Essence literary and fine arts magazine is a collaborative effort of students who share and express personal feelings, philosophies and views through the artistic mediums of photography, illustration, life drawing, poetry and short stories. The works contained within are considered, by the Essence student staff members, some fine examples of creative art and literary expression.

The Essence staff expresses appreciation to all its contributors and readers for sharing in this creative publication.
HOW DARE YOU

Assume
Because my hair is blond,
My skin is pale,
You can stand there,

Make your niggers
Are stupid jokes,
Make your rap star fat ass
jungle jokes,
dot head food stamp
slanty-eyed
wetback camel jockey
they're taking over jokes

And we're cool
We're in it together

It's a white thing

HOW DARE YOU

Give me that
Look over

That lady's head
Like we're having
The same thought
Like we're in the know
Well, I don't know.

Just what the hell is
That look for?
You'd better
Save it.
Because I'd as soon

Slap you as look at it.
And whatever club you assume

My white skin
Gets me into
Is alone
In your greasy head.

HOW DARE YOU?

- Erin Murphy
Then

Doing the Wash

When Gram and I pulled the buggy wagon to the yard, we watched the socks tumble by the dryer window. We dreamed it would take forever. And then Gram and I closed the lid and hoped it would take forever.

When I close the lid and slide in the quarters, sometimes it sounds like Sunday. A day at rest.

A day at rest.

Traci Hunt

DEAR GRAM,

SOMETIMES I GO DOWNTOWN INTO THE LEH'S AND WALK THROUGH THE LADIES' APPAREL DEPARTMENT, LOOKING FOR THE FLORAL-PRINT HOUSE DRESSES YOU LIKED TO WEAR. THE KIND THAT SMELLED LIKE FLOUR AND HAD BIG POCKETS FILLED WITH CRUMPLED TISSUES. THEY WERE THIN COTTON DRESSES FOR THE DAYS OF SUMMER WHEN YOU HELD A WET PAPER TOWEL ON YOUR FOREHEAD AND SAT IN FRONT OF THE FAN ON HIGH, WARNING, "DON'T GET YOUR FINGERS NEAR IT."

I SEARCH FOR A WHITE DRESS WITH PALE BLUE FLOWERS LIKE THE ONE YOU HAD TUCKED AWAY IN THE BOTTOM OF A DRESSER DRAWER. YOUR FAVORITE WITH THE PEARLY, PEA-SIZED BUTTONS AND COLLAR OF LACE TRIM.

THE DRESS THAT YOU SAVED FOR A SPECIAL DAY, THE DRESS THAT I BURIED YOU IN.

- Traci Hunt

Letter to Gram From Me
I'd like to strike that match
Smell the sulfur
Observe the flame
Lick your lips

I'd watch you inhale
See the smoke seep out
In white trail.
Disappear up your nose

I'd put my mouth on you
Suck deeply
Draw your fetid fumes
Into my system

I'd taste you
Savor your addiction
Let you go to my head
Exhale

I'd blow you away
Grind you and your poison
Into the ground
With stiletto heels

---

I smell you
sitting next to me
Vague but definite odors
tentatively approach my nostrils
and duck inside

Not unpleasant; these scented offerings
Your skin tells me a story
that your voice doesn't

Whether or not you intended
A part of you is now inside me.
Hmm...
You inside of me.
Interesting.

I did not mean to take something
that you did not mean to give
Or invade upon your secrets
I'd rather like to think
you were sharing a private part
of yourself with me

If we never talk
or touch each other's bodies
or share our minds
or present ourselves to each other naked
At least I know
I have smelled you.

---

Alexandra Dianna

---

Amy Hill
Creak, Creak

Creak, Creak, Creak

Lawrence Potter swung in his swing, patiently howling,
back and forth, to and fro, across his gray wooden porch floor.

He grunted now and then as he shifted his weight back and forth, to and fro.

Creak, Creak, Creak

And crickets screeched. Crickets drew their legs like
bows across their bodies in a wild mournful orchestra
that honored summer's passing.

Dusk was the darkest velvety gray of softly shrouded
the backdrop of leaves, mimicking the faint beginnings of stars.

Lawrence sighed and breathed the damp darkness and
smelled the woods and the dark sleeping lawn.

"Crickets, ah crickets," he mumbled softly in reverence and rubbed his knee that bore a gentle hollow ache.

"Margie," he called, half turning his head to
the screen door. "Margery," he repeated, slowing down the pace of his swing.

"Come outside. The evening's beautiful. Just beautiful."

His whispered ear again turned towards the night music.

He sighed and resumed swinging.

The door softly opened and slippered feet padded across the floor boards. A warm, gaunt hand
lightly gripped Lawrence Potter's shoulder. In answer he placed a
hand over hers and patted the side of the swing's seat with the other.

Their wrinkles smiled together and their eyes were dancing like fireflies.

Oh, they were as bright as the stars.

- Ken Beck

ODE

You know. They say.
They're all a bunch of
bastards.

Oh, the devil's on my back!
Because I said so.

uh-huh
lips disappear with
the long drag on a cigarette,
her head wags toward me
self-righteous but empty like a
KALAIDSCPE
No shrubbery or flowers here
No trees in holes in the
sidewalks
It's a small town,
and this is
my mother.

- Leah McCullan

- Tom Kittle
When he was young he used to kill frogs. He was preteen, around twelve. He lived in the city and went to the mountains for summer vacation. There was a lake where he stayed. It had frogs. Thousands of frogs. During the day he'd catch tadpoles with a net. He'd throw the net on the beach to see how many he caught. Some were crushed in the toss, others baked in the sun. The rest he let go. When they grew to be frogs he would catch them again. Some of the frogs looked Japanese. They were distinguished by a slightly bent snout; it hung over the bottom lip.

He'd give them a couple of seconds to hop off the swing. If they didn't then he'd smash them with a wriggling ball bat.

He'd catch bull frogs at night, hold them by the hind legs and swing them in circles until they made squeaking sounds like a cat in a fight.

He'd laugh and throw them at the girls.

Once, Tommy put a bottle rocket in one of the frog's mouths. It was a whistler.

"Holy shit! It's glowing. Look at it."

"Hey Billy, look at this one I found. It's Japanese.

"It's not Japanese."

"Sure it is. Let's find more." They found more.

He and Billy killed all the Japanese frogs they caught. He did it in a sure way. He knifed them across the lake. He'd hold them about chest height, extend his arm, drop and then kick. As his foot made contact he'd yell "kingle" and the frog would sail halfway across the lake and land in a dead spatl.

He'd also catch the ones that weren't quite frogs yet. They had hind legs and no front ones, and they still had tails. He'd put these frogs on the black seat of the swing set that was by the lake. Some of them could hop better than others but they were all pretty slow with only hind legs and a big, fat head to weigh them down.

They caught fish and used them across the lake to see how far they would fly. They caught crayfish and made them right to the death.

They boiled them in tuna cans over the campfire and ate them like they were lobster.

They even shot the local birds and squirrels with their BB guns and once they shot a pig in the halls at Keiner's farm.

At the house the parents would sit around drinking beer.

They'd talk about the critters and wackoes of the city.

They'd wonder where it all starts.

-- Alex Grands
Tonight I remember the death of a child.
A darling the size of a lima bean:
with monster blue - eyes
And devil - claw limbs.

Tonight I remember the death of my
Child
One year.
this hour.
dizzy with valium
and stuck to the tissue paper bed.

I Lost Her.
The wastebasket filled with
her remains.
Not even a burial
for my first born.

just a drain
and a scattering of disinfectant.

Tonight.
the moon stirred my innards
and I bled.
A year after
the same night
I bled.

Tonight I remember the death of this child.
Her oversized head.
her fish eyes
and bean-body
rocking like a tadpole
in some
unmarked cradle-grave.

Between tiny towns, in the
Maine woods, we swerve to miss
yet another swollen animal
left to die in a puddle of blood.
This time the furry victim
struggles to rise, nearly under the wheels.
We just miss him and pull over, dust
flying and pebbles scatter as the
brakes scream and the seatbelt
tightens across my chest.

Before the cat is still and Andrea
can silence the motor I am
out and running, as the second car
barely misses the struggling cat, ragged
and torn, wanting to drag himself
to safety.

As I kneel to gently,
carefully pull the cat to
the shoulder, an 18-wheeler
blows by inches from my head.
I can see his tiny heart pounding
as he tries to breathe, mouth
red as a cherry lollipop, the bottom
half of his face banging bleeding
on his limp front legs. I bundle him
in a towel, blood on my arm, eyes
rolling back into his head.

- Jennifer Manzelli
Kings Wood Lake

Kings wood lake with crooked violets
on its grassy banks
with violent creek bed backwater runoffs,
and cement floor pavilion picnic tables
stained with Memorial Day ketchup and underage beer.
Kings wood lake beneath shadows of clouds
that crawl over oaken benches
over the sandbox castle of bliss children
over a bicycle, a basketball, a swing set
over the tan thighs and shoulders
of the Newhart sisters on the deep end dock.
Kings Wood Lake on an open air August night
when Brian and I passed brown bag wine
and collaborated clear thought
onto the backs of M. A. C. silps
in a swirl of circular sickness.
A blessed Kings Wood lake

Only the old-timers talk about the place now
unnoticed from the road between Eagles Mere and Dushore
where they saw them come and go in 1978

Bonnie turned me into a kite to fly around with
re-living girlhood scenes in Sullivan County.

The long grass grabbed at our ankles
stretched its back on every root and rock
grass and Queen Ann's Lace pointed the way

In the clearing among the blue damsels mating
and unbroken paths of monarchs
was the broken foundation of an altar
firmly anchored to the place like a wrecked ship
mice and watermelon bugs comfortable in the cracks

I could picture them praying over the slab
murmuring to the old dirt earth
answered by wind angels
that shook hemlock needles and swayed the Penn Oak

Since the apocalypse never struck after three months
they had the deed drawn up
and willed the land to God

- Hilary Dahlman

- Mary Kittel
It's always on days like this:
    bright blue with warm winds
    that somehow find my face,
    even in oak groves or garages.

It is days when leaves tumble down
    the streets crackling, all the same
    brown now, curled and dead.

It is on these last worn days
    of autumn, as if winter has
    come and gone, that I think
    of taking you up to Ontario
    with the Starcraft and tackle,
    or down to the Susquehanna
    with the canoe. It is days like this
    when I have given up on the world
    and begin to feel sick
    if I don't blaze a trail until blisters
    pop in my boots, or run a river
    until the sun sinks into it's hole.

     -James Cj Antonion
“So what do you want to do?” I asked.

“Let’s go to Kingsman’s Quarry,” Alli answered.

“No,” Tara said. “I don’t want to go there.”

“Well, we’re going,” Alli said impatiently.

“Why not?” Alli asked impatiently.

“I don’t want to,” her younger sister said calmly.

“Come on, Tara, we’re going,” Alli said.

Alli said firmly and looked at me.

“I have to get a radio,” Tara replied.

“Yes, communism,” Tara replied. “Anything I don’t like is communism and isn’t allowed.”

Alli shook her head and began to pedal away. I followed. Tara sat in the driveway calling to us, “I’m not going...”

The Macomber Mill Road wound through fields that had become blue with berries. We followed the gravel road to the quarry in the afternoon sun. I looked over my shoulder and saw Tara struggling along behind us, her tiny knees bobbing up and down with every push of the pedals. She had caught up by the time we reached the quarry. We dismounted our bikes and laid them in the grass. We sat on the quarry’s lip and dangled our feet over the edge. Kingsman’s Quarry had dried up years before, exposing large, jagged rocks in its bottom. As we tossed pebbles into the quarry and watched as they bounced and clicked off the rocks thirty feet below, I sat fascinated with Alli’s sun-bleached hair and the way it fell about her shoulders and delicate neck.

“I’ve got a radio,” Tara announced, looking around her sister at me. The three of us went to her bike to get the transistor.

“Let me see it,” Alli said and snatched it out of Tara’s hands.

“Give it here, Alleycat,” Tara snapped.

“I’m trying to get a station...” Alli replied.

“Give it HERE!” Tara yelled, trying to pull the radio from Alli’s hands.

Alli pushed her away, sending Tara stumbling backward into the brush and dirt. I giggled at the rather comical scene. Tara sat up, her face bright red and brushed herself off. Alli turned away and tuned in a station. Over the radio, the Police were singing, “Don’t Stand So Close To Me.” Tara stood up and rushed at Alli, pushing her over the edge of the quarry. Alli cried out and landed hard on the rocks below. The transistor cracked open and black plastic sizzled across a granite slab. The radio came to a halt against the cliff wall and was silent.

“Good,” Tara said, puffing and puffing, “good...”

“Alli, you okay?” I called down to her.

She didn’t answer. Her eyes were closed and she lay motionless on the rocks.

“You okay?” I asked again, my voice reverberating against the quarry’s walls.

Dark blood ran out from beneath Alli’s head, eyes wide and fists clenched.

I turned to Tara.

Tara shrugged. “It was communism.”

– Matt Glidden

– Lawrence Gevers
I pick up the phone
a recorded message
tells me of an important
call coming.
I can wait a few moments
wondering if the machine
is an
when I find the important
voices human.
A man comes on and asks
for Mrs. Messinger.
I am confused,

"Which one?"

Well
I am the lady of the house
but not Mrs.
and she has not
been here for
years
The solicitor’s rules
are too rigid.
That is not real anymore,
real mother
never lived here.

Ms. Forester raised me
and now
she is in Michigan,
medical school.
My father recently married
again
Mrs. Messinger
But even she
is not
and, anyway, he has a new
home now.

I am the ‘lady’ of the house
but you say you will call back
looking for Mrs. Messinger.
She exists in some
the old black and white T-Vs shows.
The remnants here are gone.
I am the ‘lady’ of the house
and I live with a gay man
who is not allowed to marry, to

share his name.

-Kara Messinger

You little fawn!
strawberries
leaving me
warm cheeks of plump, taut tissues
to tease my lips
the roses come

Daisies
good
butterfly
and the
butterflies
butter them up and stick.
I don’t dare

flora and fauna

vertebrae of vertebrae

and he gives me salted liver raw.

-Mary Kittel
Perhaps you would understand me if I told you
my feelings are like pine trees—
forevergreen and growing;
branches and trunk reaching higher, greening clouds.
roots firmly planted
stretching below the surface
establishing a solid base
from which my emotions stem

I’ve learned the patience of a sapling
determined in time to grow strong and resilient
bending, flexing, allowing
the wind to move around me,
embracing, rather than resisting,
Nature’s impulsive forces
which guide me through the sometimes severe
shifts in climate I must weather

Like tender dewdrops seeping through pine needles
the syllables of your name slip through my lips
bathing my limbs in the purity of a new day.
I am forevergreen and growing
toward the heavens
nurtured by your light, hoping you will notice
that although seasons do change,
my feelings for you deepen and thrive

-Alexandra Dianna
WHAT AM I TO DO TO KEEP THE SKY SO BLUE?

A couple wrapped inafortune. 

Holidays return. 

Poetry a new friend. 

May ask her to play in the rain.

Three bottles ahead. 

She has stolen our hearts, 

But we're not ready. 

Bottle, bottle, bottle.

She's the type to cling to the streets.

And the lights of the street cling to her and her

Hot black vinyl skin.

And I'm startled by a flash of wrenching braces.

When orange lacquered nails rake away crawling curls to reveal

A young caged face.

I see her rush and plaster herself on stifly suited businessmen.

Men with red mouths, hard squared-off teeth and glittering coins for the roundness of their eyes.

I don't watch her for too long because I've got work to do myself.

Swearing, I juggle drink after drink as my tray is raised over the heads of all who patronize this neon-kicked place.

Soothly with smoke twisting from falling embers.

I wonder how much more money she's making than me.

- Jenn Beck
The Blinking Lights of Mulberry Street

Sunny side ups, Cricket thought, home fries with chopped onions. The woman loved to cook. Cricket could picture her standing in the bedroom doorway with a spatula.

Her tall thin body seemed to hang there like a marionette...

Time to get up, the woman said. Her hair was bronze from the sun and her big eyes were cold. Get up, sleepy head, the woman said, but Cricket loved to sleep and she lowered her eyes listedly. Ok then, the woman said, then it's steam roller time. She ran to the bed and rolled over Cricket yelling, Steam roller, steam roller!

Get off, Tara, Cricket said with a voice that was harsh to begin with, but had a beautiful hoarseness to it when she woke. Especially after a night out. The woman would make Cricket read from the book and she would listen laying on her back, smoking.

The woman sat up next to Cricket. Get up, she said, I made coffee, and then she lit a cigarette. Cricket pushed the covers down with her feet. She stretched making a sound like a cat, her arms behind her head.

The woman looked down upon Cricket. She let smoke out the side of her mouth, smiling. How can you look so good in the morning, she said, You make me sick. I do not, Cricket said.

The woman leaned over close to her ear and said, I want you, in a whisper.

Stop it, Cricket said. And as she was laughing the woman climbed on top of her pretending to make love like a man.

It was a thought Cricket carried with her the entire day. And she thought about it even as she stood there at five am, trembling. She was fixing the outsides of her lids, trying not to look sad in the mirror lined with glue on sea shells.

Get a grip on yourself, Cricket said to herself, try not to think and she started to break down. I should have stayed at Cock-eyed-Oscar, she said. Cricket thought of the confused boy and then the woman chasing them down Mulberry Street. I didn't want anything to happen, she said, I couldn't think.

Cricket jerked herself away from the mirror and rubbed her eyes. The boy she thought remembering the night, that poor boy. I don't even like him. Cricket pictured herself dragging him down the lonely street. She remembered the blinking traffic light and pulling him through a yard in a precarious escape.

She remembered taking him down a narrow set of cellar stairs behind the Pizza Palace. It was just to get away from the embarrassment, she thought.

Jeze what did I do? Cricket. Cricket, come back. Cricket could remember the unsettling screams from the street. You're killing me! the woman cried. The boy kept asking. Who is the woman.

Oh, I don't know what she wants, Cricket said, and she took him by the shoulders kissing him drunkenly in the cold darkness of the concrete doorway. Cricket tried to brush the thoughts out of her head.

She sat down at the kitchen table and started a note,

Tara,
I'm too distraught to write you this but,

She stopped to look at the two dried up tea bags. They were wrapped around one spoon, choked by their own string. The ash tray was filled with butts.

a burned out roach, and two Rolling Rock caps crushed like footballs. She looked at the clock over the stove, five thirty am., and wondered where the woman was. The night was so cold, she thought, the first one of autumn. She remembered leaving the bar, who knows for what.

Cricket thought. What's wrong with me, she said crying and started again.

Look, I'm so sorry. I don't know what I'm doing. I can't lie. It's just hopeless. Why were you so crazy, and what about our friends? I guess I just hurt everybody. I should leave.

Cricket

Cricket looked at the over filled bucket of recycling, all over the floor. She drinks too much, she thought and folded the letter in half. Don't go, a voice came from the doorway. Cricket looked up from under her bangs. The woman was standing there with her red eyes and a T-shirt that barely went down to her underwear. I don't live like this all the time, the woman said holding herself, biting down on her lip. Her legs were goose bumpy and she was shivering. Stop that, Cricket said. Go back to bed, you drank too much. No, please Cricket... and then it was too hard to get anything else out.

The tears ran down her neck. Don't cry, Cricket said. The woman's eyes, she thought, looked like the Lakawanna River after a good storm. Don't go, the woman said. It's how you deal with things Tara. Don't you think about me? Don't you know?

Don't leave me. Cricket. I'm sorry, she said, could barely get the words out.

It's no good, Cricket said. Let's make breakfast. No, that's not it at all. Please, the woman was crying hard and it sounded as if her chest was in cold water. You don't even know, Cricket said. I promise, no more. Oh Cricket, don't cry. You're making this hard. Cricket said disconcertingly. The woman ran over, I ruin everything, she said and held Cricket close to her breast making her cry even more. The woman's breath had a stench of hoagies and pot.

You're so beautiful, she said, please don't cry. Can't you leave me be? Cricket said.

I'm jealous, the woman said disarrayed. I'm sorry. I'll make breakfast.

How's that. We'll make some eggs and coffee. Cricket put her thin arms around the woman, her tiny fist held the crumpled note.
The Miner's Remnants

The only piece of their life that remains is this
splintered, oak rocker with the back cut out.
I walk through the cooking room and make patterns
in the Anthracite dust, with my hiking boot.

Staring
at the old potbelly,
I keep remembering my grampa's guns
exploding like Confederate cannons,
my grandmother shielding her eyes from
stinging glass.

Forcing myself in, I see a cast-iron bed frame, with it's rusted
box spring.
I picture him pushing himself inside her.
My entire body is haunted by this room.
A sweaty, yellow portrait of my father, at five, is in my hand.
He is wearing a sailor suit.
The same plaster that clung to his nursery wall
drops, scattering like
cockroaches.
I collect the last bottle and place it in my tomato box.
It is the Jim Beam one they say he choked on.
I want the crow feather that is inside, so I break it on the
wine cellar floor.
The sky was slate grey, the color
of a used chalkboard, and as I drove
the Yellow "73 Ford pick-up
truck alone route 512 my hands
gripped the steering wheel
of the **Bumble bee**.

As I made sure not to fade off
the straight-and-narrow road,
musing that spiritual weaving had
occurred long ago,
I noticed the trees
that I passed.
As a forewarning of
the storm ahead
their leaves were
turned inside out.
I was turned inside out.
Mother made me so frustrated. Why
couldn't she just listen
or react without sarcasm?

Two hours
earlier when I had picked up
I remarked to Nina
to notice "how smoky it was."

My mother retorted:
"you're leaving soon."

Cigarettes.
When I die I know that I will give
off the putrid smell of stale yellow smoke.
All the smoke that my body
accumulated will be released at death.

—My Mother’s lifelong and final gift to me.

The truck kept moving down the road
just as our mother/daughter relationship.

**The Bumble bee's** outside
rust spots were hidden by
Greenpeace and
Amnesty International stickers,
"To make it all better."

but on the inside
I still had to use both feet
to stop before I
slid into the intersection.

—Rachel Kratter
Dead Dachau

Jenifer Mangels

I walk along the snowy
build above once
lying bones stumbled through
with thick dust, stuck figures collapsing
on hard wood and concrete
and brick.

I reach the gate, and stare
at the twisted walls, sharp
feet rooted. The same as almost
a half century ago.

Past the mangled
remains of that vile German
manic, and as I slowly turn the
corner, a gray chunk of jagged
rock marks the approach.

Krematorium

faced brick, the menacing
cherry trees empty. Dead corner, no
longer batching thick white
smoke. Crossing the narrow threshold.
I step down and the images flash—pala
cloth, and stained bones, form
cloth never covering them. Piled in
the corner behind the adulterating
sucrose, I smell the
rotting,
smelled
flesh.

-Janie Mattern

Exchange

id like to exchange this forest for a fax machine
i dont want the sky i want ballistic bullets with razor discrimination
give me global communications for the first breath
i want aids not a stravinski comp
she wants mud in her pocket
the store only takes credit no tea rooms accepted
i remember an exchange with a japanese writer
he said he wanted it all
i said id trade him for a copy of
kuosawa's dream bomb

-Mark Demanto
Heather Adams
Angie Fies

Brian Benner
Adrian Brieger

Rachel Kadinger
Michael Spinna

Kate Clair
Heather Thomas

Traci Hunt
Jennifer Manzelli

Robyn Happenheimer
Mary Kittel