The Great Lake Review
-Spring 2003-

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Spring 2003 Staff

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"To conclude, Jack Barron's latest effort, *War Hounds Invade Hell*, is the most god awful piece of garbage I've ever had the displeasure of seeing. When will the studios learn that Barron is a washed up has been whose quote unquote "films" if you can even call them that, are derivative, lame, and unoriginal. It's your standard hour and a half action film that everyone's been doing for the last 20 years. Here's a clue for you, Hollywood. BIG EXPLOSIONS do not equal GOOD PLOT!!!! Barron is a hack, director James Franz is a mega-hack, and Worldwide Studios produces nothing but garbage. You all suck!"

Click.

Sent.

With that, the all too familiar, "You have posted" message popped up in Sal's browser. This was post number 1,466 for him. He leaned back in his chair, knowing that he had once again done the world a service by providing his opinion about a movie on the Internet.

Sal was the most notorious member of the online message board community at TheCoolMovieSite.com. The website billed itself as the clearinghouse for everything film, with sections dedicated to films from the past, present, and even ones that wouldn't be coming out for years. Since it had opened four years ago, Sal had slowly but surely gained the reputation as being the harshest armchair film critic to post on the website. His diatribes against films, celebrities, and Hollywood were legendary. Who could forget his forty-page manifesto against the summer blockbusters of 2000?

He posted on TheCoolMovieSite.com, or TCMS for short, as "Good To Be King," a reference to an often-said line in many of Mel Brook's films. He had risen to the rank of moderator on the message board, putting him in control of who could post messages. TCMS was Sal's kingdom, and he ruled it with an iron fist. He was feared. He was revered. He could have you banished from the forum, HIS forum, just...like...that. He surveyed his realm daily from his folding chair throne that was situated in his tiny basement apartment in Los Angeles.

Sal barely had a moment to reflect on his brilliant posting before the Intercom buzzed.

"Yeah?"

"Pizza's here."

"Thanks. Be up in a sec."
Sal grabbed his credit card and headed up the creaky stairs to the side door. He was renting the basement apartment from Jacob Bollocks, a seventy something widower looking to supplement his Social Security checks.

"Hey, what's up? Your total is $8.65," said the chubby pizza delivery guy. "Credit card, right?"

"Yup."

"Sign here please," instructed the pizza guy, who was about to show Sal where to write his signature, but he already beat him to the punch.

Sal was quite familiar with the almost daily process.

Sal turned around, pizza box in hand, when he saw Jacob. He was spying on him from atop the staircase, next to the door to the upstairs apartment. Jacob eyed Sal like a hawk eyes his prey. He was dressed in his raggedy brown robe and beat up slippers. His nose was long and crooked, like it had been broken one too many times.

"Don’t you ever go out?" asked Jacob, already knowing the answer.

"Evening Mr. Bollocks."

"What the hell do you do down there all the time anyway?"

"Stuff. My work."

"Your work? What work can you do in front of those computer things? They’re just oversized calculators."

"Actually Mr. Bollocks..." said Sal, as he was interrupted.

"In my generation, we actually went out and did things! We didn’t sit in front of little TV boxes all day, staring at them, tippity tapping away on the typewriter keyboards, not accomplishing a damn thing! I went to war in Korea. I've seen sixteen different countries. I got married. I started a business. And it was all done by the time I was twenty four."

"Good night, Mr. Bollocks," replied Sal as he headed back downstairs.

Sal was 25.

***

Sal polished off the final slice of his pepperoni pie. Growing up, Sal been a pretty scrawny guy, but since college, he had started to develop a gut. A steady diet of pizza and Buffalo wings will do that. He thought about what Bollocks had said and dismissed it as such. He had done a lot! For the past three years he had been working as a freelance web page designer. His apartment served as his office as well. Sal had designed web pages for companies in Sweden, Japan, and England. Sure, he hadn’t actually been to those places, but who cares? He was doing perfectly fine for someone his age. In fact, he’s actually doing better than his college roommates! Jake was still living at home. Matt’s...
1985, and it would be a better 1985 than the one he left.

And at the movies, true love is entirely possible. People may have gotten divorced, like his parents did, but they always found happiness in the end. They didn’t end up getting arrested for possessing child pornography, like his dad did. And they wouldn’t drink themselves into a stupor and live off her trust fund, like his mom did. No, when those credits roll, everything is always right with the world, sometimes even better.

By the time he hit his teenage years, Sal would spend his entire afternoon at the movies, sneaking from one theater to another. His record was seeing five films in a row. Sal would still do this today, and justify it to his online compatriots by saying that ticket prices are astronomical, which they are, and he was just getting his money’s worth.

***

11:05 p.m. rolled around, and just like Bruce Willis hit the self-destruct button at just the last second during the climax of *Armageddon*, Sal finished organizing his movie collection in the nick of time. From crap to gold, his movies were once again in a semblance of order. Keeping things in order was important. He headed back upstairs and out the side door.

Sal didn’t own a car. There was no need for it. He worked out of his apartment, so he never had to commute to an office. There was a grocery store that was in walking distance, but most of the time Sal just had his food delivered by an online grocery delivery service, like netgrocer.com. But most importantly, the LaBrea Film House was a mere 15 minutes away by foot.

The LaBrea Film House was one of Los Angeles’ oldest movie theaters, rivaling Mann’s Chinese Theater in elegance. It was 80 years old, and even though it didn’t have a state of the art sound system, very comfortable seats, or the best smell, Sal loved it. The place was a throwback to the old days of Hollywood. It was a classic, and Sal could see it in every corner of the theater. Despite the single auditorium being split up into six screening rooms in the 1980’s, the classic architecture still held up nicely. On the ceiling of the main screening room, the clouds and glowing stars that had been painted on when the place first opened still remained. Even though the stars had faded a bit, you could still see their faint images when the lights went down. The old balconies were still there as well. Even though no one was allowed to sit in them, Sal had dreamed of watching films from those box seats during theater’s heyday. Imagine watching *Gone with the Wind*, or *The Wild Bunch*, or *Cool Hand Luke* here! While the plaster may be cracking, and the paint may be peeling, and the bathroom doesn’t always work very well, Sal was the most faithful patron of the LaBrea.

As Sal arrived at the theater, he gazed down the busy street that the theater was located on. When it was first built, everything around was so clean and new. Now it was just dirty and run down. The shallowness of its citizens could be seen at every turn, from the cheap souvenir stands to the sidewalk hustlers selling knock off Laker jerseys. Didn’t these people see that there was more to life then themselves? Idiots. Sal approached the ticket booth, with his mind elsewhere.

“Hey Bill, one for *The Last Stand* please.”

“Bill quit yesterday,” replied a very un-Bill-like voice.

“Oh, my... mistake.”

Time skidded to a screeching halt as Sal set his eyes upon the most beautiful girl he’d ever seen, who wasn’t on a movie screen or computer monitor. It was just like Henry Fonda and Barbara Stanwyck in *The Lady Eve*. She had eyes like Catherine Zeta Jones in *The Mask of Zorro*, a voice like Marilyn Monroe in *Some Like It Hot*, and a smile. That smile! It was exactly like Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*. She had a shock of red hair, just like him. But on closer inspection, while his red hair was provided by his Irish heritage, hers was supplied by a bottle of Manic Panic.

“Sir, Sir?”

The light from inside the ticket booth illuminated her, bouncing off her nose ring. She was radiant, a true beauty. Seraphims were singing the hallelujah chorus in Sal’s head. In the city of angels, Sal had finally found his heavenly being.

“SIR! Wake up!” hollered the ticket girl, snapping Sal back into reality.

“Oh jeez, I’m sorry about that. I just, you see, I…” Sal stumbled to find the words.

“You ticket,” she said, passing it to him under the glass partition.

“Thank you,” Sal said, looking down at her nametag, “Shelly.”

“Enjoy the show.”

“I already have.”

Her name was Shelly. What a beautiful name.

Chapter 2

Sal didn’t remember the film. Nor did he remember leaving the theater or walking home or logging onto TCMS and ruthlessly bashing the film based on other peoples comments.
“Her name is Shelly, dude,” typed Sal into the Instant Messenger box on his computer screen. He pressed the Enter key, and with a ping, the message was sent.

“So King, you gonna fuck her?” replied Harryholmes88, in the IM window. Harryholmes88, or just Harry for short, was an online friend of Sal’s from the TCMS message board. Harry was a fourteen-year-old kid from Texas who loved to bash films as well. What he lacked in eloquence, he made up for in sheer viciousness.

“All she did was sell me a ticket. Besides, I made a complete ass of myself. She probably just thinks I’m some spaz,” said Sal.

“You are a spaz, but that’s besides the point. Do you like her?”

“Yeah. She’s gorgeous! And she has a nose ring! Girls with nose rings don’t date guys like me.”

“Sure they do! All you need is to be confident. Chicks dig confidence. And scars. Look at me! I have shitloads of confidence, and I’ve had sex with five girls because of it!” proclaimed Harry. “And I’m working on the scars too.”

“Right...”

“Shit yeah! I was hanging out after school by my locker with some of the boys, my posse, and this beautiful girl Lisa gives me the eye. I followed her and she gave me head in the broom closet!”

Sal sighed. Was there anything more pathetic than fourteen-year-old message boards troll boasting about his fictitious conquests? Yes there was. A twenty-five year old virgin living in a basement apartment mooning over a girl he has no chance with.

“Whatver you say Harry. Whatever you say.”

As Harry continued to talk about his romantic “conquests,” in disgusting detail, Sal began to clean out his desk. The apartment, especially his computer desk, had gotten a bit cluttered lately, and with space being limited as is, Sal couldn’t spare an inch. As he waded through piles of movie magazines, work related documents, and preliminary web page sketches, he came upon his application for NYU Film School. It had been sitting in his drawer for months now, just like last year’s application did, until it was too late. The due date was still a month away. Sal remembered a quote from some Hollywood director, probably that idiot Joel Schumacher, who in response to a question about the Internet message boards and websites such as TCMS, said, “As the old saying goes, those who can’t do, teach. I’d like to amend and apply that to these online talk-backers. Those who can’t make movies, bitch and complain!”

The application was completely filled out, except for the essay question, which read, “In 1000 words or less, tell us why you want to make movies.” For the life of Sal, he could never come up with an answer to that question that wasn’t, in his mind, the stupidest, most cliched piece of junk in the history of the written language. He stared at the application for a few more moments before tossing it back into the pile.
Don’t intimidate a rebel

Forgive my lyrical disposition
a sick spin on these 4 am words
but motionless eyes can’t hold me
back from sporadically combusting
this ranting force of mine
with its energy I am divine
I assail like shrapnel
from the blindness of the sky
blasting your serenity of mind

“your say doesn’t infiltrate your do”

as you scheme vain counterstrike
the delicate smell of your frying brain
permeates my nose, a sweet blend
of stubborn and torn

between my lips and liberation
between your head and my affections

now still, I sit, licking the chapped creases
of a relentless grin, letting my breath leak out
real slow and satisfied

the soft underbelly
of your once daunting pride
at my indecent disposal

-Melissa Anne Stefanec

dogs, high octaves, and less than thirty percent.

i am a summer we can sleep through.
today is my fourth book of february.
it is a day designed to be dragged at 34 miles an hour.
we were born already old, there was no growing involved.
and to think that i’ve already done this three times before.
i lack motion sickness.
i lack anything done “beautifully”.
in a blue dress to be worn to go wishing,
i hid twenty-nine pages folded in squares.
february wants me alone with the paper.
it keeps telling me that i am no good at lying.
it says everyone knows me too well.
but why would it ask me to turn over?
why did you just think of me as “summer”?
i wear this to go wishing.

-Robert O’Neil
I Don't Remember At All

The flowery scent that filled the air,
Complexion like a doll.
Her kind soft gentle mien
I don’t remember her at all.

Birthmark on her cheek,
Brown eyes which quick enthral.
It’s plain for all to see,
I don’t remember her at all.

Her body fit curled on the bench
With forearm brushing mine.
With whisper in my ear our breath
So briefly did combine.

The flattering frames which fit her face
Would not impede my fall.
So many times doth I protest:
I don’t remember her at all.

-Kenneth Nichols
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Insta-Life
by Marie Connolly

As a parent I have come to the realization that there’s nothing quite as draining as when your child is upset. It’s easy to calm them when another child is teasing them, when they’ve scraped their knee from falling off their bike, but it’s damn near impossible to console them when their beloved pet passes away.

What’s a parent to do? Traditionally there have been two options when this tragedy strikes: switch the pet for a look-alike (without the child knowing) or replace the animal with the acknowledgement of the child. The first option is a sneaky way of saving little Susie’s feelings so you don’t have to inform her that her beloved kitty is taking that eternal nap. But kids today are smarter and more observant than we give them credit. So, the latter option has become the more reasonable... even though it means you have to help your child cope with the concept of death.

The death of a cherished pet is a traumatic ordeal. I remember bawling my eyes out when I was young because I found “Alice” (my goldfish) at the bottom of the tank. It was a painful experience, one I would prefer that my children never experience. And it is with such a goal in mind that I have devised this ingenious plan. I propose... through using the same technology that brought us Sea-Monkies... we genetically alter pets by introducing a freeze dryable gene.

By making all pets freeze dryable it would inevitably cut down on the cost of replacing pets. If Bobby’s puppy is killed it could cost upwards of $75 to replace him by picking up a new pup at the local animal shelter, even more if you pick a specially bred one. Hamsters are not that cheap... $10-$15 a pop for one of those little hairballs. The process is simple; if a car hits Fido there’s no longer a need to fret about him dying... simply place his body in the dehydration machine and press the button for the type of animal (this will avoid the catastrophe of over drying the animal and henceforth, turning them to dust). Then when the timer rings remove Fido and submerge him in a tub of chemically treated room temperature water. Watch in amazement every time he pops out of the water completely rejuvenated... totally unaware of anything having happened to him.

These freeze dry pets will have access to a fountain of youth, so to speak. They could die of old age still, but unlike humans they could be revived by the simple plan brought forth by the Sea-Monkies. The pet’s body would be younger, but it would still retain its knowledge from before (i.e.- how to use a litter box, knowing not to drink from a toilet). This process could even be used if pets suffer from a medical condition such as arthritis or glaucoma. Just have a medical professional put them to sleep (you cannot put a live animal through the process, they have to be dead) then put them through the process and presto... problem gone... it never existed.

These pets would also differ from traditional pets in that they would no longer cost as much to feed. They would get their nourishment in similar fashion to Sea-Monkies; owners would be able to drop a measured spoonful of food into the pet’s water and they’d be all set. No more dealing with large bulky bags of dry food, no more numerous cans of wet food cluttering your pantry. A simple compact canister of food would last 3 months for the average feeding of a single animal, saving the owner hundreds of dollars over the course of ownership. No longer would the owner find bits of the pet’s treats scattered about the floor, because treats would be served the same way as regular food. This compact method of feeding would take up less valuable storage space than the traditional pet feeding system. Another plus side to this feeding system... pets would never again be over weight. They get all their nourishment through food flakes in water; water has no calories so henceforth no calories means no weight issues ever again for your beloved pet.

The family pet would become the family heirloom, being passed down generation from generation much like the fine china used on holidays. These pets would be able to be enjoyed by everyone because along with their being able to be resurrected, they would also be altered so they no longer contain allergens. That would mean that Aunt Bessie could be in the same room as Fluffy without having to worry about sneezing all the time or getting red-puffy eyes.

These freeze dry pets would inevitably end the childhood heartbreak of losing a pet. They are a more convenient version of your parents’ pets. You want to go on vacation but don’t want to spring for a kennel for Lucky, just have a vet put him to sleep and dehydrate him and wave good-bye to that costly kennel fee. Just soak him in the water upon your arrival home and you’re good to go. Lucky is a part of the new super-breed of pets: they can be brought...
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back from the dead, horrible medical conditions can be erased, and obesity is no longer an issue. So do your family a favor, and dive into the new wave of pets. You, yourself, can end childhood heartbreak now by buying these super pets at any local pet emporium along with the dehydrator and special chemical for the revitalizing bath¹. Make little Annie's day by giving her a pet that will never truly die.


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The Dancer

Poised,
She gracefully glides across the floor,
like a swan in flight.
Closing her eyes, she pushes herself more than ever before.
The work of years shows on muscled calves and rock like thighs.
She feels the beat,
pulsing,
like her fast racing heart.
Like a feather caught in the air, she twirls round and round,
A few hairs escaping from a severe bun,
to kiss her face.
Her forehead glistens with the work she has done.
Pushing past exhaustion she exerts herself.
She pas de bourres across the floor, her muscles screaming,
Chasing wildly across the floor,
Dancing is all she sees.
As suddenly as she has started,
she stops.

-Andrea Marsh
Insomnia

it's late...
only because the days have grown so long
and i wonder
if i should let sleep overcome me
should i
allow myself
to become so
... vulnerable to dreams
considering the way my mind has been working
towards and against me lately
the past few hours spent
in retroflection
introspection
wondering where the hell i think i am going with this
dizzy from running in circles
i spill out words with a forked tongue
choking on the fragments
of emotion i havent figured out yet
its march... i wait for april
and mother may i
put living off til june?
each new moment brings more intense a
sensation
of certain impending doom
im afraid ill disappear if i turn off the light
i was more stable broken down...
ive begun to deny my trade.
i am not who you know i am...
i am your hollow...

The Picnic

On a rose patterned blanket
among the greenest of grass.
Late summer breezes
brush lover’s hair.

Light tender kisses between
bites of ham sandwiches.
Giggles and smiles as
the geese swoop in.

Day before she leaves;
college far from thought.
True love at its purest
captured in a picture.

The day etched in paper
for them to remember
the love etched in stone
when miles lay between their lips.

-Kailin Edrington

-Allison M. Teetsel
Wandering Girl

She's a sad girl in an angry world
Taken for granted and misunderstood
There are no more tears for her to let slide down her cheeks
She has been used, battered, and kicked around.
Everything brings her down,
From the laughter of small children to the crying that comes at night from
the dying, scared souls.
She can't find pleasure in the lovers that pass through her bed
Night in and night out, they all seem the same to her
Used once again for some shoddy one-night stand.
Someone take her and hold tight to her soul
Soon it will be too late and she'll be lost,
Lost in this angry world

-Jessica Capton
Gina flung her slender stem over the side of the claw-foot ivory bathtub, which was filled to the brim with water gone tepid. The water's surface was iced with thin foam, residue from various bathing accessories—shampoos, conditioners, designer soaps, (in scents rich and delicious enough to make one want to sink their teeth into the bar) shaving creams and bubble baths. The sprays and oils and lotions she used did not leave foam but a lingering odiferous presence that clashed flowery and fruity, bringing to mind the idea of a hearse full of funeral wreaths crashing into an orchard. As she prepared to shave for the fifth and final time that bath, she peered around the room at the bottles and bars and jars, trying to calculate exactly how much of her paycheck went to buying out the entire hygiene aisle at CVS. Probably about half, she figured, happy that she was learning to conserve and buy the cheaper, more general brands to save money. The house was small and very cramped and money was a big issue. She knew she should spend her check on things people considered to be less frivolous, but this way, she reasoned, no one could ever call her white trash.

After marinating in this brew for over an hour and a half, her skin was shriveled like a washerwoman's after a long empty day of drudgery. She had to learn to be quicker, she knew that she didn't have time to scrub her skin raw everyday, yet she could not lift herself out of the tub. Not until she had one last shave. One more should be about right. She told herself over and over again, "You have to look like a nice girl for work, Gina. You need to show them you're clean.

Gina's body knew it was dirty, infected, and she wasn't going to let that show. She didn't want the girls at work to know how she sensed the filth crawling over her body, in and out of her pores, poisoning and infecting her. Disgraceful, ugly, trashy Typhoid Mary. The dirt and grime and germs in the air and earth penetrated and stained her skin, she could envision it. She became sick at the sight of her moles, freckles, marks and warts, disgusting interruptions on her skin. What brought these things forth, Gina would wonder while staring at them with disgust, what illness deep within? She imagined the roots of these outer marks anchored deep beneath the surface of her skin, chaining themselves to her, poisoning her blood. And her hair, unclean weeds of her skin, like the bristles of a broom accumulating things unmentionably low.

Then the razor slipped sideways, slicing the smooth skin over her prominent tibia, and a rivulet of blood immediately streamed forth. A deep crimson drop splashed on the white bathroom tile. The world sank into silence around that small sound.

Gina did not find herself in a bathtub, but staring into a cracked and blurry mirror, searching her eyes through the poor reflection. The person staring back had her face, her eyes, but it wasn't her. There was odious snoring from another room. She was naked, and breeze from an open window was making her hair stand on end, calling up goose bumps. It was September, she could tell just from the breeze. There is no mistaking the hint of chill in September air. She looked down and saw someone else's hair strewn all over her, curling like vines on a brick wall. A foreign scent inhabited her skin, and her feet bottoms were caked with brown from the floor speckled with debris. Between her feet she saw a red puddle, a shallow, thin red on a white tile. Inside, her walls were raw and crying.

Gina blinked and her bathroom flashed back. She stopped up the blood from her leg and bounded out of the bathtub, not bothering to drain the water, and rushed to throw on her work clothes. She made herself up, and stepped out the door of her house to the late April afternoon in the outskirts of the city of Troy.

Traffic passed her by driving too quickly down the poorly marked, weather worn roads. Sounds from the city proper droned in the distance. To her left (was it her east? Gina didn't know about that sort of thing) lay Wynantskill, the mini-strip of suburbia before the never ending sea of farmland and forests, quiet crossroads and hamlets that meandered and stretched all the way to the Massachusetts border. In the opposite direction, Troy came in sections, boroughs that only locals could tell a distinction between; Albia, Lansingburgh, North Troy, South Troy, Downtown Troy, Griswold Heights, Emma Willard District. Where Gina lived, the outskirts of everywhere, no one bothered to assign a name or make a distinction. It seemed that anything that couldn't be labeled, classified or recognized was worthless. This place was a dusty book that hadn't been checked off the shelf for twenty years.
Troy was a city of passed prosperity; it was a place of forgetting. No one remembered when the city was booming, when stores were having grand openings instead of closing sales, when the architecture was flawless and not eroded, when the city could boast color besides graffiti against stone gray. Nobody spoke about the river beside Troy, the Hudson, or at least not how it used to be. The Hudson was once a vein pulsing through the land running rich with life, so pure that whales would swim up from the ocean and the fish were edible. Now, polluted by mankind’s meddling and bad decisions, all anyone ever said when they even noticed the thick band of blue beneath the bridge was how the river was a dirty disgrace. No one remembered that it was someone’s fault. The cement walls along its banks and the abandoned buildings just a few feet away that erected them made the river terrifying and mechanical. These thoughts hugged Gina’s mind as the bus pulled away, bringing her towards her evening job at Manory’s Restaurant.

Gina was a gorgeous girl, but her beauty was unusual. People she dealt with noticed her complete lack of arm hair and the makeup caked over her birthmarks; even the ones on her collarbone were spackled over like a crack in a wall. She always wore an outrageous amount of makeup that would make any other girl look cheap, but she could pull off the look of an Egyptian princess by complete accident. She was never without a necklace and a bracelet, always matching, always silver. Her 98 pound body made old women want to drag her back to their kitchen and pack a warm home cooked meal down her skinny little throat. Gina also never lacked a sparkly piece of clothing. She left glitter behind on the bus seat everyday.

By Prospect Park, after passing through Albia, a man boarded the bus. He was as plain as a slice of white bread. Neither his appearance nor his gait gave any clue as to his demeanor, occupation, class or even mood. Two seats ahead of Gina, he sighed and twisted his body for a stretch. She saw his long, unkempt goatee and quickly turned her face.

The mattress was strewn with cigarette ashes, and had blotchy, suspicious stains on it in various shapes. Outside, a streetlamp that stood in the autumn night, its light pierced by rain, allowed a narrow stripe of light to leak in through a window pane, casting shadows upon the mattress and slightly exposing the room. It was large, but so greatly cluttered with pieces of derelict furniture and other abandoned trash that it seemed to be very small. The air was stale, and his breath in her face choked her. Insects crawled over her body, feeling, surveying, conquering, invading her. He was large and low, (the sort of being she thought had died out with saber toothed tigers,) with gnarled hair everywhere, and eyes as cold as Arctic night. Her hands over her head, held by one hand with big knuckles, went limp as she gave up and closed her eyes. She couldn’t think with words, no specific instant could be intelligibly repeated and understood. She had no story. She couldn’t trace back to how she came to be pressed against that mattress, to what instinct failed her, what instance that determined which way she fell. All she was waves of feelings disconnected from thought and the unprocessed facts her senses gave her; the dead odor of the room, the sound and smell of his breath bouncing on her face, the bruise spreading blue beneath her wrists, the mattress' friction beneath her body. Her old structure no longer applied. She was above nothing, and nothing was impossible.

A pothole jolted the bus, forcing most riders to desperately grip a metal bar or handle to keep their balance. Gina, in another reality, was sent careening off of her seat and landed belly side down in the bus aisle, damp and dirty from the daily parade of tired shoes. Gina realized she had missed her stop. Rising as quickly as possible, as if no one would notice her flight if she pretended it never happened, reached for the stop request wire.

“Hey, honey...” It was the man with the goatee.

She looked down to find her entire front frosted with street sludge like a snack cake is iced on one side by chocolate. Her head began to feel heavy and her limbs were like melted Jello.

“Hey, honey. You gettin’ off? You left your purse on the seat.”

His voice was kind.

She began to cry and reached for her purse, but he reached over the seats and handed it to her. His rough, calloused hand touched hers for only a second, as quick as the flick of a bee’s wing. His arms were covered by long brown hair.

Gina tore the purse out of his hand and emitted a piercing scream. The bus driver, scared beyond the value of his paycheck, opened the doors a block from the bus stop to release the flying banshee. Gina plowed down the wide, awkward bus steps and found herself on a sidewalk near the river, an inky black string eternally moving throughout every day and night. She walked beside, the river’s sounds drowned by traffic and hurry. No one seemed to notice her ruined attire or her upset manner in the anonymity of the city.
night, and she began to calm down. There weren't too many people around anyways. In the nighttime, she wasn't sure where she was, but in a city by a river you can't get too lost, just veer away from it.

She approached an intersection while deciding to call into work on a personal day. In front of her, a male figure exited a corner pub laughing uproariously. Gina passed behind him and hadn't given him a second thought until she heard a whistle, sharp and clearly well practiced, directed at her. She visibly recoiled and her blood felt like it was surging backwards.

He walked beside her, speeding up to her stride. She kept her eyes to the ground, watching her feet put pavement behind them.

"Mmm... kitten. What's happened to you? You get dirty? You lo-o-o-st?"

"No. I'm not."

"Wanna come up to someplace I know and relax a little?"

Gina knew. The innate knowledge came to her so quickly that a wave of nausea came over her. She didn't have to look into his eyes and encounter a moment of realization. She stood frozen as a dreamer in a nightmare, wanting to escape danger, but trapped and helpless in an impossible fantasy.

"Hey... I remember you."

His face was a scramble of color, like the faces of suspects in police videotapes that had been edited for TV. She could suddenly feel each grain of dirt from the bus aisle staining her clothes then burrowing into her skin, to her blood, contaminating and degrading. He touched her arm... "You want some more, my little whore?"

A growl emanated from deep inside Gina's chest, small at first, but it grew more powerful, like a wave on the sea with constantly building momentum, and then she crashed her fist into his Adam's apple. The man choked and fell against a building; Gina dealt him a knee to the groin and fled.

She shot into the street, never stopping to check for cars or if she was being followed. She did not run along the straight, parallel planned paths of the city streets, she ran without any thought to logic. The pavement disappeared and was replaced by short grass, then by unrestrained, un-kept grass, and then without any prelude or warning, the deep, wide water of the Hudson, flat and blank in the night.

Gina plunged into the river without any intention, letting the frigid river water swirl around her, engulf her, pull her south on its sacred route. The fierce current pulled away all that was impure from her body and washed over her harder than any shower pressure ever could, cleansing her through and through. This was what needed to happen. Gina let her ears fill with the amazing sound of silence, felt herself dissolve, and every memory washed away.
I want to be Blue.
This word with so many meanings,
All depends on where you are,
What you’re doing,
Your mood,
Who you’re with,
The last cd you bought,
Aquafresh or Crest,
Friends or Raymond,
Whatever you know,
To understand what Blue is.

On a summer hilltop, (Since crop rotation is grass this season)
Overlooking the lake in the valley,
Blue is the sky.
Cliché and endless,
Sky above, water below,
Blue is freedom and space,
The up-boundary in its purest state,
Stand on your head,
And it satiates anxious feet.

At age 12 my mother put me in private trumpet lessons,
In the hardwood floored musician’s living room,
In a neighborhood less safe than when he bought the house 10
years before,
Blue is the blues scale this man with a horn doctorate improvises,
Mouth on the instrument,
Hand on the valves,
Other hand on the ivories.
He never touched me,
But Mom dropping me off - alone with this genius for an hour a
week to learn the Blues,
Left me cautious.

Decay
(Eastern State Penitentiary, 2001)
by Greg Shemkovitz
Great Lake Review

So a pop song comes out called Blue,
About a Blue man in a Blue world,
Repetition,
Poppy chords,
Synthy beat,
The song may still play in my head when I finish this poem.

NYPD Blue – Cops, drama, authority in the city
Jet Blue – Affordable airline company
Labatt Blue – Fun beer, Canadian
Skyy Blue – Non-beer beer
Selsun Blue – Dandruff treatment
Blue Bowl – Colored toilet water, piss turns it Green
Blue Plate Special – Diner eats
American Express Blue – Upscale techno credit card

I want to be Blue,
So I’ve decided how to do it...

I need approximately $10 million to promote this poem.

I will go to the biggest and the best marketing firm,
And I will embark on a full-scale media campaign.
You will see this poem on subways,
Poetry in Motion,
Alongside William Carlos Williams.

We will replace celebrity faces on posters and billboards with my face,
Giant letters titling Blue above,
And this very poem below.

I’ll do late-night talk show promotions,
Reading Blue on Conan O’Brien,
Which Conan will praise,
Because he praises everything production requires.

There will be commercials,
And I will budget for a film called Blue,
Which will be an adaptation of this very poem.

Publishers will encourage me to write the Blue book...
But I will refuse in favor of the big screen,
And will allow a rising hard working writer to adapt my Blue
movie to paperback.

If Blue flops,
People will make fun of it.
Comedians will parody,
And I will go hang out with MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice,
When it all comes crashing down for Blue’s failure on VH1.

If Blue succeeds,
They will demand a sequel.
Agents, producers, directors, and publishers,
Will demand I do Red,
Or Yellow,
The avant-garde will demand Purple or Pink,
Or the Fuchsia obscure.

Regardless,
In the end you will put Blue between Labatt and Blue Bowl,
And I will have succeeded...

I will be Blue.

-Tomas Hoffman
Beauty

Little queens
Longing to be beautiful.
Squeezing, plucking, painting,
Constant torture.

Slapping on the primer,
Covering up who they really are.
The fakes who hide behind masks of color.
They are frail frames covered with paper mache.

They drown their souls out
With name brands who promise the inevitable,
They long to be beautiful.

-Sarah Preston

Timing
by Alex Thayer
Heart of Winter

Sleep's smell lingers.
Bright, vibrant light washes me clean.
The window is a poor sentinel
for slumber's cold grasp.

Dried tear stains
wrinkle the green pillowcase.
The warm ocean around me
lulls me back to its depths.

She is sleeping next to me.
Her soft, angelic features
accentuated by the light.
But all I see is the night.

She is dark.
She thinks I am blind.
Her delicate hands reach to me.
I pull back.

The sunrise is beautiful
as it peeks over the trees.
But it is red.
It is tainted.

The grass is frozen.
People are gray.
I feel a cold lingering
in my heart, that the light missed.

Her voice tinkles like icicles
in my ear.
She's calling me back to bed.
I do not feel her warmth.

I envy the ceiling as I stare
lying in bed with her.
Blank. Clean.
Never touched.

I feel the outside on the inside.
Night comes quickly in the winter.
Night always comes quickly.
It is eternally frozen here.

-Matthew Bertram
A Perfumed Remembrance
Smelling Better than a Girl

The streets perspired in a way I would eventually...
Rain fell a while ago and now the pavement sweats it out.
It does not bead or smell of salt;
it rises into an August air and decorates
a living-space
in time.

The scent does spread,
is wafted into the air of that year
and the next,
falls into the background
of a memory
of a ball to foot,
of a kicked-can to toe,
of a time
again
only children
will know.

-Corey E. Tesler
Jumbo Rogers
by Jon Dufort

Jumbo Rogers can’t stop cursing under his breath and leering at every third girl. Even his trips to the grocery store spark off sex dreams, and the distance between those dreams and reality explains his cursing. He spends most of his time drinking at home.

His environment is given. All of us are getting jostled around in the same one. Skies above that range from week-old hamburger gray to kindergarten blue. Below, dirt: loose on the beaches, dark in the graveyards and hard-packed into concrete almost everywhere else. Constant erection and destruction in the space between sky and dirt.

There is a knock on the door. Probably another person. Jumbo Rogers would rather not get out of the easy chair. Especially since the television show is making him feel connected and superior again. The second knock comes, just the same. Soon he will need another Genny from the fridge. Commercial break for a water slide park. He wrestles himself up and then toward the front door.

Two young girls are behind the door. Both are cute brunettes. Other than that they look nothing alike except for the shit-eating grins. Jumbo holds the knob and does not speak. This beginning differs little from so many of his lonely fantasies. His only thought is to lock these girls away in memory before one of them speaks and ruins it. Wide eyes, flushed skin, smooth new curves. The hair, so impossibly complicated and sensual. Innocent, ignorant, eager. Jumbo’s mouth hung slackly open as he concentrated on all the physical details. Later he could invent plenty of permutations.

One spoke. She said, “Hi! I’ve always had a knack for dialogue and I’m going around the neighborhood striking up conversations with regular people for my freshman fiction class!”

“I’m recording it all,” the other put in with much less enthusiasm.

Jumbo could only look into their sweet eyes. He saw both sets looking him over. Saw them glance over his swollen fruit-of-the-loom T-shirt and Santa-red sweat pants. Saw them trying to look away from the exposed swell of pale hairy flesh between the two. Saw the disgust, the discipline behind their politeness. Saw their amusement with him, a truly pathetic subject, no doubt riddled with prejudices and comic beliefs. He saw their pride, their anticipation of an A grade for interviewing such a Loser. This always happens. The tables turn so quick. Now they are judging me, sizing me up.

“It would really help us with our grade if you could tell us what you think about something, anything. In your own words. Maybe the impending war on the Arab world or the state of the inner city schools? Don’t you have a few moments to spend with us talking, sir? I would really appreciate it.”

Jumbo betrayed no emotion. One girl stood there waiting. The other edged closer, offering her microphone, recording the silence. He shut the door and got himself another beer.
For Eva Cassidy

“Rhywle dal i ganu” Scottish for “I can hear you in the rain.” A line from a song written about Eva and performed at her funeral.

Eva’s voice waves into my ears like honey-coated steam.
So fragile, so sweet, so warm.
Eva in the present, only lives in the past tense.
No one listened to Eva until she died.

Naked, hunched, skinny arms clutching knees pulled in.
She rocks slowly, sobbing gutturally
As water, like hot wax, drips on her body.
She turns the water higher, hotter
Between plaintive cries, she hears Eva on her stereo.

Rhywle dal i ganu

Eva loved God. And human beings.
Eva loved bicycling, caterpillars, birthdays and spring.
Eva saved a red sugar rose from her February birthday cakes
To eat on the first day of every spring.
Eva loved to sing.

Eva’s voice waves in
As hot water bites her back making welts, pricks and pecks.
She welcomes the pain. It’s kinder than the other sort.
Nausea waves in
As she crawls out of the bathtub weak
From hunger born of the systematic starving of body and soul.

Rhywle dal i ganu

Eva was sunshine.
I never saw a photograph of her indoors, or in the rain.
Eva’s hands were always moving.
Across metal guitar strings, shiny beads, sequins, glass and filigree.
Eva loved to paint.

Her hands caressed canvas, making love to it,
Eventually gestating that white silence into images of angels and insects.
Eva loved her drawing of homely Sylvia, who was beautiful
In God’s eyes. Eva loved God.

She always lives in dark rainy places.
Vultures need sunshine and clear skies to sharpen their eyes for moving prey.
Nobody taught her really smart vultures how to hunt in the rain.
She starves all the meat off her bones.
Vultures like plump fleshy prey.
Nobody taught her really smart vultures know
The meat of a skinny girl’s heart is the tastiest.

Eva died in the cold. November 1996. Eva was 33.
Melanoma bit her back in the early 90’s
Leaving an ugly misshapen red impression.
But she was able to run then and wanted to live.
She dodged the fatal bite
Until it circled back years later, flanking her, diving down
Scoring a mortal blow to her fleshy hip.

It’s raining outside.
The clouds provide cover for the really smart vultures.
They aren’t interested in killing. They live to wound, to inflict pain.
Like a Promethean nightmare, her heart flesh regenerates after every agonizing bite.
The really smart vultures can always smell the new flesh
And attack biting harder every time.
Every bite weakens her. Every bite enhances the pain of the last.

Such an arbitrary word — melanoma.
It sounds like something gorgeous and sweet.
Like the mellifluous flow of a singer’s voice. As if I could say,
Eva had the most astonishingly beautiful melanoma.
Words, like God, are arbitrary.

This will be another day she takes one handful of colored pills.
She sleeps all day and all night, waking only
To listen to Eva on her stereo
And melt and sob into the steaming rain of the shower.
She prayed the vultures would leave, but there's no refrain.
Maybe today — 3 handfuls of colored pills.
Then, no more wounds, pricks, pecks, bites, tears.
And while waiting for the release, Eva will keep singing to her.
Eva's voice and the drill of rain will bridge her into silence.

Rhywle dal i ganu

Eva's voice
Creates waves of hatred in her scarred, bitten heart
For the flim-flam man we call God.
An apathetic dictator, a flawed composer, a cruel hunter, a pimp.
She and Eva were born the same year, 1963.
She has always prayed for death. Eva prayed for life.
Eva was light, beauty, music and love.
She only takes up space, like beats between notes in a song.

Eva died thinking no one would ever hear her sing.
Eva died surrounded by friends who loved her.
Eva spent the last excruciating days
Of her life
Drawing cards for people she loved.
In every one, she wrote "God Bless You."

-Carolyn Kelley
A Piece of Cardboard
by Greg Shemkovitz

He was sitting on the ground, with his back against the wall, legs bent so that he could rest his arms on his knees. Next to him sat a mutt, exhausted from malnutrition, watching me as I passed. A tattered piece of cardboard leaned against his shins with a message written in black marker that read: On my way home to Carson City, backpack stolen, out of luck. Need Money or Food. God Bless. It was evident that if the dog could read, he would have abandoned the man long ago. Every bum has a story and just like the movies, there are only so many plots.

The man looked up at me and I gave him the typical, palms up, I-got-nothin' look. He followed me with his eyes as I passed. I couldn't help but think that the mutt did little for his cause. It's like a man who walks his dog in the park to attract women. She pets the cute, little puppy while the man whimpers at the other end of the leash. If he really cared for his dog, he'd have left it with the SPCA or with a more accommodating owner. Between survival and loyalty – dogs aren't proud. They just don't know any better.

I stopped to fix my hair in the reflection on a storefront window. I hadn't seen myself yet that day, smearing a sweaty palm over my disheveled hair to no avail. When I looked back, he nodded his head once and I knew to move on. I wasn't helping his business. Waiting for handouts was his plan. All bums have a plan. Some spend their day dragging discarded blankets and mattresses to their fortress of filth beneath a freeway overpass. Others earn a dwindled living as street performers on Venice Beach. I live in a broken-down van and spend my days compiling notes for a book I'm writing. It's on how to live as a bum, aptly titled, How to be Bum in L.A.: A Guide to Better Living.

I thought about the bum and his mutt for a few more blocks down Pico Boulevard. I thought about the loneliness of being homeless, about the detachment. I thought these things until, suddenly, restless voices grew louder. I looked across the street to see an argument ensuing among a group of men gathered by a light-post, all wearing similar white T-shirts and khaki pants, like uniforms. They were day-workers, primarily Mexican border-jumpers who sell oranges at freeway exits and stand around street corners waiting for passers-by to offer unskilled, landscaping jobs. They are a step above the homeless, practicing patience and selective ambition.

Though many day-workers have loyalty to one corner over another, with this group, it seemed more of a summer heat induced quarrel than a territorial dispute. Accordingly, fellow workers broke up the argument almost immediately. Then one of the men went to a stretch of shrubbery along the sidewalk and began to urinate. When he zipped up, he looked around slowly. He wasn't looking out of caution but more as an assessment of his surroundings, as though he were scouting a new place for the next time he had to piss. That's when he looked across the way, directly at me. Our eyes locked for a brief moment. I could read nothing into his gaze. His expression was blank. I quickly looked down at the pavement where I noticed a denim wallet. As if I had just dropped it myself, I picked up the wallet and continued walking down the street.

When I got a few blocks down the way, I stopped at a bench on the corner of Pico and 24th. I needed a moment to appraise my find. It was every bum’s dream – free money. I couldn't believe my luck. I turned the wallet over and over in my fingers. It was the kind of wallet you would find in a fashion accessory store for girls. It probably came with a denim handbag donning an embroidered logo of a boy-band or a popular cartoon. At a closer glance, I could see faint brown streaks along the blue denim, either from the dusty street or my hands.

I took a deep breath and unsnapped the button that held the wallet secure. A windowed pocket revealed a driver’s license with the owner’s picture, cute though young. She had shoulder-length, dirty blonde hair that curled up and out at the ends, with a part down the center. Her skin looked soft and warm. The expression on her face was unusual but between the slight squint in her eyes and her smile, she had a natural effervescence. It was as though her boyfriend might be the one taking the picture.

I scanned the rest of the card. Her name was Kimberly Michaels. She was 5 feet, 4 inches with hazel eyes and would soon celebrate her nineteenth birthday. The other pockets held the usual: credit cards, grocery store discount cards, and a student I.D. for Santa Monica College. I was surprised to find her voter registration card. But I was even more astonished to discover, folded up and tucked behind her license, a speeding ticket. I curiously unfolded the yellow paper to find the officer's scribbling. From what I could decipher, on May 23rd, Officer Nightingale caught Kimberly going 54 mph in a 35 mph zone. She was to appear in West Los Angeles Court on July 10th at 7pm.

Aside from that, there was little else in the wallet. She had sixteen dollars in the billfold along with a crumpled lottery ticket. A single quarter slid around inside the change compartment, with it a fortune from a fortune
cookie. However, the writing had bled into a red smear, faint and illegible.

Before I closed the wallet, I looked at her photograph one last time. Her teeth were straight and white. The lines at the corners of her mouth made it appear as though she was enjoying the moment more than the DMV might allow. Her expression seemed candid. I suddenly wished I had been the photographer.

For the rest of the afternoon, I sat on that bench, watching people go by and wondering what to do with the wallet. My fingers probed along the edges of the denim, following the seams and circling over the cold metal of the button. I wondered if Kimberly would ever know what hands had held her wallet. Seeing the filth beneath my fingernails, she might not want it back. I sometimes wondered what fingers would page through my book. Would they be weathered or manicured? I imagined my reader to have my hands, the paper gliding smoothly under a callused thumb.

Ultimately, I knew that returning the wallet was the right thing to do. I just didn’t know how. Her address on the license was from Beverly Hills and I had no means of getting there. I thought of leaving it in a lost and found at her college but I didn’t want it to fall into untrustworthy hands. I even thought of sending it through the mail. Using her money. But I didn’t feel right spending it without her permission.

In my position, I could have used the money. I could have made charges on the credit card before she cancelled it. It may have amounted to a few substantial meals, maybe even a change of clothes. Nevertheless, I knew I’d be fine without it. I knew I didn’t have to find that wallet. After all, I was writing a book on how to live without such treasures. I slipped the wallet into my jacket pocket.

When I finally got up from the bench, I still felt uneasy. I was holding a portion of someone else’s life. As materialistic as it seems, I was holding a part of her. I knew more about Kimberly Michaels than she knew about me and, yet, I wanted more. For instance, I wanted to know what the fortune had read and why she kept it. If I returned the wallet in person, I might have asked her about the speeding ticket. Was she going faster than 54 mph? Did the officer let her go with a reduced charge for a first offense? Where was she going in such a hurry?

I reached into my pocket and felt the stiff denim. I wanted to open the wallet again. I wanted to see that picture, though it wasn’t so much the picture I craved. It wasn’t her hair or her eyes. She could have looked dreadful, and still she was fresh and new, like a second chance. I imagined meeting her at a diner. She would buy me coffee with the money in the wallet. We would talk.

In that diner, I’m just an average guy with the kindness to return a wallet. She’s a girl who happened to get a speeding ticket and ran out of luck. We could tell our stories from the beginning, I could be charming and romantic. She could be understanding and compassionate. She could ask me about my life and my book, all the things that wouldn’t fit onto a piece of cardboard. And afterward, when we walked down the street together, she could stop to pet the dog and I could leave some change with the man on his way home to Carson City.
Mark's Poem

A hundred years I've slept, hidden in my secret tomb, peacefully.

Today I wake to clawing shovels, pick and grate, and the mutter of careless voices discussing a past they know nothing about.

My life, my death. It is not for them to ponder like the latest piece of gossip.

It was mine; it was all I had. A thousand secrets that they cannot hope to unravel from the bits and pieces left behind.

For they are but an echo, A hollow preservation of what they, those others who knew me only from the ghost of a self I put on display, could see. What I showed them.

It was not me. It was a promise and a package. I do not want to be known for the artfully designed seal on my soul, that empty shell.

Only the soul matters. Only what I took the most care to hide. They will never find it. They will never understand.

I have taken my secrets to the grave. My decaying lips are sealed; the windows to the soul have rotted away. They will only find what does not matter, only the shallow details of a shell.

-Julie Bednar
A Diner on Dogwood

Shot the ultraviolet rays,
And you could

See the children dying
Inside of her.
Watch her conditional smile rise,
And now you have no hands.

Did you reach out... too deeply?
Too late?
Too much to destroy in a single moment of exchanged silence.
The kitchen is so
So bright,
So I am sorry I walked in from the mud.
But I banged the heels as hard as I could,
Just trying to get the cake to fall.
I don’t think we’re done here yet.

You could bury your head inside a hole,
But your ass is hanging out.
This waitress never wants to work,
And she serves up my soup cold. Still I leave her
With something.
An old five-dollar bill I owe to a friend.

And this waitress’s skin is hanging from the ceiling fans,
And since there are no complementaries before the door,
I cannot leave until day is a dark hole.
But I have to admit,
I’ve lost my appetite.

There she is – a cancer smoking a cigarette.
(And the surgeons thought it was the other way around!)
As I wait for old friends to come around,
I feel the chill of the ceiling fan,

Taking charge,
Taking hold.
I drink the cold soup,
And pay the check.

— Lauren Sartor
And then it was over...

On top of me...

fighting and holding me down...

with the force of a Mack truck...

I was helpless...

I couldn't fight back...

to survive I needed to fight back...

so I did...

And then it was over...

-Michael Dodge

Epilogue

Working on a student publication has been an interesting experience over the past three years. There is a lot of talent here at Oswego, and a lot of potential for that talent to be put down on paper, in word processors, or in paint, pencil, ink, and charcoal. What we print here in the Great Lake Review is just a sampling of that talent and skill.

Sadly, there are sometimes works I see by my peers elsewhere that I wish we were able to consider for our publication, but for whatever reason many talented authors and artists do not submit works to us. On the opposing side, there are things I see in our submission piles that I wish I could talk to the writer or artist about and point out the few small changes or editorial decisions that would make their work so much better. It's difficult to take the piece as it is, without wanting to raise it to all its potential glory.

With this in mind, what you see printed here has only had minor mechanical and grammatical adjustments made to it. These student works - experimental, draft, and professional pieces - are something of which to be proud. Though those printed here may look back in ten years with mixed reactions, it is a step towards a future self that is made here. Congratulations are in order.

To all those who made it, and especially all those who did not, keep at it. I leave you with my best hopes for the future.

Sincerely,

Julie Bednar
Great Lake Review
Editor-in-Chief