



*Hedera
hetix
2010*

Literary Journal of Sigma Kappa Delta

*The National English Honor Society
for Two-Year Colleges*

Volume VII

The background of the cover is a light-colored, textured surface, possibly stone or concrete. On the left side, there are several dark, detailed leaves of a ivy plant, showing their characteristic lobed shape and vein structure. The title 'Hedera helix' is written in a large, elegant, white cursive font, with '2010' in a smaller, simpler white font below it.

*Hedera
helix
2010*

Journal of Creative Writing
Sigma Kappa Delta
*The National English Honor Society
for Two-Year Colleges*

Editor of Publications
Jan Anderson

Graphic Design Artist
Beth Butler

Proofreader
Janet Kincherlow-Martin

Purpose of Sigma Kappa Delta

Sigma Kappa Delta serves two-year college students who achieve academic excellence in English. Members need not be English majors but must demonstrate an interest and proficiency in literature and writing. ΣΚΔ offers members opportunities for

- Scholarships
- Awards
- Leadership
- Competition
- Publication
- Travel
- National Conferences
- Networking

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Hedera helix – the scientific name for English Ivy and the national plant of ΣΚΔ, symbolizing resilience and individual growth. In keeping with the Greek spelling, we use the lower case “h” for helix.

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Editor's Note

Sigma Kappa Delta continues to grow in leaps and bounds, and our writing and photography entries continue to improve in quantity as well as quality. This year's entries cover a wide range of topics, indicating that our members are reaching beyond ho-hum topics and into the depths of their experiences and their souls.

Challenge your members to write and/or take photographs to submit to this year's contests. Recognition by publication is a boost to chapter accomplishment as well as individual accomplishment. Furthermore, the monetary awards that accompany the winning entries are quite nice. For entry forms, rules, and deadlines, see our website at www.english2.org.

I look forward to receiving the 2009-2010 entries this winter. Make them good, and you just may see them in print.

Jan Anderson
Sigma Kappa Delta
Director of Development & Publications

2010 SKD Scholarship/Award Winners

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Dr. Don Perkins Service Scholarship:

Kayla Cordell, Northeast Alabama Community College

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Short Fiction:

The Inventor's Garden - Kirsten Bloss,
Collin County Community College

Essay:

My Daddy's Hands - Brenda S. Beaver,
Darton College

Poem:

Tunnel of Jazz - Angela Jordan,
Northeast Alabama Community College

Literary Analysis:

Exploitation of Innocence -
Cindy Maggiulli, Amarillo College

Photography



1st Place:
Serenity
Alisha
McFadzen,
NorthWest
Arkansas
Community
College



2nd Place:
No Bites
Angela Jordan,
Northeast
Alabama
Community
College



3rd Place:
Summer Zinnia
Melissa Gilmore,
University of
Wisconsin-Fox
Valley

Table of Contents

6

Exploitation of Innocence

by Cindy Maggiulli

10

The Inventor's Garden

by Kirsten Bloss

14

Fairy Godmother

by Kirsten Bloss

18

Tunnel of Jazz

by Angela Jordan

19

Oil-Leak Rainbows

by Angela Jordan

21

My Daddy's Hands

by Brenda S. Beaver

23

Becoming Classic

by Bailey Lovell

24

Carpe Shmarpe

by Angela Jordan

25

Just Around the Corner

by Philip Fullman

26

Bigmama

by Elizabeth Norman

Exploitation of Innocence

In Joyce Carol Oates's story "Where are You Going, Where Have You Been?" Connie, a naïve fifteen-year-old (Oates 547), finds herself incapable of self-defense against the lewd and threatening advances of thirty-year-old Arnold Friend. This story mirrors an actual event that occurred in Tucson, Arizona, in the early to mid-1960s. Arnold Friend, the personification of evil in Oates's tale, alludes to Charles Schmid, "The Pied Piper of Tucson," a young man popular with local teenagers, who murdered three teenage girls. Even though he bragged among the teens about the first two murders, no one reported it; then, a third girl was murdered. At the root of Oates's story is: (1) How did this happen? At the core of the explanation are references to America's preoccupation with outward appearance and sexuality while glorifying the anti-hero. (2) How do we prevent such catastrophes in the future? Prevention is found by teaching critical thinking skills to children and adults so they can avoid succumbing to the tyranny of control.

A primary aspect of Connie's misfortune is her vulnerability; her susceptibility is inherent in the mores and values in that era of American culture that preaches, that her worth lies in her ability to attract attention through her physical beauty. Unfortunately, she is typical of many teenagers who become obsessed with their looks to the point of vanity; she identifies her self-worth in direct proportion to her ability to attract others. Connie is particularly receptive to and desirous of Friend's interest; she perceives his advances as a compliment rather than the true threat that they signify. Oates writes of Connie, "She was fifteen and she had a quick nervous giggling habit of craning her neck to glance into mirrors, or checking other people's faces to make sure her own was all right" (547). Connie's yearning for attention reveals her insecurity and exemplifies her need for approval through her loveliness. She deems her outward appearance as all-important: "she knew she was pretty and that was everything" (547).

Oates illustrates the American culture's emphasis on the outer shell throughout her story and exposes the predominant societal endorsement of the anti-hero that portrays Friend as desirable. Although anti-heroes have long existed in literature, the ability to influence the psyche of an entire culture en masse is a modern experience; consequently, the effectiveness of propaganda on the population at-large is a well-evidenced phenomenon in the early to mid-1960s, the era represented in Oates' story (560). Music (549), and movies (550), accentuate the allure of an attractive facade and have mass produced the lure of the anti-hero, rendering him as the essence of masculinity (551, 553). His rebellious attitude generates a larger-than-life idolized character while equating defiance and its associated danger as romantic and fascinating (551, 553). Friend, as anti-hero, intrigues Connie (552), as if he were James Dean or Marlon Brando in his "tight faded jeans stuffed into black, scuffed boots, a belt that pulled his waist in and showed how lean he was...and showed the hard small muscles of his arms and shoulders"(551). America's preoccupation with attractiveness and its counterpart, youth, are a cultural trend.

Friend empathizes with Connie and emphasizes youth in his exploitation of

the “generation gap” between Connie and her parents (558) for his purposes of abusive seduction. He uses music (551, 556) and common friends (552) to bond their likenesses despite their difference in age (553). Friend feigns to offer Connie love “the way it was in movies and promised in songs” (549-50). Friend is also all too willing to supply Connie with the “adoration” she craves from her parents, even as she appears to reject them in her transition from childhood to adulthood. Although Connie’s parents are less than perfect, they are acceptable. On the derogatory side, they do consist of a father who is absent though living in the same house and a critical and envious mother (547, 549). The jealousy of Connie’s mother reiterates the theme of desirability but highlights the nonexistence of true values and the inner/spiritual self and the lack of reflection upon and communication of such matters.

However, the abilities intrinsic in conveying such thoughts are the instruments that could prevent the tragic events that Connie encounters. Evil is present in this world, and not all hideous acts can be stopped. Nevertheless, definite steps should be taken through the teaching of crucial thinking skills to thwart those who are able to be circumvented. Connie does recognize her need: she has “got to think ...to know what to do” (558). Most people need to be taught these abilities; they need the faculty to determine for themselves the true value of life and to discern and avoid the wrong intentions of others. In emphasizing the development of critical assessment rather than the knowledge of sexual details, the acquisition of such insight is appropriate for all ages. This facilitates in safeguarding the “Connies” and trains them to better refute those attempting to endanger them; it assists them in



recognizing that the abusive are capable of being outwitted. However, it is not necessary to violate the innocence of children in an effort to protect them. Instead, doing so assists the "Friends" of this world in their corruption of the ingenuous through the same inundation process found in music and movies (549-50). Therefore, development of reasoning ability as tools of self-defense is necessary to shield and equip the innocent.

Friend, of course, prefers that Connie not guard herself. In order to take advantage of her innocence, Friend weaves his web with techniques of charisma and flattery to entrap her. He exemplifies techniques of exploitation: first, he uses allure to manipulate and, thus, ensnare; secondly, he uses fear to intimidate into helplessness and acquiescence. He entertains and disarms her with his humor, his sex appeal, and a sense of excitement (551). Friend charms Connie with his obsession with her: "I took a special interest in you, such a pretty girl, and found out all about you like I know your parents and sister are gone somewhere and I know where and how long they're going to be gone, and I know who you were with last night, and your best girl friend's name is Betty. Right?" (552). Quicker than she has time to think, he adds names of other friends she'll recognize; he infers that they are his friends, also (552). Later, after fear has been introduced, he even twists his threats of violence against her family into a compliment to Connie. He portrays her as a "heroine" if she will submit to rape and, possibly, the loss of her life (556, 558). She is unable to think during her worst crisis (558). Friend uses a variety of methods to capture Connie's imagination and preoccupy her mind; thus, he leaves her inattentive to the true danger. After Friend has woven Connie's imagination into his web of deceit, he transitions to the mode of subjugation through fear; he introduces panic in incremental steps in an attempt to paralyze her ability to refuse him. First, he manages to pass himself off as the "good guy" in comparison to his tag-along "crazy" buddy, Ellie (553-558). Ironically, Friend capitalizes on Ellie's behavior to present himself as a source of refuge to Connie. As Friend terrifies Connie, he also makes himself her only sanctuary. Next, he uses warped logic to keep her anxiety high and prevent her from phoning the police when he says, "Soon as you touch the phone I don't need to keep my promise and can come inside. You won't want that" (555). After that, he states how easy it would be to light the house on fire, and she would "come running out into my arms, right into my arms and safe at home"; in the process, he is repeating a refrain from last year's latest song (556). Subsequently, he speaks of harming her family if she doesn't oblige him (556). Then, he introduces the topic of "an old woman down the road" (557) who is dead; hence, he specifically mentions death. As he petrifies Connie, she is intimidated to the point of utter helplessness; this results in her compliance (557). Although she makes one last effort to use the phone, she is beyond reason, a prisoner of a surreal world: "she ran into the back room and picked up the telephone. Something roared in her ear, a tiny roaring, and she was so sick with fear that she could do nothing but listen to it...she cried for her mother...she was locked inside it the way she was locked inside the house" (557). Through absolute dread, Friend incapacitates Connie (558). He conquers her for his personal gratification. He leeches life without thought; he has no regard for her well-being, no sense of morality, or even the dangerous consequences to himself.

To prevent such debilitating injury, society should promote values of respect, moral character, free expression of opinion, and instruction regarding consequence and conscience. An important step in this process is the proper development of cogitation. In certain instances, such steps result in saved lives; perhaps, if the teenagers had disclosed the “Pied Piper’s” claims of murder, another tragedy may have been prevented. Many harmful acts are avoidable: if Connie had judged right, she would have shut the door and never spoken to Friend again; she would have phoned the police if Friend had lingered outside. Also, she would have recognized that her submission to Friend would not have protected her loved ones. If she were dead, Friend would do as he pleased to her family; if she lived, Friend, using blackmail, would continue to rape her; relatives worth shielding would never have wanted her to do so. Oates’s rendering is a vivid, though appalling, image that exhorts us to equip ourselves and others, including children, with tools of discernment. The development of critical thinking skills is a part of the solution; this includes acknowledging the right for Connie to speak her mind and the right to expect and receive respect. These duties are at the heart of the true meaning of being an American — much more so than the latest propaganda en vogue that obsesses over beauty and creates targets of the innocent.

Work Cited

Oates, Joyce Carol. “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” *Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing*. Ed. Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell. Compact 7th ed. Boston:Wadsworth, 2010. 547-58. Print.



2010 Literary Analysis Winner

Cindy Maggiulli

Phi Beta Chapter

Amarillo College

The Inventor's Garden

Some time ago, in a secluded forest lived a great inventor. His inventions, like the whozamuhibbbit, were nearly necessities in those days, but he hadn't invented anything useful in many years.

He lived alone in a tiny dilapidated cottage on the edge of the woods, spending his days in his lab trying to create one last great invention. Always failing, he never gave up hope that one day soon he would do something great, greater than anything he had done before.

One day, the Inventor went for a walk in the forest, hoping to clear his mind. He was strolling along the forest path when he stumbled into a circular clearing surrounded by a thick band of elder trees. Looking around at the empty field, the Inventor thought that the splendid little clearing would be a wonderful place to put a garden. So, on a whim, he went back to his home and found a shovel and lantern.

Though it was nearing dark, the Inventor returned to his field and began turning the soil. It was hard work; the ground was parched because the trees surrounding the little clearing hoarded all the water, making digging difficult. The Inventor continued, though he was no spring chicken, and his muscles and joints ached from the effort. With every turn of the shovel, his quaint whim progressed into strong desire. He had nothing else to do, he reasoned, other than sit in his lab and reminisce about the old glory days, and a garden would be a peaceful place to relax as his time grew shorter.

The Inventor worked well into the night until he finished turning all the soil in his new garden. He wanted to continue but was simply too tired. So the Inventor headed for his bed, for he knew he could work on the garden in the morning.

The rest of the week was spent solely on the garden. The Inventor traveled to the nearest market and bought seeds, fertilizer, a watering can, a hoe, and all else he needed to grow his garden. He scraped together every last coin he could spare to buy the required supplies, and had just enough.

Each seed was planted with the care of a mother tucking in her sleeping child. He planted every type of seed available to him and watered them religiously. In the following weeks, he weeded, pruned, and spent almost every hour of the day tending the garden. The more he worked in it, the greater love he felt for his garden. The Inventor couldn't invent anymore, that was true, but he had made a paradise he could enjoy for the rest of his life. He was happier than he had been in years.

After several weeks, the Gardener's labor bore fruits. Flowers budded: roses, tulips, daisies, orchids, lilies, flowers of all shapes in pink, purple, yellow, white, orange, and red, all of these flowers had come into their own. Small round tomatoes could be seen as well as the tops of carrots and onions. There were also beautiful artichokes, potatoes, melons, and many other delightful plants in this garden. The garden became the Gardener's refuge. There he could spend his days thinking and reflecting on his life in a solitude that was not lonely. The flowers were all the company he required.

One day, the Gardener came to his garden to find a rabbit munching on his beloved plants. He became terribly angry. How dare this furry little monster destroy his garden? Needless to say, the Gardener caught the rabbit and made him into stew.

The little terror would never come dining in his garden again, and after all, “waste not, want not.”

Though he had dealt with the rabbit, the poor Gardener was still very upset. What if there were more of them? He couldn’t stand to see his garden ruined chomp by chomp, and he certainly wouldn’t be able to kill anything larger than a rabbit. The Gardener decided to spend the night there to ensure that no other mangy beast would have a midnight snack. From then on, protecting the garden became the Gardener’s main priority.

He brought a tent and supplies to his garden and stood watch until he could stay awake no longer. When he did fall asleep, he dreamed of thousands of hairy rodents ripping his garden to shreds. After waking up from the horrible nightmare, the Guard did a very careful inspection of his garden to be certain nothing had actually been destroyed while he slept. To his relief, nothing had been touched. This did not allay his fears, though, and for the rest of the night every little sound the Guard heard, and every little shadow he saw had to be investigated. The Guard knew it was only a matter of time before another creature would come for a snack.

The Inventor thought hard for a solution to this problem. For days he wrestled with half-planned notions of scarecrows and garden gnomes. At last he found an answer. He would build a fence around his garden! It would be tall enough so that no animal would be able to get into his dear garden, but there was a problem: the Inventor had no money for lumber; he had already spent almost the entirety of his savings. The Inventor found a ready solution to that, as well. He was in a forest, after all, and what made a forest? Wood.

And so the Carpenter built the fence. It was back-breaking labor, even harder than planting his garden, and it took a heavy toll on him, but his garden needed protection. He spent weeks cutting down trees, chopping the wood, sanding the logs, measuring the lumber, working long days to build the glorious barricade he envisioned. He was so intent on his work that he was rarely able to enjoy his garden. The Carpenter knew, though, that this fence was necessary. As soon as it was done, he could go back to enjoying his garden in tranquility.

At last the fence was done, and the Gardener nursed his garden back to its former glory, a glory that had been lost while he had worked on the fence. The Gardener moved back into his little cottage and resumed his peaceful life of eating, sleeping, and gardening.

His tranquility, however, did not last.



He was sitting in his garden one afternoon when a man strolled out of the forest and called out to the Gardener.

"Hello! I didn't know anyone lived out here. I'm John."

The Gardener greeted the man and asked him what he was doing in such a secluded place.

"Hiking," said John. "I've been at it all day, but I saw you through the gaps in the trees, so I thought I'd say hello." John then spotted the garden inside the fence, "What a beautiful garden you have," he exclaimed, "but why do you have a fence around it?"

The Gardener explained his problems with the wildlife.

"Well, that certainly was a good solution. Your garden looks absolutely perfect." John said.

After the compliment to his garden, the Gardener warmed up considerably. They talked for many hours, the Gardener describing his garden in detail, and John filling the Gardener in on current events that the Gardener had not heard when he last visited the market. The Gardener's amiability dried up very quickly, however, when John asked, "May I pick a flower as a souvenir for this wonderful day?"

The Gardener was horrified. Pick one of his flowers? Absolutely out of the question! And the Gardener told John just that.

"Would you let me pay for one, then?" John asked.

At that, the Gardener became enraged. Was the man insane? Pick one of his flowers and trade it for money? Impossible! He'd sooner sell an arm than a plant from his garden. The Guard chased John away, screaming threats and profanities the entire time.

Though John was gone, the Guard was extremely troubled. What if John came back or told someone else about his garden? Would his garden be destroyed by grubby hands picking flowers until none were left? The Guard could not let this happen; he had to protect it.

He moved his tent back to the garden and kept a vigilant watch for trespassers. Every night he would see faces in the shadows. Every creak of a branch was an intruder bent on the destruction of his garden; the Guard's imagination was relentless.

After finding no signs of an actual person for days, the Guard, troubled by his imaginary sightings, was still worried about his garden, but he did not know how to protect it from people. He couldn't kill them like the rabbit. No, that would end up drawing attention to his garden. The Inventor thought and thought until he had the perfect solution. He would make the fence even higher, high enough so that even the tallest person could not break through.

So the Carpenter cut more trees, chopped more wood, sanded more logs, measured more lumber, and worked until his tall fence was complete. It was only then that the Gardener realized he had shut himself out of his garden! How could he enjoy the rest of his days if he couldn't even see his garden, let alone tend to it?

As always, the Inventor devised a solution. He decided to cut a door into the fence so he could visit his garden whenever he wished. To ensure that no one else would be able to go through the door, the Inventor built a lock to which only he had the key. His garden was safe at last!

Years later, a family hiked through these distant woods and happened upon a

ridiculously tall wooden fence enclosing a piece of the land. All of them were curious as to what could be inside the fence. For some time they stood there guessing and guessing, each thought wilder than the next. When one of them finally worked up the courage to open the door, they found it locked. Slightly disappointed, the family went on its way, no wiser to the fact that the Corpse was just inside the fence, sitting in his chair, next to his garden.



2010 Short Fiction Winner

Kirsten Bloss

Chi Gamma Chapter

Collin County Community College



Fairy Godmother

I lost my wand again.

Sometime during my eight hundred and six years, you'd think I would have grown out of losing the blasted thing every single day; however, according to my current empty hand, I have not. Well, it will turn up eventually.

"What's lost and cannot be found always comes around," I said to myself distractedly. Where had it gotten to? I searched around my cluttered study, growing more irritated. How can I work my projector without my wand? Aha! Found it!

"There you are you little mite; how could you give me such a fright?" I crooned to the wand while waving it about my brass projector. I said the required magic words; the wand clanked around and... there she is!

My precious girl, my Cinderella. The sweet girl that I was assigned to when her father died, all those years ago. The kind girl that I have watched over all these years - my Cinderella, my goddaughter.

Granted, she isn't the most brilliant girl in the world, and she's certainly far too spineless for her own good. You'd think she would have realized by now that she doesn't have to bend to the Hag's every whim. But she has a good heart; always taking in stray animals, feeding them, and clothing them. In the end, that's what matters.

She's just woken up; her cheerful (and annoying) birds wanted her to see the sunrise with them. She had a dream? I check my dream/wish records. Ah yes, there it is! Well, that's a new one; nothing about her parents or stepfamily at all. Hmm. She was dancing with a man. Is she in love with someone? No, the face is blurry; no man in particular. She wants to find true love!

Oh dear, what can help along true love?

I suppose a nice man and a notice-me spell would do the trick, but there are so many men and true love is fickle. Maybe the butcher's son; he would make a fine husband. Or, the florist! So intelligent and wise; he would be a good contrast to Cinderella. I could use any number of ways to start a romance between one of these good men and Cinderella.

Of course all of this is wishful thinking. Find Cinderella true love when I can't even get her out of the grasp of that evil Hag? No, of course I can't because that would be *direct interference* and the Fairy Council won't have that.

"Give help that's indirect and small, and humans will notice us not at all." I muttered bitterly to myself as I watched Cinderella make her stepfamily's breakfast by herself. The Council's most important rule: stay below the human's notice. Considering what these humans did to the witches not so many years ago, I can appreciate this rule. But it is so limiting! How can I truly help my goddaughter if I can't even talk to her once in a while? Knowing her dreams and wishes helps, of course, but they only tell me so much.

As I watched Cinderella go about her chores, I remembered the days when fairies could actually help their godchildren out in the open, no rules stopping them, no fears holding them back, just giving the poor little children the good lives

they deserved. Those were the good days, but those good days disappeared far too long ago.

Cinderella is very sad today.

Not that she isn't a little sad every day, living with *those* people, but today there's something more. Maybe it's because of that dream. Nothing makes humans sadder than when they've had a taste of pure bliss, even if it's only in a dream, and it's taken away.

It makes my situation all the more difficult to bear. How can I help her indirectly? What in her life doesn't require direct intervention? She doesn't know how to say no, and her stepfamily is pure evil. I can't even make that horrid cat Lucifer behave without stepping out of the tight circle the Council has drawn all fairies into. I am doomed to sit and watch helplessly as Cinderella is continually taken advantage of by her terrible "family."

I stop my projector, tired of watching the Hag punish Cinderella. Surely there is something I could do, something to get her out of that house, even if it's only for one night.

I've got it!

I know the perfect way to get Cinderella out of the house for a night. A plan to give her at least one evening of fun in her life. It would be dicey - the Council probably wouldn't like it, but it is just indirect enough to get by.

I will implant in the mind of the human king a strong almost painful desire for his son to get married. And what does royalty do when they want their children married? They throw a ball! A ball that every eligible person of the opposite sex *must* attend. The Hag has to obey her king, doesn't she? Cinderella will have to be able to go to the ball.

"Take that you old hag; I've got this one in the bag," I said triumphantly.

I executed my plan, throwing in a sweet dream of grandchildren for the king and waited for the Council to arrive. They are very good at knowing when a fairy has performed magic that nearly violates one of their precious rules. Granted, it happens quite often (fairies don't do so well with limits), so they are pretty practiced at it.

Yes, there's the bell. I answer the door and wave the three fairies in. I have known these fairies for hundreds of years, and it is safe to say that I annoy them as much as they annoy me. In spite of that, I have a grudging respect for the Council; the fairy realm is peaceful under their rule, and no fairy has been burned at the stake on their watch.

Before I could say anything, Drake, one of the two male fairies on the Council spoke. "Heddie, a certain king in a certain kingdom has suddenly decided that he needs a daughter-in-law before the week is out. Do you know how this little whim of his came about?"

"Ask a silly question and you will find you get an answer of just the same kind," I told him reprovingly. Obviously I had done it; why beat around the bush?

"Still have that rhyming problem, Heddie?" asked the other male, Wynnstan, the friendliest fairy of the group. "I would think that a fairy of your talent would have been able to reverse it by now."

"The witch's curse is one that is very tricky; I probably shouldn't have gotten into a situation so sticky," I said regretfully.

"That is very true, Heddie; if you would just learn to hold your tongue, you wouldn't get into these messes," said Clara, the sternest and most reserved fairy I have ever known. As much as I hated to agree with her (she could be such a know-it-all), I had to admit she was right. Insulting that witch's poetry was not the brightest move I've ever made, even if the poetry was really bad. (Platypus and juice don't rhyme no matter what realm you're in.)

"Enough about tongues and rhymes; get to the lecture and save us some time!" I said impatiently. Anything to stop talking about this confounded curse!

"Fine. If you are so eager for a lecture, then we'll give it to you." Drake said. "Heddie, you're on thin cloud. The humans are bound to think it's strange that their king has suddenly become so set on finding a wife for his son. His subjects will notice, and even if they don't, the prince most certainly will!"

Of all the ridiculous arguments! He's a king, for fairy dust's sake; kings are eccentric! What is so strange about wanting a wife for his son, anyway? They are going to need another heir eventually.

"If your arguments are going to be weak, perhaps it is better if you do not speak." I snapped at them.

"Really Heddie, you are impossible!" said Clara, "The Council is done trying to reason with you; cross the line again and your wand will be confiscated!" And with a great huff she left, trailed by the other Council fairies.

I went back to my study, thinking about what Clara said. Wand confiscation wasn't new; it is the usual punishment for a fairy that has broken the rules. Still, this is the first time they have threatened me with it. I'll just have to tone the magic down for a little while. Let them calm down and get over their irritation, and then things will go back to normal.

I turn on my projector, still feeling a little miffed about the Council's threat, to see Cinderella thanking the Hag profusely. She's going to the ball! My bad mood disappeared instantly. All the trouble with the Council was worth it, knowing that Cinderella is getting a night out.

Wait, what does the Hag mean "if"?

Cinderella has to go! She is a girl of the kingdom; it's mandatory that she attend! She has to get all her chores done? But that's impossible! There's enough work on that list for a week, and she only has the afternoon. Maybe if I speed her up with a spell, or make the hag forget the list, or do the chores...

But that would be direct interference.

I would lose my wand.

Maybe she'll get done in time. She is a very fast worker and she obviously wants to go. And she has those animals to help her. Maybe I don't need to do anything; it's never good to overreact.

I turn my projector off, trying to get rid of the guilty feeling in my stomach. She'll get done in time, I repeat to myself, and she'll be able to go. I avoid my study for the rest of the day; the projector is just a reminder of my inability to help her. Eventually, after hours of moping, I work up the nerve to turn the projector

back on.

Cinderella is running down the stairs in a beautiful dress.

She's going to the ball? She's going to the ball!

I dance around the room in celebration, bumping into furniture and knocking books off my desk. I can't believe it! My plan worked! I won't lose my wand!

And then I see the Hag set her daughters on Cinderella.

I see my Cinderella absolutely broken.

I never liked my wand much anyway; I'm always losing it. And with that thought, I summon up as much magic as I can and I pay my goddaughter an overdue visit.

When I get home, I am exhausted but pleased with myself. My only regret is that the magic wears off at midnight, but I simply don't have the ability to make it last longer. I did manage to make the slippers permanent, though; my parting gift to Cinderella.

The Council is waiting at the door. I'm not surprised; they're very good at what they do, even if I don't like it. Without saying anything, I hand over my wand and go inside. I can find out my official sentence after I have a nice, long sleep.

Ten Years Later

With obvious reluctance, Clara hands me back my wand.

"Just when we are finally getting some peace, your sentence ends!" she says disgustedly. Maybe she should retire.

I race back to my house as quickly as I can, with only one goal in mind. As soon as I reach my house, I go to my study, eager to find out how Cinderella is after all this time. Is she still under that Hag's thumb? Has she finally moved out? I turn on the projector and...

There she is, my precious girl, my Cinderella. Now what does she have on her head?

Cinderella is queen?!?

Kirsten Bloss

Chi Gamma Chapter

Collin County Community College

Tunnel of Jazz

Brass kisses blown from the other end of the tunnel
Spiral sweet around my feet
So I cross the street
And make my way to his swaying silhouette.
I empty my pocket into the black hat standing
On its head on the pavement
And watch the glowing blur of tail lights pass
When finally he asks, "Any requests?"
I lean against the cool tile wondering what jazz is
and call out loud against the traffic, "Just don't stop!"
His grin shifts sideways, his eyes close slowly
and his mouth finds its kiss without searching.
His fingers caress until the metal is pliable
He plays endless like the river lapping the banks just outside the tunnel
Crescendo-my chest rises and falls
With the swells of his breath and the swells of the river
A rhythm salty like the humidity
Presses against my hips—side to side they sway
And I call out, "Play!"
I stomp my foot when the melody drops
And moan low, "So this is Jazz!"



2010 Poetry Winner

Angela Jordan

Epsilon Alpha Chapter

Northeast Alabama Community College



Oil-Leak Rainbows

I recently braved dinner in a nice restaurant with my three-year-old son and some good friends. I ended up getting a to-go box before I even tasted the entrée because my son kept asking the ever-so-nice people sitting behind us if they had boogers. He and I played in the parking lot until everyone else emerged full-bellied and smiling. It was one of those rare August evenings when the wind lifted the heat. We all gathered in a semi-circle, laughing while the moon rose, catching up on the events of our lives. The conversation turned, as it often has, to Zen. "What is it we're missing? Where do you find inner peace?" My son was crawling up my skirt, so I spent most of the conversation silently struggling to keep my privies privy. "Wanna see my flower?" He asked person after person. And person after person rubbed his head smiling him off. He hopped around on one foot incessantly, noting objects on the ground. "Look at this!" I chased him around the group, hearing only bits of the conversation: "Zen is the desymbolization of the world." "Wide-eyed wonder." "It's that smile when no words are needed." My son scurried in and out of everyone's legs. "I threw a rock in the puddle. You wanna see it?" They all smiled at him. "That's cool, kiddo. I bet it was neat. Maybe we'll go see in a minute."

"Lao Tzu says... The Bible says... Gandhi said..." And he gets a pat on the head while they all grow more and more frustrated... "but where? In daily life? In the midst of stock market crashes, construction detours, and struggles to pay the bills? How do you actually apply the ideals in such a crazy world?"

"I threw my flower in the puddle, and it made a rainbow," he said. And suddenly it occurred to me - perhaps we've all gotten jaded, and perhaps, just perhaps, whatever being watches over us in this little terrarium we call earth is speaking to us right here, right now... pointing us in the direction of a pothole in a shopping center parking lot, filled with flowers floating in rainbows of fluids leaked from various vehicle innards. Maybe we should have all been hopping on one foot to the puddle. Being dignified, or stuffy, we all just walked. For a moment, staring down into that rainbow, we were all on the same page - the same quiet page where we all remembered, at some point, thinking how beautiful those puddles were, back before we knew about pollution, back where inner peace was.

Perhaps, being three years old is Zen. It's mustering intrigue in the mechanisms of the world. The ability to focus our attention on something beautiful anywhere, anytime instead of standing in semi-circles in the sweet release of a breeze from summer's assault, talking about where, philosophically, inner peace might be hiding. The truth is: It's not hiding. It's screaming, waving its arms wildly above its head trying to pull our attention from the negative to focus on the beauty and wonder everywhere our eyes fall.

My son stops to smell the flowers. So when I'm busy, he stops me to smell the flowers. Thankfully, Zen can be forced upon a person. When I'm rushing out the door on the way to some important meeting with people whose names I probably won't remember in ten years, my son stops me dead in my tracks in the middle of

the yard. "Look." I stop. I look. "An ant," I say, looking at my watch and tugging his arm.

"No look," he says. I don't see anything more important than the clock ticking away in my head, except...exactly that. I notice, looking down at the ant, I rarely think of anything more than the clock ticking. So I breathe. I wonder what he sees. He watches intensely for a long time. And I begin to wonder if the way to finding inner peace is, in fact, the desymbolization of the world; the UNnaming of things. Zen is not seeing the word "ant" when you see an ant. You don't find inner peace by thinking "Doppler Effect" when you watch ripples on a pond. Zen is before that. Zen is just watching the water rise and fall and enjoying the company of whoever threw the rock, even if you are alone. It's forgetting about the clock. We find inner peace by balancing the insanity, the fear, the frustration with a good dose of marshmallow toasts, with cooking popcorn the old-fashioned way, and by, as Alice Walker points out, noticing "the color purple."

Where we won't find it is in a deep conversation about where it might be, not even in good company on a beautifully perfect starry summer night after a great meal (if you had a chance to eat). Zen is a grey muddy hole in asphalt, with a flower petal floating atop oil-leak rainbows. Zen is the peace we find when we spot something surprisingly beautiful in a world where, let's face it, all too often beauty is surprising.

Angela Jordan

Epsilon Alpha Chapter

Northeast Alabama Community College



My Daddy's Hands

I can see Daddy sitting in his old chair holding a Camel non-filtered cigarette between his tobacco-stained fingers. I always loved my Daddy's hands. His middle finger would never straighten out because he had been in an accident that cut the tendons in the knuckle. When I was a little girl, I would sit in his lap and try to straighten his fingers, but not too hard because I didn't want to hurt him.

When we are born, our hands are soft, pink, and smooth. I have often wondered if my Daddy's hands could have ever been soft. Probably not. He was born into generational poverty. His father died when he was five, leaving his mother to raise nine children alone. As a child he had been farmed out to work with relatives because there were just too many mouths to feed, and that was the way things were done. Perhaps some of the stains on his hands came from carrying a suitcase from one place to the next or from being forced to accept charity.

When Daddy was seventeen, he lied about his age in order to get a job at a mill. The country had just entered its second world war. After working at the mill for about two weeks, he received his draft slip. He joined the U.S Navy where he became a boiler tech onboard the *U.S.S. Midway*. Some of his fingers had been burned so often by the intense heat of the boilers that they no longer had prints. I used to hold his giant hands in mine and try to see the remains of his fingerprints. Those that hadn't been burned off were buried under stains from years of smoking or from the dirt and oil that comes with working on machinery. The stains of time, having been absorbed into his skin, gave his hands the look and feel of ancient leather.

My Daddy's hands were never clean. He would take out his pocket knife and clean out from under his fingernails, and I would watch him, always fearing that he would cut his hand, adding another scar, like adding a line to a story in a book. Those scars told of battles often fought yet rarely won - battles with poverty, scratching to feed a seemingly endless number of children from a paycheck that was never enough. Battles fought in the cage which held him, forcing him to live a life that had little room for dreams. Battles with time and a world that was moving too fast for him to keep up.

Daddy's hands were a bit like God's hands to me: to be loved and sometimes feared. Having his hand rest upon my narrow shoulders or atop my head was better than the Zero bars he would bring home every Friday afternoon. Daddy hardly ever had to give me and my sisters a whippin'. That chore was usually designated to Mama. She wasn't as good at giving whippin's as Daddy. I bet she must have torn me up a dozen times or more compared to the single whippin' I got from Daddy. I can't say that I recall a single time she whipped me as clearly as the three times I was on the receiving end of Daddy's belt.

As I grew older, I began to try to bend my fingers to look like Daddy's. I would place my still small, soft hands on a flat surface and bend my middle finger in an arch while keeping my index finger as straight as possible. My ring finger had to be bent only a little. By then, I, too, was smoking and had gotten into the habit of get-


ting up early so I could sit with Daddy, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. These were the quiet hours of the morning when the rest of the world was asleep and it was just me and Daddy. He liked to eat 'sweet cakes' and always offered me half.

It was in these years that I began to suspect that Daddy's hands sometimes caused him pain. My God was becoming mortal. I began to buy him gloves to protect his hands from the cold and injuries, and at night I would rub lotion into them in a vain effort to soften the leather that was his skin. He would sit and talk about his chickens or his dogs, allowing me to ease the aches in his hands because he knew it made me happy to do so.

After my son was born, I awoke one morning to find Daddy holding him. Those large, callused hands gently cradling my tiny, smooth son strengthened my ties to my Daddy. I sat quietly, watching them as they stared into each other's eyes; Daddy passing his ancient knowledge to my newborn son while regaining something precious that he must have lost during his journey through life. When Daddy caught me watching them, he smiled his one-sided smile and told me that I'd "better watch this one."

Later, when I moved away, I clutched Daddy's hands in mine. Fear of the unknown loomed ahead of me while the reality that he was not an immortal God stood starkly in my mind. Never had I been so far away from him. It seems that I had barely left when I was called back home. Daddy was sick. I spent the next week clinging to Daddy's hands as his body was wracked with coughs. I stroked them as he struggled with his fears of the unknown. I felt them stroke my hair, comforting me, as I prayed. I held them gently as he died.

When I was ten I broke two of my fingers and they never grew back straight. My hands aren't pretty or soft. They are scarred from fooling with chickens and often dirty from working in the garden. They are callused and ache in the cold. Over time, the sun and the wind have left their marks on my hands, cracking them in the winter and sprinkling freckles on them in the summer. I still sit and try to bend my hands to make them look like Daddy's. It isn't as hard to do as it once was. I have my Daddy's hands.

 2010 Essay Winner
Brenda S. Beaver
Pi Beta Chapter
Darton College



Becoming Classic

I want to be an intellectual great like Atticus Finch,
An educated man devoting my life to reform,
All the while inspiring those I love with my character and heart.

I want to stop my life at a single point like Miss Havisham.
Avoiding future heartbreak,
I will cease living, choosing instead to only exist.
No one can hurt me if I refuse to live.

I will become simplistic and bright,
A Huckleberry Finn of modern times.
Running away on a riverbend,
Discovering that others have emotions, thoughts, and fears,
Like me.

Jane Austen will overcome me,
The best and worst overly romantic thinkers of our times.
She will love me and I will love her.
Together, we will be appreciated.

The song of the nightingale
Will become my own personal infinity.
I will enter its world
And dance in the breezes of Heaven.

These worlds—
These people—
These stories—
A part of me.
They reside in my heart, my mind, my spirit.
Like them, I will live forever
In the heart of those whom I have loved
And who have loved me.

Bailey Lovell

Theta Beta Chapter

Calhoun Community College

Carpe Shmarpe

*"I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life...
to put to rout all that was not life; and not, when I came to die,
discover that I had not lived." ~ Henry David Thoreau*

The marrow, dear Henry,
got caught in my throat
and I choked and choked
 'til I turned blue.

The bone of life, it seems,
 is bigger than I'd realized.
I wish you'd warned me to suck it slowly.

Angela Jordan

*Epsilon Alpha Chapter
Northeast Alabama Community College*

Just Around the Corner

What they liked about each other could
be found in a photograph.
She just ended a long-term relationship.
It'd been a long time since he had had
one.
They met through friends who kept
telling them they should meet.
Neither was interested.

One weekend they were forced
together at a barbeque.
They were introduced.
Then their host awkwardly excused
himself
And left them to get acquainted.

They liked each other's looks enough to
talk for a while.
Soon they discovered they couldn't
stand each other.
Nothing in common.
Politics.
Religion.
Both agreed they weren't getting
enough sex.
He didn't ask for her number.
She wouldn't have given it.

Three weeks later they ran into each
other at 7-11.
She was picking up beer and heading
home to watch movies.
He was getting milk and cookies
Then settling in with a book.
They made small talk.
Turns out they lived a few blocks apart.

Maybe it was her glasses or her ponytail
sticking out the back of her cap.
Maybe it was because he couldn't
remember the last time he was with
an actual woman.

Maybe it was because he looked cute
buying milk and cookies.
Maybe it was because she was out of
batteries.
Maybe it was for all those reasons she
invited him over and he accepted.
Maybe they just knew.

Neither finished their first beer before
their lips met.
Soon other body parts were introduced.
They found in each other what they
both needed:
Touch.
Skin.
Release.

That was over a year ago.
She's still not ready for a relationship.
He still doesn't want one.
They see each other at least once a
week,
Sometimes more.
She still thinks he's an ass.
He still thinks she's crazy.

But they both have what they want.
And they found it at 7-11.

Philip Fullman

Chi Gamma Chapter

Collin County Community College

Bigmama

She wore her white hair up in a bun during the day, and nearly fifty years later, I still remember feeling privy to some kind of secret feminine ritual as I watched her take it down at night and brush it into molten silver falling past her waist. She must have been in her 90's when I was just a girl, but even at a slight 4 feet 10 inches tall, she was bigger than the whole world to me. Bigmama was my great-grandmother, my confidante, my teacher, and in the 1960's Alabama of my youth, she was even more.

Her full name is lost to memory, and it was a long one as she had buried four husbands. The nickname was like many bestowed on elders in nuclear families of the day, invented when the ubiquitous "Grandmama" or "Granddaddy" was needed for the slightly junior generation. It stood as a play on her small stature, of course, but for anyone who knew her, it was just as much an affirmation of the size of her presence. She was a force: opinionated, strong, and nearly full-blood Cherokee, her grandparents having escaped the Trail of Tears by marrying briefly into the local white community.

She didn't care much for most members of her family, calling them "spoiled by foolishness" like cars and TVs. I was just a young city girl, one of many great-grandchildren, but I was lucky because Bigmama and I found a special connection apart from that boisterous modern world. Almost every Friday afternoon, my parents would take me to her house, and there I would spend happy weekends until compelled to leave on Sunday.

We had breakfast for supper every Friday evening, and Saturday she cooked squirrel dumplings, venison, or fresh fish, whatever my grandfather brought her from his hunting trips. Early Saturday morning we walked several miles to town for groceries and retraced those same miles home with a full bag each. Most seven-year-old city girls I knew would have protested, but my Bigmama knew every tree, every bird, every wild thing on our way, and any walk with her was high adventure for me and not to be missed.

She had something she called the "animal touch," and she claimed I had it, too. Maybe I did enjoy a certain ease with animals, but it was nothing compared to hers. Many times I watched her take a handful of cornmeal or breadcrumbs behind her house, standing with arm outstretched while wild birds landed on her forearm and ate from her hand. In my adult mind I have tried to fit logic around this, telling myself that these birds had become conditioned to her, but I also know that at some point each bird trusted her over its natural fear of humans, and that is magic I cannot explain away.

Fridays when I arrived at her house, I dropped my bag on the front porch and ran to a special corner just inside the front door where I knew I would find my animal for the weekend waiting. Each time, I found a new creature that she had captured and set up in an old wire birdcage for me. A chipmunk, a dove, a baby owl, a ground snake, a turtle; all weekend she would teach me the animal, where and how it lived, what it ate and what it knew. I spent many fascinated hours feeding

Literary Journal

and watching it, often falling asleep on an old quilt on the floor, listening to Big-mama spin tales of the animal's life, dreaming the dreams she painted for me.

She told me of the chipmunk, hibernating underground for the winter, but awakening to eat on milder days – a warm day in winter is still a chipmunk day to me. She showed me how the ground snake would roll on its back, stick out its tongue and play dead, waiting for its enemy to pass, and how the grey squirrel could go weeks without drinking water by eating plants that catch the morning dew. She explained that the turtle may appear slow, but by moving to its own time, it can live well over 100 years, a creature so loved that it was created before most other animals.

It was only later that I came to understand that she was teaching me not only her animal stories but proverbs and lessons on life as well. I wonder if perhaps she knew, as I did not, that a day would come when her stories would be my strength, even my salvation.

When pain became an enemy, I was able to take my mind to other places until my enemy passed, as the ground snake did.

When I lost everything, I knew I could survive on almost nothing, like the grey



squirrel.

And when I could not walk, I recovered by adding sometimes only one step a day in my own time like the turtle.

But as that young girl, I mercifully knew nothing of what was to come; I simply loved the stories, the animals, and walks in the woods with Bigmama. As I became a teenager, our weekends grew more occasional, crowded out by school and social activities, but I always found my way back there, and her house was the place I ran to when I needed shelter from the world.

Bigmama died when I was fifteen, and some in my family didn't understand me not going to her funeral, but mourning her was different for me. While they were paying their respects at the cemetery, I was off in the woods with Bigmama, finding her then as I do now, around every tree, past every rock, in every wild thing.

I think of her often, of all the beauty she gave me, all the gifts she left me with, and I have come to know that the greatest of her gifts was a kind of steady happiness. She made me understand that happiness is not a matter of what we do or don't have or what we can or cannot do. True happiness is simply a choice, unrelated to circumstance. That choice, she taught me, is our gratitude to our Creator.

My wish is that I will one day share those gifts with my own great-grandchildren, and my hope is that they will see a spark of Bigmama in my own brown eyes when I tell them about the animals, about her, and show them the kind of secret wild places where an old woman and a young girl had everything in common. And the knowledge that Bigmama has in some small way lived on in me? That, I assure you, would be my privilege.

Elizabeth Norman

Epsilon Alpha Chapter

Northeast Alabama Community College

