changing because of fear. This was significant for a nation whose building blocks came in part from its welcome to the world. Emma Lazarus, in her poem, "The New Colossus," embodied America when she stated, "Give me your poor/ Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" (line2-3). This welcoming message is on the Statue of Liberty. Lady Liberty sits in New York harbor where immigrants have entered this country for over a century. Now, the United States government is building a wall on the United States and Mexico border to keep out immigrants. This is about fear from the 9/11 attack. Will we as a nation of immigrants, let the terrorist use fear to transform our souls? Will fear transforming our values that have been the principles that our nation was built on?

The wall on the United States and Mexican border symbolizes the need to do something to protect ourselves, even if it does not address the real issue. In "Our Wall," Charles Bowden's view is that "Walls are curious statement of human needs" (63). After 9/11 our country's need to be safe was foremost in people's minds. The issue of immigrants crossing illegally into the United States from Mexico began years ago, but after 9/11 came the fear of terrorists. Then came the demand for the wall. This is the reason Dan Duley, who lives on the Arizona border by the wall, gives in "Our Wall" when he is asked about its existence. He states his fears, and they include. "We're being invaded. They've taken away our jobs, our security" (66).

This whole concept of a wall on our border with Mexico to keep out illegal immigrants is unrealistic. In Charles Bowden's essay "Our Wall," Bowden maintains that

They all work for a while; until human appetites or sheer numbers overwhelm them. You have the Maginot Line, a series of connected forts built by France after World War I to keep the German army from invading. It was a success, except for one flaw: The troops of the Third Reich simply went around its northwestern

end and invaded France through the Netherlands and Belgium (64). The fear driving us to build the wall on the United States and Mexico border harms us more than it helps us to be safe. Think about the wall that Israel has built on its border with Palestine. The result has not made Israel safer. It has caused more hostility between the two states.

The *Critical Thinking* section of “The New World Reader” quotes Harold Hongju Koh, Our enemies in this war are out to destroy our society precisely because it is open, tolerant, pluralistic and democratic. In its place, they seek to promote one that is closed, vengeful, repressive and absolutist. To secure genuine victory, we must make sure that they fail, not just in their assault on our safety but also in their challenge to our most fundamental values (9).

Koh is stating that terrorists are trying to destroy our principles and beliefs at our core. Watching the world stage play out one feels we may be losing this war because we are shifting in our values.

After 9/11 our government began its war on terror. The problem was understanding this new type of warfare. We were ill prepared from the start. Those in charge of making the important decisions seem to have mixed messages. Fear lead us, for the first time in our history, to initiate a pre-emptive war. The facts that are coming out today sadly show that most of the reasons given were fabricated intelligence and misrepresented facts. As stated in “The Importance of Counterterrorism in the Twenty-First Century,” an article by Peter Pawlick, and Chuck Goodwin, “Attempting to connect Iraq with al-Qaeda and possession of weapons of mass destructions (WMD), the Bush Administration initiated a pre-emptive war. To date, no evidence has been found to support either claim” (2). This pre-emptive war has cost not just lives, but for America, the things that made us a country of high principle and honor.

The views that the rest of the world have about how we have behaved after 9/11, give an idea of how fear drove the U.S to make poor choices. Our closest allies have questions about those choices that we made. *The Week*, in a paraphrase from the London Guardian, makes clear how our country has lost its creditability. “Bush’s real legacy, though, is how he eroded America’s principles.....He’d like to be seen as a noble patriot, but he ‘profoundly ill-served America’ by authorizing torture, setting up secret prisons and an extra-legal gulag at Guantanamo Bay, and abandoning ‘the rule of law.’ The damage he did to America’s image abroad will take a generation to repair”(5). One of the most important values that we as a country gave the world was that after World War II, we created the Geneva Conventions that protected prisoners of war from torture; now fear has made us think it permissible to torture. If we continue our present course we will have no real credibility in the rest of the world. We have become hypocrites, in what we say and what we do.

It was fear that caused the passing of laws which are so un-American. It's hard to believe a nation could so easily change beliefs that are at its very foundation. But with eyes wide open we let the right wing government of George W. Bush enact some of the most dangerous laws ever created in our country. The following statement is found in "Effects of Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Threat from Terrorism on Restriction of Civil Liberties" by J. Christopher Cohrs, et al.

Shortly after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, laws were passed that restrict civil liberties. For example, in the United States the USA PATRIOT ACT, passed on October 26, 2001, facilitates surveillance and eavesdropping of political organizations, allows the Federal Bureau of Investigation to access private medical, financial, library, and student records without probable cause of crime, and permits non-citizens to be jailed on mere suspicion and without meaningful judicial review (Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy 263).

Welcome to the new America. This means we've lost most of our rights such as individual freedom, privacy, and protection from arrest and detention. This law should truly scare any American. But because of fear there are still people who believe this is a necessary evil we must learn to live with. That's how fear can destroy our country; that's how the terrorist will defeat us.

The article "War on Terrorism: An Overview," by Rich, A.K.

Moreno-Riano, Gerson makes a clear point:

Many critics claim that the blow inflicted to the civil liberties of Americans as a result of the United States ant-terror legislation has been too high a price to pay for curbing the spread of terrorism. In addition to the extensive wiretapping conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) various arms of the American government have conducted questionable Interrogations of terror suspects throughout the world (1).

Ask yourself why was this law called the Patriot Act? It was at that time that Mr. Bush said, "You are either with us or you are against us". This phrase conveyed the idea that if the public disagreed they were not being patriotic. What is really amazing is that a large part of the population went along with this idea. The general public did not even notice how this law threatened civil rights such as individual freedom, privacy and opened up the possibility of any one's arrest and detention. These laws were the beginning of an environment from which torture was born. Fear can lead a nation down a road where it's possible for good men and women to give into excuses that allow horrors to be done in their names.

This land is the supposed home of the brave, the land of liberty and justice for all. However we have let fear drive us to give up some of

our freedoms and liberties. Worse, we have let fear change our code of honor by allowing torture. Losing our code of honor causes a larger concern. Our code of honor is not governed by laws as much as by conscience, which makes it a reflection of higher values. So in the name of fear we have let our nation be transformed into an America that much of the world does not recognize.

Academic Essay

Honorable Mention

Eric Reinach

Elements of the Iconic in *Bicycle Thieves*

While I watch Vittoria DeSica's *Bicycle Thieves* a pronounced déjà vu occurs, the images and expressions are so archetypal that I feel a pull, a definite sense of having seen the faces and scenes before. In writing this essay I hope to identify some of the reasons for this sensation, and address why a film deeply rooted in a specific setting (Rome, Italy, 1948) manages to transcend that time and place to speak so profoundly to a modern audience.

As discussed in our class lecture, Italian Neo-Realism was the product of the nine years immediately following the Second World War. DeSica's direction, out of both aim and necessity, brought together many issues of the Italian political and social climate at the time. After the War social concerns remained turbulent, the wake of Fascist rule and the rise of Stalinist Russia loomed over an uncertain future. Similar issues being faced all over Europe and the Western world comes as perhaps the first reason the movie was so well received from its debut, not simply in Italy but by Hollywood as well.

The elevation of the stakes from the very beginning is a more personal reason I find the film compelling. *Bicycle Thieves* invokes a sense of the dire economic situation at once and centers the action around this simple theme for the rest of the action. We see this expressly when the film opens with our first in a series of recurring shots of crowds, this time located at an employment office in a town outside Rome. Through the mass of men we see the 'hero' character emerge, a lean faced family man who lucks into a job when so many obviously have no work. And here we discover another central theme – the necessity of having a bike. From the very start the boss makes clear to our protagonist that he must possess a working bicycle, the man's initial excuse that his 'bike needs to be fixed' (a lie) doesn't stand up. The director informs us with the small, white lie that the protagonist is distinctly human, a flawed man trying to do his best for his family. So the audience knows from those first few scenes of the film what will be pivotal throughout; a man, a job, and a bike.

At this point I begin to wonder about the potential for our hero to steal a bicycle; an idea I believe DeSica purposely introduces and maintains as the narrative develops. The empathy of the audience is a tool that

he wields like the wand of a maestro conducting an orchestra. We begin to want the man to steal a bike, and also to care deeply about the situation of his family. Of course the hero's need for a bicycle becomes fairly immediately (but also temporarily) obviated by the intervention of his wife, who dutifully sells her finest linens to sponsor her husband's new career. Their impossibly cute child watches on in adoration as his father dons a uniform and sets out for his glamorous career as a, wait for it, movie poster – poster. The apex of the protagonist's success occurs here – early in the movie, and we endure every blow with him on the downward trajectory that follows. My description of these characters leads to another aspect of the film that I think allows audiences to appreciate it more than six decades after being released.

By employing non-professional actors from the local region DeSica imparts an extra sense of realism to the affairs at hand. I got the definite sense that cast members personally knew how it feels to wait in line for meager work, to have no money to feed their children, and even to be accused of thievery. And audiences, anywhere, anytime, have an affinity for the truth above all else. When a work, be it a film or a novel or a play, truly captures the reality of a time and place – we, even the most cynical of modern minds – can appreciate the fact that our own times merely reflect mankind's problems of the past in different ways. A truly iconic work reminds it's viewer of the old adage, "Nothing is new under the Sun," through a portrait of the shared elements of human experience, no matter time and place. At once both exquisitely local and breathtakingly universal, *Bicycle Thieves* fulfills all the requisite attributes of such a work.

In closing I draw attention again to the images we see repeated throughout the film: the stairways (including a shot of beautiful white marble steps that stretch forever), the streets and walls of a concrete city, the teeming crowds that flow from everywhere. DeSica could not have known these images would continue to remain potent over the decades, reminders of the alienation and economic woes that haunt cities across the world. But they have, and they do – just as the many stark, vital instances of beauty in the film cannot be withered by the passing of time alone. A truly remarkable artifact, *Bicycle Thieves* belongs to the canon of man.



Santa Fe Community College

6401 Richards Ave.
Santa Fe, NM 87508
(505) 428-1000
www.sfcc.edu