

The Alchemist Review
2003

A journal of the University of Illinois at Springfield
English Program

2003 Editor
Stacey Laatsch

2003 Selection Committee
David Logan
Cliff Garner
Penny Pennell
Joanna Tweedy Willmore

From the Editor:

At the bottom of Brookens staircase, hidden in a corner behind a maze of media services, waits the archives of this growing university. I found my way there early this year to read through almost three decades of *Alchemist* authors, fascinated by how far and wide the stream of creative thought flows even in a small, liberal arts college. In the history of *The Alchemist Review*, writers from our community and from all majors of study at this university have submitted their creative efforts for publication. And this year, the first UIS Writers' Repertory Short Fiction Contest drew submissions from all parts of the world. Writing, I have heard, is the loneliest profession—no person can accompany a writer on that exhausting trip from ideas in the mind to words on the page—but so many people still welcome that solitary journey. The first itch of inspiration, the desire to build an idea with words. The fear, the vulnerability, as word by word the layers of a writer peel away, not just down to skin but to the exposed nerve. The anguish when those words are rejected, and the elation when they're not, when the words are printed—published, valid, *justified*. So many of the emotions of life can be lived through a pen or keyboard, and the established existence of *The Alchemist Review* proves just how many writers in our community embrace the loneliness of writing. Writing is a lonely profession, indeed, for which one has plenty of company.

Stacey Laatsch
2003 Editor

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AFFECTED BY HISTORY IN SPRINGFIELD

Five years between me and my sister
were the years of World War II.
When our hero came home,
his income fell low,
his opportunity came slow,
his family kept increasing;
and in 1945 government provided
the John Hay Homes—perfectly charming for families.

A home, economically perfect,
was rented according to income.
While flowers lined the court,
hopscotch stenciled the walk,
children played out 'til dark,
benches let moms rest;
and permission from the super
got grass mowed—government-owned push mower.

My friends, in '55, moved away
and left just the trusting to stay.
When a new landlord came in,
the rent was raised,
our own appliances stayed,
government created disparity;
and it furnished for those on the dole
free commodities—adding good names to the role.

My parents, responsible and proud,
would not relocate and change.
But flowers died,
the sidewalks cracked,
and life styles rearranged
until people whispered about you;
and we became "the other side of town,"
as the old John Hay Homes began to tatter down¹.

Honest tenants sat like pawns in a game
when in '65 vandals came.
From opportunity denied
I painted dreams dark.
I was unsafe at the park.
Little encouragement was given;
and I lived a history not meant to be,
when the government designed the perfect family.

¹ Inspiration from "Old Ironsides" by Oliver Wendell Holmes.

VESTED

i

Mom smiled above yellowed photos and cake
lovingly recalling the old pattern
of matching girls in purple crepe
who smiled back, under barrettes,
as she reaped the joy of her investment.

She was endowed with the right
to kiss them goodnight,
to dry each tear,
to look and hold dear,
to sacrifice and toil
and to guard their small souls.

ii

Soft crepe pajamas with downy ducks I sewed,
extending the pattern as crib border,
until spoon after spoon of puree
and the mammary department's order
induced angelic slumber 'neath my sigh.

I piled cookies to the rim of porcelain hen,
holding in my left hand the keys
that coaxed precocious baby steps,
jingled a signal elementary,
and prompted the station-wagon-morning-school-run.

Separating anger and delegating chores,
I reached for a miracle-making kit
of flour and water paste on paper chains
or books of verse that rhymed a bit;
and I taught toddlers to stir time in a bowl.

I'm endowed with the right
to kiss them goodnight,
to dry each tear,
to look and hold dear,
to sacrifice and toil
and to guard their small souls.

iii

In multiplied love that returned to me,
as my patented orchestration finalized,
I was steeled for all my eternity,
and saw with increasing years
how the mandate's promise held.

I'm left with the right
to kiss them goodnight,
to dry each tear,
to look and hold dear.

2003 WRITER'S REPERTORY SHORT FICTION LITERARY AWARD WINNERS

1ST PLACE

"La Squelette Humaine"

Jean Hanson

Boulder, CO

2nd Place

"Apocalypse Moon"

Amy Sayre-Roberts

Springfield, IL

3rd Place

"Sky of Diamonds"

Sally Haxthow

Vancouver, British Columbia

The first year of the contest brought entries from twenty U.S. states and Canada. Our second round of judging narrowed the entries to 31 from which our winners were selected. Thanks to all who participated in the contest.

Writer's Repertory would also like to extend their appreciation to our panel of judges: David Logan, Penny Pennell, Stacey Jo Laatsch, Joshua Doestch, Michael Shipman, Joanna Tweedy Willmore, Joe Carrier, Ryan Roberts, and Mary Gilmore.

A special thanks to Marcellus Leonard and The Center for Teaching and Learning for helping make the Writer's Repertory Short Fiction Literary Award, not only possible, but also a success!

David Allison—I'm an English student, thought not much of one judging by my grades, but I can story-tell. I've been writing for years now, mostly short fiction since I get bored fast. Speed is another thing I'm known for—and I'm sorry if I've almost ran you down with my wheelchair.

Chad Baldwin lives in a group home in Jacksonville, IL. He is 7'2" w/ red hair and deeply soulful brown eyes. His favorite color is poppy-cock. He is single with no children and is allergic to penicillin.

Cliff Garner is an English graduate student at UIS. He currently works in the Center for Teaching and Learning as a Writing GA. He is a singer-lyricist in a number of bands and sang at Carnegie Hall with a chorus in May 2000. In addition to music and academic pursuits, he has also spent over a decade in business locally.

Jean Hanson's essays and short stories have appeared in numerous magazines, including *North American Review*, *Zoetrope*, *Indiana Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and *Nimrod*. A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, she has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, received an artist fellowship from the Colorado Council on the Arts, the Hackney Prize in the short story, and a Poets & Writers award for emerging writers.

Denise Howard—I am currently an English major at UIS, planning to obtain my Bachelor's in 2004. I work full-time at Brown, Hay & Stephens as a Legal Assistant and write short stories in my spare time. I live in Springfield with my best friend Michael and my pet cat Psycho. I love to read and write and, if given the opportunity, would be an English student for the rest of my life. I have work previously published in the e-zine www.storybytes.com, and aspire to work in the publishing industry while pursuing my creative writing.

David Logan—By writing, I experience the vitality of life through the victories and losses of the characters I create. They are the sadly beautiful and wonderfully tragic, all baying at the streetlights with distinct howls, different voices, and stammering tongues. Writing is a powerful plea. It gives the writer the strength to command life, making him the victim of his own creation. It can rattle mountaintops.

Cheryl Miles— I am a child of the '60s, Vietnam, John Kennedy and Buddy Holly. My generation believed anything was possible; we were the last of the innocents. My writing is born of this time and place, rooted in the familiar and commonplace. I hope my efforts will please and entertain you.

Pam Miller— With valuable lessons from Dr. Nancy Perkins, I found much joy and fulfillment in using my creative ability to spin words into rhyme and structure on a page. Much of my work has been an expression of my life experience and is indicative of my generation. My readers have said, "Your poems make me feel . . .," and to achieve this under-

standing is why I wrote. As an adult student, I've worked full time while attending classes and will graduate in the spring of 2003. I wrote my first poem in 1998. Currently I'm working on a manuscript for chap book publication, a collection of poems about family.

Barbara Robinette—I work as a Staff Clerk in the printing & duplicating department of UIS. I enjoy reading good poetry, from William Wordsworth to the darker secrets of Emily Dickinson to the simplicity of George Oppen's words and around again to the songs of Walt Whitman. And when my husband and I are not busy working or traveling to our cabin in the woods, I try to give some time to writing my own poems.