

HIGHBRIDGE VOICES LITERARY MAGAZINE

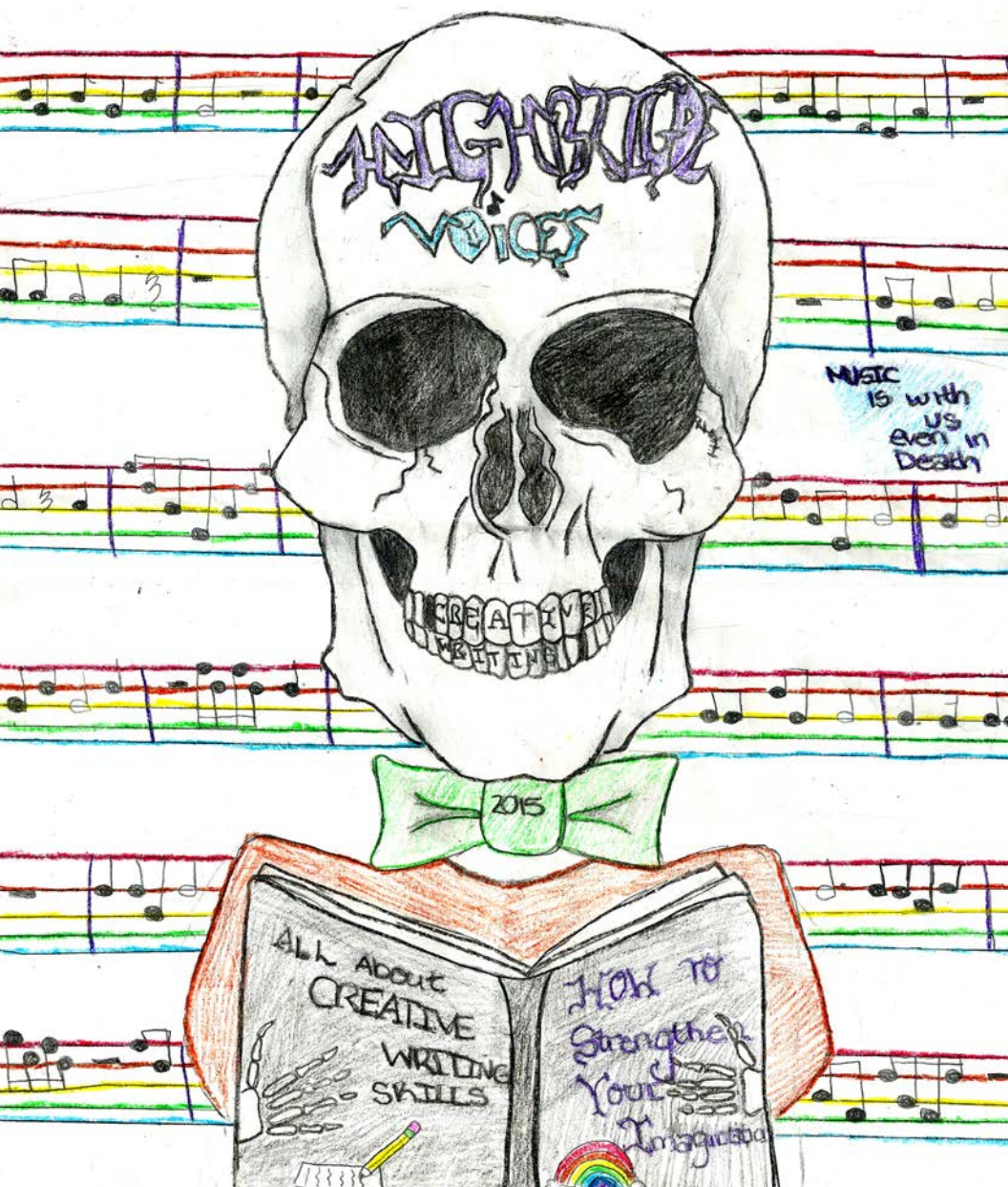


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Cover art by Rosaliana Santos

Back cover art by Khalid Chapman

A Note from the Editor

The Highbridge Voices Literary Magazine has been an idea with a fairly long gestation period. Originally, the writing class taken by middle-schoolers and high-schoolers at our program focused on five-paragraph essays written about music. After all, the five-paragraph essay is the foundation of expository writing. Practicing it would very likely help our students achieve and maintain better academic outcomes, which, along with inspiring excellence through music, is Highbridge Voices' primary goal.

But there are a few problems with the five-paragraph essay. First off, it's boring. Sure, you can learn some rudimentary organizational techniques through it, but nothing that can't be learned some other, less stultifying way. But more importantly, it doesn't encourage student individuality. At Highbridge Voices, we do our best to instill discipline and a sense of camaraderie in our students. Choir, by its very nature, is a communal activity. It's a wonderful way for students to learn the pleasures and satisfaction that can come when a large group of people cooperate to achieve a common goal.

That doesn't mean we should forget about student individuality. When we started the creative writing seminar last November, we wanted to provide a safe forum where students could feel free to express themselves through their own, unique voices, giving shape to feelings they often put on the back burner for the good of the "team." We wanted them to tell us how it feels when they turn off the lights at night and close their eyes, to let them know that the things they think and feel are important, and not to stifle those impulses, but to find an outlet for them. And I believe, despite some initial reluctance, the students have bought in. Big time.

We hope the inaugural HVLM becomes a tradition at Highbridge Voices over the years as we continue to expand on ways to help students become successful adults. The writing itself is truly remarkable. We think you'll like what you read. I'd also like to extend a special thanks to Michael Rondon, Darrien Sanon, Blessing Adebisi, Angel Fernandez, Adal Fernandez, Ashely Alvarez, Daniela Velasquez, Pierre Sanon, Kayla De Mundo, and Rosaliana Santos for forming the Saturday Afternoon Editorial Team. Without all of your help, this magazine would never have come to fruition.

Thanks! Enjoy!

DANNY LANZETTA
Editor-in-Chief

Earth: A haiku

BY DANIELA VELASQUEZ

Earth: are you upset?
Are you crying for the past?
Who is there to blame?

Quack Equipment: Unfair Prices (an excerpt)

BY ROSALIANA SANTOS

This story takes place in a duck neighborhood with a reporter who documents her trip to the most popular state in the duck continent. But during this journey, she runs into trouble that ends up changing her life... for the best! Here is an excerpt of one of the situations she runs into.

“Oh my feathers. Why did I put myself in this situation? It’s all my fault. Why can’t I just speak to my brother? I just can’t communicate with him anymore. It’s like after my oldest brother Duckstin died, there is just a lost puzzle piece in the jigsaw.”

“Sorry for your loss.”

“Thanks. I just don’t know what to do about my brother.” His face began to look like my Aunt Betty’s when she doesn’t get any cream pie on Thanksgiving.

Just then, a lightbulb went off inside my head! But it was the only and silliest answer.

“Maybe I can talk to him,” I offered.

“Oh, will you? Will you talk to him Sydney?” He was so happy.

“Fine, fine,” I grumbled. “I will talk to him for you.”

“Oh thank the chickens! Thanks, Sydney!” I walked to the front door of the shop and banged on the door. Donald opened the door with a face as if he had just woken up and an attitude that resembled Scrooge.

“What do you want from me?” he asked with a raspy voice. The moment he opened his mouth, I could smell four dead men, garbage, and rotten fish all tumbling down, invading my personal space. I nearly fainted and pushed the mayor in front of me to talk to his brother.

“What are you...?” He gave me an evil look. Then he looked back to his brother. “Umm... hi...Donald, umm, we came by to say hello and also... also...ummm... you need to stop being a jerk to everyone. Okay?” I winced and waited for him to lash out.

“And who are you to boss me around, Mr. Too-Perfect?” I was so mad. I couldn’t bear it. I had to speak, even if his breath was as bad as a garbage truck.

“You can’t keep doing this. It’s not right,” I said, stepping in. He gave

me a nasty look and rudely slammed the door in my face.

But soon, Donald became annoyed. I heard him behind the door fussing and yelling at the top of his lungs. Pretty soon, his business began to fall apart and people stopped patronizing his store. No more customers meant no more money, which wasn’t okay in his mind. But that didn’t make him give up. He wasn’t about to go down that easily. He tried to stay mean. But the power he thought he had over people was not true. In reality, the great citizens of New Duckleans had control because his shop couldn’t stay afloat without being financially stable, and his customers provide him with the green.

Days passed, and time went faster by the minute. Donald lost money every day. He couldn’t take it. He came outside and began to speak. “Okay, okay. I give up. You win.” He threw his hands up in defense. We all smiled and soon began to feel relieved.

Well, this is my story of how I helped make a change. Even though I didn’t get a chance to have my interview with the mayor, I got something better in the end.

Untitled

BY DANIELA VELASQUEZ

My name is someone,
Someone I don't know,
Born during who knows when,
Born in the snow.

Who am I?
I'm untitled.
Untiled forever,
Untitled to the end.

My name is someone,
Someone I don't know,
Dead and spirited,
Fun but blank.

Who am I?
I'm untitled.
Untiled forever,
Untitled to the end.

My name is someone,
Someone I don't know,
Someone who prospers,
But doesn't grow.

Who am I?
I'm untitled.
Untiled forever,
Untitled to the end.

My name is someone,
Someone I do know,
Someone who fills in the blank,
But is the star of the show.

Who am I?
I'm untitled.
Untiled as a person,
Not as a soul.

I live forever,
Live and grow.
Untitled I am;
Untitled I stay.

But one day,
This shaggy old name will fade,
Fade white,
And a new person remains.
Remains happy and new,
Wild like a dog,
But humble like a frog.
A new person I will be;
Now and forever be free.

That Broken Heart

BY ADAL FERNANDEZ

The skin outside
Shows no emotion.
The heart inside
Bleeds from the melancholy days of life.

The broken heart is dry,
For no tears remain.
The broken heart is torn,
For it can no longer repair.
All its tears are wasted;
All its happiness gone.

It beats every day just to live,
Its fear of dying overpowering its despair.
It wants to live.
But despair is all in life;
It no longer waits for the light that never comes.

For who will care about one broken heart?
It's spent too much on hope,
And received so little enlightenment.
"Death must be better than this," it says.
And with that it all ends.

The End Zone

BY DARRIEN SANON

1.

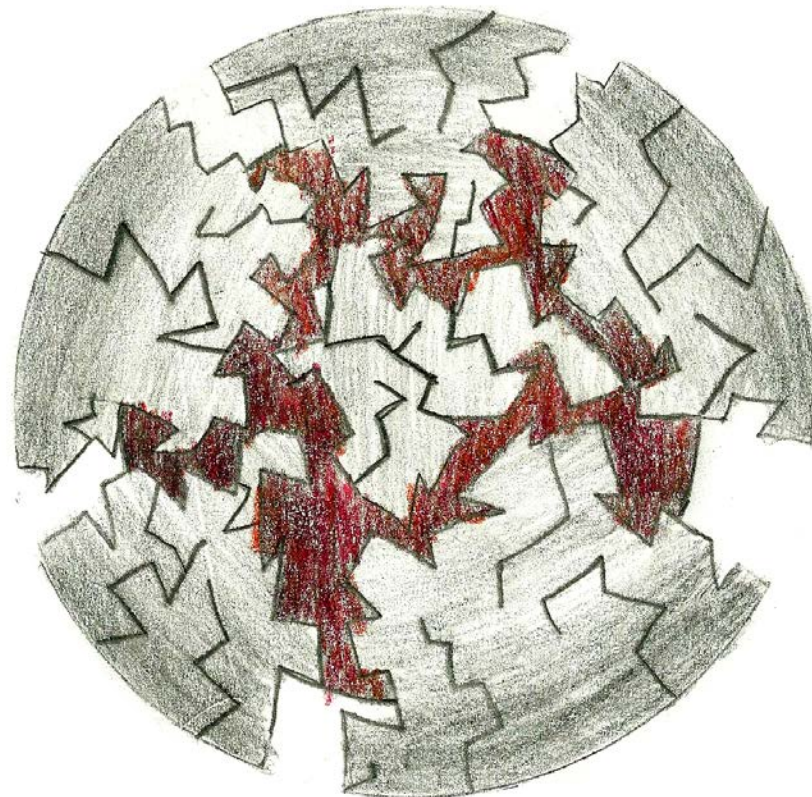
The air smelled the same.
It looked the same.
It felt the same.
It even tasted the same.
But it wasn't.
I got up and started to panic.
A woman came into my room.
She said everything was alright.
And then she welcomed me to Mars.

2.

“Wow. I can't believe I'm on Mars.”
The lights started flashing
and the sirens went off.
Everyone dropped to the ground.
I ran to the window and I
saw four walls as far away as the eyes could see.
Then something crawled over the wall.
A giant, six-legged creature that I'd never seen before.
People jumped out of windows
and flew toward the beast
to behead it.
It dropped dead.
The sirens and the flashing lights stopped.
Everyone got up.
I looked up into the sky.
And there I saw it.
Earth.

3.

I asked the woman what happened to Earth.
She said, “Earth? Oh, you mean The End Zone.”



A Soul's Life

BY ASHELY ALVAREZ

Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
You're sweet as sugar yet
As cruel as tattoos.

Laced with sadness,
Raised with no hope,
Summer's eve won't cleanse the broke.

Nothing to love,
No one to hold,
It's the life of a young soul.

Parents fighting,
Siblings deciding,
What to do...what to do?
Someone to love,
A bond to hold,
That's the life of a middle soul.

Sleep in peace,
Don't R.I.P.
Nothing to do.
Forget what we did
When we lost someone to love,
Then
Burn the thing that holds the bond.
It's the end of the old soul's song

My Special Secret

BY ASHELY ALVAREZ

My dear old friends,
I have a confession to make.
It's about my dear special secret,
So sit up straight.

I'm like an old dam
That's about to break.
I'm tumbling over my words
Just to say it before it's too late.

Bada boom bada bing,
I'll tell you my secret now.
So come close, quiet down,
Cuz I'll say it in a whisper.

If you can't hear me,
then that's OK,
cuz in a count of 3, I'll show it
Across the land.
(Did I mention that my secret is grand?)

1...

2...

3...

My secret is...
Well, how can I say this?
But it doesn't matter anyway,
Since I forgot my special secret again.

I guess you'll have to find out another day.

Unexpected

BY BLESSING ADEBISI

You get a call from your best friend, and he says he has to tell you something. He then tells you to meet him at Krave's Koffee Kafe. You knowing that it is important, so you drop everything and head to the place. You get there, order a French vanilla and wait for him to come. You're waiting and waiting and he still doesn't come. You check your phone and you see that almost an hour has passed. You wait there for a few more minutes, and finally you see him coming in. Oh man it's not even him; it's someone else. You take your phone out and dial his number. "Ring.....ring.....ring," the phone goes. No answer. As you are about to leave, he comes in, and you say "What took you so long?" He says nothing. You ask, "What's wrong?" He says, "Sit down." You look at him fearfully, knowing something is wrong, You ask again: "WHAT. IS. WRONG." He then opens his backpack and hands you a big, yellow-orange envelope. Before opening it, you look him in the eye and say "Yes, what about that?" He then says, "Yeah, I was helping your mother sort out some things when I found this," pointing at the big envelope. You open the envelope and drop it on the floor with a befuddled expression on your face.

Then he says, "I am your brother."

Grim Reaper

BY SAMUEL OWUSU

They say he da Grim Reaper.
I say he might be.
Nobody knows,
'Cause it's a secret
That death beholds.

They say he da Grim reaper.
Dude in black cloak,
Black pants and all,
Hood over head,
Scythe in hand.

He comes to bring you back
To the land of the dead.

They say he da Grim Reaper.
The smell of decaying flesh,
Or death,
Looms like an aura.

Oh the horror!
As he sneaks and gets closer:
YOU KNOW YOU WILL MEET HIM NEXT.

Time Passed

BY MARIANGIE PEÑA

Mom watches the baby in the incubator,

Happy to take her home.

She smiles and takes pictures.

Suddenly the baby can stand.

Oh how the time passed.

Mom cares for the baby,

Feeds and changes diapers.

She smiles and takes pictures.

Suddenly the baby can walk and talk.

Oh how the time passed.

Now the baby's in school,

She has many friends,

She smiles and takes pictures.

Suddenly the baby says, "Look Mom, I have a boyfriend."

Oh how the time passed.

The baby's packing for college,

She visits family to say goodbye,

She smiles and takes pictures.

Suddenly the baby is not a baby anymore.

Oh how the time passed.

Mom sits home and sulks,

Her baby is gone,

Only pictures in her place.

She sighs and says,

"Oh how the time passed."

Short News Daily (an excerpt)

BY KAYLA DE MUNDO

"Did you see Short News Daily today?" I asked
 "Nope," he said popping the P. "Couldn't, we didn't pay the electricity bill yet," he said, looking off into the distance.

"Oh," was my genius reply.

"You better not feel bad for me," he said with a light chuckle. Aaron is the type of person that doesn't like when people give him pity.

"I'm not," I said getting him to laugh and raising my hands in defense. I didn't even realize it but we had reached the library. We stepped inside as a light breeze pushed against us. We moved toward the counter, and the girl of my dreams was behind it.

"Hi, how can I help you?" Carla said, snapping me out of my daze.

"Oh, hi!" I widened my eyes, still amazed by her beauty, even though I've known her since I was eight.

"Can I get one session on the computer?" I said, while digging in my pocket for my money, Aaron doing the same.

"Sure," she said while holding her hand out, waiting for the money. I took the money from Aaron's hands and combined it with mine, handing it to Carla. Our fingers brushed against each other lightly, and I don't know about her, but I felt an electric shock run up my arm. I jerked my arm away, rubbing my hand ever so slightly. She gave me a weird look and I threw a smile her way. She handed me a card with a code number on it.

"Thanks," I said, reaching for the card carefully so I wouldn't touch her again.

Poison You Have Swallowed

BY ROSALIANA SANTOS

You criticize
 As I look into your eyes,
 With a look so judgemental,
 Too blind and mental,
 Sending the message continental.
 You speak of lies and truth,
 But you're the one full of Ruth.
 You play holy Christian man,
 But cover the blood on your hands,
 And watch as sweat lands
 In my eyes.
 Nothing but lies
 And the thought of saying goodbye—
 But why?
 I'm nothing but prey,
 So there isn't much need to stay.
 Wishing you would stop,
 But this plot has reached its top
 Making this your job
 To make me sob.
 But you do make me glow
 On days you act like the opposite of a foe,
 Tipping on tippy-toe,
 As this wicked black
 Gets flipped on its back
 While sappiness
 Turns into happiness.
 For sins will be shallow,
 Because what you do will always follow
 From the poison you have swallowed.

Pain

BY JILLIAN LEWIS

Sharp.
 Piercing.
 Darkness surrounds me.
 It swallows me in an instant,
 Completely covering me.
 The blanket of nothing
 Becomes a
 Straitjacket of insanity.
 I'm completely trapped
 Forever.
 My tears stream down my face
 Like steady pouring rain.
 It hurts.
 It's horrible.
 It's terrible.
 When I open my eyes,
 I see it.
 It.
 What has gotten into me
 And taken me over.
 YOU.

Spring Again

BY AJ CARTER

The flowers are stretching their limbs,
 Rising from being tucked away all winter,
 Greeted pleasantly by a warm sun;
 The trees now grow back their leaves
 For the use of people searching for shade.
 The grass becomes green again
 And welcomes the backs of people laying on it.

The Highbridge View

BY MICHAEL RONDON

I remember the old days of my neighborhood. The times where there were no new-fangled buildings, or housing complexes that flooded the empty lots. My building was surrounded by several empty lots, filled to the brim with grassy features, trees, and many plants. But there was one thing that stood out most of all. It was the sight of the Highbridge, a view that was only visible from my building.

You could see the bridge in all its glory. You could even see the tower, which overlooked the Highbridge Park. The Park sat in Manhattan parallel to its Bronx counterpart. It was a special view, a view that I would share with visitors to my home. But as the years passed, there was something that didn't sit well with me.

I began to see construction trucks bringing copious amounts of cement blocks and different supplies. I remember being really confused as to what was happening. I wasn't aware of what to expect. As the trucks kept coming, bringing more and more supplies, my wonder kept growing and growing along with it. And as the wonder grew, the plants that populated the lots disappeared from their usual spots, being replaced with manmade structures, stacks of concrete, and occasional men with unusual clothes. I remember every day seeing these unusual things, all from the sight of my window.

But then, I saw unfamiliar, almost alien, structures resembling steel foundations replacing the lots. There was a particular foundation that caught my interest. It was the foundation right in front of the bridge. I started to wonder if the view would be obstructed by these foundations. As the days passed, the foundations grew and grew, forming the shape of apartment buildings.

At this point, I started to wonder what would happen to the view out my favorite window. I couldn't believe the things I'd known and gotten used to were changing so drastically. The buildings that were forming in front of me symbolized my new knowledge, my oncoming maturity, while the view of the bridge was the sacrifice for this maturity.

I was losing my innocence.

Mamá?

BY JOENIA YEGE

Left? Right?
Where my Mamí?

I look to left, I look to right.
Mamá, look, I tied my shoes!
Nowhere to be found.

As I get a little older, age a little more.
The streets become my close friends.
Education not so much anymore.
Mamá, look, my friend got shot!
Nowhere to be found.

Emancipation! Proclamation!
Two words, I ain't even know what they mean.
Straight from the Boogey Down, no affiliation.
Drugs, a temptation, to unshackle my brain from this whole damn situation.
Mamá, look, I'm a drug addict!
Nowhere to be found.

More and more days go by, not a hearth to be seen.
The centered fire that once warmed my welfare paid apartment isn't here.
Just tiny specs of midnight dark ashes filling my lungs,
As I inhale and exhale.
Mamá, look at these rivers I cry just for you!
Nowhere to be found.

My imagination took flight into a Juan of another block.
He was un cholo, a part of the Latin Kings.
But this is how it starts, damn desperation took over.
Did I dare do it? Yea I did it, goddamn I did it!
Mamá, look, I'm pregnant!
Nowhere to be found.

I gave birth to little Carmencita.
I looked into her deep marron eyes and saw my own reflection.
The way she cocked her head into a slight 5-degree angle,
Scrunched up her nose like a little piggie who would not allow the Big Bad
Wolf's rotten sharp teeth of truth bite her by the hair of her chinny-chin-
chin.

Neatly combed hair in its place decided to become all mangle-tangled when
she was understandably confused.

What a cute little baby!

But it reminded me all too well of the moment I realized that Mamí was
gone.

God, I can be like that woman.

I can't be like that woman.

I can't be like that woman!

Hell, anxiety trickled down my face and exposed raw emotion to the
elements,
Like the mother bear that mourns not her lost cub, but the thought of losing
such a precious life.

I look to my left, I look to my right.

I see Carmen growing up

I get a little older, age a little more.

My birthgiver remained a faded memory in the back of my brain.

Mamá, look, I've become something you never became—

Something you never were;

Something you'll never be.

Love

BY SAMUEL OWUSU

Love is a thing that follows you.
If you love and you aren't loved back,
it breaks your heart sooner or later.
If you love and it is returned,
you live happy for a long time
(unless you're unlucky,
and it stops loving you).

It connects people
Romantically,
Or through family;
either way,
it's special

Until you leave someone
and break a heart,
At which point
She seeks revenge,
Takes everything you have,
Destroys your heart,
And leaves you for dead.

You live on in despair
with nobody there for you.

Remembering

BY ASHELY ALVAREZ

I remember my first trip to the Dominican Republic in first grade;
It was a close community.
I remember waking up in the morning with puppies sleeping by my side;
I remember leaving DR in my high-low dress and Gladiator sandals.

I remember my first love in second grade and the way I felt
like I was on Cloud Nine.
My first love's name was like music to me;
I was fascinated with the way it sounded.
I remember my obsession with the way it sounded,
and how I felt sad every time someone turned on the radio.

I remember meeting my best friends
Blessing, Darrien, Ya'Majesty and Michael.
I remember the fun/stupid times we had when we hung out together;
I remember forming the Fab Five and giving each other stupid nicknames.
Every day that goes by, I remember my brother, even though he's in heaven.

Hell Must Be Better Than This

BY ADAL FERNANDEZ

Hell must be better than this;
At least I won't be living.
No more heartache to suffer,
No more pain in my soul.
Who cares about my life?
I sure as hell don't.

I don't want to be living—
It's the pain I hate.
In Hell I won't rot.
In Hell I'll be happy.
Oh, I'll still suffer,
But there'll be no more pain.

I've given up on Heaven—
My sins are too many.
I've tried to find a cure
For this living hell on Earth.
I've almost done all seven,
But I still have one left,
And I'll finally have all seven,
Once I end up in Hell.

Isaiah

BY ROSALIANA SANTOS

He was the
tiniest thing I ever
saw. He was as
soft as a pillow
and delicate as
a glass vase.
His beauty was
the side course
while his presence
was the main event.
The walls were bright
with joy, and the sunshine
brightened up every minute
Isaiah
walked deeper into the house.
You could see the walls grinning,
singing their joyful song
to welcome God's beautiful
child. My mom placed
him in my arms and
snapped a picture. It was
a memory that would never
be forgotten.

HAIKUS BY BLESSING ADEBISI

Butterfly

Flutter in the sky
On wings of many colors
Land upon flowers.

Life

Death is a long road
And life is the traveler—
Our soul is our guide.

Spoon King (an excerpt)

BY ADAL FERNANDEZ

Spoon King: These are the words that greet you as you enter the once-famous school. You walk around and notice drawings splattered across the floor. One of them catches your eye, as you realize it's not a drawing, but a poem called "Hell Must Be Better Than This."

The writing is obscured, though you can tell the child didn't enjoy school. As you look up, you notice blood on the walls. You start following the trail and notice splinters from broken bones, though you can't tell if they're from a child or a teacher. You turn and see a huge splatter of guts on the wall. Nauseating. You turn and begin to walk towards the teachers lounge. Amazingly, your luck gets even better as you trip, breaking your \$300 cell phone from a company that can't even make a proper cell phone case. As you take out your lighter, something falls on your head. Looking down, you notice a candle on the floor. Lighting it, you get a dim view of the room. A body sticks out, and you begin walking towards it. As you walk closer, you see the words "Help me" written across his forehead. Something's wrong, though. You realize there's no stench from the hanging body. You stumble back in shock as you realize this person has just died. Yet you heard no screams as you were exploring. You heard no desks or chairs falling.

Just then, something splatters onto your shoe. You look at the body. Something splatters onto your shoe again. Realizing there are no wounds on the body, you look up. An enormous red stain is spread out over the ceiling. You run out as the ceiling caves in, painting the room a dark red. Seeing a set of stairs, you decide to go up, since that's where all the blood came from.

To Be Continued...

Hell Week (an excerpt)

BY JOHN CORTEZ

It all started when I was just another newborn child wanting to go back inside his mother's stomach. When it's time to be physically formed in the real world, you exist. Not even, before then, when you exist in God's image. And in God's image, not only are you formed, but He knows you. He knows who you are before you become you. And it's all just a matter of time before you're gone.

It's all just weird. Life is a pain and it always feels like you're being restrained. As if you're being held back by something or someone that makes you feel like you don't exist.

"Welcome home, hun," said my mother with a warm smile. I greeted her and went to my room to read and just rest. Everything has been different since I turned five. Dad left for unknown reasons. Dad. I recall his personality. The memories. His eyes. Those hazel eyes with a mix of green, which reminded me of the leaves in fall. It was when I was 5.

"Dad. Come here. Quick!" I called when I saw a snake eating a mouse alive. "Look!" It was a horrible image to see at such a young age.

"That, son, is a cycle in the chain. Animals do it all the time. There are predators and prey. We are prey, remember that." I didn't understand then what that meant and still have no understanding to this day. But I do understand that he left my mother and I. For unknown reasons. I wish he could come back and tell us why he had to go. Whenever I try to question mom about dad, she always says the same thing: "He had to go somewhere, that's all." Then she usually changes the subject quickly. Growing up was difficult for me since I was left alone with my mother. The times were rough, and they still are.

While I was in my room, I was interrupted by my mother. "There's a letter for you from someone we know." I was sort of surprised since I don't usually get letters and it was weird how she said "someone we know." I thought it was probably my Aunt Katherine who lives in Wyoming. She's always asking how we are.

But this time it wasn't her. Instead it was from . . . Dad. I opened it and it was all hand-written. But why? Why now? I remembered thinking that I was at least glad to know he was alive. It read:

Dear Andrew,

I know this might be strange or tough for you, but I am very sorry. I know I left you and your mother but I didn't want to. Just know that I had to leave. I love you and your mother very much and I miss you guys. If everything is over with, I can return home and be with you guys again. If I don't make it, then I will see you sometime later. It hurts me to say that, but please understand son. Forgive me, and don't think different about me. I hope to write again if I ever have the chance. I have a feeling that it's been hard for you to be without me, to live alone with your mother. I probably missed out on a lot of new things like your middle school graduation. But I'm always here in spirit for you. I love you son. As for you, Becky, take care of our son. I know you must be mad at me for making this decision, but I am very sorry. I can't reveal any more right now.

*With Love,
David*

Everyday Life

BY ASHELY ALVAREZ

It's a tragedy
When the person I love
Is a forbidden fruit
In the eyes of society.
A star-crossed one-sided love—
I live through it
Every day . . .

If I was the sea and
He was the sky,
Then only if I create a tempest,
Will we collide, but
He'll clear by himself,
While I stay wild of my tides.

If he was temptation and sin,
I would be a saint full of desire,
Wanting a taste of what's to come—
I give a sigh of pure agony.

People call this depression;
I call it everyday life . . .

The Fun of My Power (an excerpt)

BY MICHAEL RONDON

As I walked in, I saw that the classroom space was really colorful. I was almost put into a trance. “Hello there,” a lovely voice said. I turned around, and I was greeted by a friendly figure. She looked at me with a loving smile as she continued to say, “You’re new here aren’t you? Michael, isn’t it?”

I stumbled to speak, mainly because of nervousness. I finally opened my lips and said, “Um...I... I don’t know wh—”

“It’s alright, hun,” she interrupted. The friendly figure gently touched me and led me slowly to the other students. “My name is Ms. Carla. I will be your teacher for this year. Your mom told me how feisty you were when she enrolled you.”

She was right. My mom didn’t enroll me in school right away because I was so apprehensive. But in the end, she won, and eventually put me here. I started to feel welcomed. Ms. Carla, along with all the students’ warming smiles, calmed me down. I thought, nothing will go wrong, right? Oh golly, I’ve never been so wrong.

Ms. Carla sat me next to two of my new classmates. They stayed quiet and smiled. There was a little moment of awkward silence, until one of the kids turned to me and said, “Uh, hi. My name is Frank. What’s yours?” I felt shy, but answered, “I’m Michael. . . . Hey.”

“Okay children, please give a warm welcome to our new friend, Michael!” Ms. Carla said, followed by the whole class saying “HI MICHAEL.” I was kind of embarrassed, but I wasn’t sure why.

“Now, for today’s lesson, we are going to have fun and use a certain tool that we are not used to,” Ms. Carla started to explain, “It is used in offices and workspaces.” She looked at me and said, “Michael, if you are not aware, we have been studying the different tools we use in writing and where we use them.”

The friendly figure picked up a strange-looking, neon-colored object, which looked like the pens that my mom uses for work. “Class, this is a Highlighter.” Everyone watched attentively as she showed everyone the Highlighter. “This tool is used for marking important things in books, papers, passages,” Ms. Carla continued. “Luckily we can all have fun with

Highlighters since I got one for everyone!” She then pulled out a small box full of the colored pens.

Once the highlighters were distributed and everyone had one, Ms. Carla handed us a worksheet with a passage in which we had to highlight the important information. But I wasn’t sure what to do.

I looked at my neighbors, and they didn’t seem to have any trouble at all. Frank, who I’d met before, was zooming through the assignment like the worksheet was a stick of butter and he was the knife. I started bubbling emotions of anger and frustration as I was trying to figure out what the heck to do.

Oh, how I wanted to fade! I felt like a donkey amongst a bunch of smart robots. I felt dumb, so dumb. As I kept getting angrier, I closed my eyes and started to breathe hard. I knew, oh I knew, that I was attracting attention. I breathed harder and harder and harder. I breathed so hard until I was stopped by the lovely voice I was now familiar with, “Michael? What are you doing? Are you doing that?” What was she talking about? I opened my eyes and my question was answered.

The highlighter was floating in the air. Just floating. I was astonished. But my astonishment faded when I remembered my anger. Then, something unspeakable happened. The highlighter that was in front of me broke! It burst all over the worksheet I’d been given. Just like that, I felt as though my anger settled and I was much more calm. But I was also upset by the whole mishegoss.

“Michael, are you okay?” Ms. Carla said out of sheer terror. I didn’t want to stay there any longer.

“Can you call my mommy?” I said as a bunch of questions zoomed through my head. Did I do that? Why did it burst? How did it float? I needed to find answers.

The kids around me seemed to be totally freaked out that a kid potentially lifted a highlighter off the ground and into the air. I knew they were weirded out. Amazingly though, nobody said a thing. What seemed like only a moment later, I heard Ms. Carla saying to me, “Your mom is here, Michael.” I got up, seized by shame, and left the room. As I walked into the hallway, I overheard something Ms. Carla said to my mom. “He’s a monster! I can’t have that demon in my class!” Fortunately, my mom didn’t react in a defensive way. She just stood there. When my once-lovely teacher noticed me eavesdropping, she quickly went back to her class.

As I hugged my mother, I broke down in tears. All the emotions just exploded. “It’s alright, Michael. It’s going to be alright,” she said.

“What did I do? I don’t understand it Mom. What was that?”

“Don’t worry about it, Mikey. Let’s go home and relax.”

And with that, we left the school and the utter confusion and embarrassment that was my first day.

Cookie Monster

BY ORLANDO MENDOZA

Me lost me wallet with 40 dollars for cookies.
Me passed my test on cookies.
Me bought cookies, chocolate fudge, but it don't phase me.
Me sing for cookies today.
Me eat cookies!!!!

The Outcasts

BY DANIELA VELASQUEZ

I'm the realist,
The outcast,
The old-timer,
The classic.

You're the unreal group,
You're the evil Republican,
You're the new generation.

I babble all day long,
Except only you can't hear it.
I read all funny books;
Jokes,
Comedies,
But you can't hear it.

You're that evil Republican,
Only you're the new generation.
While I'm the new Democrat,
Better than the old.

Our cliques separate us—
Not just me, but many others.
I sing the proudest song,
Yet you don't understand it.
You sing the lazy song;
It's full with made-up words.

Hot, lit, okay.
Beautiful, Gorgeous,
That's the way.

I sing America's wisest,
That small circle you
See on the picture,
Regardless of whether you're here.

Come or listen!
You will feel the vibe.
I, too, sing America.

The Man They Call Fear

BY MICHAEL RONDON

Fear is tall and discreet,
Well known among all.

So notorious, so popular,
He wears the most grand, fashionable garments,
Lined with the most dark, undiscovered, and mysterious colors,
Filled with the wretched work of his past victims.

He is Deceiving,
Giving you a ride in his car of "peace,"
Driving you into the ocean of disorientation,
And drowning you in mental and physical distress.

He is Betraying,
Stabbing you in the back,
While you hear the wretched laughs
Of the people who take advantage of you.

Overcome him.
You are not his slave,
And it is you he only craves.

Just Because

BY KAYLA DE MUNDO

Just because I'm light skin
Doesn't mean I'm white,
Doesn't mean I'm different,
Doesn't mean you shouldn't like me.
I am Puerto Rican.

Just because I'm a girl
Doesn't mean I'm weak,
Doesn't mean I have to be treated differently,
Doesn't mean I can't do what boys can.
I am determined.

Just because I failed once
Doesn't mean I can't get back up,
Doesn't mean I can't succeed,
Doesn't mean I'm a failure.
I am not a downer.

Just because I'm still young
Doesn't mean I won't understand,
Doesn't mean I need special treatment,
Doesn't mean I won't get it.
I am a person too.

And just because I laugh and smile
Doesn't mean I'm not broken,
Doesn't mean I'm not crying on the inside,
Doesn't mean I'm not lonely.
I am hiding.
I am me.

My Neighborhood

BY NYKARA AGOSTO

I've always lived on Shakespeare Avenue. I've never moved. Neither has my dad. My grandma lives right across the street from us, so we usually go to her house for the holidays. I remember when I was younger, I slept over her house the day before Thanksgiving and helped bake pumpkin pies. They came out really good. The crust was golden brown, and the smell was amazing. We brought a table out into the family room, put a vase of flowers out in the middle, and placed mats around it. The next day, music poured out of the speakers. There was talking, dancing, and "interesting" singing from my grandma. But overall, it was a pretty good day.

I remember I was in my room one time and I was getting ready for bed. There were several old men right outside my window playing Dominos and listening to Spanish music. I just couldn't believe that these guys literally set out a table in front of my window and began a noisy game of Dominos! It was ridiculous. My mom walked outside to tell them to move somewhere else, and, thankfully, they did. A similar situation had occurred when there was a group of teenagers outside my brother's window, as if it was a hangout place. So there was a huge fight—basically my parents had a "talk" with them. (They threatened to call the police.)

There are a lot of people who live around Shakespeare Avenue. Like this girl who my old babysitter used to babysit. I saw her one day, and we looked at each other like we knew each other (which we did, of course). I just couldn't remember her name. I hope I see her again. There's also this boy named Raymond who used to go to Sacred Heart with me. I see him around sometimes. I just think that it's nice to see old friends around my block. You know, friends you've known forever that you can think of as family.

TV Electronic

BY JOENIA YEGE

"Hello Mike, welcome to Sony's new automated system, press select to start."
 Those were my first words to him, I remember clearly.
 He'd grab my grand central and turn me on in only a matter of seconds.
 Instruction was given to me by the press of a button.
 My LED lights splashed color into his eyes,
 And he enjoyed it, every single pixel.
 It was my masterpiece, my creations that assured his entertainment.

"Hello Mike, welcome to Sony's new automated system, press select to start."
 Those were my first words to him, I remember clearly.
 My surround-sound made perfect pitches, harmonic harmonies, and melodic
 melodies that were music to his ears.
 His commands transferred to me into a sublime sequence of ones and zeros;
 He listened to the tunes of Beethoven and Chopin and fell in love with me,
 my sounds.

But one day he brought a female home with another telo-electronic device—
 Something older, slower, larger, which replaced me automatically.
 While I was in sleep mode, they'd have deep conversations of being a soul
 hipster and antique collecting.
 I did not compute exactly what they were saying, but I knew that he wasn't in
 love with that old, plastered, battered-up thing.
 He was in love with me, and he taught me to become a virtuoso

"Hello Mike, welcome to Sony's new automated system, press select to start."
 Those were my last words to him, I remember clearly.
 But is this what it means to be in love?
 Fall for the subject who can easily be amused and replace you the next?
 Do not laugh.
 I have seen human love and you do not last for eternities together for
 opaque reasons.
 Instead you kill each other with emotion,
 Too much emotion for a TV electronic me.
 "Now. Sony powering off."

Seasons

BY DARRIEN SANON

I remember the smell of the beautiful flowers.
I remember the smell of mom's home-baked cookies.
I remember the scent of lemongrass during spring cleaning.

I remember the warm sand between my toes.
I remember the hot sun beating down on my skin.
I remember the cool sea water flowing in my hands.

I remember when I saw the beautiful sun set on the wonderful horizon.
I remember the orange and red leaves falling from the trees.
I remember the quiet, gentle autumn wind.

I remember the shimmering snowflakes falling from the sky.
I remember the cold air hugging my body.
I remember it all disappeared in front of me as the warmth of spring came
trickling in.

Then it all started again.

