Special thanks to Jeanne Hanrahan, Maureen Roen, Jill Brenner and Blanca Villapudua for their hard work and dedication to the Tempe Community Writing Contest and the *Tempe Writers Forum.*
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Thoughts from the Mayor Mark Mitchell:

Stories play an important role in human life – they entertain, educate and introduce us to new concepts. Stories spark conversations and bring people together through common experiences. They are crucial to preserving our culture and capturing today’s moments for tomorrow’s readers. Not only can storytelling create a narrative, it can also help build neighborhoods, connect the community and strengthen our city.

Every year I am inspired to see so many individuals enter our community writing contest. More than 100 people submitted non-fiction, fiction or poetry pieces on topics ranging from home life, nature, teenage tragedy, family, and more. In addition, there were nearly a dozen entries into the city’s book cover design contest. The talent in the Tempe community is remarkable.

I would like to congratulate all of this year’s entries and encourage each person to continue writing, creating art, and sharing that work with friends and colleagues to build a stronger community. I would also like to extend a special thanks to the Tempe Public Library and Arizona State University’s creative writing community for their efforts in compiling the Tempe Writers Forum, Volume 3. This amazing work couldn’t have been done without their hard work.

Sincerely,

Mayor Mark Mitchell
City of Tempe
March 1, 2017

Dear Friends,

Arizona State University is pleased to celebrate the third annual Tempe Community Writing and Cover Design Contest and this resulting publication —volume three of the Tempe Writers Forum.

At ASU, we are driven by a charter that demands we advance research and discovery of public value and assume fundamental responsibility for the economic, cultural and overall health of the communities we serve.

Helping people become more confident writers is an important part of that responsibility because becoming a more practiced, confident writer contributes to success in many arenas of life.

This annual contest offers opportunity and incentive for individuals to hone their craft and build community around their art.

Many classes and workshops are available at ASU, at the Tempe Public Library and in the community that can help you gain writing practice and feedback from peers.

Enormous thanks go out to all those in the Tempe Public Library, the City of Tempe, at ASU, and in the greater community who have enthusiastically supported this collaborative contest and encouraged and evaluated submissions.

I especially thank all the writers and graphic designers who shared their work. You have enthralled us, touched us, and delighted us. And to anyone reading this who considered entering but didn’t, I
urge you to share your writing or art with us next year!

Sharing our stories—and experiencing others’ stories through the arts—expands our empathy, ignites new ideas about possibility, and stretches our humanity.

Warm regards,

Duane H. Roen
Dean, College of Integrative Sciences and Arts, and University College Vice Provost, ASU’s Polytechnic campus
Your Library always has established authors on hand to check out, but it is also the place where emerging authors can find a safe and supportive environment to help them take the next step as a published author. This publication contains the works of the best local authors for 2017 as selected from the third annual Tempe Community Writing Contest, a collaborative endeavor between the Tempe Public Library, Arizona State University and our community.

I am very proud that the Tempe Public Library is a crossroads for local authors—a place where they can critique and learn from each other and discuss the pains and joys of the calling to write. If you, too, are a budding author, please check the Library’s quarterly newsletter for groups and classes that might help you take that next step in your work. (www.tempe.gov/library)

The breadth and depth of talent of this year’s contest winners is inspiring. As you laugh, learn, and dream through their words, the Library team hopes you find the inspiration to make your dreams come true.

Congratulations to all the authors and illustrators and the very best for future writing success!

Kathy Husser
Deputy Community Services Director - Library
The Hobo Shack

by Sandra Simmons

Adult Fiction
The Hobo Shack

Tara and I sat on the stoop of my house after picking buckets full of dandelions. My dad gave us a quarter a bucket and we had to decide what to do with the dollar we each had in our jean pockets.

Tara stood up and tugged on her tee shirt. It had got so tight on her it barely reached to the waist of her jeans. Tara’s breast buds pushed against her shirt and I wondered when I’d start to grow some breasts myself. Most of the other girls in my seventh-grade class were already wearing bras. And Tara was a year younger. It wasn’t fair.

I blinked into the sun and stood up, too. “I s’pose we could go to town and get an ice cream and a soda.” I pushed my bangs aside to wipe the sweat off my forehead.

“Good idea, Jennie. Let’s ride our bikes.”

“How about we go out by the creek and have us a picnic?”

“I dunno. My brother told me hobos hang out around there.”

“Really? Hobos?”

“Yeah. They’re rapists and perverts. No telling what
they’d do to us.”
“I never heard of anybody getting hurt by no hobo.”
“Well you don’t know everthin’ that goes on around here.”
“And your brother does?”
“Well he knows more’n you. He’s older ya know and he sees and hears stuff. Anyway, how’re we gonna ride bikes and carry sodas and ice cream?”
“We could get the ice cream in cups with those little wood spoons and have Mrs. P put ’em in a bag for us.”
“Nah. They’d be all melty by the time we got to the creek.”
“Awright, then. What’s yer idea?”
“I dunno. What if we got candy bars and canned sodas? That might work.”
“Deal! Race ya to the soda shop.”
The soda shop was quiet on Saturday afternoon. Old Mr. Warner sat at the far end of the counter reading the newspaper and sipping from a cup of steamy coffee. He set the cup down, folded the paper and brought it up close to his face, squinting and adjusting his glasses.
Tara and I went straight to the candy counter and made our selections. I got a Mars bar and Tara picked a Baby Ruth. We took them to the counter and sat on the stools swinging our legs.
Mrs. P came to take our money. “What’re you gals doin’ here on such a purty day? If I’s you I’d be out playin’ in the park or lollin’ in the back yard.”
“We rode our bikes here,” I piped up, not wanting Mrs. P to think we were some kind of lazy slouches.

“Yeah and we’re goin’ to ride out to the creek for a picnic.” Tara flipped her shoulder length brown hair like the girls she’d seen on TV.

“Well, watch out for the snakes. They like to hang out in the tall grasses this time of year.”

“I ain’t never seen no snakes out there and we been out there lots a times. Huh, Tara?”

“That’s right. Mr. Jonas takes us out there huntin’ frogs for science class.”

Mrs. P handed us our change. “Jus’ cuz you didn’t see ’em don’t mean they ain’t there.”

We looked at each other and nodded as we scooted off our stools. We put our change in the soda machine and waited for the clunk of the cans to drop into the tray at the bottom. We stuck the cans in the bags with our candy and made for the door before Mrs. P could give us any more advice.

It was a pretty day. June could be cloudy and rainy but today the sun was shining and the daisies and hollyhocks decorated the yards we passed along the way. I especially liked Mrs. White’s rose garden with its pink, white and yellow blooms. But today we pedaled past them without stopping for a whiff of their heady fragrance. Instead, we biked straight to the edge of town and took the dirt road that led to the creek. Nobody else had showed up, so we had the place all to ourselves.

I jumped off my bike and leaned it against the one-lane bridge that crossed the muddy water flowing under it. I headed
for the old oak tree with Tara right behind me. The tree roots provided a good place to sit under the shade of its canopy that reached over the creek. There used to be a rope swing but it broke off and nobody had replaced it. The short end hung from a branch above us, swaying in the slight breeze.

Eagerly we opened the bags and took out our treats. I remembered Mrs. P’s warning and kept a wary eye out for snakes while I nibbled on my candy and guzzled the sweet cola from the can. “Hey! Let’s make some boats out of our paper bags and candy wrappers and float them down the creek.”

“Yeah! Then we can ride out to the railroad crossin’ and see which boat gets there first. I bet Baby Ruth beats Mars.”

“You wanna bet? I’ll betcha a quarter my Mars wins.”

“You’re on!”

We created our boats and used sticks to make the candy wrappers into sails. Carrying them to the creek, we scooted along the sloping bank to avoid ending up in the water ourselves. As soon as the current carried the little boats away, we scrambled up to where we left our bikes. The race was on.

Tara led the way with me huffing along behind her. We took another country road that ran along the creek. We didn’t have to go far to get to the railroad crossing. We parked the bikes near the trestle and climbed down under the overpass to look for the little paper boats. The lazy creek flowed slowly.

“I hope we didn’t miss them, cuz I know I’m goin’ to win.” Tara paced along the side of the creek to see if she could get a better look.

“I’m pretty sure we’re faster than this stupid creek. It
might as well be molasses as fast as it’s goin’.

“Hey! I think I see something comin’.” Tara shouted.

“What? Let me see.” I tripped and splashed into the creek, soaking my tennies. “Oh, no. Help me out. I’m stuck in this muck. My Mom is goin’ to be really mad at me for getting mud on my new shoes.”

Tara reached out and pulled me back onto the bank. I struggled to wipe the mud off my shoes in the tall grass. “Do you see anythin’ now?

“Nah. It must’ve been a stick or somethin’.”

As we sat waiting for the boats to float by, a train rattled overhead. Tara jumped up. Her eyebrows arched and her face went white. “We better get outta here.”

“Why? What’s the problem?”

“Hobos ride the train and sometimes they jump off here. Come on. Let’s go. I don’t wanna get caught by a hobo.”

“Fine. I’m tired and wet. I better get home and try to get this muck off my shoes anyway.”

We climbed up the grassy slope to retrieve our bikes. As we came out on the road, Tara pointed to a ramshackle abandoned house off in the distance. “See there. That’s where the hobos hang out.”

I’d heard some of the old abandoned houses in the country were haunted. I hadn’t paid much attention to this one before. It was partly hidden by a clump of apple trees. I looked intently at the structure, noting that half the roof had caved in. The front door was missing and the window panes were broken. “Let’s go have a look.”
“Are you crazy? What if there’s a hobo in there?”

“It doesn’t look like it. Come on. Don’t be a scaredy cat.” I pushed my bike along the dirt drive that led to the house. Weeds had nearly overtaken the road, now reduced to a narrow path. Tara hesitated, then followed me.

“I’m only comin’ cuz I don’t want to wait out there by myself,” she whined.

As I came up to the house, I saw the toilet and sink had been ripped from the floor and were toppled over in the back yard, if you could call it that. Litter was scattered everywhere. I walked into the front room, stepping carefully around heaps of garbage on the floor. “This place is a mess. I don’t know why anyone, even a hobo, would hang out here. But obviously somebody does. Look. There’s a disgustin’ blanket over in that corner.”

The door to what had been the bathroom hung by a hinge, revealing a gaping hole where the toilet had been. I reeled from the sewer stench and walked toward the kitchen. A mound of empty food cans filled the sink and I could see bugs crawling around the counter and along the floor. “What an awful life to be a hobo.” I got the creeps and shivered.

“Have you seen enough?” Tara walked to her bike and started back toward the road.

“Yeah. It really stinks. Let’s go.”

***

That night I couldn’t get the hobos out of my mind. “Mom, Tara told me there are hobos around here. She said
they’re rapists and perverts. Is that true?”

Mom looked at me and raised her eyebrows, surprised at the question. “Well…I don’t know about rapists and perverts. Do you even know what that means?”

I had let on to Tara that I knew, but I didn’t. “Are they bad people who steal things and kill people?”

“Something like that. They usually hurt women and children. I haven’t heard any stories about anyone who’s been attacked by a hobo. I suppose it’s possible. I doubt they’d come into town or show themselves. Mostly hobos are men who’re down on their luck without a job or a place to stay, so they go around looking for someone who’ll give them something. Mostly I think they go to the farmhouses near the railroad tracks. Just to be safe, you better stay away from the tracks. And you better stay away from the creek, too, from the looks of your shoes.”

I ducked my head and said, “Yes’m.” But the more I thought about the hobos, the sorrier I felt. They were probably hungry and cold in that old shack. I didn’t think a rapist or pervert would be interested in a young girl without any boobs. I was more afraid of the bully boys, and Tara’s brother was one of them. They were always standing around downtown or in the park like a pack of wild dogs. They’d whistle and yell rude things at any girl that passed by. If they got a rise out of a girl, they’d hoot and holler until the girl slunk out of sight as fast as she could go.

In Sunday school we learned how Jesus cared for the sick and the poor. I decided it was my Christian duty to do
something to help the poor hobos. I began to save up my allowance and chore money. I got so busy earning money for my project, I didn't spend much time with Tara.

She came to my house one afternoon with an invitation. “Let's go downtown for ice cream and candy.”

“Nah, I don't feel like it today.”

“You never want to have any fun. What's the matter with you?” Tara stomped off to her house, slamming our screen door on her way out.

I knew better than to tell my friend what I was up to. We'd known each other since kindergarten and were great pals. But Tara couldn't keep a secret. She'd get all worried and spoil my plan. So I kept it to myself.

One Saturday Mom sent me to the store for a few things. I counted out my money. Ten dollars. I could buy a couple of meals for that. I hitched a wagon to the back of my bike to carry the stuff home. I thought hard about what to get that wouldn't spoil. I got a can of tuna and some peanut butter. Too bad the apple trees by the hut had died, but apples weren't in season yet anyway. I got a couple of oranges. The science teacher always harped on the importance of vitamin C. It prevented scurvy. He liked to tell tales of the pilgrims dying for lack of oranges. And for dessert I got a couple of candy bars. I made sure the flour and salt my mom wanted got packed in separate bags.

“Look at you helping your mom out with the shopping.” Marge looked over my items. “I see she let you get a treat for yourself, too.”

“I used my own money for that.” I puffed up at my in-
dependence and my secret mission. I left the store and loaded the whole mess in my wagon. It wasn’t as easy as I’d thought it would be to haul the wagon behind my bike, but I took it slow and eventually made it home. I parked my bike in the garage and hid my packages behind the lawn chairs stacked against the back corner. After lunch, I told Mom I was going for a ride.

“You be careful not to get your shoes muddy again. I don’t want you going down to the creek, you hear?”

“I won’t. I think I’ll go out to the cemetery. It’s always so quiet and pretty with all the flowers and everythin’.”

“Is Tara going with you?”

“No, she went to spend the day with her cousins.”

“Oh. That’s too bad. Don’t be too long, then.”

“I won’t. I’ll just ride around and come right back.” I scooted out the door letting it slam behind me before Mom raised any more objections.

I took my school bag, loaded the groceries into it and slung it over my shoulder. I thought this would be easier than pulling the wagon. Besides, the wagon would never make it down the weedy drive to the hobo shack. I sped out of the neighborhood and down the country road.

The school bag kept shifting and several times I had to stop to reposition the load. By the time I got to the hobo shack my shoulders ached from the burden and my legs were starting to cramp from peddling fast with the extra weight.

Just as I turned onto the road toward the railroad crossing and the shack, a train whistle blew and I watched the train slowly pass by. I felt a chill crawl up my spine and remembered
Tara’s tale about rapists and perverts. I still wasn’t sure what a pervert was but I didn’t want to run into one. I shuddered but pressed on, remembering what Mom had said about people down on their luck and the Sunday school lessons about helping others.

So I kept going and delivered the groceries to the shack. I picked up some of the litter and put it in the grocery bags to take away with me. I inspected the blanket. It smelled awful. I held it at arms-length and gave it a shake. A cloud of dust engulfed me and I wiped the grit from my face. I carried the blanket out back and draped it over the broken sink laying on the ground. I thought at least it could air out and maybe it wouldn’t smell so foul.

Every few weeks I took my savings to the grocery and lugged my special offering to the shack. I noticed that the food was gone and the containers had been carefully stacked in a pile. There was less trash around the place and the blanket had been neatly folded in the corner. I smiled, thinking that some unfortunate soul had appreciated the help I offered and shown their gratitude.

It was late summer when I headed out to the shack again. I was just about to turn down the lane when I heard whooping and hollering coming from under the train trestle. My throat went dry and I could hardly swallow. I was out in the open all alone. What if there were a group of hobos, not just one? No one was around to help me or keep them from being mean and tormenting me. I didn’t know what to do. Leave the stuff at the shack or turn around and get out of there? I froze in
indecision and fear.

I dropped the bag of groceries at the end of the lane and was about to peddle home as fast as my legs would take me when four boys came up the slope from the trestle.

The bully boys spotted me.

“Hey, look what we got here!”

They were pulling on their shirts but dropped everything and started running towards me. Even though I had the advantage of my bike and a head start, I couldn’t outpace them. Someone grabbed me and pulled me off the bike. I screamed as he threw me on the ground and straddled me, holding me down. I recognized Don, a friend of Tara’s brother. The other boys quickly caught up and shouted obscenities, egging him on.

“Take her top off.”

“Let’s have a look at her little skeeter bites.”

I screamed again as Don grabbed my shirt and gave it a tug. Just then a man came up behind him and grabbed his arm. The other boys scattered as the man grimaced and growled at them. He had a board in his hand and threatened to whack them with it. When the grizzled man released him, Don leaped away and joined the others. The boys yelled insults as they ran off.

“Hobo.”

“Sleeze bucket.”

“Bum.”

“You better get outa here cuz we’re gonna get the fuzz and he’ll lock you up, you old tramp!”

I wrapped my arms over my head. Afraid to look at my
rescuer, waiting for him to hurt me, too. I started to whimper.  

“Thar, thar. Don’ ya fret. Them boys is gone now and I ain’ gonna hurt ya. I ’spect you’s the one bringin’ food, ain’t ya?”

His voice was soothing. I peeked at the man over my arm. He looked fearsome. His clothes were tattered and he was covered in grime. He extended a hand to help me up. I recoiled and scooted away.

He hung his head, looking sad. When I realized he wasn’t going to hit me, I got up and straightened my shirt.

The man helped me retrieve my bike. “Thanks for carin’,” he said as I turned to leave.

“Thank you for savin’ me from those awful boys.” I got on my bike and started down the lane. I looked back to see him lugging the bag of groceries I had dropped.

I didn’t tell anyone about what happened, not even Tara. I felt sorry for the hobos, especially the one that rescued me, but I never went back to the hobo shack. I didn’t want to run into the bully boys. They were the real perverts.
I am inspired by people and their struggles to not only survive but thrive and find meaning in life. My stories reflect my interests in nature, travel, hiking, dancing and spirituality. Family and friendships have played a major role in my life and helped me maintain balance and perspective as I navigated the difficulties of being a working single mother and caregiver to my elderly parents and life partner. My debut novel, Moon Glow, is available on Amazon, in the Tempe, Mesa, Scottsdale and Avondale libraries, Changing Hands and the Book Vault.
Lavender

by Kahri O’Bien

College Fiction
“An apple a day keeps the doctor away. Something to do with an apple that not only makes sense for your physical well being, but your mental and emotional and let’s not forget the oh important dental benefits of the apple as well. It even relates to love. See, what people don’t know is that when they look for their soul mate or the love of their life or whatever bullshit they believe in, they are looking for the perfect apple — healthy for them in every way. But there’s always that one. That one apple that hurts a bit when you first bite into it, but you continue to eat it anyway because god it tastes so right. Then, it gets stuck between your teeth and it stays there. You’ll floss until the blood has overwhelmed every sense in your body. When that doesn’t work you’ll brush at your teeth until you can feel the enamel scrap off with each stroke. Eventually you’ll give up and go to bed bleeding and defeated, with that apple still between your teeth and the sweet taste turning more bitter by the moment. That is what he was to me, the perfect apple.

“Lucinda” my name was sweet as honey on his lips but it affected me none as I felt the uncomfortable weight of 200 pounds of pure football player shift on top of me. I opened my
eyes to complete darkness and shut them quickly again before they could adjust. “Oh fuck, Lucinda. You feel so good.” Josh? John? Justin? whatever his name was let out an inhumanely roar on top of me. I braced myself for the next thrust and tried to forget the act of what I was doing. It was the same each time. Different name, different town, but the same act. Same reality that I kept promising myself would all be a distant memory. I reach for the crisp bed sheets under my hand and grasp them tightly, they feel like water running through my fingers and I aimlessly try and think of what type they must be. Silk, maybe? This is my life. Forever letting strangers have sex with me and contemplating bed sheets. What have I come to? Twenty minutes later I am slipping out of the front door of Jason’s house, having finished his business he was very able to point me to the door and direct me to where my panties and shoes had been thrown. The night is calm when I leave. Nights after I give myself up, normally are. Pulling out my phone I realize the time — 4:00 in the morning, the perfect time to start my long trek home.

I have a car, don’t get me wrong, but I prefer to walk when I go on these conquests. What are these conquests you might ask exactly? What am I doing having sex with a random boy who is barely a man, who I have just met maybe 2 hours ago. Well, why I do it is simple. It is something that everyone wants to do. Something everyone wants to have. I do it to feel. This might sound contradicting because I didn’t stay the night, nor do I ever. That’s one of my rules of course, no real interaction. No cuddling, no movies, no late night conversations —
just sex. Raunchy, emotionless sex. Sometimes it’s easier to get off scot free than it is other times. Thinking back to tonight I know Jeremy won’t call me ever again and he’ll probably forget my name after he tells all his friends about the “hot chick” he “laid.” Other times, they want me to stay. They get butt hurt when I tell them that I can’t. And then the phone calls ensue. Sometimes one or two, other times 20-30. Some men are relentless let me tell you, they cannot pick up when a girl isn’t interested in them.

For me, it’s not just about the sex. Yes, sex feels great. But what feels more amazing is knowing that you have someone completely in your power. Men, they can’t resist. It’s like they see a little tit and suddenly they become animals, powerless to their urges. Me, sadly I just take advantage of that. I see that as an opportunity to feel anything but the numbness I feel every other day. Some people use drugs, some people slit their wrists, some people just cope and put on a happy face and then cry themselves to sleep at night. My vice is sex. I get a really good fucking and I’m fine for a week. I can smile and pretend to be happy. Without it, god knows where I would be. Or who I would be.

People do unnatural things to feel okay, but not me. I picked the one natural thing and stuck with it. It makes me feel normal. I don’t know why I need to feel normal, I have no reason to not feel normal. I live a stereotypical life — a mom and a dad, white picket fence, two dogs type of life.

Glancing up at the sky, the stars seem so sparse tonight. Like they know the deed I have done and they are hiding from
me. Almost as if they are saying, “Lucinda you skank, we know who you are. We are the only ones who know.” The awful part is they’re right. Most people have some reason for this behavior. Can I tell you a secret? I have none. I do it simply for joy. The joy of being in control. Maybe that is an addiction within itself.

I finally reach what my brother would call home. I let myself in the front door, not trying overly hard to be quiet; it wouldn’t be the first time my parents caught me in what most would call the walk of shame. For me, this walk is just a regular walk up the two flights of stairs and into my lavender infested room. As I walk through the door a familiar feeling engulfs me. I find myself 6 years ago walking through the same door. Looking up I see my mom, radiant and bathed in light. As we walk through I am overjoyed by what I see. Purple, in all shades, surrounds me. My mom has made my greatest dream come true. I feel like a princess should when she is taken into her castle. It even smells like purple. When this sentence squeaks out of my mouth my mom corrects me.

“Lavender, my love. It is calming.” I don’t know how she got the scent in the room, but it is the right kind of overpowering. I dress in my new jammies and crawl into bed. Receiving a kiss on the forehead my mom tucks me in and leaves the door open just a crack. I roll over when slowly I am once again bathed in light.

“Mommy?” I whisper excitedly. Maybe there is another surprise she forgot about. As the light grows and then fades I hear a rough voice grow closer to my ear and I shrink inside my bed. Closing my eye’s tightly I pray that I disappear into the new
fuchsia sheets. It’s the boogie man, and he is here to make me cry.

“It’s okay princess.” He coos softly and suddenly I no longer feel as if I am in a fairytale.

Suddenly, I am back in the present. The smell of lavender makes me gag, yet I can never seem to make it go away.
Kahri O’Brien

Kahri O’Brien is currently a student at Arizona State University pursuing her undergraduate degree in Creative Writing. She is an Arizona native who has always had a strong passion for storytelling and writing. When she isn’t writing she can be found spending time with her puppy and large family.
The textured earth pressed into Atlas’s shoulders, deepening the ravines in his upper body. Fourteen-hundred years ago, he was honored with the duty of holding up the earth. This world is the foundation for the wellbeing of all gods. Though powerful, immortal beings subsist upon the offerings and prayers of humans. These help them remain in power. Without human intervention, gods remain immortal but not powerful. In return for the people’s libations, the gods bestow upon them gifts like longevity, prosperity, or certain skills.

Though symbiotic, the gods always thought they had the upper hand in the relationship. Because without them, people would not be able to progress. They were proven wrong. One after another, the gods lost hope. Humans rapidly forgot the ones who had given them their abilities in the first place. The immortals began to abandon the earth they had created. The number of powerful gods and goddesses occupying Olympus (Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Hera, Athena, Aphrodite, Hephaestus, Demeter, Apollo, Artemis, Hermes, and Dionysus) dwindled down to zero.

They all blamed Atlas. He was seen as the catalyst for
human innovation. He saw the potential mortals held and decided to deliver their first gift: fire. Zeus was furious. He feared people would overpower the gods, but soon came to realize that this was not the case. The fire had actually caused them to begin worshipping the gods. Every time something good happened, it was because of a god. As his reward, Atlas was given the privilege of holding up the earth. This is considered the highest form of power because all life depends upon the holder. Both mortal and immortal alike cannot live without the common supporter.

Atlas has always believed in the humans. They are not always on their best behavior and often abuse the gifts they are given, but he saw no difference between this and the actions of immortals.

The exodus began with Athena. Although most academics used her gifts of intellect and inquisitiveness for technological developments, they were also used as instruments for human destruction. Nothing compared to the fatalities born from Athena’s gifts in the 1940’s. Horrified after viewing how the nuclear and atomic bomb could affect the earth, she used the last of her powers to make the humans agree to never use it again. With hope dilapidated, Athena left Olympus in search of a life untouched by the immoral mortals.

Artemis followed soon after. Poaching cleaned the forests of their former diversity. Instead of running and hunting with her band of maidens under heavy treetops, the group was faced with stumps and barren wildlife. Apollo shared the views of his sister. His music was not valued as much as it once was. He felt useless. They missed the days of yore, longing for people
to need them and look up to them. They voiced their concerns. Atlas replied, “Yearning for what used to be will not help you accept what is.” The twins decided to establish their own city in a remote corner of the earth. Now they run freely, practicing the lyre and hunting in the moonlight, away from civilization.

Even though the humans strayed from the gods, they were always grateful to Atlas. Enraged, Zeus spread the rumor that Prometheus was the one who brought them fire, discrediting Atlas and pushing him from human thoughts. He tried for many years to get mortals to revert back to their previous beliefs. They were giving the new God too much power. No longer seen as the king he was before, Zeus stepped down from his throne, urging queen Hera to come with him. She hesitated, but knew the importance of staying united with her husband. She left with Zeus. They went to see Atlas. “The humans are terrible beings, and if not for you, the gods would not be in this position,” they accused. Atlas faced the king, looked him in the eye, and said, “the ones who do not adapt to change are the weak.”

Poseidon’s once lively domain was ravaged by new marine technology. A hunger for fish led to species dying out and lives lost pointlessly. Poseidon had a front row seat to the overfishing and killing of his ocean. Demeter similarly saw the divide widen between her traditional practices and how food began to be cultivated. The gifts she once bestowed were meaningless when compared to a machine that could farm better than any person. Pesticides covered the need for “green thumbs.” Both felt as if their kingdoms were stolen. Defeated, they sought out lives they wished others would live. Demeter
started a small farmer’s market; Poseidon became a fisherman for a remote village.

Dionysus saw how drinking was left for rambunctious behavior more than celebration. As people began to drink away their problems and use alcohol for perverse reasons, he lost the love he had for the fermented grapes. Wine used to be seen as a delicacy and although some would drink their fill too often, it was never this extreme. He went to explain why he decided to forsake Olympus. Atlas nodded and dismissed him.

Hades was content with his position. He had little to no interaction with mortals. Hephaestus concluded he was not necessary because of the constant technological innovations made without him. Hephaestus descended into the underworld, where his skills were valued. Hades needed new ways to organize the exponential amount of dead coming through his gates. Hephaestus began an industrialization of his own, using methods he learned from the mortals.

Aphrodite had a say in how the most beautiful mortals were formed. She created features which exemplified unique beauty. She was a strong proponent of inner beauty as well. She left after Athena. Aphrodite took the atrocities committed based on appearance very personally. Her heart hurt when she saw races targeted by others. It became too much to bear after the death of a young boy, Emmett Till, who was blessed with exotic characteristics, was murdered for being too cheeky with a store cashier. She went to Atlas before leaving. She gave her reasons. Atlas stayed silent, looking down. Aphrodite retreated with Ares. Even though war was constant and chaotic, he thought it
did not hold the values it did before. Bravery and courage were conquered by manipulation and fear.

Hermes stood, deserted, upon Olympus. With no more messages to carry, he had no purpose. He went to say goodbye to Atlas. Hermes, frustrated with the loss of his family and his standing, exclaimed, “The views of ancient peoples differ greatly from those of modern. The changes in morals are unbearable. How can you support a planet which disagrees with the fundamental values of the gods?” Atlas whispered, “It is not that these advancements are evil, but they simply do not fulfill the needs of the gods.” Hermes was disgusted with Atlas’s refusal of the old ways. He left.

Now Atlas stands alone. The burden upon his shoulders seems heavier than ever. The 12 most powerful gods retired because the weight he held was too much for them to bear. Atlas considered his options. He thought about how throughout all of their history, humans have left death and destruction in their wake. Looking up at the rock he struggled with every day, he saw war, famine, disease, and hate. The world became leaden. He lowered his shoulders, holding the earth in front of him. He had saved these creatures for a reason. He had believed in them. Atlas peered closer. He pushed past the gory horrors on the surface and spotted something that opened his eyes. He glimpsed acts of charity, kindness, and love, all done without immortal intervention. The humans did not need the gods to be moral, they needed nothing but a will to do good. It was not the gifts themselves, but the utilization of these gifts, that changed humanity. Atlas’ heart blossomed with hope. Just as he believed
in them 1400 years ago when he risked his life for these mortals, he believes in them now. Atlas stands tall and strong, proudly bearing the weight of the world. As Atlas rests the earth upon his shoulders once more, he smiles.
Emma has been writing since she was 8. While she originally focused on the horror genre, she now prefers to write about morality and ethics. As a high school student, Emma has explored her passion for writing by joining her school’s debate team and participating in newspaper club. She is honored to be acknowledged by the Tempe City!
Poetry
Morning Rhythm

by Sandie Miller

Adult Poetry
Morning Rhythm

Grabbed boots
screen door slaps behind me
hot mug of roasted brew
rocker creak
hits its morning rhythm

Leggy chenille grass
catches the wind
red-winged blackbirds
stand atop unfolding cattails
courting the day

As a blue heron
blended beside tawny reeds
ever so still
awaits finned morsels

Thump of a sturdy tail
against dried plank porch
brings me back
laces tied
Sandie Miller is a longtime resident of Tempe and graduate of ASU. Besides her counseling work and teaching self-healing, she cherishes the company of words, open spaces and 4-legged friends. To share thoughts Sandie can be reached at: mindbodytalks@yahoo.com
Going Home

by Claudio Garcia

College Poetry
Whenever I get sick,
I eat a lemon
with a sprinkle of salt. This is an old trick
of my mother’s that she learned
while homeless.

My mother, like any other Latina woman,
knows that you can clean anything with lemon juice,
but the magic isn’t in the lemon.
It’s in the scrubbing, the knees on the tiled floor,
the sore in the crook of her elbow.
The strength in being willing to bend.

That’s what gets the stains out.
Claudio Garcia has been published or is forthcoming in *LUX*, *Marooned* and *Sandscript*. He is currently studying Creative Writing, Classics and LGBT Studies at Arizona State University. A native of the desert, he fell in love with libraries at a young age upon discovering they have air conditioning. Subsequently, he has worked in libraries his entire life, and can usually be found in one.
To Forgive is to Forget

by Aimee Cheng

High School Poetry
Betrayal and forgiveness constantly
Recur in nature every month and day:
The loyal sun who acts so patiently,
Is, oh, betrayed in almost every way.

Her rays are exiled by the moon each night,
And sometimes covered by the hostile storms;
Still, every morning she comes to bring light
And to spread warmth upon life of all forms.

The sun was always able to forgive,
And so did I each time you hurt me,
For without you I thought I could not live.
But now I see a way for me to be set free.

So, this time I will not come back like the sun.
Yes, farewell. This time my regrets will be none.
Aimee Cheng

Aimee is a junior at Tempe Preparatory Academy and has been writing poetry ever since she discovered her love for it in 6th grade writing workshop. She enjoys many different forms of writing but poetry is her favorite because of its adaptability and its sense of rhythm. Some of her favorite activities, other than writing, are reading an interesting book, hiking, or watching a good movie.
Nonfiction
The mid-afternoon air was graveyard-cold. Frankie pulled his winter coat collar up and hunched his shoulders as he crossed the student parking lot at Montana State University in Bozeman. The two inches of snow that had fallen the night before had frozen, and his Pat Boone-style white buck shoes made a crunching sound with every step. He hopped into his customized Merc and quickly regretted upholstering his seats in Naugahyde. They’d take a while to warm. The leather-covered steering wheel didn’t feel much better. When he hit the starter, the big engine roared to life and the Smithy’s glasspack mufflers purred. Frankie flipped the heater switch and turned on his radio. He heard the Everly Brothers singing the last notes of “Wake up, Little Susie” on KMON, the 50,000 watt rock ‘n’ roll station in Great Falls.

“Damn, what a day to have a physics test,” he mumbled to himself when he drove onto the highway. Usually, he was out of town early on Fridays when he was going home to Cut Bank for the weekend, a five-hour drive when the weather was good. His packed suitcase was in the backseat. He’d promised his sister he’d arrive in time to dance the last dance with her at her
I spotted Frankie on the first day of high school. I was a lowly freshman and he was a junior. He was standing on the front steps wearing pale purple corduroy pants and a turquoise and green flannel shirt. He had an audience, the McClanahan girls, twins who were well known because they played guitar and sang duets at events around town. Frankie was animated, gesturing with his arms and hands. The twins were apparently enjoying his antics. I could hear them giggling as they watched him perform, he in his mismatched peacock-colored duds.

His sister was in my freshman class. Cecilia, or Cissy as we called her, was unlike her brother. She was quiet, never wanting to take the spotlight. My girl, Janet, was her best friend. My buddy Robert and Cissy became an item and we double dated. Cissy’s big brother was considered one of the school’s in-group, but she thought he was a pain and they ignored each other during the day.

Frankie enjoyed widespread popularity. Girls liked his bubbly personality and the fact that he was funny. They weren’t drawn to his looks; he wasn’t masculine, was somewhat chubby, and didn’t carry his weight well. The guys hung out with him because he was rich and generous to a fault. He paid for everything: movies, fast food, bowling or whatever else was on the agenda.

Frankie and Cissy’s parents, the Graces, Frank Sr. and Lydia, were farmers. Frank came from an established Cut Bank pioneering family and he’d inherited the family home and acreage. Without debt they became wealthy. In addition to the
farm property, they owned a beautiful Colonial-style home on Main Street, where they lived during the school year. The home was within shouting distance of Saint Paul's Lutheran Church, where the family attended Sunday services infrequently but always on Easter.

The dad was distinguished, quiet and unassuming. Lydia was an eccentric. Despite their riches, she delivered the Cut Bank Pioneer Press newspaper to earn extra money. In winter, she bundled up in men’s clothing, wearing black overshoes and a Khrushchev fur hat, its ear flaps bobbing as she walked her route. Kids didn’t chide Frankie and Cissy about their strange mother. We all claimed an odd character or two in our families.

We all knew Frankie was headed for greatness. He was smart, an A student who was class president as a junior and student-body president as a senior. He also served on nearly every school committee. His future plans included law and politics.

The Grace parents didn’t overindulge their kids. There were other rich farmers who purchased new cars for their sons and daughters when they became teenagers. Maybe since the Grace home was two blocks from school, they didn’t think the family needed another car. Instead Frankie was relegated to driving his parents’ Plymouth wagon. Cissy said her brother pleaded with their dad to let him have his own car, but to no avail. She said his true fantasy was to own a customized Mercury like the one he’d seen in Hot Rod magazine. He had a photo of the car tacked to his bedroom wall. It had been built by George Barris, a famous Southern California designer.

Frankie’s begging finally bore fruit when he entered his
senior year and his dad funded the purchase of a 1950 Mercury coupe. It was in decent shape but Frankie visualized it in customized form. He started making a few modifications himself, like removing the hood ornament and adding spinner hubcaps. He'd reached the limit of his skills. Frankie was not a mechanic. He had never touched a crescent wrench. He enlisted the help of his best buddy, Jerry, who was enrolled in school shop, but between the two of them, they managed only to remove the trunk lid ornament, which left a gaping hole they planned to fill with Bondo, but never did.

Then Frankie's semi-modified Mercury disappeared. Cissy said he'd shipped his partly disassembled car to California to have it redone by professionals. The car was gone for three months and town kids were as eager as Frankie to see the final product. Robert and I were eating hamburgers and fries at The Point Drive-in when Frankie pulled into a parking space driving his newly-customized automobile. His pal Jerry was riding shotgun, a spot he claimed from there on. The proud owner gunned the engine and the car rumbled. The noise of the twin exhausts caught everyone's attention and kids gathered around.

The Merc was a work of art. The top was chopped three inches and the chassis dropped six inches in front and eight in the rear, giving the car a low profile. The hood was louvered, the nose and trunk trim shaved, and the door handles were removed. Doors opened by pushing a solenoid button in the chrome trim. The customizers had molded in a designer grille and added Lakes pipes along the sides. The exhaust came out in front of the rear wheel wells. The magnificent ’50 received a coat
of beautiful pearlescent paint. The matching pearl-and-gray Naugahyde diamond tuck-and-roll interior was accented by a dash with custom gauges and a T-Bird speedometer.

Frankie had the town’s hottest car. Not only was it gorgeous inside and out, it had a souped-up Chevy V-8 that filled the spotless engine compartment. Frankie spouted details about horsepower and other specifics, acting like he knew what he was talking about. I didn’t understand half of what he said.

Everyone wanted a ride and Frankie was more than willing to oblige. On our turn, he took Robert and me down the highway toward Shelby, a fifteen-mile stretch, arrow-straight. The Chevy-powered Mercury seemed to float above the blacktop like a bullet in flight. I felt panic to my soul when I leaned forward from my backseat perch and saw the speedometer pass 100. I swore that would be my last ride with Frankie. His front-seat buddy took the speedy journey in stride. He looked as thrilled with the car as the driver.

After graduation, Frankie had his choice of universities, including some Ivy League schools. Instead he opted to stay close to home and enrolled at MSU. Cissy told us he was a 4.0 student studying political science with minors in math and science. Now that he was away from the family, she and her brother had become close.

I was a high school junior that year. At prom time, I asked Janet to the dance, and Robert invited Cissy. Dad offered me the use of his 1951 Caddy, a dark maroon Coupe de Ville. Wearing my new gray suit and a boutonniere on my lapel, I drove across town to get Janet. My pretty date looked spectacu-
lar in her strapless light pink formal and a string of pearls. I presented her with a wrist corsage that matched her gown, and we posed for pictures in her living room. Robert was my next stop. He looked downright sharp in best Sunday suit. Cissy was ready when we reached the Grace home. She was wearing a light blue formal and looked prettier than I had ever seen. Her mother and dad had a camera and flashbulbs at hand to record the event. Bulbs flashed when Robert pinned a white corsage to her gown. On the way to the prom, Cissy told us Frankie was coming home that night. He’d promised to be there for the last dance of the evening.

The night was one none of us wanted to end, surrounded by friends and dancing to fifties tunes. But, as the hours passed, Cissy was getting concerned. Her brother was a no-show. That wasn’t like him! He still hadn’t arrived when the last song played, or when we’d finished eating our after-dance dinner at Burgin’s restaurant and dropped the girls at their homes. It was just before eleven.

Robert and I decided to hang-out at The Point Drive-in until it closed at midnight. Several others had the same idea and the place was crowded. Frankie’s best bud, Jerry, was there and we overheard him saying Frankie had called from a Great Falls diner where he’d stopped for a bite to eat. He’d left the Bozeman campus later than planned and he’d found it slow going on the icy roads through the mountain passes. But he was expected to arrive soon. The words were barely out of Jerry’s mouth when the town ambulance, its red light flashing and siren blaring, sped past, heading toward Shelby and Great Falls. We instinc-
tively knew where it was going, and many kids, including Robert and I, jumped in our cars and followed. Five miles out, we were stopped a hundred yards from the Etheridge Curve by a patrolman who'd cordoned off the highway. From our vantage point, we could see far out into the prairie. Headlights of the ambulance and other emergency vehicles lighted the field, which was covered with metal carnage. We'd seen wrecks before, but not like this! Frankie had missed the curve, glanced off a power pole and rolled his pearlescent pride and joy over and over. He must have been moving at a tremendous speed on that narrow, dark roadway. Only pieces of the car remained and almost nothing was left of Frankie.

A family-only funeral service was held at the Saint Paul's Lutheran Church. The brief obituary in the Pioneer Press stated the family preferred that instead of flowers, people could send donations to the Glacier County Friends of the Library. Frankie was interred at Crown Hill Cemetery.

Frankie's death was the subject of conversation for weeks. The occurrence of a teen accident was common, a rite of passage for Montana prairie kids, usually a combination of beer and fast cars. In Frankie's case, it was a fast car.

Kids who were backyard mechanics wondered what happened to the Merc's Chevy power plant. According to the tow-truck driver who cleared the accident scene, the engine had survived intact. Sadly, alongside it, lying in a puddle of oil and shattered glass, was a white buck shoe, size ten, the laces still tied. Frankie's dad made sure the powerful V-8 didn't kill someone else's son. He retrieved the motor from the salvage yard and
buried it in some unknown location, probably on his farm.

After the accident, Frank Sr. changed, becoming reclusive. Folks assumed he was overcome by guilt for having financed his son’s fatal fantasy. Frankie’s mom was hard to read. She kept up her weekly routine, walking the Cut Bank sidewalks, delivering the town newspaper in her floppy-eared hat. Cissy was devastated by the loss of her older brother and, always quiet, she withdrew for a time, regretting the earlier years when she could have gotten to know him better. She relied on her friends for support, especially Janet.

Ironically, under Frankie’s senior yearbook photo, he’s quoted as saying, “Some people live forever, but I drive my own car!”
Thomas Scott

Thomas Arthur Scott resides in Tempe, Arizona, with Joy, his wife of forty-six years. He has a son Jason, daughter-in-law Elizabeth and granddaughters Addison and Anabelle, who live in Scottsdale. The short story, The White Buck, was taken from Thomas’s just completed autobiography titled The Coldest Place, My Childhood on the Montana Prairie. The author can be contacted at: scottywords@gmail.com
The Recital

by Bonnie Brockway

College Nonfiction
The Recital

She heard them at it again in the next room, the thin walls barely muffling the harsh words, the raised voices. She looked down at her small fists, clenching and unclenching against her favorite blue-and-white checked dress. She loved to twirl the short, circular skirt, pretending she was a famous ballerina dancing lightly on her toes. She had been doing just that, spinning around and around, happily watching the skirt flare out gracefully. Then the fighting had begun.

Her long coppery hair had been brushed until it shone, and tonight she felt pretty. She didn’t often feel pretty. She hated her round nine-year-old face, despised the sprinkling of freckles across her nose, and for the millionth time, wished her eyes were brown instead of greenish-blue.

Butterflies wiggled in her stomach. One hour from now she was to perform in her very first piano recital along with a half dozen of her classmates. She loved the piano. To her, it was not just an instrument of music; it was an extension of herself and her emotions. She could make it laugh or make it cry. It reflected her moods, understood her shyness. It was her friend. Through her fingers, she vented her anger, her happiness, her
loneliness, her pain. She found it difficult to open up to people, to express herself in words. Music did it for her.

Tonight she had hoped to make her fingers dance, expressing her love of music and the love she felt for her parents as they sat proudly beaming in the front row.

And now they were fighting. Maybe it wasn’t serious, she told herself, just a small quarrel. Her friends’ parents quarreled from time to time. Her friends told her so. It was probably nothing to worry about. But it sounded serious this time. Suddenly, her mother screamed, “I hate you!” The viciousness of these words slammed into the girl’s small body, doubling her over into a comma shape. Mama was sobbing; Daddy pleading, “Please stay, just until after the recital. Then if you still want to go, I won’t stop you. Please don’t disappoint her. This is so important to her. She needs to have both of us there.” He was crying, too.

The young girl, though unaware, silently pleaded along with her father. She held her breath waiting for her mother’s reply. Finally it came. “I’ll stay until the recital is over, but then I’m going to leave.”

She felt relief flood over her small body, felt the tears running down her face. Somehow she felt her mother’s final decision to leave or to stay depended on how well she performed tonight; whether or not she succeeded in stroking the right words from the keys, words that were now ringing in her head and her ears, “Please stay, Mama. please don’t leave me.” She whispered, “Dear God, let me play good tonight.”

She noticed the suitcase by the door as they left the
house, felt the tension as the three of them walked the short distance to the school. She took her place with the other students and wondered if other mothers had suitcases packed, ready to flee when the last notes died away.

Across the room, she studied the two most important people in her young life. Her mother’s eyes were red-rimmed. Her father looked down at his hands. She didn’t want her friends to know that her world might be splitting down the middle, so she tried on a smile and turned away. It was all up to her now.

She grew frightened as her turn drew near. Unconsciously, she felt the terrible weight of the outcome of this evening on her alone. Even though she was only nine-year’s-old, she somehow realized that her shoulders were too small, too thin, too young to bear this great responsibility she had taken upon herself.

As she walked to the front of the room, she breathed, “Don’t leave, Mama. I’ll play good, you won’t be ashamed of me. I’ll play real good.”

Her trembling fingers touched the keys and she was lost in the music. Then it was over and she was bowing to polite applause. Only one mistake, she thought. One mistake is good. Is it good enough to make Mama stay? If she does go, will she take me too? Take me away from Daddy? I don’t want to leave Daddy, and I don’t want Mama to go, either.

She tried to prolong the refreshment hour, the exchanging of pleasantries over coffee and cookies. She talked with friends, keeping an eye on her mother, looking for some sign,
some clue. But there was none. No one spoke during the walk home. She knew she had played well. Had it been good enough?

The suitcase was still by the door. Mama headed straight for the bedroom. Daddy hugged her. “I’m so proud of you, honey.” The girl went to her room and slowly undressed. She carefully hung up the ballerina dress and slipped into her nightgown. She listened for sounds of leaving, of the suitcase being picked up and the door slamming shut behind her mother. But all was strangely quiet.

Her eyelids were heavy, her young body drained. The stiffness in her limbs finally relaxed. She nestled deeper into her warm bed, brushing away a tear with her small knuckles. *Mama’s not leaving, not this time,* she thought as she slowly lost the fight to stay awake. *I played good enough. Thank you, God.* Then she whispered, “I’ll play better, Mama, you’ll see. I’ll practice harder, I promise. You won’t even have to remind me. Just don’t leave me, Mama, please don’t leave me . . .”
I was married early and so was not able to attend college when I was young. But college was always my dream. After 22 years of marriage, I was divorced and had to support myself, so again, my college dream was put on hold, but the dream never left me. So, at the age of 70, I enrolled at Mesa Community College. I graduated from there with my A.A. on May 15, 2015, and, now, at the age of 75, I am attending ASU working toward procuring my B.A. My major is English/Creative Writing. I love school and I believe that learning keeps one young. I have four beautiful grown children and numerous grand- and great-grandchildren. I read voraciously, love the computer, and enjoy crocheting afghans for my kids and grandchildren.
Endless Rain

by Michael Preston

High School Nonfiction
Could I hate the rain, when it was all I’ve known?
Through nature’s waters, birthed all that I’ve grown:

Lit by the scarce morning light,
I see my life’s work, a garden out West;
So carefully cultivated, so meticulous.
Amid the ruins, holding steadfast:
A rainbow, the beautifully backwards
Child of the Storm;
A Rose and a Sunflower, standing tall and
Graceful as ever;
A White Oak erects, branches spread wide,
Roots spread deep;
A Lily, sprouting between them all,
Bringing the City new Life.

I’d at last levied my work unto the professor, not knowing what it meant to me anymore. And again, and again, until he was satisfied. Until my poetry, forced by the hostage of my grade, had been sufficiently trimmed. Two pages to one. One to a half. 100
lines to my underwhelming sonnet, read in front of those that I used to know. At the top of my class, but the bottom of the food chain; number one, yet as a person, none. And therein lies the greatest challenge of high school: for most, you either excel as an underclassman, or as an upperclassman. I was king for a while, until everyone got up and lived their lives, while I stayed behind, worrying more about academics than, well, less appropriate recreations. The only time I’ve been close to a king in two years is in my acting of Hamlet, yet again when my professor sees it fit for me to do so.

They say, as “they” always do, that the framers of the Constitution chose every word, every line, every connotation with extreme caution, circumspect in their attempt to leave no doubt for the untold time yet to come. Supposedly, these politicians of the Free World (tm) had more literary ability than the great Shakespeare (or as the professor himself would say, Shaksper (those Stratfordians be damned, indeed)), who Himself, revered as he is, made a plethora of mistakes over time -- although his approximately 900,000 words across all those sonnets, plays, and the like, are bound to be imperfect in some sort. I have always strived to be among their ranks. Not as a politician, heaven forbid I waste my life bringing a knife to a global nuke fight, but as a capable author, able to pick every word with absolute confidence (as is my way of life), leaving very curious words in my texts, but knowing that rather than being simply dismissed as poor diction or altogether ignorance, they could be dissected, with actual effort put in to understand me in ways
no one else ever would.

I am a (insert arbitrary gender here) of ambition, it is to be certain; to reveal a perhaps scandalous amount of information about myself, I am the commanding officer of my high school’s NJROTC unit, and soon to be Valedictorian.

It sure is lonely at the top.

I have to think of something to write for my graduation speech, to all of those whom I’ve forgotten, and the handful I ever knew anyways. Again my mind drifts to the virtues of confidence, ambition, persistence, and whatever other synonyms I can derive thusly. I will not begin to describe the purgatory I suffered from my years prior, but I am so wholly a different (reinsert gender pronoun) that I can only recognize myself through my old eyes -- when they could still see. All my success if one can call it that at this point stems from the desire to never turn back. Never turn about, and gaze into the Abyss I’ve wasted eons crawling out of. I’ve become everything there is to be in an attempt to protect myself, to distract myself, to prove to the only person who’s always been here, not there, in my life, that I am different. If one could only Photoshop the mirror. Can I tell all of my peers to do as I have done, to fight as I have fought, knowing it could lead them anywhere, but possibly here? I thought this road would take me away from my problems, as
it had done for quite some time, for three years in fact. But in the past two, I’ve only noticed it beginning to curve, to change direction and, to my utmost horror, loop. I see the horizon, and it is bright as it always has been, but my eyes that I’ve forced to keep up now stray, glancing at the hole in front of me.

The Abyss is home. Its loneliness is familiar.

They do say, after all, that home is where your heart is. For now, I’ll trust them, if no one else. I was so happy to be alone during that awful time, so uncomfortable around those I’ll soon stand above. Yet as I forced myself to change, I coerced myself to also crave people. Now, as I approach the most abandoned place in my world, I’m compelled to go at it this time with an addiction I cannot satisfy anymore. I was a swan surrounded by ugly ducklings, who all grew up, spread their wings, flew; and here I am, confident as I am, a lie that I live, unable to fly on my own. I was a role model, until they began to question why I did not fly with them. Why I would not elope with them. I figured if I just put on a mask everyone loved to see, I could be loved, but rather I’ve found it clasped, hardened to my figure, unable to come off, unable to show the “man’ behind the mask.”

I’ve learned some very hard lessons in life, and I thought myself to be all the wiser for it. And again, and again, it was naught but lies. Yea, though I walk through the shadow of the valley of the
Abyss, I shall fear no lies, only welcome their pain. That first lesson, which immaculately spawned all others, perverted them away from my hooded gaze; as I stepped forth from eternal night, into the sun, the warmth of man, was a peculiar one: “No one loves someone who cares all the time.” As ungraceful as it may immediately sound, those words are from a person long gone. I’m sure there would be no mind to my plagiarizing. The Abyss opened for me when I cared too much about someone. It all began quite, quite simply. And again I come back, clinging desperately to my false ideals, doing my best to, as the Major put it, “throw my pack as far as I can” — that is, to relinquish myself of all responsibilities, and thus all there is to care about. Perhaps if I stop caring now, I can turn back? But why turn back, when either path leads to the same? At least it was a joyful road, though I wonder if I’d still enjoyed the journey had I known of the destination. Could I hate the Abyss, though it’s all that I’ve known? It seems hate is the only logical response to make from an apathetic lack of concern for anything, still stubbornly believing that’ll fix something, ripping the mask off, exposing the world to the horrors underneath from years of being untouched, indulging in the waves of drunken pain I knew would come from all those around me who were sailing away anyway. I built myself so high I can only fall. I’d rather see lady Fortune’s knife dig into my side than merely wince and wait. I’d rather help her guide it in.

I have destroyed myself, am destroying myself, and will destroy myself, but I would not dream of passing on the blame; my
Endless Rain

pride never did let something of mine go unbranded, anyway. Maybe this is all a work of art, maybe it is something you who judges me will read a few lines of and discard for fear of “ecstasy.” I should face my accusers then, rather than wince. I will not wait. I was once more checking my Barrett application status, hopefully another distraction to pat myself on the back (and feel for any suspicious wounds), when I saw the advert for this little contest. I write when I have matter in my grey matter to disclose. I have no audience other than who I will be, typically, so I figured that, whether this is appreciated or not, discarded or not, it shall not be written for naught. This is therapeutic; after all, who else would know who to assuage the victim than the accused himself? Only I know his suffering. Only I know his worth.
Michael Preston

Michael is a senior at Apache Junction High School, on his way to become its valedictorian. Afterwards, he plans on pursuing a Bachelor’s of Science degree in Computer Systems Engineering at Arizona State University. His love of creative writing, he claims, stems from encouragement from his AP English professors and his own personal experiences.
Book Cover
Design
by Emily Hanaoka

Book Cover Design
I used Adobe Illustrator as my medium. What inspired me was more of a process rather than inspiration. I first started off with a different design idea but then I got stuck on how I wanted to proceed. I later forgot about the cover and was messing around doodling mandalas and got my idea from that. I didn’t want to be too repetitive with the design, so I added some color variation to it.
I graduated from Northern Arizona University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Communication with minors in Photography and Japanese in May 2016. Since graduating from NAU, I have been enrolled in a couple of design and photography related graduate courses at Arizona State University and was recently accepted to ASU’s graduate program in Visual Communication and Design which starts this fall 2017. Additionally, I have done some freelance graphic design work for a couple of local organizations and friends. In my free time I enjoy drawing cartoons about my daily adventures, taking pictures and cooking, anything to drive my creative juices.
Tempe Community Writing Contest 2017 Reviewers’ Biographies
FICTION

Tom Bonfiglio’s stories have appeared in two dozen publications, including Fiction, Lake Effect, Wag’s Revue, Evergreen Review, Fringe Magazine, mixer and The Literary Review. He teaches writing at Arizona State University.

Robert Isenberg is a writer, filmmaker, and stage performer. His most recent books are The Green Season and The Mysterious Tongue of Dr. Vermilion. Visit him at robertisenberg.net.

Marc Mason lives in Tempe and teaches in the Academic Success Program and in the Masters of Liberal Studies program at Arizona State University. His works include the young adult novels Schism: Out of the Shadows, Schism: Shadow terrors, and Battery: the Arrival; non-fiction books The Secret World: Traveling Abroad for the First Time at 40, The Joker’s Advocate, and The Aisle Seat: Life on the Edge of Popular Culture; and comic books Red Sonja: Raven and Red Sonja: Sanctuary.

POETRY

Andrea Janelle Dickens is originally from Tempe, but spent much of her childhood in Virginia. She currently teaches in the Writing Programs of the ASU English Department. She is the author of The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages and of several dozen published poems. Her poems have recently appeared in The New South, streecake, Found Poetry Review, *82 Review, Of Zoos, and anthologies by Kind of a Hurricane Press and Silver Birch Press.

Rosemarie Dombrowski, PhD, is the inaugural Poet Laureate of Phoenix and a Senior Lecturer of English at Arizona State Univer-
Tempe Community Writing Contest 2016 Reviewers’ Biographies

sity’s Downtown campus where she serves as the editor of the student & community writing journal, Write On, Downtown. She’s also the co-founder and host of the Phoenix Poetry Series, the editor-in-chief of rinky dink press (a publisher of micropoetry microzines), and a poetry editor for Four Chambers. She has received four Pushcart nominations and was a finalist for the Pangea Poetry Prize in 2015. Her collections include The Book of Emergencies (Five Oaks Press, 2014), which was the 2016 winner of an Indie Book Award (personal challenge category), and The Philosophy of Unclean Things (Finishing Line Press, 2017).

Ryan Holden received his Masters in Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Arizona State University. His poems have been published in Hobble Creek Review, Adirondack Review, and Ampersand Review. He currently teaches at Arizona State University.

Patricia Murphy teaches at Arizona State where she founded Superstition Review. Her book Hemming Flame (Utah State University Press, 2016) won the 2016 May Swenson Poetry Award. Her work was in American Poetry Review, Quarterly West, The Iowa Review, and Black Warrior Review, and has received awards from Gulf Coast, Bellevue Literary Review, among others.

Kelly Nelson is the author of the chapbooks Rivers I Don’t Live By and Who Was I to Say I Was Alive. She’s been awarded a grant from the Arizona Commission on the Arts and an artist residency from the Cultural Center in New York Mills, Minnesota. She received a PhD in Anthropology from Brandeis University and teaches Interdisciplinary Studies at Arizona State University.

NON-FICTION (PERSONAL ESSAYS, MEMOIRS)

Rebecca Byrkit is an award-winning author of four books of poetry;
her work appears in *Ploughshares, Best American Poetry, Crazyhorse, Arizona Highways, Rolling Stone* and *New Letters*, among many other journals and anthologies. She is a founding faculty member of the Masters of Liberal Studies program at ASU, teaching Special Topics and teaches creative writing workshops for the ASU English Department.

**Robert Isenberg** is a writer, filmmaker, and stage performer. His most recent books are *The Green Season* and *The Mysterious Tongue of Dr. Vermilion*. Visit him at robertisenberg.net.

**Paul Morris** directs the Master of Liberal Studies program at Arizona State University and teaches nonfiction writing. He writes about travel, food and the Greater Phoenix area for the *Valley Guide Magazine* as writer at large.