

Early Expressions 2005

Lamar State College-Port Arthur



Lamar State College-Port Arthur
A Member of The Texas State University System

Early Expressions

2005
Volume VI

Early Expressions 2005 - Winners

DANGEROUS EXPERIENCES

First Place

Danger Zone Benjamin Thomas

Second Place

River Rat Susan McPhail

Third Place

A Tragic Event Rikki Newton

Honorable Mention

Darkness..... Huong Nguyen

DECISIONS IN LIFE

First Place

Cat..... John Jordan

Second Place

You Pay for Your Raising William West

Third Place

First Day in Foster Care..... Tina Coe

Honorable Mention

How I Learned the Hard Way Royce Allen

A Decision Made Cody Garner

The Stained Glass Window..... Chris Hussey

The Corner Ron Taylor

FAMILY

First Place

Piney Woods William West

Second Place

Paw-Paw Lamondon Williams

Third Place

Lake Sam Rayburn Anthony Stevens

Honorable Mention

Granny Crystal Biscamp

My Great Summer Vacation Omar Chavez

To Survive..... Cuong Dang

Guardian Angel..... Ronald Hayes

FAMILY

Honorable Mention

Independent Woman Quincee Spencer
Aromas.....Tammy White

FRIENDS

First Place

Helena John Jordan

Second Place

Shirts and Skins Daniel Larcade

Third Place

Regretfully Reminisce Tien Pham

Honorable Mention

Tear in My Hand Justin Montalvo
Wanted to Be Her..... Linda Nguyen

GENERAL POETRY

First Place

From Activist to Terrorist Justin Montalvo

Second Place

Living in America Alcestis Arago

Third Place

Come Back to Me My Soldier Esmeralda Reynoso

Honorable Mention

One of America’s Greatest Gifts..... Tien Pham
America.....Lamondon Williams

MY COUNTRY ‘TIS OF THEE-POETRY

First Place

Melting Pot Tina Coe

Second Place

America, Land of the Free Keith Richard

Third Place

Flags FlyingMatthew Williams

Honorable Mention

We Are One..... William Angelle
My Country, Be GladEvie M. Jones

Honorable Mention

Proud to Be Benjamin Thomas
American Flag Phu Tran
Land of the Free Demond Wiltz

MY COUNTRY 'TIS OF THEE-PROSE

First Place

America Brenda Aldrich

Second Place

American Values Anthony Stevens

Third Place

Living Free Joseph Gongora

Honorable Mention

What America Means to Me Royce Allen
Racism in America Roshana Broussard
The Privilege to Be American Omar Chavez
Dominate Daniel Larcade
Ask Not Rikki Newton
Coming to America Tan Nguyen

REFLECTIONS

First Place

Random Thoughts on Time Devan Callihan

Second Place

Mexico in December Marisol Gutierrez

Third Place

What Do You Stand For? Dawnicka Williams

Honorable Mention

Are We Comfortable in Our Skin? Ona Bassett
Purpose Charline Sam
The Purpose of My Life Felice Solis

PUBLISHER'S AWARD

Come Back to Me My Soldier Esmeralda Reynoso

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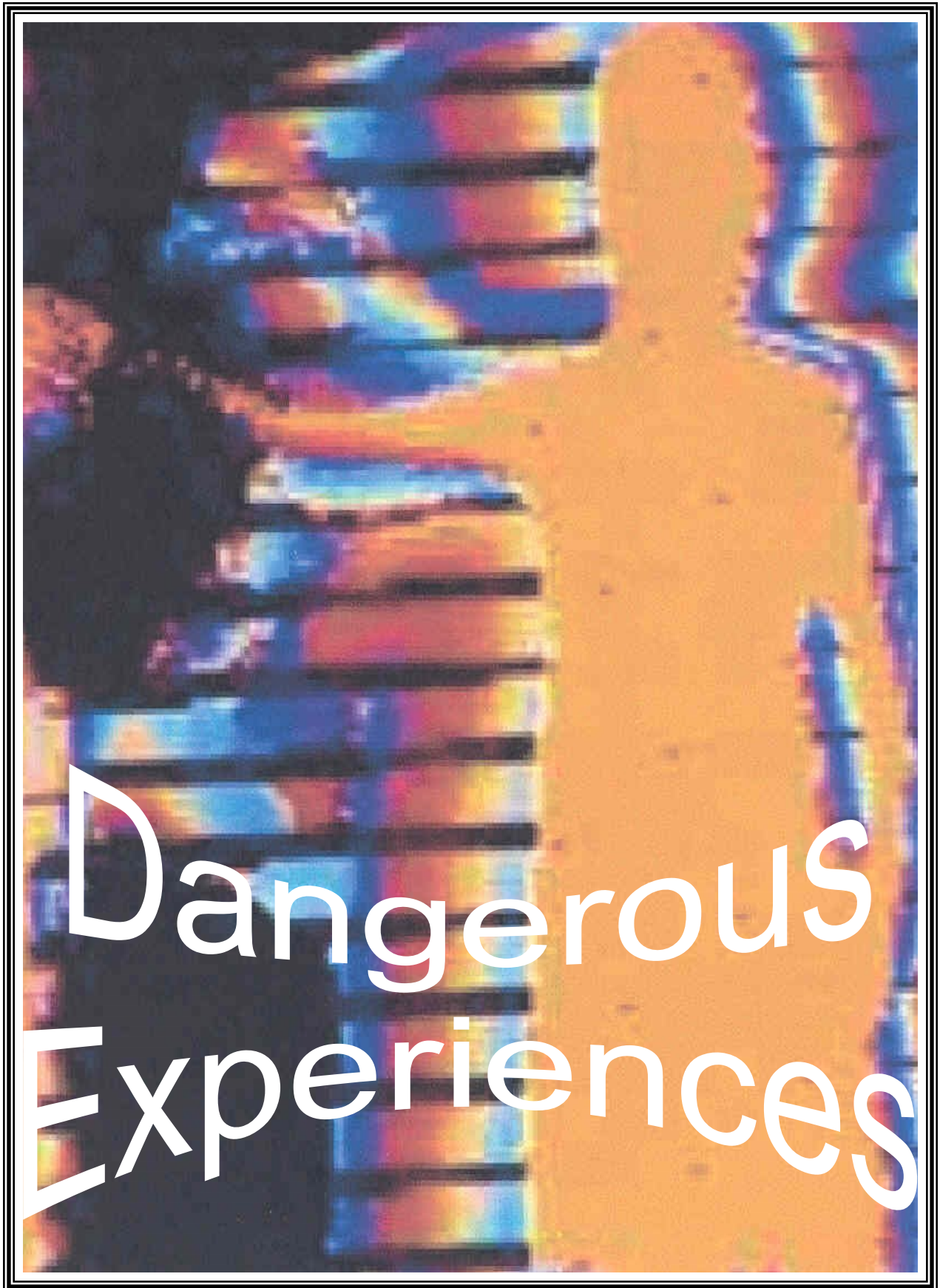
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Dangerous
Experiences

Dangerous Experiences-First Place

Danger Zone
Benjamin Thomas

As I held my head trying not to think about a piece of metal fence stuck in the left corner of my forehead, I thought about my mother, replaying her telling my brother and me not to play football next to the danger zone in the backyard”

Now that everything is over, I guess I can tell the story.

It was August 17, 1995, a regular summer day. The sun was shining and there was a slight breeze blowing. Every day around 4:00 p.m. my brother and I waited eagerly for our father to come home, so we could get permission to go play sandlot football in the backyard with some of the neighborhood friends. This day our mother arrived home before our father, so we had to hear the same old ear bleeding lecture. First she would start off by telling us "Tie your shoes tight, don't try to kill one another, and always try to avoid the *danger zone*." Now that she was done lecturing and we were done pretending to be paying attention we dashed out like two criminals trying to flee a bank after they had just robbed it. With that said, you're probably wondering what in the hell is a *danger zone*? The *danger zone* was known to be from the beginning of the metal fence to about ten feet down at the end of the metal fence on the left side of our yard. Down that border there was nothing but broken beer bottles imprisoned between a six foot wooden fence and the old rusty run down metal fence. It was almost like we were asking for trouble when we were headed in that direction. The *danger zone* never seemed to be a big deal to me.

I was always the little one who just ran up and down the yard happy to be picked on a team until this day when something happened that would change my life forever. My brother, Little Mac, and I were all on the same team, and we were going to lose 4 to 3 going to 5. It was second down, and we had to reach the first pole on the metal fence for another first down. My brother with his bright ideas called a huddle and told Mac to run as fast and as far as he could. Then he looked me in my eyes and said, "When you get the ball, run straight ahead and pitch it

back when they're about to tackle you.” I nodded my head and marched to the imaginary line of scrimmage where I lined up in a three point stance. I eagerly waited for my brother to say hut. *Down*’stretching every syllable he could *set*’ holding the ehh syllable *hut!* I raced out of the three point stance, I sped for about three yards, and quickly turned around. The ball was already on its airborne path towards me, so I jumped up in mid air and extended my arms as it fell right into them. Then my brother began to yell *Go, Ben, go!* After that I heard no more. Everything became silent. It was just me and the great amount of green grass ahead. I clenched the ball with all the strength I had and ran full speed towards the end zone. I can't remember just what it was that caused me to start stumbling, but I did and headed for the danger zone. I let go of the ball, closed my eyes, and went crashing head first into the gate. I tried to push myself up, but I couldn't. It was almost like something was holding me down. That's when my brother ran over and told me not to move. He said that he was going to get somebody to help me. Hearing the tone of his voice, I knew it was bad. My vision was blurry, and my head was numb. I couldn't feel anything, so I started to cry and panic.

When I heard my brother's voice approaching closer, I began to hear my father saying that he was going to cut the access piece of metal from the bottom of the metal fence that was stuck in my head. When I heard that I guess I went into shock or passed out because all I remembered was waking up lying down face up on the back seat in my mother's car on the way to St. Mary's Hospital. I saw the blood on my shirt and looked at my reflection in the window. I saw a piece of fence about two inches long out of the left corner of my forehead. As I held my head trying not to think about it stuck in my forehead, I began to think about my mother, replaying her telling my brother and me not to play football next to the *danger zone* in the back yard. I guess that's a lesson that I had to learn the hard way.

Dangerous Experiences-Second Place

River Rat
Susan McPhail

Summer as a teenager was always fun. My mother would send me to my uncle's house in San Marcos. He was a bachelor with only his pet ferret to keep him company. I always came around the beginning of July. That was the perfect time to go because his business was in its slow season, so he had more time to spend with me. When he was at work, we would drop me off at the river so I could swim. With an old black inner tube, I would float down that river all day, but it only seemed like a little while.

The river was always cold, even in hundred degree weather. My skin would be hot to the touch until I would jump in that sixty-eight degree water. It was the most refreshing feeling. The San Marcos River is a natural spring; it has crystal clear water. It stays the same temperature year around, too. I love to lie down as I float down the river, I can see all the way down to the bottom; I can't tell whether its four feet or twelve. The float is only thirty minutes short with a ten minute walk back, but it's a relaxing thirty minutes with the best scenes I could imagine with umbrellas of trees that whisper in the wind. Huge elephant ear leaves line the edge, hiding local animals like ducks, turtles and otters. If I ever wanted to stop and look at something I just needed to grab the wild river rice grass that grows throughout the bottom. I didn't like running into the river trash. They call it gun-ga, and it was mainly plant life which had broken off and floated together making a land of slime. It felt really gross and hard to get out of. I never really cared for that stuff either. Other than that, I loved the river.

Dangerous Experiences-Third Place

A Tragic Event

Rikki Newton

I was an only child for nine years. When my brother came along, I was excited and at the same time very jealous. I would never admit to being so at the time. I wasn't the baby anymore. I would pretend he was my baby doll. I was always wanting to help when he needed care. As he got older, his being so cute got old fast. My brother was always getting into my things. He always knew what to do to make me mad. I remember one time he threw my cordless phone into the bath tub. I was thirteen; the phone was my life. My brother was constantly going through my room searching for something to annoy me. He was so young, but he was really smart.

One day he started crying and vomiting. My mother thought he had a virus. After a few days of being sick, he seemed to be feeling better. Mother thought he deserved to go to McDonalds. McDonalds was my brother's favorite place. I actually thought he deserved to play there too. I hated going to McDonalds with both my mother and brother most of the time. I guess I thought I was too grown up. I remember that day as if it was yesterday. My brother was having so much fun. He was running from the table to the playground continuously. I warned him several times to slow down. Mother would remind me that he was just a little boy. I went to the restroom, and on my way back, I saw my brother running again. As I walked out to the playground, he fell and hit his head on a small brick wall. When he fell, he was knocked unconscious. It happened so fast. He finally came to and started screaming. He was bleeding badly. At that minute I was very angry, scared, and upset. We finally got him to the hospital, I felt better once we got there. My mother talked to the doctor, and he was going to be okay. The doctor said they had to do a routine cat scan. I think that day was meant to be. If my brother had not fallen, we might have found out too late that he had a tumor in his head about the size of a grown man's fist. We were devastated to hear the news. After a life-threatening surgery and recovery, I still have my brother. I learned much from this tragic event. The most important one was I will never take my brother for granted.

Dangerous Experiences-Honorable Mention

Darkness
Huong Nguyen

Silence! No sound or noise; even the sound of breathing seemed loud. It was dark, but the moon gave a little light. During the day the room was bright as if the sun itself was here. At night it was a whole new world, a world with mystery, strange, and different things. What's that? That noise; it sounds like the cry of a baby. No, it can't be; there's no baby in this neighborhood, no one that I know anyone who has a baby around here. My mother told me that cats cry like babies; it must be a cat crying, yeah just like a cat, nothing else. I must go to sleep now, it's getting late. It's really hot in the room, but the covers can't protect me if there really is something out there. Oh, my God! What's that noise!?! It sounds like plastic rubbing together or really loud static. I can't tell. Should I go see what the strange noises are? But what if something's out there? Oh, God help me! That noise really scared me; it was like a sharp, and fast sound, and it's probably all in my imagination. It's getting close to midnight, and I still can't sleep. Oh I wish I had never listened to those scary stories, and watched all those horror movies. Oh, why can't I sleep? If it was morning, I wouldn't be so scared.

Maybe I can turn on the light, but the nightstand seems so far away. All I have to do is poke my hand out and pull the switch, to turn on the lights, and everything will be fine. Oh, why can't it be morning already? People must think I am crazy, but I'm not. Scenes of bloody hands, white faces, vampires, and ghosts keep going through my mind. Every time I watch horror movies this happens. The quicker I fall asleep, the faster it will be morning. What's that? Yes, it is the first sunlight, finally morning.

It turned out that noise was my corsage. It fell off the wall; that explains the creepy noise. What about the sound of the cry? Yes, it was the cat like my mother told me. The neighbor cats were fighting. Why am I so frightened at night? I have lived here more than ten years. That's it, no more scary movies ever again. Maybe a semi-scary movie is okay!



Decisions in Life

Decisions in Life-First Place

Cat

John Jorden

On a Monday night, I arrived home, late from work, at about nine o'clock. As a lineman for the local electric utility company, it was not unusual for me to work late on some sort of emergency, with little or no advance notice. It did not surprise or even worry me that my wife was not at home.

I unlocked the door, stepped inside, and removed my heavy climbing boots and socks. The soft, plush carpet soothed my bare, aching feet as I strolled through the living room toward the kitchen. There on the kitchen table was a note, just where I knew it would be. Picking it up, I glanced at the familiar words, punctuated with dashes; "gone with friends-supper's in the oven-see you later-love Helana."

It was pay-back time. She was just getting even, and I knew it. Two days ago, on Friday night, I had not come home from work. There had been a poker game going in the South End, and they needed a fifth player. I went to the game straight from work. The house cut every pot, the liquor was free. I came home, staggering drunk, at two in the morning and several hundred dollars to the good.

Lonely and scared, my wife had patiently waited up for me. She still had last night's dinner warming in the oven, just in case I might be hungry.

This was familiar territory. I knew the drill and what was expected of me. I was supposed to go up Highway 90 the two miles or so to the Radar Lounge, where I would find Helena and her friends. After an apology, a drink, and a dance, we would tell everyone goodnight and go home. Arlene and her husband, Fred, owned and operated the bar. They had known my wife ever since she had been in grade school with their daughter, who was my wife's close friend. They were like family.

Tired out, and knowing that Arlene would see that my wife got home safely, I decided not to play that game tonight. After a long, hot, relaxing bath, I ate a ham-and-cheese sandwich, washed down with a 7-Up.

Then, wearing pajamas, I watched the nightly news as I gently stroked the back of our white Siamese cat. She lay stretched out next to me on the sofa. With her

eyes closed, she softly purred, while sensuously kneading my stomach with her soft paws, and extending and retracting her claws. About eleven o'clock, I went to bed.

I had been asleep for a short period of time, when, in a dream, the cat jumped onto the bed and snuggled up next to my shoulder. She was still purring. In the dream, I got out of bed and carried the cat back to the living-room sofa.

I had hardly gotten back to sleep, when the cat climbed back onto the bed. This time, she cuddled up next to my back. She had grown twice her normal size. With a low guttural moan, she was flicking and darting her tongue about my ears and neck. Once again, I carried the cat back to the living room. This time, however, she struggled and resisted being returned to the sofa.

Back in bed, I drifted off to sleep. Suddenly, the cat was back. She was even larger than before. She now weighed about thirty-five or forty pounds. She was like a miniature tiger. She crawled on top of me, and, as in that old wives' tale, she was trying to smother me. The cat's mouth was on mine, and she seemed to be trying to suck my breath away. She was beginning to frighten me. The animal was scratching my shoulders and biting my neck. After quite a tussle, I managed to carry her through the living room and push her out the front door. Somewhat shaken up, I returned to the bedroom and lay on top of the covers. Remember, this was taking place in a dream.

Suddenly, the cat burst into the bedroom and pounced upon the bed. She had grown to about the size of a seventy-five or eighty pound German Shepard. We fought and wrestled on the bed; twisting, turning, rolling over, legs intertwined, each striving to gain advantage. The ferocious feline was scratching and clawing my chest and shoulders. She bit my ears and lips. My pajamas were torn and shredded. I was getting weak, and the cat seemed to be growing stronger. Somehow, I managed to grab her two front paws. With a desperate surge of energy, I dragged the biting, scratching, caterwauling cat across the living room carpet and forced her once again outside, through the entrance door.

Fraught with dread and in trepidation, I slunk back into the bedroom. After removing my torn and tattered pajamas, I lay back, nude, on top of the tangled bed covers. Surely, the rapacious beast would return to finish off her prey.

I knew that this time it would be a life or death encounter. Still in the dream, shaking and sweating in the dark, I awaited the return of the pygmy lion.

Then, as suddenly as before, the cat was back. She weighed at least one-hundred-ten or one-hundred-twenty pounds. Uttering a throaty growl, she leaped upon the bed and the final set-to commenced. I felt her hot breath on my face. She dug her talon like claws into my chest. I grabbed her paws and she bit me again on the neck. Gasping for air, I wrapped my arms around the cat. I could feel her heart pounding against mine. Her mouth was again on mine. Strangely, she tasted like whiskey, and her skin and hair smelled of my favorite perfume. There was a slight hint of tobacco smoke in her hair. Might this be a sign of my impending demise? Was this how my tour with the living would end; mauled and pummeled to death by this imposter of a pet from hell?

I was teetering on the brink of despair. The essence of life was being squeezed, gushing and spurting from my body. The empty shell of my soul was being sent, hurtling and spinning at the speed of light, into the inky blackness of the great beyond, returning to that eternal light where all life begins and ends and begins anew.

At that very moment, I awakened from the dream. Revived from death, I found Helena, naked as the day she was born, on top of and astraddle me. With her legs firmly clamped to my sides, and wearing a triumphant smile, she was trembling and shuddering with cascading, convulsive orgasms

After that night, I quit drinking and gambling so often. As much as possible, I try to let Helena know where I am and what I am doing. For some reason, she quit leaving those notes and going out with her friends.

Sometimes, when I catch the cat and my wife staring at each other, it seems as if the cat winks at her. Also, on occasion, when the cat and I look at each other, it appears as though she has donned my wife's victorious smile.

I have never revealed this particular dream to anyone, not even to Helena. It is just one of the less frightening ones, tucked away in the back room closets of my mind. Some of them date back to early childhood. I seldom go back there.

The therapist seems to think I have somehow erased that invisible line between fantasy and reality, and that I am stuck or lost somewhere between

life's reverse/rewind button and the fast-forward button. If she knew about this dream, she would probably insist that we analyze it together.

Decisions in Life-Second Place

You Pay for Your Raising

William West

In 1990, I was living in Lake Jackson, Texas. My dad called me to talk to me and sounded serious. He finally told me that he had terminal cancer. He said that the doctor told him there was nothing that could be done. He said they had gone to two doctors, and they both told him the same thing. When the cancer was found, it was too far advanced and too late for treatment. Dad had been having trouble with his back for several years, calcium spurs on the spine. He had associated the pain with his back and had let it go too long. I knew I wanted to spend as much time with my dad as possible. I made a decision to move back to Beaumont to help Mom and Dad not knowing that this would lead me to a career change.

I talked to the manager at the company I worked for about moving to Winnie, Texas. The company had built another site there recently, about thirty minutes from Beaumont. I called the main office in New Orleans, Louisiana, and they told me about a man at the Winnie site who wanted to move back to the site where I was. It took about three weeks to get the paperwork completed. In about a month, I was moved into a rental house and visiting my dad. I was contacted shortly after that, and my house in Lake Jackson was sold. Although I did not want to sell the house I did make a fair profit on it.

After about a month my dad started getting a little worse. We put him in the hospital, but he wanted to go home. He was getting rapidly worse, so we went ahead and put a hospital bed in the living room where we could keep him company and help him when he needed it. I brought my clothes and other articles I would need and stayed there. It got to the point where he was getting disoriented and blind most of the day. Strange as it was, about two hours each morning he knew where he was and could see. So each morning I would cook him breakfast, and while he ate, we would visit and talk about family and friends. He died approximately three months after I moved home. As afraid as he was at first, he was at peace with his dying at the end. At his funeral his friends and family came

and laid him to rest at a cemetery close to home. I went back to work on a regular schedule and thanked everyone for being patient with me for the last three months. I learned the new site and made some good friends. In 1998, the site went through a major upgrade to automate the system. The company started talking work force reduction in near future. Due to the automation of the site, they didn't need the amount of employees that we had. The layoff was delayed as long as possible, but in September 2003, I was laid off by the company. I filed for unemployment but as much as I tried, none of the other companies would hire me. It seemed every time I tested and applied for a company in what I was trained, there were several hundred other younger and just as trained eager to go to work. Now here I am, getting close to the end of my first semester at Lamar College and the start of another career.

Little did I know that my dad's dying would lead me back to Beaumont and to college for another career. I think back at times of all the things I had done while I was growing up, things that would have disappointed my dad in my eyes. I doubt my dad ever felt that way. Dads seldom do. He always told me, "You pay for your raising." I am just now realizing what he meant by that saying his dad always told him. I find myself telling my kids the same thing. Maybe some day they will know what I mean and pass it on.

Decisions in Life-Third Place

First Day of Foster Care

Tina Coe

My elementary years are a blur in my mind even today. There is one memory that I will never forget as long as I live. When I think about the memories of that day, the emotions come rushing back.

It happened on a sunny day in September of 1980. I was ten years old. My younger sister was five, and my younger brother was three at the time. The day started out like any other day, giving us no clue as to how drastic our lives were about to change forever.

Due to a conflict in our family, The Department of Family Service was called out to our home. I remember them saying to me that my sister, brother, and myself would have to go with them to a new home. I remember the confusion that I felt that day. I was not old enough to understand that my family life with my biological family was not a good situation for children. Through the tears and mixed emotions, I packed a suitcase for my siblings and myself.

Looking back on that day, I'm sure I was thinking it could not get any worse. Then a Department of Human Service social worker told me that there was not a home available that could take all three children, which meant we would have to be put into separate foster homes. I will never forget the look on my baby brother's face when we were leaving him with his new foster family. He held on to me like a child would hold on to his mother, saying "Sissy-Sissy." I remember feeling my heart tearing apart as the tears streamed down my face; I felt so helpless. If I think about that day too long or too hard, the tears will come back still today.

Decisions in Life-Honorable Mention

How I Learned the Hard Way

Royce Allen

At a young tender age I discovered the power of lying. With lying I could make things seem perfect when they weren't. I thought I could make things go the way I wanted. The only thing that I didn't know at the time was that one lie always leads to another; it's very stressful, and I always managed to get caught. Here is my experience with lying, and how I learned the hard way.

My parents valued the grades of their children. They didn't ask very much from us except just to bring home honorable grades. When we brought home good grades we were praised and commended, and, of course, if we brought home low grades, we could see in their eyes that they were upset, and knew automatically we would be punished for the next three to six weeks. In the seventh grade I was a pretty good student and brought home decent grades. I had become so use to making good grades, but on one particular six weeks I decided to slack off, not to study, no homework, or projects. For some odd reason I thought I would bring home the same decent grades. However, the week of report cards, I learned that not doing my work leads to failure. I found out that I got a C in math, a D in English, and a F in reading. This was the first time in my life, I had actually failed a class and made low grades. Seeing these horrible grades and knowing what would soon come would not be anything good at all. I started to get very depressed and could feel tears building up in my eyes. I had to hurry up and wipe my eyes before anyone saw me crying. I kept thinking about why I let this happen, and what I what I was going to do. I knew my parents would be highly upset, and I also knew that I would be punished. I decided to change my grades. On the day the report cards came out, I looked at my grades and studied them hard. I figured I could turn a seven into a nine and a six into a eight. I changed my grades. It wasn't a perfect job, but it didn't look too bad either. Once school ended, I walked quickly to my bus, and what usually seemed like a long bus ride was a quick one. Just my luck, I thought. I had already begun to feel miserable and guilty because I knew I was about to lie to my parents. When I got off the

bus, I walked home slowly. When I got home, I could smell my favorite food on the stove, okra and rice. My mother makes the best okra. It is seasoned well, and has sausage, shrimp, and sometimes crab along with many other things. For the first time in my life, I wasn't hungry. I was much too nervous and stressed out about what I was about to do. My mother was in a good mood, of course, because my brother brought home straight A's. She asked for my report card and I gave it to her and walked quickly to my room. I wanted to hide because I knew what I did was wrong. All of sudden I heard a scream from my mother. She began to shout, "Royce Allen come here!" She sounded as if she was talking to someone a mile away. I began to walk, but my legs weren't going anywhere. Then all of sudden my mother appeared in front of me. Her face was red, and I began to see the pain in her eyes. She asked me if I had changed my grades. I began to deny it, but I told the truth because I knew that there was no way to get around it. I felt very bad as if I were the worst person in the world. My mother sent me to my room and gave me the usual punishment, which was no television, I couldn't go anywhere, no phone and I had to clean up. However, she added something new. I had to eat peanut butter and jelly for six weeks.

Food has always been very precious to me because I love to eat. My parents are great cooks, and I love fast food. At first it wasn't so bad, but after weeks of peanut butter and jelly it was beginning to taste like vomit. Of course, I also had the school food, but everything tasted the same. After I lied and changed my grades, my parents told me how disappointed they were in me. They said I was capable of doing much better in school, but they knew I wasn't perfect and wouldn't bring home perfect grades all the time. However, they let me know that they were mostly disappointed in how I lied, and that it shouldn't have come to this, and that I should always be honest with them. They let me know that I was mostly punished for being dishonest not because of my grades. From then on I did my best in school. I had learned to be honest, and that lying is not the way out of a problem, and it never solves anything. It got me in more trouble, and it hurt me more than anyone else. From then on I learned a valuable lesson, and I always tell the truth.

Decisions in Life-Honorable Mention

A Decision Made

Cody Garner

Being young has its advantages and disadvantages, but being stupid has no advantage. Uneducated decisions sometimes result in painful consequences that rippled out to other members of your family and sometimes friends. It can affect more people than you realize. Those decisions coupled with peer pressure, inexperience, and the teenage sense of immortality can have disastrous effects. That's why I am writing this paper because of the problem I once had. About four years ago, I started experimenting with drugs.

At a young age, peer pressure is a big influence. Whether it's a look, a remark or not being part of the crowd, it's just miserable. Everyone wants approval, so when someone said "try this" or "do that," I was ready for action. I would do just about anything for the approval of my peers. Being with the "in" crowd is very important, especially to teenagers.

Inexperience is sometimes okay. It leaves you open-minded to new ideas, makes you more adventurous and fearless in that pursuit. However, if you are experimenting with drugs, it can be dangerous. Being young and not really realizing the long and short-term effects can be crucial, and dangerous. At some part in a teenager's life he disregards or ignores information given to him by family, friends, or other people in authority.

Feelings of immortality are in most teenagers. They feel like they are ten feet tall and bullet proof, and can conquer the world single handedly. They can sleep all day, and party all night. I didn't think about my life or the life of those others who may have been injured by me while driving under the influence of a deadly, if not lethal, mixture of drugs and alcohol. To hell with the consequences, family, friends and cops. I am with the "in" crowd.

We make dozens of decisions everyday. Sometimes we will not know for a long time the effect it will have on us or our family. When I finally got arrested for using drugs, I found myself at a crossroad. I asked God to show me the right path. He did. After an eighteen month probation period and my taking charge of my

life, I finally started making some good decisions. I am back in shape, no more drugs, and I eat properly. I don't hang around with the "in" crowd anymore. I am the "in" crowd. Last but not least, I am a proud member of the Garner family who takes good care of me and are very proud of my going to school to get an education. Changing my life was the best decision I have ever made, because one cannot beat the feeling of your family's love and respect.

Decisions in Life-Honorable Mention

The Stained Glass Window

Chris Hussey

At the age of six, my brother and I always went down to the corner of my street to play soccer. The corner consisted of a huge field and a little white church. This incident changed lives forever. My brother and I were kicking the ball around, and I accidentally put the ball through one of the church windows. A large multi-colored stained glass window, and it shattered into hundreds of pieces. I knew I was in trouble. This, in turn created three big problems for me. I needed to pay for it, tell my parents, and find the same window.

Paying for the window was going to be impossible because I was six and did not have a job. I could tell the window was very expensive. I remember being so scared I did not want to go home. My brother was so happy it was not him, that he fell down laughing. I knew this was going to be a very bad day. We decided to try to see if anyone was inside the church. After realizing no one was there, we walked home.

When we arrived at home, only my mom was there. I asked her to come in the kitchen because I had to talk to her. She was so mad she wanted to kill me. She sent me to my room and told me to wait until my stepfather got home. When I heard that old blue truck pull up, I was really nervous. After he got in the house, mom called me into the kitchen to discuss everything. He was furious and said that we needed to call the church to find out what we needed to do.

We went back to the church to meet with someone. That is when my stepfather realized what a big mess I had made. The man from the church gave us a number to call to get another window. I was never told how much it cost, but I knew it was a lot. My stepfather said he would put the new window in so he could save a little bit of the cost. As he was putting the new window in the frame, he dropped it. I wanted to crawl underneath a rock when I saw his face. The new window broke into pieces, and so he had to buy a second one.

Once it was all over with and the window was fixed, I was never allowed to go back to the field and play. I learned never to play any kind of sports around windows, especially stained glass windows. My stepfather was mad for quite a while, but he did get over it. Now we can talk about it and laugh. Looking back I should not have been so scared to tell my parents. It was just a big accident and a big lesson learned.

Decisions in Life-Honorable Mention

The Corner

Ron Taylor

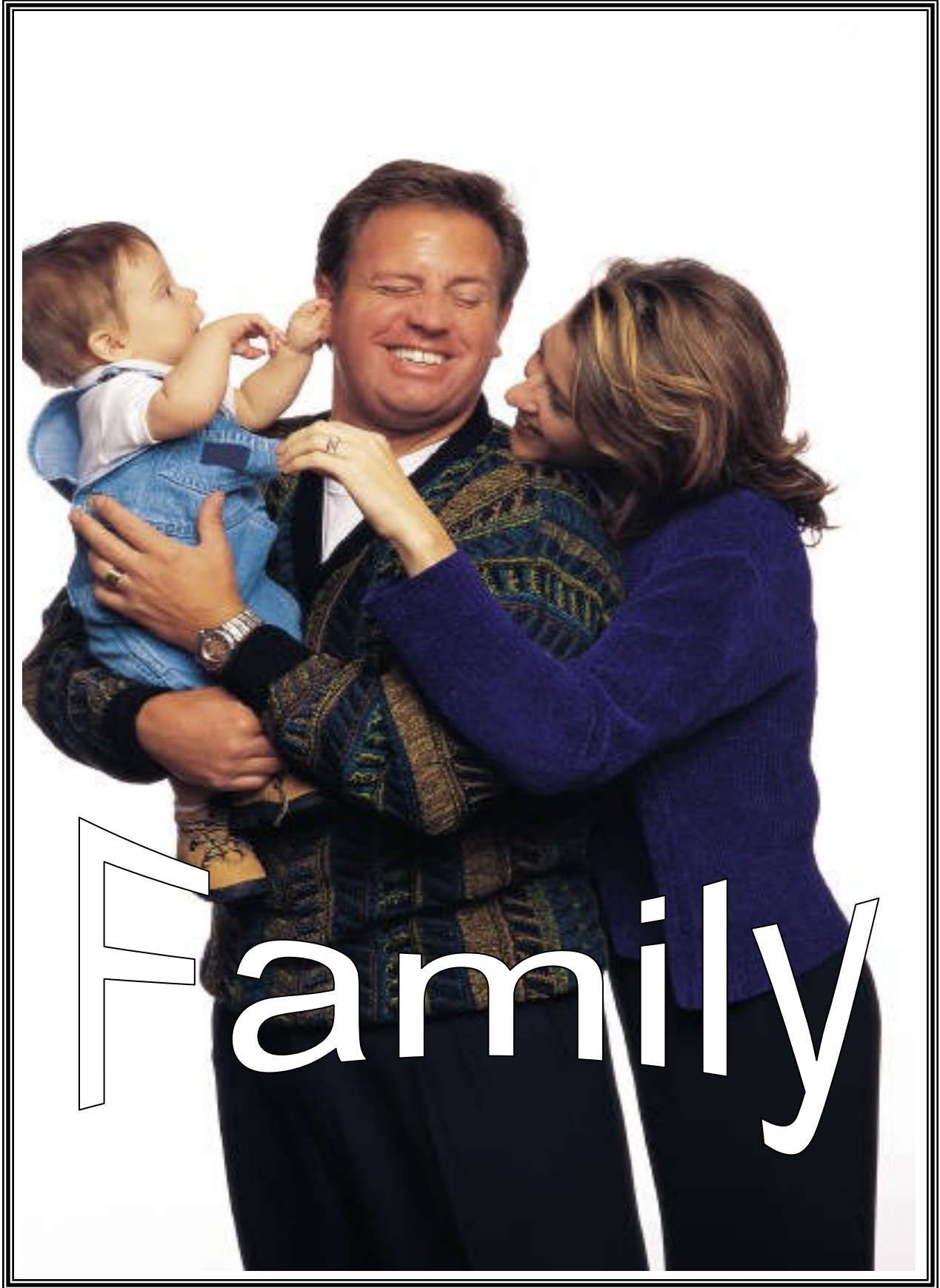
It was my first trip there. The first day of school my mother said, “Hurry up and get dressed, so you can go to the corner.” Right there where Minnie Street meets 53rd is the beginning and the end for many people. This spot is not prejudiced; it welcomes all comers. Through a visitor’s eyes, it may seem like just another street corner in a predominately black neighborhood, but the people who are familiar with this area or reside in this area, know this corner all too well.

My parents sent me there in the morning to catch the bus. However to a child this corner was more like a meeting place, where all the kids from the neighborhood gathered before a long day of school. As I waited for the bus to arrive, it seemed like the fun never stopped, I played chase, tag, and many other childhood games right there on the corner.

At the conclusion of my school day, the bus dropped me off at the same corner. The place that seemed so fun just a few hours earlier was almost forbidden territory now. Just before I left for school Mom said, “When you get off that bus, don’t hang on that corner. Come home! I mean it.” To a child this was a little confusing. One minute it was okay to be there, and the next is was not.

As the years passed, I grew older, and I realized why my parents didn’t want me hanging on that corner. It also had a bad side that took form later in the day. There was a different type of crowd in the evening. Everything from drug dealers to murders and drug addicts occupied this space now. For many people their lives ended right there. They made a lot of the wrong choices that would affect them for the rest of their lives.

Now when I look back on it, I realize my parents were just trying to protect me from the bad side of the corner. It’s truly amazing how an area so small can have had such a big effect on my life. I guess that’s why people say that the corner is funny like that.



Family

Family-First Place

Piney Woods

William West

When my brother and I were fourteen and twelve, the family would travel to Kirbyville, Texas, a small town in the piney woods. Most of my aunts and uncles lived there and worked for the only industry in this small at the time, Kirby Lumber.

A few years earlier, my Uncle Cotton had the opportunity to oversee about five hundred acres of Kirby Forest; in exchange he would watch over the trees and treat the property as his own. My uncle had two sons, and being brought up on a farm, they had a good idea what hard work was. My uncle and his sons cut a path through the heavy brush about two winding miles back into the woods until they reached a certain part of a creek. The creek had a big white sand bar, and they had built a cabin on stilts among the tall timbers. The creek bank had a large tree that leaned over the water. We had tied a rope onto the highest branch that we would dare to reach.

All the boys had the “run of the property” as long as we returned by dark. We Spent, it seemed, endless days exploring the woods, sandbars and sand pits. The brush and trees were so thick at times one would think it was almost dark. We learned from our cousins that we could smoke muscadine vines, and spent many hours with our heels in the air throwing up. We would explore old and at times new locations through what seemed like endless summers over and over again. By the end of the summer, we had fished, swam, and explored enough to last us until the next year. We would be half way into the school year thinking “will this ever end,” so we could go back to those piney woods again.

As we grew older into adults, our families moved to different cities. However, we still had family reunions, and the summers in the woods when we were kids always seemed to be one of the main topics for the young and old.

Later as relatives passed away and the family reunions became fewer and fewer, I always had the fond memories of a bunch of little boys running through The woods daring each other to do something bold in our eyes. I can't help but think that wherever my other relatives are, they think back to those days also.

Family-Second Place

Paw-Paw

Lamondon Williams

My grandfather was like my dad until he passed away. It has been a while since his death, in 1988 to be exact. I remember all sorts of things that he did with me because I was with him everyday. I used to wake up early every morning and sit on his lap and watch sports center and the super station.

That is where I get my love of sports. He told my mother that I would become a professional baseball player. At the age of one, I was hitting, throwing, and catching a baseball, and he said that was unusual. I would take his glasses and wear them, and he would laugh, We used to go to the store right around the corner from where we lived, and he would buy me all kinds of toys and candy. We must have walked to the store at least three times a week. When he died, the whole town of Abbeville was very sad. He was a coach and school teacher for about forty years.

Everyone knew him. When I went to his wake, I thought he was just sleeping. I didn't understand really what was going on; but I saw everyone crying, and that made me cry too. Since his death I have always thought about him, looking at pictures and plaques that he received. Also everyone says I look just like him. It would mean a great deal for me to become a coach and teacher like he was. To be able to affect that many people and be a part of all those lives, is just something that is hard to explain. I will try to become a better coach and teacher than he was. I know it would make him proud. He showed me hard work pays off in the long run. I couldn't write this paper without mentioning there is now a park dedicated to him called the "Herbert Williams Park." So whenever I have kids and bring them to the park, they will understand what a great man their great-grandfather was.

Family-Third Place

Lake Sam Rayburn

Anthony Stevens

As a child growing up my father took me on many fishing trips. The lake we often visited was Lake Sam Rayburn. The park that we usually camped at was San Augustine Park. San Augustine Park was the best by far of all of the campgrounds around the lake.

San Augustine Park is a pristine area, with gravel roads leading all though out the park. Bordering the roads leading through the park are tall Pine Trees, Oak Trees, lush green grasses, and a variety of multi-colored flowers. Each road leads to different campsites through the park. The campsites are numbered and each campsite is equipped for a variety of uses. All of the campsites have concrete picnic tables, which are covered by tin.

For some campers who do not want to camp out in a tent, the campsites offer electrical hookups for RV trailers. Another feature that the campsites have are fire pits. The fire pit is used for cooking food and roasting marshmallows. Most campers use the pit for building a campfire to sit around and share the day's events. The evening time is the best time to sit around the campfire. The bright light of the fire flickers from a breath of wind, and it is a quiet peaceful time. The most important feature of the campsite is that they are within walking distance of the lake. Most campsites are fifty feet or less from the water's edge. In the morning as the sun comes up, a shimmer appears across the lake's surface as a fiery flame. As the sun rises higher in the sky, the dark blue of the lake sits with tall trees surrounding it. It is a beautiful sight to see. As the wind blows across the lake's surface, it creates shimmering ripples. The wildlife wakes up, as birds fly over head waiting to catch a morning meal. The squirrels rustle about playing in the pine needles. Occasionally, a fox or a deer may appear for brief moment, and then disappear back into the trees. Not only is this a time when wildlife seems to stir about, but campers do as well. As campers begin to stir, trucks are started up as they take their boats to the boat ramp to be launched. Boats are launched, and

the enormous roar of the big motors echo throughout the camp grounds. Those campers who are still in camp usually sit under the canopy of their RV's and watch as they drink coffee. This is a very popular area for both campers and fisherman alike. This place is where families can go to enjoy the outdoors and create memories. Lake Sam Rayburn has been and will always be special to me for several reasons. The first and most important reason is because of the memories that I have of my family outings to Lake Sam Rayburn. Secondly, that even today Lake Sam Rayburn is still an annual vacation spot. Today, Lake Sam Rayburn hasn't changed much other than the fact that more people now camp there.

Family-Honorable Mention

Granny
Crystal Biscamp

She lived right down the country dirt road about the distance of one city block away from our house. Although there were no houses between hers and mine, the walk was almost entertaining and full of sights from the tall dark trees with a strong scent of pine needles to the beautiful birds singing as they flew from tree to tree. Being a little girl and walking down what seemed to be a very long dusty road with huge trees was often one of my favorite moments. Oh, how I enjoyed those walks to reach Granny's house, wondering what she had in store for me today.

Directly across from her house was a small white old Baptist Church. We used to walk across the street every Sunday and meet with the congregation. Once inside, the smell of wood immediately took over the room, you would see wood floors and two rows of hard wooden pews. The preacher would start his sermon and soon came the singing. I was so proud as a small child only about three or four years old of being with my Granny. I remember sometimes getting very sleepy, and I would lay my head on her lap as she petted my hair so calmly. Those were the greatest naps. Often times after church we would go back across the dirt road to her house for dinner. She always prepared food for anyone who wanted to eat. In her kitchen above her table hung a picture of "The Last Supper." I remember sitting there at her table, time and time again, as she would prepare her meals.

Eating my favorite snack at that time, cornbread in milk, no one could ever make it taste like Granny's. Sometimes we would go in her backyard: to pick berries. She would hold my hand and lead the way, always so kind and loving. She called me her "little mockingbird," I always repeated the things she would say to me. In my grandmother's presence, the room, or the yard, no matter where we were, she filled the area with her loving and caring spirit and always wanted to help someone or to make sure everyone was happy. I have so many precious memories of those times at my grandmother's house.

I wish we could have made more wonderful memories together. Granny was smiling so peacefully the last time I saw her. She looked like an Angel already sent home.

Family-Honorable Mention

My Great Summer Vacation

Omar Chavez

Waiting for the long, tedious school year to end was the hardest part for me to conquer throughout my childhood. Partly because I did not have to wake up early every morning, but mostly because it was when my cousin, aunt, uncle, and I would all pack up to go to our favorite vacation spot every summer, Parish Lake, San Diego. The same process was repeated every summer: packing and getting ready for the camp, and the hot, confusing drive up Interstate Eight. As always, my Uncle Arthur would get stuck in the traffic and then somehow end up taking a wrong turn, even though we had been to the lake plenty of times for him to know exactly what roads to take. Even though these small inconveniences set us back a little, we were still excited for what was to come.

As soon as we made it to our destination, Parish Lake, north of San Diego, my family and I would quickly unpack our belongings and begin to set up for camp. My cousin and I would also apply sunscreen to our bodies as fast as possible remembering the scorching sunburns we had received from the previous summers. Since we were so used to setting up the tents from the past summer vacations, my uncle, cousin, and I became experts and had the tent set up in minutes. While we were setting up the tents, my aunt would get out the transportable barbecue grill we used every summer and began to make the best, juiciest hamburgers in all of San Diego. As soon as the camp was set up, and when we were finished ravishing down our delicious hamburgers as if we were starving, my cousin and I would jump up and run into the cold water for a calm, relaxing swim.

Even though it is said not to go swimming right after a person eats, we never listened because we could not wait to go swimming in the prettiest lake one has ever seen. The water was clear as a mountain spring and so blue it was as if we were swimming in the sky. The white sand surrounded the water like a barrier to the outside world, and my cousin and I would always have a contest for the biggest seashells. Of course, my cousin would always find them quicker than

I would. In the lake, we would race to see who could swim faster. My cousin would always win that too. However, when it came down to see who could hold their breath underneath the water the longest, I would always win. After the usual games in the water, we were finally exhausted and then decided to get out of the water ending up with huge goose bumps on our skin from the extreme difference of the water being warmer than the air itself.

Another favorite activity I loved to do at the lake was ride the jet skies. My uncle owned two jet skies which could hold three passengers. The jet skies were really fast, which would scare my aunt each time we would ride in them, so that it made the hair on the back of her neck stand up. She would continuously gripe about how dangerous the jet skies were, even though we always wore life jackets. My cousin and I would never listen to my aunt's complaints about not riding the jet skies because we could never resist the excitement and pleasure we would receive. The wind would catch our breaths so that it was difficult to breathe, and our eyes could barely stay open because of how fast we were going. The drops of water would hit my face like little pebbles while we swerved and swept the waves at such high speed. The jet skies became apart of me, and I never wanted to get out of the water. I would have cherished the ability to live on the side of the beautiful, clear lake, in which my days would be filled with nothing but swimming and jet skiing all day long. At night, my thought would change quickly since the weather would get cold enough to where any person would have to get by a fire as quickly as possible.

After dusk began to settle in, my family would begin to set the fire up for the supper and because mosquitoes would quickly disappear once the smoke began to spread around our area. We would eat supper, sit around and chat for awhile, and then head off to sleep since our day was filled with lots of excitement. In actuality, my aunt and uncle would go to sleep in their tent, but my cousin Andy always came up with the idea of going to shoot his BB gun at the noises we heard. Of course I would have just preferred to have stayed in my tent for the simple fact the noises scared me, but like always, Andy would get his way. It was really dark and the surrounding area was creepy to me, because we had two flashlights and only

one BB gun. One of the first animals Andy crept upon was a white owl who had his bright yellow eyes on us. Andy did not shoot him, and I was thankful since I thought the owl was a good luck charm in my adolescent mind.

After the owl flew away, we heard a very strange noise which scared us to the point that Andy forgot about his BB gun, and then we just started running back to the campsite as fast as possible. Even though we did not get to shoot anything, we still had a great time in the dark. In away, it was a good thing we did not shoot anything, so then we never got in trouble for the noise and being out of our tent. The memories from my favorite trip to Parish Lake still stick with me today. I remember there were no responsibilities, like paying bills, or having to be an adult. I had a great time being a kid who did not have a single worry in the world. It is kind of an eye opener to remember those days and to look at myself as I understand I am only getting older and wiser, but I will never get those great days at the lake again as a child. My hope is one day I will be able to take my children to the same place and share the same experiences which will follow them throughout the rest of their lives, so it will make them cherish their memories of being a child with no worries in the world as I did.

Family-Honorable Mention

To Survive
Cuong Dang

My childhood in Vietnam, I had a nanny and also my parents. I always saw them when I woke up and before I went to bed. We might not have had breakfast together, but we were all there at dinner.

We talked about everything that happened during the day while having dinner. My father always took me out on the weekend, either to some places or to shop for Disney's movies. They were there when I needed them for advice or to answer my questions. Since we moved to America, it seems like I lost them. I missed all the good times that I spent with them. Our lifestyle has changed. They had to adapt quickly to survive. They were always busy working, and did not have time for me anymore. They went to work before I woke up for school, and by the time they came home, I was already in bed. It has been a long time since the last time I had dinner with both of my parents.

I felt like I was raising myself except that I did not have to go to work to pay for everything. Now I call my parents a couple of times a week to see how it is going with their business. As a grown-up, I understand why they were so busy and had less time for me because I am doing it myself now. I also understand that money is power. I know that I can't get everything with money, but without it, life in America will be miserable.

Family-Honorable Mention

Guardian Angel

Ronald Hayes

“It is not always a good idea for a person to be remembered for the things that he did or did not do in life, but it is good to remember him for the kind of person that he was.”

I have vivid memory of the first time that I met him. The conversation that I can recall the most is about his being raised in California. He possessed the style of the rich and famous even though he was not. He wore some expensive clothing with matching shoes and luxury car to go with it. My first trip to "Astroworld" was with him. He made my trip the best ever; and even though I have been many times afterwards, nothing compares to the first one with him. The visits became more frequent when I became sixteen and played football for Thomas Jefferson. Every time I played, I could look up in the stands and see him, his wife, and his two kids with maroon and gold shirts on that had my name and number on the back. One of his prized hobbies was traveling to watch me play football, and I still plan to keep playing until I am no longer able.

He was one of the smartest people in life due to the fact that alcohol, smoking, and yelling were never priorities or occasional things for him. He would just wake up every morning that God had given, and with a big smile on his face, he thanked God for waking him and his family up each day.

When I graduated high school in 2001, I went to Houston to stay with him and attend Texas Southern University as he wanted me to do. I only stayed one semester, and then things started for the worst in my life.

He went into a coma. When I found out about him, I rushed to the hospital to be there for him like he had been there for me. It hurt me to see him with so many tubes connected to him. What really hurt was the fact that I was talking to him, but I could not get a reply, although he could see me and hear me, hopefully. On his sixth day of being in a coma, I received a call on my cell phone saying that he had passed away. I could not stand the fact that he was gone.

I was about to quit college and give up on life until someone put a good thought in my head, "Don't you think that your brother would have liked to see you graduate from college and make something of yourself?" I eventually got my act together and transferred to Lamar State College-Port Arthur so I can succeed in my life.

He was my oldest brother, Alvin Hayes, Jr., and he is now my guardian angel. I have a tattoo with his name and his sunrise and sunset on my arm for remembrance. I know the memories of a person holds in his heart are enough to remember a special moment or person by, but I just felt better having him in my heart and his name on my arm.

Family-Honorable Mention

Independent Woman

Quincee Spencer

I heard the sound of her slippers as she passed down the hallway, I turned over and looked at the clock. It is 5:00 a.m., but she acted as if it was not that early!

She turned on the news, and then the smell of Folder's coffee filled the air. The biscuits were in the oven. As I walked in, she greeted me with a hug. Sometimes I don't understand how it is that we are related because our personalities are nothing alike. Every morning I asked myself will there ever be a day when we finally shared something that we had in common. I stared at her and thought to myself what actually could have transpired in her life to make her feel so blue? Is she upset because once in her life she was like me?

Maybe she doesn't want me to follow in her foot steps because her footsteps in the last were not going in a good direction. Chills ran through my body every time I wondered if I would end up at fifty-two wishing there was something I could have done to make a difference, even though she spent most of her life being a devoted mother, wife, and friend to other women who had similar problems. As she struggled with life, I wondered how different life would had been if she had a good Christian companion to share life with. I love her, and I will remain supportive of my mother because I also could have had a hard life.

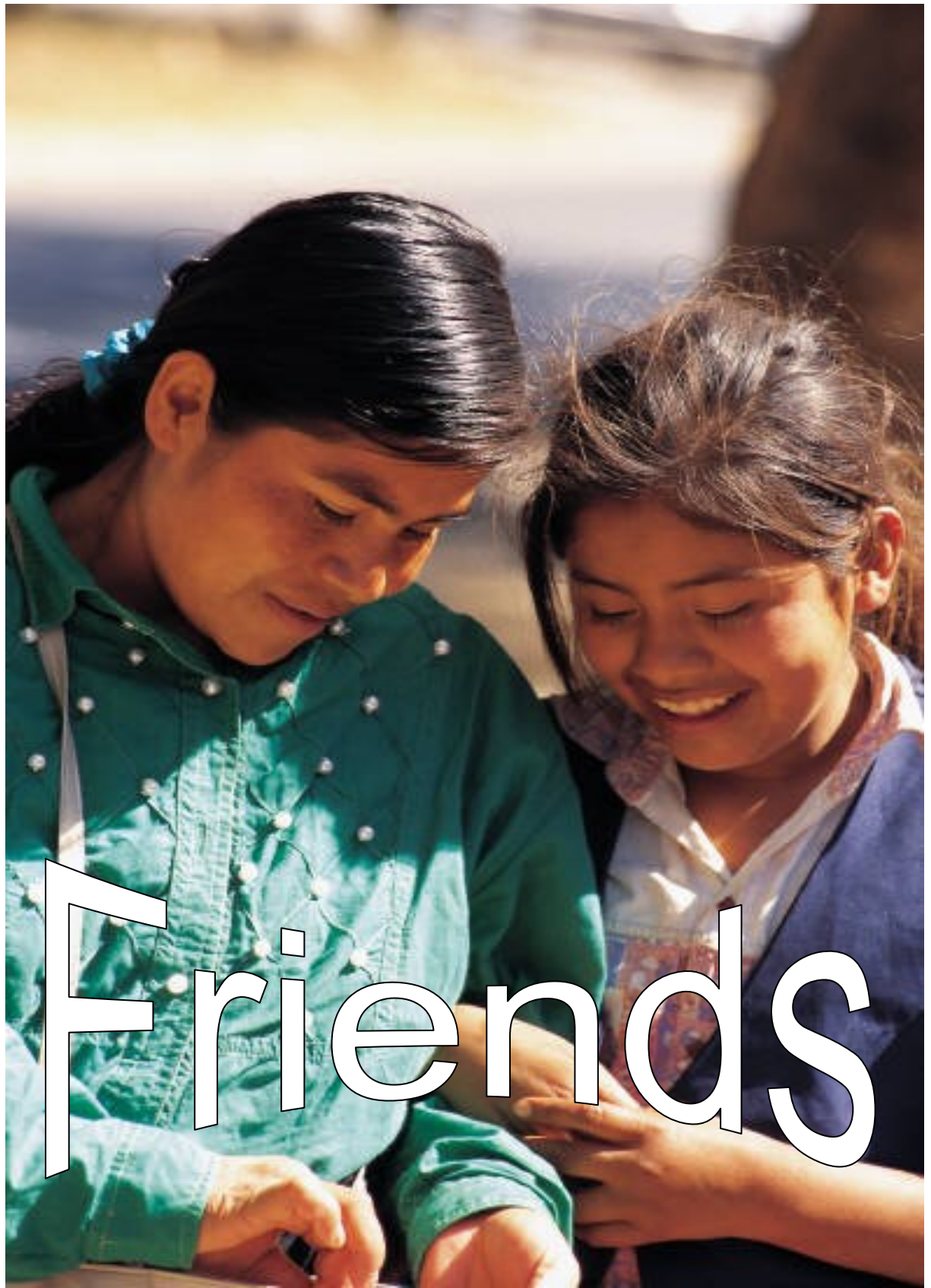
Family-Honorable Mention

Aromas
Tammy White

I remember a tall handsome man wearing a cowboy hat standing at the window of the station. My mother would stop by Bill's place every evening after picking my brother and me up from school. "Papa", I would ask, "How can you tolerate the smell of gas all day without passing out?"

He'd look at me with those thick eyebrows raised and say to me, "Tiny, when you've done this as long as I have, you become immune to the smell." On Sundays we all attended church services except for papa, but he always made sure that he was on time to pick up grandmother after church, parked right out front. Everyone would spend Saturday afternoons at papa's house. Butterflies would dance in my stomach the closer we'd get because I knew the moment I arrived, papa would have a shiny new fifty cent piece to give me. Upon arrival we would see grandma and papa on the front porch sitting in their favorite chairs, papa eating his favorite, roasted peanuts. Grandma would begin preparing dinner; all the granddaughters sat in the kitchen with grandmother to watch as she baked corn-casserole. The sweet smell would have us drooling, licking our lips just knowing how good it would taste as we gobbled it down. Grandma would allow some of the girls to make the salad, and the remainder of us would set the table.

Our cousin would race to the table because the first one there could sit next to papa. At dinner, the room filled with the aroma of delicious foods and laughter; everyone enjoyed themselves as always.



Friends

Friends-First Place

Helena
John Jorden

In the studio photograph, she is sixty years old. When she was younger, her hair was a strawberry blonde color. At that time, her hair fell like a lion's mane, past her shoulders, to about mid-back.. Here, in the portrait, her hair is fading and tinged with gray. It is close cropped and done in tight curls. Also, there are crow's feet at the corners of those same mischievous, emerald green eyes. A sprinkling of freckles decorate her nose and cheeks, testimony of many long days in the sun. Those same even, white teeth and that humorous, friendly smile are unmistakable.

If you have a moment, and care to look, I'll let you peek at a few of the memory pictures of her in my private collection. These are living, breathing, moving, speaking pictures that you cannot touch, but they never fade and are far superior to the ones on paper or canvas.

In the still silence, she stands nude, knee deep in the cool, clear waters of Theuvinns Creek, frozen in time. The sweet, delicate fragrance of magnolia blossoms and wild honeysuckle permeates the airs. The evening sunlight's dancing rays, filtering through the foliage of towering pines, massive, majestic magnolias, and giant red-oak and hickory trees, create the illusion of a golden halo hovering above her wet, tangled, reddish blonde hair. The droplets of water on her shapely white shoulders and back, slender waist, and firm round butt are transformed into glistening, glittering diamonds. It is really Helena, or could this beautiful woman be Eve?

She is dressed in an elegant evening gown, at a sedate formal gathering. She does an impromptu, comic, burlesque bump and grind dance to (in her words) "loosen up this constipated county club crowd."

With tears in her eyes and trembling lips, she gently washes her younger brother's face for the last time, as he lies in a coma, with his deep blue, unseeing eyes wide open. It is late at night, prior to her brother's death, just before dawn of the following morning. Clad in a faded cotton gown, she kneels beside the bed. With her head bowed, elbows bent and resting on the bed, and clasped hands

firmly pressed to her chin, she softly whispers a prayer. At the head of the bed, a coal-oil lamp on the night table bathes the room in a warm, soft glow and pastes her silhouette against the opposite wall.

She cuddles and rocks an infant niece in her arms. Both of them are wearing smiles of pure delight. She and the baby gurgle and coo to each other in that special language that only females and infants really understand.

These are just a few of the countless pictures of her in my private collection. It's a bit embarrassing to show them, and I probably will not do so again.

Friends-Second Place

Shirts and Skins

Daniel Larcade

I guess it all started when I was in the 7th or 8th grade, although I can't really remember that far back. It was basketball week in gym class. The boys would have one half of the gym, and the girls would have the other half. We would play sports while the girls would dance or do ballet.

One day Coach Beaumont was looking for the practice jerseys so we could recognize who was on what team once the game started. When he came back, she said he couldn't fine them. That's when he said the most god-awful thing anybody could have ever said to us. He said it would be shirts and skins, I guess you could call me, a "big boned kid." The most horrific three words I have ever heard in my life. I froze for about two minutes, scared out of my wits. Then I heard him start counting "1...2...1...2...." A one meant you got to keep your shirt, and a two meant that you got made fun of by the girls on the other side of the court. He made us line up, then he started counting. I could hear him start counting, and I was praying under my breath, "God, please not me; I'll do anything." I counted what number in line I was and found from my calculations I was going to be a one. I let out a big sigh of relief but then Coach messed up and gave me a two. My heart must have stopped for at least 30 seconds. I took my shirt off and started playing basketball. Sure enough the girls started starrng and pointing at me.

I guess it was my 10th grade summer vacation when I discovered weights at the gym. Everyday after school I would go and spend hour-upon-hour lifting weights, trying to change my appearance. While I would lift, I would think to myself, "I'll show them." I did. By the time I was senior in high school, I was the biggest, fastest, strongest, and the best. If I were in competition with anyone, I was the best. That feeling alone made me feel like I was invincible, that I could do anything.

That day in junior high gym class changed my life. I guess you could say that the people who made fun of me really helped me out.

Friends-Third Place

Regretfully Reminisce

Tien Pham

It has been over two years since my friend Tram Pham died in a car accident. Her life was short as it was sweet; she never had a worry in the world. She was a lively individual with the ability to touch people's hearts. Open and honest with her feelings, she spoke her mind without reservation. She had just finished high school and was about to begin college; many say that is the starting part in our life. Many people grieved over her loss; they would create web pages, songs and many even wrote stories about the time they shared with her. Over time we seem to forget and move on with our lives. How much I miss her no one really knew, and they don't understand how, I truly feel.

She was a short beautiful Asian woman, with long black hair covered with blonde highlights that ran throughout her hair like a peeled banana. Her hair was always soft like silk; and with the touch of the wind, it almost looked like she was flying to a place where someone can feel free, escaping from the harsh violence of this world. Then when I looked at her face, I would notice her brown eyes. When I looked into her eyes, a sign of relief came over me, as if I had known her my whole life. They would show a sign of innocence and comfort, and I could stare at them forever. I would be constantly daydreaming as I stared into her eyes, but at the same time I would be trying to focus on reality, I could not look away. I would look into her eyes and feel that there was nothing I had to fear. Slowly I would notice her pearly white teeth. I remember her most by her heavenly smile. What a beautiful smile it was! Her smile was almost as bright as the snow covered mountain. She was always smiling, like she was a little girl and it was her birthday or she was a person in love, like a child receiving gifts that she had wished for in her dreams, or someone had congratulating her over a job well done. Her smile even with no meaning could deploy stories that I concealed within me. I could never tell a lie when she smiled at me. A feeling took over me, and I had to confess my sins; she would always get the best of me. Her smile always

brightened my days, and something even made me feel like I could smile forever. When I was discouraged, her smile always encouraged me to strive for excellence; it gave me strength and forced me to believe. What a carefree smile she could deploy, that make me smile back with joy.

Smiles were not her only weapon; her cheesy laugh could make me laugh forever and would be embedded in my mind. It was like a little pig giggle that would make any person laugh at her. She would always laugh at her own jokes for some strange reason, but it was always an inside joke. Her jokes were as weird as they could get, like a bad movies that had no concept to them. Her jokes never made sense to me, but you had to think about it for a while to really understand what she was trying to say. She was always the type of person to laugh when things seemed tough, as if to hide the fear away. Nonsense is how I like to defend her jokes; you would agree too , but you would definitely agree that her cooking was one of a kind.

Her cooking, if I do say so myself, was delicious and often surprised my taste buds. She would mix exotic flavors and ingredients to make some excellent dishes. Vietnamese, Chinese, Italian, and even American cuisines are some of the many dishes that she could prepare. She always told me that it was a secret family recipe and always said, "If I tell you what it is, I would have to kill you." I always sat there looking at her cook her figure was that of old woman over a hot stove, tasting the food until the flavor was just right, adding more spices to enhance the flavor, mixing it all together, then pouring it on to the serving dish and making us say a prayer before we began our feast, but now that just a memory.

Throughout our lives we sit and wonder if we will ever meet another person like the one we lost. There is a possibility that someone like her is out there, somewhere. We haven't realized it yet, but one day we will come to our senses and notice that they are right in front of us. We still envision in our mind the one we love and can never forget. One day I think we should just, let the past go. It will only hold us back from becoming the perfect human beings that God wants us to become.

Friends-Honorable Mention

Tear in My Hand

Justin Montalvo

Reverence is what I shared with my best friend of eleven years of my life. In retrospect I would always refer to Jeremy as my inspirational brother. His smile could light up the darkest room and, fill my heart with gold. He would listen to me and nurse my hurts for all of my own well being. He used to hold me when people would scrape my pride at high school and gave me a reason to smile. When I would fall, he would be no more than a step behind to catch my hand. He took me in his heart, reserved a section of his life for me, and we painted a sacred picture of life together.

As 2004 came along, we both became busy. He was in school, and I had begun school at Lamar State College. It is heart breaking when you start to realize that life starts to take its hard gear forward, and you are starting to see less of your friends. However, no matter what, I always knew if anything would happen Jeremy would be there to assist. On December seventeenth he went into St. Mary's hospital with severe headaches. I was notified and went the following day that Friday, while God held his fate in his hands. By, the nineteenth he was in ICU; his immune system was weakening. The following night he was sent to Baptist Herman Memorial Hospital. I had gone to see him in the ICU unit in Houston, and he was hooked up to multiple respirators.

Back in 1999 I was attacked by two guys walking home, and I ran home with blood running down my face. It infuriated Jeremy how someone would beat me up because I'm gay. Jeremy was the first one I called, and he rushed right over to calm me down. He wiped the blood off my face and promised everything would change for the better, to keep the faith. Remembering that night, I bent down and whispered in his ear, "You wiped the blood off my face, and now I will cleanse your hurt the best I can." Then that night I traveled back home, and it was the next day he was tested to be brain dead. Then following procedure, the life line was disconnected on December 23, 2004.

I have a photo of Jeremy and me fighting with a coat hanger; it is just one of the

instances this happened. It was shock that I actually had him pinned down on the floor; we both knew it usually was always the other way around. When the stars have all burned out but one, I know he's that one up there burning so bright. People say that things change, but my heart's been hard to find. Though I knew everything would be fine in time, it truly hurts feeling old at 22, never thinking this day would come, writing of how much of a wonderful friend he was to me.

There was a poem in the handout at Jeremy's funeral that really makes my skin tremble. One sentence catches my heart about how I must not tie myself to him with my own tears. So the balance between two people who share trust, friendship, and guidance for each other is a percent of my life. However, as days go by, I seem to realize that we have to build our lives. Good men must die, but death cannot kill their names. Jeremy may be physically gone, but in so many spiritual ways, he is still alive.

Friends-Honorable Mention

Wanted to Be Her

Linda Nguyen

Being a new kid in school was not an easy thing to do and being the unpopular girl surely was no fun. I was in the 9th grade and had just transferred from another school in another city, and I knew I was not very excited about school. There was a particular girl that I just met, and instantly I knew I wanted to be her, would have given up everything just to be her, but luckily I didn't. She was pretty, had beautifully clothes, and a fantastic boyfriend.

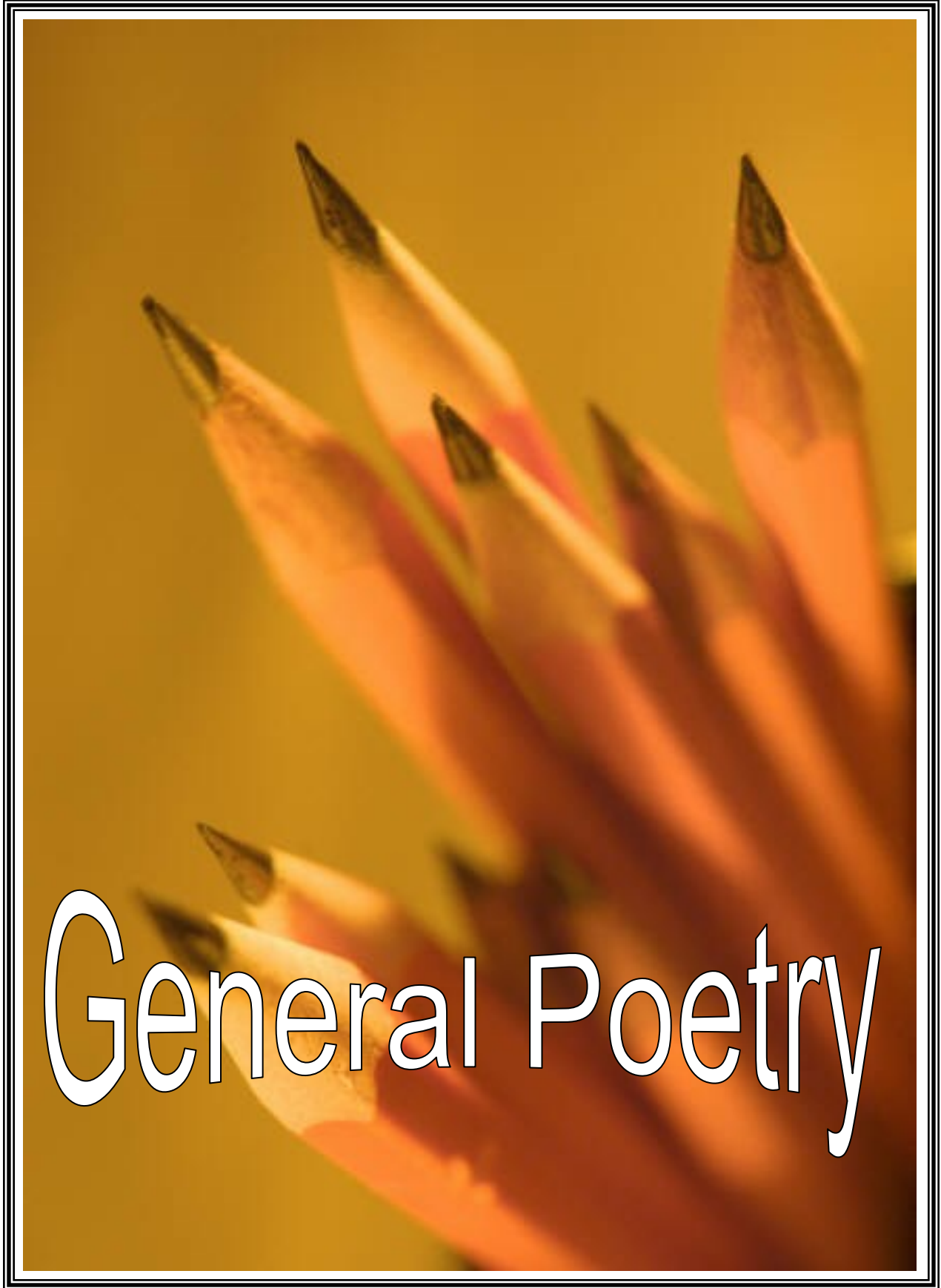
The day began with math, and the teacher was teaching material I did not understand. She asked me to solve a problem on the board, and I froze. I did not even know how to start. The next thing I knew, a young lady raised her hand and asked if she could help me. "You may, Abigail," my teacher said. Abigail was very pretty. She had a glowing look upon her face, and you would know by looking at her that she took really good care of her skin. She also had a bright smile that lit the room when she laughed, and everyone would be looking at her mouth every time she talked. Her hair was nicely done every day for school. When she got up to the chalk board she worked that math problem so fast I could only say "Oh my goodness!" She was already through. Right then and there from that day on, Abigail had my attention.

I went on with my other six classes, and like my math class, I was not recognizing any material. I looked around the classrooms, and I saw Abigail. She raised her hand for every question, the teacher always called on her, and surely all of her answers were correct. Abigail wore beautiful clothing, brand named, and they always matched. She would match from the bow on the top of her head all the way down to her perfectly fitted shoes. I thought to myself that she probably came from a rich and well-mannered family.

There was a boy who sat behind me in one of my classes that I had my attention on also. He was handsome, wasn't all that smart, but I didn't care because he was just so dreamy. His teeth were straight, he smelled like fresh cologne, and his

hair was nicely groomed. The only words he spoke to me were, “Hey, let me see your paper.” That was all it took. After a while I started to notice him speaking to Abigail in a different tone, and all of his attention was on her. I realized that they were dating; I should have known. A perfect guy with a perfect girl.

There was a time that I wished I was someone else, but as I have grown older I realize that the person I wanted to be before isn't all that perfect now. I'm happy about where I am, and I wouldn't wish to be anyone else.



General Poetry

General Poetry-First Place

From Activist to Terrorist

Justin Montalvo

A Mother did not raise her daughter to die
A Father did not strengthen his soldier son to cry
And yet the daughter of the mother dies for you
And the son of the father sacrifices his life as many do.

But what you didn't expect was another warrior's revolution
You must go before they hunt you down for their solution
Can somebody tell me am I alone with this,
With the matter of complication when every country becomes a twist?

She wasn't just a girl and he just wasn't that boy
They marched for you, then were piece by piece destroyed.
She died for that child's next breath you'll never know to adore,
And he gave birth to Marwa, the girl that he soon after died for.

Can somebody tell me now who are these terrorists
With their manipulative fancy, acting as the faces of activist?
I dare not recline to being an American advocate.
I dare to be a voice on a shoulder to soldiers this is dedicated.

What language is it going to take for us to communicate?
What trust is this planet going to have to deliberate.
To the father of the son, I invite you pour to your tears in my hand.
To the mother of the daughter, this is my word, for her I stand.

For all those terrorists who can hear my voice
You shall fall and stumble and not by choice.
Let us stand and salute Mother Liberty;
Once again, her soldiers win again, momentarily.

General Poetry-Second Place

Living in America

Alcestis Arago

A country that was so foreign
before I thought it was boring.
Eight to fours, nines to fives,
do these people have any lives?

Then, I turned sweet sixteen,
now, I know what they mean.
Sixteen was not so sweet
I need to work to buy something to eat.

I came to the point
where I decided,
living in America
was what I wanted.

A year has passed,
I can vote at last.
Twelve years of waiting,
now, I can be part of the cast.

General Poetry-Third Place

Come Back to Me My Soldier

Esmeralda Reynoso

Come back soon my lovely soldier
Oh, please don't stay behind
More than ever we all need you
Embrace yourself to life.

Be brave, be careful, have faith
Awake with God in mind
Come back soon my lovely soldier
Knock on my door tonight.

Today of you I dream
Of you holding me so tight.

My dear and lovely soldier
Endure for me tonight.

Miles away from me you are
Yet my heart with you is,

Sing with me my lovely soldier,
Open your heart to me
Let go of the pain you suffered
Dissolve the core of pain
Incinerate the bad memories
Eliminate the war smell
Rejoice and be happy, Rejoice and Thank the Lord.

General Poetry-Honorable Mention

One of America's Greatest Gifts

Tien Pham

Live life for what you believe
For only through your eyes you can see
For only through your mind you can think
This is your life
Live it to the American dream
But remember not to be deceived
From the path you seek,
For not everything you see is real.
Remember to find strength
In your belief.
Remember to take a rest
Shed those tears
Then go on, be strong.
Remember to live the way you wish
For if you don't
You will miss one of America's greatest gifts.

—The Gift of Freedom

General Poetry-Honorable Mention

America
Lamondon Williams

It is hard to me
Being a black man today
Too many problems

My Country 'Tis of Thee



Poetry

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Poetry-First Place

Melting Pot

Tina Coe

My country 'tis of thee

A place where you can eat at Roadhouse, Casa Ole', or Applebee's.

My country 'tis of thee

A place where you can watch Johnny on AMC.

My country 'tis of thee

A place where you can drive Chevys, Nissans, or Model T's.

My country 'tis of thee

A place where you can be a Longhorn, a Seahawk, or an Aggie.

My country 'tis of thee

A place where you can be a Lawyer, a Nurse, or a Doctor that works on PP's.

My country 'tis of thee

A place where you can be gay and straight, whatever you want to be.

My country 'tis of thee

A place where you can purchase fake titties either A's, B's, C's, or DD's

My country 'tis of thee

A place where you can wear your pants below your hinny.

My country 'tis of thee

A place where the President can have a cigar and a Monica

My country 'tis of thee

A country where you can drink Coke, Sprite or Tea.

My country 'tis of thee

A place where you can walk down the beach and let everything be free.

My country 'tis of thee

A place where you can disagree.

My country 'tis of thee

A place where you can express yourself and be free.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Poetry-Second Place

America, Land of the Free

Keith Richard

America, the land of the free
Oh, how beautiful She is,
Always showering Her concern in the time of need.
She is so wonderful indeed.

America, the land of the free
No matter what Her plight
She's forever shining her bright light.
In tragedy, She bands
Giving helping hands.

America, the land of the free
No weapon formed against Her shall prosper
Because still She stands.
So preserve Her, On Lord,
For in Thee She puts Her trust.

America, the land of the free
has not been given the spirit of fear
but of power and of love
America, the land of the free forever stands.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Poetry-Third Place

Flags Flying
Matthew Williams

Flags flying so high
People fighting for freedom
I love my country.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Poetry-Honorable Mention

We Are One
William Angelle

From the rolling hills of the Carolinas,
to the thunderous waves off the Hawaiian coast.

We the people come together as one to achieve
dreams our forefathers fought for.

We united once before after a gruesome battle
amongst ourselves; now we have united in our
country's darkest hour.

For that one moment we forgot all our problems
and focused on everyone involved in our country's
greatest tragedy.

With Ole Glory waving from the massive iceland of
Alaska to the glorious beaches of Florida, WE ARE ONE.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Poetry-Honorable Mention

To My Country, Be Glad

Evie M. Jones

Be glad
that we can walk in the sunshine and in the rain.

Be glad
that we can feel both pleasure and pain

Be glad
for love and freedom

Be glad
for a country standing strong

Be glad
of your country that has been blessed by God.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Poetry-Honorable Mention

Proud to Be
Benjamin Thomas

America
Sweet land
Home land
And birth place
I am proud to be an American
Proud to stand up for what I believe in
Proud to stand united
Not fall divided
Proud to have freedom
Freedom of speech
Freedom to learn
The freedom to teach
Freedom to urge
For the freedom of life
Reality
To love a spirituality
Only in my country
My country 'tis of thee

GOD BLESS AMERICA

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Poetry-Honorable Mention

American Flag

Phu Tran

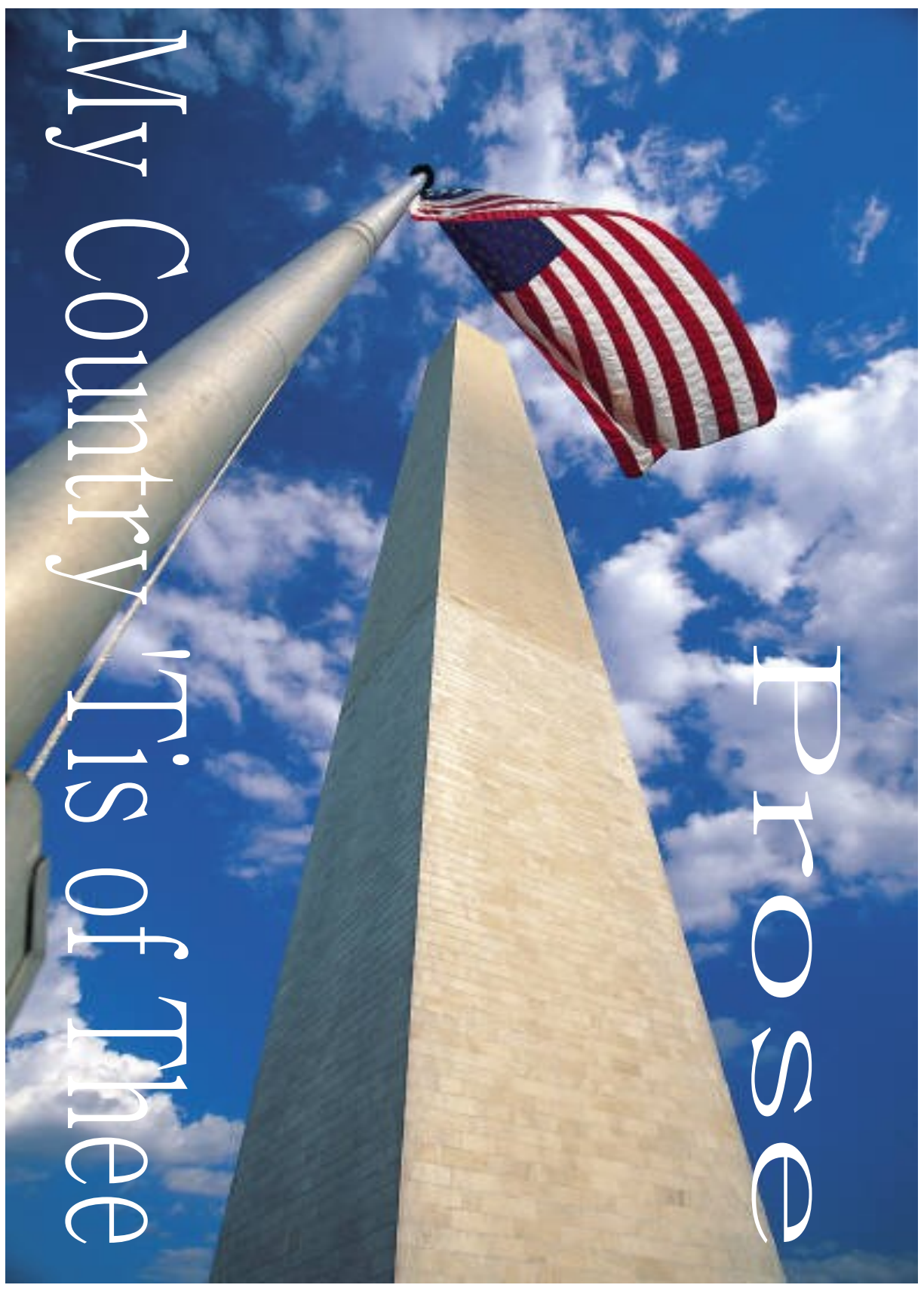
I stared at the amazing blend of colors,
The texture and brightness of each line,
The redness like blood was on every other stripe,
White that looks like it has just come out of the washer,
The many stars counted for each state,
I stand proud of our American flag as it waves through the air.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Poetry-Honorable Mention

Land of the Free
Demond Wiltz

My country 'tis of thee
Sweet land of Liberty
Land where the buildings fell;
Land where the homeless dwell.
Land where we send millions to help;
Land where here hunger is still felt.
My country 'tis of thee

America, land of the free, they say;
Land where racism occurs day to day.
Land of hate; when will it stop?
Hopefully soon or this country is doomed
My country 'tis of thee



Prose

My Country 'Tis of Thee

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Prose-First Place

America
Brenda Aldrich

When I think of the song “My Country, ‘tis of Thee,” I think how blessed I am to live here. Our founding fathers wrote the Declaration of Independence, and it has served us well. The rights and privileges to live in a free land have been bought by the blood of men who fought for our country. Our freedom, democracy, and equality of all persons to live, work, play, and worship as we want is a wonderful thing.

In America we have so much and I count myself necessities blessed for everything it gives us. Many countries do not have all of these necessities, which we have in America. Some people on this earth do not have running water or plumbing or electricity. America has been a great nation, but I am not so sure now. Yes, we still have all the necessary things to live better, than most countries. However, America is forgetting part of our history that our forefathers based their lives upon God. “In God We Trust” is on our money, but not in our minds and hearts, I am afraid.

America is a land of purple mountains, canyons, and valleys, desert and lakes all created for us by a loving God. From the wild animals in the forest to the tame ones we have as pets, each day is a new day of new beginnings with the bright sun to a rainy day; they both are days in which to live to the fullest.

“Long may our land be bright with freedom’s holy light. Protect us by the might, great God our King.” This is part of the last verse of the song. People who love this country should pray for her. Our men and women who have given their lives for all of us should be remembered more often.

I know that America has turned away from many things over the last two hundred years. Have we forgotten what price has been paid with the blood of young men and women? Have we forgotten about pride and honor or our flag and national anthem? My we pledge anew to remember, America, Sweet Home of the Brave.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Prose-Second Place

American Values

Anthony Stevens

America is called the land of the free and the home of the brave for many reasons. For over two centuries America has been involved in battles and wars to bring about peace. The wars have also been fought to preserve freedom for those who could not defend themselves. The Civil War was one well known war that took place on American soil. The Civil War occurred when the North and the South fought over the release of slaves that worked on plantations in the southern states.

Other wars that followed were World War I and II, Vietnam, and now the war in Iraq to name a few. Throughout all of the wars that America has been involved in, America is still the country others turn to for help in world matters. America is considered to one of the strongest countries in the world based on the standards we set and the beliefs we stand for.

America stands for a free democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, the right to vote, free enterprise, and many others as stated in the U.S. Constitution. Citizens from other countries have left their homes in search of a better life in America and fulfill life long dreams. There are many dangers in attempting to reach America. Immigrants from other countries attempt to cross our borders illegally, and travel thousands of miles across vast oceans in the search for freedom. Some immigrants have lost their lives trying to reach this free land. The colors red, white, and blue on the U.S. flag, as well as the Statue of Liberty are symbols that stand for life, liberty, and justice for all. These values bestowed upon us will never die, and will be carried on by future generations to come.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Prose-Third Place

Living Free
Joseph Gongora

Throughout our entire lives up until after high school we put our hand over our hearts and gave thanks to what our veterans gave up so that we could be free. We would always go through these motions, but after 9/11 occurred, we really went into depth about what this meant, and how truly lucky we are to be living in a country that allows us to do the things that we do.

We Have the right to vote for who we feel will led our country to its best, the right to choose our own religion, where other countries have that decided for them. The women of our country are able to go to college and decide on a career of their choice whereas in other countries women are not even allowed to go outside and show their faces.

If there ever was an issue that we didn't like about our country, we are able to speak out and let our country know that we do not agree with it. We as a country don't have to be afraid that our children will not be allowed into a school because of the color of their skin or the slant in their eyes. We can know that if we are disabled or with a handicap, that we still have a right to get an education and know that we are allowed anywhere, and no one can tell us that we are not.

Sir Winston Churchill of England once said "All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom; justice; honor; duty; mercy; hope." I think if we live by these words we can truly be thankful for what we have.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Prose-Honorable Mention

What America Means to Me

Royce Allen

What comes to my mind when I hear the word America? America means freedom. Freedom of speech, choice, the press, opinions, and the many other freedoms based on our Constitution. So many people take it for granted that they live in such a free and beautiful country such as ours. Many people have fought for us to have our freedom. Until now, I have never really thought about how much freedom I have.

Many countries across the world do not have the freedoms we have. In some communist countries, it is an automatic prison sentence if a person is believed to have been involved in certain religious worship. Here in America we can be in any religion we want and will not be judged. Not too many other countries can say that. We are free to believe in what we choose. Our religions beliefs are our choice.

As I think of what America means to me, I realize that freedom does not exist anywhere but in our country. Our forefathers came to this unknown country to establish a life in which they could form their own laws, governments, religion, press, and the many other things which our nation is based upon. Our country has seen many battles and struggles for this freedom. Much suffering and pain, tears, and blood have been shed for the precious freedom we all desire to have within our lives. Many men have died for us. I treasure that people cared enough about our country to fight for us.

Men such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Franklin, Jefferson and others struggled to get and keep the freedom we have. It is because of the many men who have died for us that we and enjoy our freedom. If it were not for them, we would not have the freedom we have now. We should continue to keep fighting for our freedom. We need to be aware of the fact that if we do not show some responsibility, we may not have our freedom forever.. We should become involved in order to keep our freedom.

Freedom is not just a word it is being able to express yourself in the way that

you feel it is best done. We can protest, vote, argue, cry, laugh, and sigh, to completely show how we feel. We are truly fortunate to have such a wonderful gift of freedom. We should be proud to live in the country as America where we can say, "I'm free!" This is what America means to me.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Prose-Honorable Mention

Racism in America

Roshana Broussard

There is no other place I would rather be than America. I love my country with all my heart. Everyone is equal and there are so many opportunities. The Pledge of Allegiance tells everyone in the world what a privilege it is to live in the United States. Unfortunately, we still have problems.

I do love my country, but I cannot stand the way we lie to ourselves. If you are a white male you can go as far as you want in America. Women and any other race but white can go only so far. There are so many ways to keep you from having too much power. There is only one black man in the Senate; every time it seems like racism is ending something happens, and African Americans are receiving more jail time than any other race.

It really bothers me that there is only one black man in the Senate. He is from the State of Illinois. How can our voices be heard if there is no one there to make the difference? I am not saying all white people in the Senate are racist, but I know many are not concerned with trying to improve the black race. A survey proved that we are one of the poorest races in America. Most black people do not own their houses, because it is so hard to get a loan.

So many people try to put racism in the past but something always happens to bring back the memories. In Jasper two white men dragged a black man to his death. There was a movie made showing Jasper is not the racial town like the nation portrayed it to be. Yet, years after the dragging death of James Byrd, some teenage boys vandalized his grave site. The teenagers received probation. The teenagers also apologized to his family.

It seems like blacks are receiving more jail time than any other race. The black population makes up most of the imprisoned. A white woman killed five children and was found insane. A black teenage girl killed her baby, and she received life. A survey also showed black women are receiving more jail time than males. Without a mother, our children will end up lost in the system. Soon they will feel like no one cares about them.

I really do love my country. No matter what I will never leave America. Hopefully one day we can all work together to change this country. I am not asking for everyone to just give all the power to a black man. I wish our country would mean what it claims to stand for. When this happens I will be able to say the Pledge of Alligience and be proud of the words.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Prose-Honorable Mention

The Privilege to Be American

Omar Chavez

Being an American citizen is a privilege that many people take for granted. There is not a single country which can compare to our strength, freedom, and the chance of becoming successful in a lifetime. Nowadays, many people can grow up living in poverty, but through organizations and other sources, there is more chance of people becoming successful and at least being comfortable with their financial status. Citizens in the United States have advantages that are often overlooked compared to other countries; such as clean water, freedom of religion, speech, and democracy. Three reasons why I am so grateful to be an American are our freedoms, the diverse society joining together, and the strong military we have in the United States.

The freedoms Americans have are always taken for granted. During our country's early days, black people and women were not allowed to vote, speak opinions, and be a part of the political world. Now, there are laws protecting people from discrimination, such as religion, sex, race, and other personal backgrounds that once were harshly judged by others. Americans are allowed to dress in any way they feel and work wherever the individual desires which is now dependent on experience and competition for who is compatible for that position. In other countries like India and Afghanistan, women have to cover their skin for acceptance and also because it is the law. Also, people in India are not allowed to own property, which is why so many Indian foreigners these days own property. It is an advantage that they take with much pride, and practice their rights with more gratefulness than original Americans. Lesbians and gays are still looked down upon, but never have to worry about hiding who they are or worrying about speaking for what they believe in. In other countries, people are executed for trying to speak their opinions and standing up for what they believe in. Religions vary all over in this country since, so many beliefs are practiced by different people. No one is allowed to say, "We cannot tolerate this behavior" because religious freedom is protected in the Amendments.

In other countries, if an individual does not believe in the country's religion, he may be executed or exiled from that country. It is such a privilege to be able to have freedoms, as we Americans do, and being in different countries and observe other society's practices, I understand the freedoms we have and learned to be extremely grateful for them as well.

The diverse society is another advantage that Americans take for granted. We are not made to dress a certain way, believe in a certain religion, work in a certain area, or be someone who we do not want to be. Our expectations for an American citizen is to do what is right, which is to work, start families, or do whatever it is as long as we are not trying to destroy America, but to help her become stronger. The different cultures that survive among other cultures is amazing. Who would have believed 100 years ago that foreigners could be accepted as they are today, and accept Americans as well. No one is denied American rights unless they are not U.S. citizens or at least have temporary citizenship. It is also amazing that other Americans take such a strong interest in other cultures as well. I mean, how many white or black people love Mexican, Chinese, or Italian food. It is funny that our society today can make huge profits from the ideas and customs adopted from other cultures. With Americans open-mindedness to be so accepting of other cultures without much hesitation, it is humorous to me after realizing from history how much people would fight hard to resist change. Although there are still confrontations about changes in the United States, mostly dealing with taking God out of schools or prayer from public events, Americans are definitely more adaptable to change and accepting different ways among many diverse societies throughout America than it was 100 years ago.

My final reason for why I am so grateful to be an American citizen is the strength and power that our military has in protecting our country. Many people are in the military because of many reasons. A lot has to do with the advantage of being financially secured basically for the rest of one's life. Veterans are well respected and also have advantages still to this day to receive special treatment from the government. It is an honor these days to have spent time in the military devoting

so much time to improve our country. Another reason why people join the military is the chance of learning skills that can be used for the rest of their lives. Many people join the military, learn a special skill, and become employees afterwards to become financially successful. Education is also why people join the military. A person may not have enough money to go to college, but when he joins the military, available for that person will definitely have the advantage to go to college, with adequate scholarships however long they wish. Since there are so many benefits in being the military, that is why we have such a strong force as we do, other than the simple fact of people wanting to serve their country. It is such an honor for the United States to have such a strong and powerful military in the world, and the government, as well as Americans, take much honor in being in such a position. Even though societies in America still face many conflicts with war against AIDS, drugs, violence, and other issues, we should all be very grateful that we do not have to go walk for miles just to get a drink of water or worry consistently about where could one go to receive just a simple meal. Many opportunities are offered to Americans for those who are so willing to be successful. It is a privilege and an honor to have freedoms as we do. live in a diverse society fairly well, and to have the military willing to give their lives for our country. It is the simple fact that our ancestors worked extremely hard to get our country where it is today. Being an American citizen is truly a gift from God to become a part of improving our nation for the better and being the best that a person can be.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Prose-Honorable Mention

Dominate
Daniel Larcade

To me, America means being dominate, in government and sports or whatever you're doing, even when you are picked to be last.

We have a very powerful government. We tell other people or countries what they can and can't have. That's about as dominate as you can get. We told Iraq that they couldn't have any weapons of mass destruction. They disagreed, so we went to war.

Sports are another area that America is obsessed with being dominate. We have so many ways to determine who is best at which sport. We have the Super Bowl for football, the Rose Bowl and other bowl games for college football. We have the All-Star game, Home Run Derby and the World Series for baseball. For hockey we have the Stanley Cup match. Every person has either watched sports or has seen some kind of sports activities before. I'm sure everyone has a favorite team, I know I do. For football it's the Cowboys, baseball, Astro's and for hockey it is the Dallas Stars.

The best underdog story about dominance has to be about the 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey team. In the 1980's pro hockey players were not allowed to compete in the U.S. games. The players were college age hockey players from different colleges who had never worked together before. They came together and practiced for seven short months. They had to play Russia, who were older, faster, stronger, state sponsored, the same as being professional. Everyone picked Russia to win because they were the best team and had dominated the sport for years. The U.S. team came from behind and took the lead and won the gold medal showing everyone who was the dominate team.

My Country 'Tis of Thee-Prose-Honorable Mention

Ask Not
Rikki Newton

We the people of the United States enjoy freedom and rights found in very few other countries in the world.

Our nation has fought two World Wars and attempted to promote economic growth, democracy, and peace around the globe. The United States will continue to participate in world affairs throughout the new century. Americans should know with such freedoms come responsibilities and duties.

Whether we spend the day cleaning a local beach or stand to vote, citizen participation is what keeps our country strong. As President John F. Kennedy said, "My fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

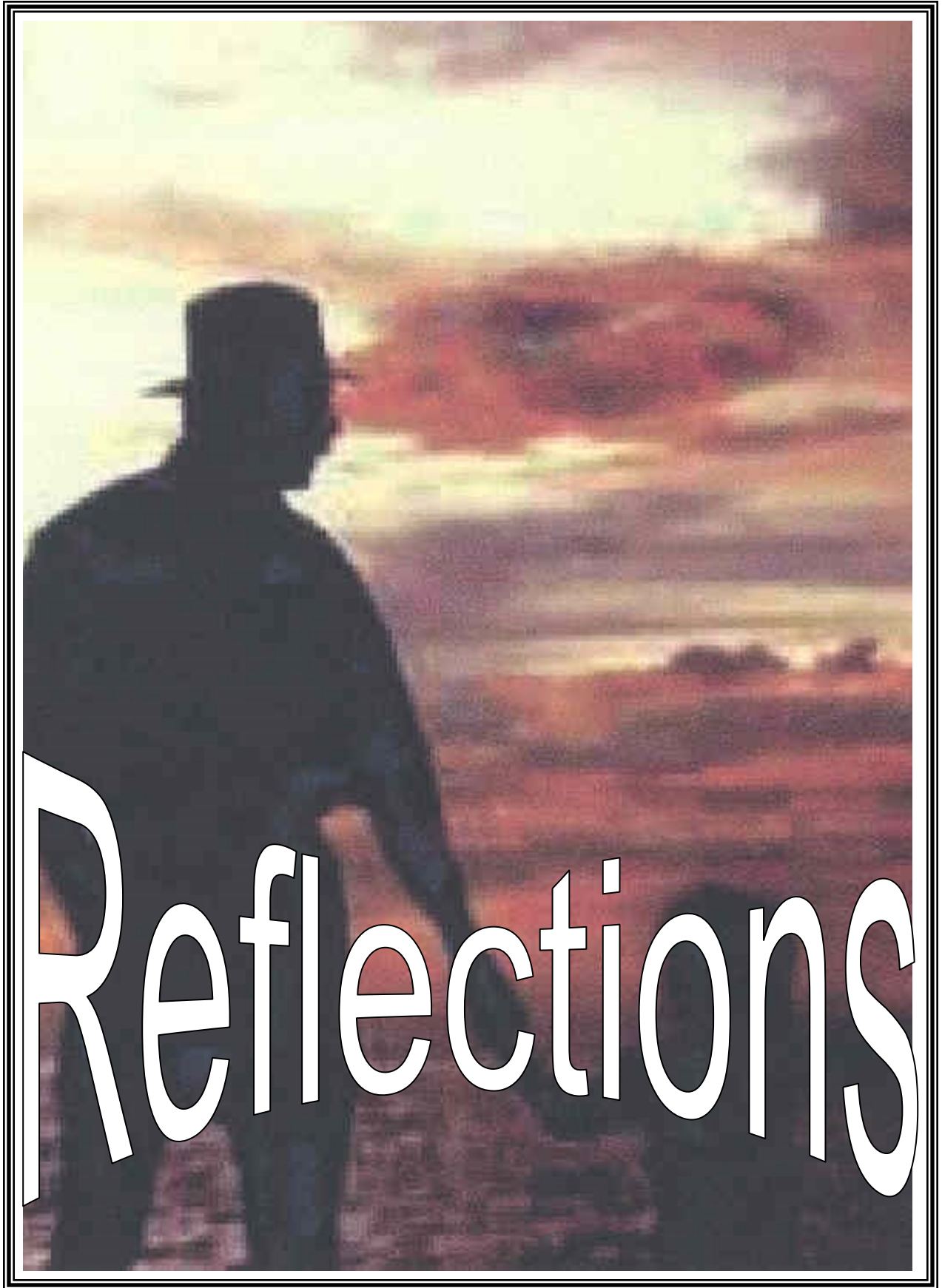
My Country 'Tis of Thee-Prose-Honorable Mention

Coming to America

Tan Nguyen

The United States of America is one of the best places to live because people can have freedom to do certain things without being punished. If I were a foreigner, I would try to come to America to get freedom. America has plenty of things that represent it and they are: The Statue of Liberty, the United States flag, and the bald eagle. Each of these symbols has its own meaning about America. First, the Statue of Liberty has an official name that is called Liberty Enlightening the World. The Statue of Liberty symbolizes freedom for all the people in the United States of America to live in peace and harmony. Americans do not live in fear for several reasons like terrorists. Next, the United States flag—the stars represent the fifty states that make up this country. The red and white stripes represent the thirteen original colonies. This flag means a lot to America because it represents all of us.

Finally, the bald eagle represents America because the animal is strong, smart, and has the courage to do anything it wants. We are like the bald eagle in a way because we are strong as a country, and have courage and strength to defeat our enemy during times of war. This eagle is the national bird of the United States of America. In conclusion, I think we should keep America safe and peaceful. We should never go to war unless it is necessary. America is a place where I would let people come, so they would have their freedom.



Reflections-First Place

Random Thoughts on Time

Devan Callihan

Time has no color, preference, sex or religion. It doesn't take applications, it doesn't make exceptions, and it doesn't care who your mother and father are. It controls everything and it haunts all of us like death. Death and Time are distant twins. When one steps out, the other steps in. Time eludes me like money. It is always around, but I don't seem to have any of it. I consider my time to be very valuable; there are a lot of dreams to chase. Unfortunately, people's dreams are often waylaid by responsibility. The only thing in the world that scares me is the thought of never getting to chase my dreams. I don't have a problem with time management, for that's the only way to survive. When it's time to work; I work hard. When it's time to play; I play hard. I don't mind this life at all. Life favors two kinds of people, and those are the responsible and the prepared. You can't go wrong if you are both.

Reflections-Second Place

Mexico in December

Marisol Gutierrez

December is a month when families reunite, when kids get presents, and everyone is happy. However for many families like mine it is that time of the year once again to travel to Mexico. Many people wonder why in the month of December we leave literally everything, our jobs, schools, our friends, to travel to Mexico. Maybe it is hard to understand, but at the same time that in this country families are waiting for their loved ones to visit for Christmas, our loved ones in Mexico are waiting for us, especially the elderly and those that for some reason can't travel to this country to visit. December is the month when we get to see almost all the family members that we haven't seen for years; it is that one time that we all get together. December is the month when everyone gets married, when the children get baptized, when the young girls make their first communions, and when the church celebrates the parish fiesta. December is the only month of the year that once everyone forgets about their stressful lives in the United States. Things move much slower in Mexico.

Many people don't agree with us traveling to Mexico, especially those at school. I understand that we are now in another country, and that we have to respect the laws and customs of that country, but that doesn't mean that we have to give up our traditions and customs. Traveling to Mexico in December is a tradition and believe me, there might be some things that we have to give up, but for us whether we live here or in China, when December arrives, it will be that time again to make that trip, that trip that so many people don't understand.

Reflections-Third Place

What Do You Stand For?

Dawnicka Williams

For the past few days my mind has been occupied by something one of my teachers said. “We are the future, the people who will be responsible for the citizens of our world. The thing is, what do you stand for?” I asked my friends this question, and the answers truly surprised me. Their answers were about clothes, pop stars, and the best places to pick up men. What does that say about our generation? To me, it says that we are shallow, superficial people. My friends complain about the economy and the lack of jobs in Port Arthur, but not one of them even bothered to vote. How do you expect to change the world if all you do is complain about the problems in it? We are lost, and we don’t even know it. Where do we go from here? Who will help us if we can’t help ourselves? I’m not trying to get on my soapbox as if I’m as politically correct as I should be, but I try. I don’t always understand everything being said or done nor do I agree with most of it. However, if I make the effort, that is better than sitting back, thinking that because I am just one voice, it won’t matter. Let your voice be heard! You have an opinion that the world needs to hear. Get the facts and make an informed decision. It all begins with the first step. For the sake of our future take that step!

Reflections-Honorable Mention

Are We Comfortable In Our Skin

Ona Bassett

Are we comfortable in our skin, or is there someone else we want to be? There was a time when we used to appreciate the things we were given. Now it is all about how much can I get or how can I get more than someone else. Society has commercialized, so many things we don't know whether we are coming or going. That is why there are so many people imprisoned, not prisoners of a jail cell, but prisoners of our own minds. Not being comfortable with oneself is bad because you are not facing who you really are. I believe in the old school. I was taught that in order to get more, you have to appreciate what is in front of you or what you are faced with. No one is born with a silver spoon, not even the rich who we think have it so easy. They are the ones who are doing the most damage to themselves. I feel if you are getting everything you want, then how are you going to handle the things you finally can't get.

Reflections: Honor Mention

Purpose

Charline Sam

It's about seven o'clock, and I'm listening to the radio. For some odd reason, in the middle of a song, I started thinking about why people make the music they make. What's the purpose? That got me thinking about the purpose of my own life. I know that I'm here for a reason, and every day I live there is a reason why. Some people seem to live their lives trying to make others happy. Although that is not a bad thing, I have learned the hard way that one cannot make others happy. One can be a part of someone else's happiness, but true happiness has to come from within. There are so many reasons for people to live their lives and do something positive, but most people have their own beliefs of what they are supposed to be doing. On the other hand, there are some who are completely clueless, while others seem to care not at all about the purpose of their lives. Furthermore, some people do not believe there is a purpose to life. They think that life is just one big party, but they are in for a rude awakening. I may be only eighteen years old, but I know that life is real. I may not know exactly what my purpose is, but I've got a pretty good idea. I know that I'm off to a good start. If I continue to travel the road I'm on, I will not have any other choice except to live fully the purpose I was intended for.

Reflections-Honorable Mention

The Purpose of My Life

Felice Solis

A thirty-two year old woman should already know the purpose of her life, right? I am still trying to figure out mine. I often ask myself this question, when there are piles of dishes in the sink, a pile of laundry on the sofa, or a stack of toys that need to be picked up. I thought that the purpose of my life was to be a good mother; I think I am accomplishing that, or to the best of my knowledge at least. My kids have three good meals a day, shelter, and clothes on their backs. They attend a great school, are straight “A” students. They are in every extra curricular activity you can think of, so I think I’m doing all right. However, sometimes, I just feel like there is something missing. That is why I have decided to come back to school and get my degree. I know that this is going to be a different kind of journey for me, but I truly feel that I am up for the challenge.

Early Expressions 2005

Faculty Advisor-Editor

Peggy Gene Knight

Judged By:

Sally Byrd

English Instructor

Lamar State College-Port Arthur

Publisher

Janet G. Polk

Print Shop

Lamar State College-Port Arthur

Technical Assistance

Bobby Summers

Coordinator of Public Information

Lamar State College-Port Arthur

Statement of Editorial Policy

The editorial staff of EARLY EXPRESSIONS 2005 would like to thank all of the students who submitted work for consideration to EARLY EXPRESSIONS 2005 this semester. Unfortunately, not every entry can be published. In order to insure fair and impartial judging and publication selection, the copy without the author's name is submitted to the judge. The judge at no time sees the copy which identifies the individual author.

The purpose of EARLY EXPRESSIONS 2005 is to publish the best entries for consideration. We are proud of the entries published in this issue and appreciate the support of all students who contributed to and enjoy the magazine.

Peggy Gene Knight, Editor

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