ESSENCE

Essence literary and fine arts magazine is a collaborative effort of Kutztown University 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.

Nothing

The weight of nothing is heavier than we know.

To know nothing is to risk nothing.

Nothingness is a lifeless life.

And nothing is risk.

Sowing nothing and reaping less.

To feel nothing is to feel nothing.

Nothing at all within our without nothing loaded on our backs.

Morgan Shea
It was Monday morning I showed up for work about two minutes after nine, 
My boss said “you’re late”. I said “indeed I am” and I blame it on the cheap wine, 
“We have just reviewed the Comprehensive General Liability Policy” he said 
I looked at my watch, pulled up my socks, and felt an aching in my head.

Customers singin’ telephones ringin’, paperwork up to my spleen 
Seat unfastened, went to get some aspirin to help me relieve this pain, 
Went through the lobby saw my co-worker Bobby, he said “hey cot you’re eyes are red” 
I looked at my watch, pulled up my socks and felt an achin’ in my head.

I guess I was hurtin’ more than I thought cause I ate about 12 of those pills 
I felt sorta dreamy so went over to lean upon the window sill 
twas then I realized I’d had enough and went off to find a bed, 
So I looked at the couch, pulled up my socks and lay down to rest my head.

I dreamed of May flowers and April showers, I thought it would never end 
When the boss stepped in with a titanic grin and said, “hello my employee friend” 
I said “quit bein’ creepy, I’m so darn sleepy” he showed me his teeth instead. 
He said “look at your watch, pull up your socks, is something wrong with your head?”

He chased me up the stairs, but I was takin’ the lead, he was way back in the caboose 
All of a sudden to my surprise, we were up on top of the roof 
All these pigeons were flying around, I explained that I had no bread 
I looked at my watch, pulled up my socks, and felt an achin’ in my head.

I was turnin’ purple, he was chasin’ me in circles, slurpin’ his cigar so sweet, 
The dropping of my socks made me remember those matchbox cars down in the street, 
Came to the edge at last, the boss was runnin’ fast and I thought that I was dead, 
I looked at my watch, pulled up my socks, and woke up on that bed.

I wiped the sleep from my eyes and started thinkin’ the boss must be gain barzcrk 
“Analyze these documents,” that’s all he said, “oh go on now get to work.”
But the funny thing about the morning was when he sat back down at his desk, 
He looked at his watch, adjusted his crotch, and I saw a pigeon poop on his head.

James ‘Cat’ Antonson
How old was he when
He still delivered to kitchen doors?
His incomplete hand tapping the screen
Accompanied by a raspy, quick "Hello!"

His good hand held several dozen eggs
In pressed, blue paper cartons.
When the red Ford pulled in from the edge of town,
He was greeted by mothers
Or their children with proper change.

Fowl were cheap,
At ten cents per pound.
They came in wooden spindle crates
Unsure of their surroundings.

Children were transfixed by
The eggman's missing fingers.
Mothers said it was impolite to store.
Perhaps he might have told,
But no one ever asked.
it has always been a problem his

taking without even asking ever since he

Oatmeal

was a child his mother had the worst time

with him and the cookie jar from which his

Raisin

greedy grasp would reap and although not

in the same manner he will with you or I it

was without permission for his favorite

cookies which are oatmeal raisin and the

crumbs of which will someday be found

between the blankets of our beds.

Joel Cairo
I am driving to work
with Bruce Springsteen screaming
and my hands become ten years old,
smaller, knuckles swollen from cracking,
and I hear again my mother in the kitchen
calling my dad a drunk.

I open my bedroom door enough to see
her shoulders pinned against worn linoleum,
But when I say his name
he returns to the table,
to his half-eaten sandwich and beer
and calls me to sit with him
in the fluorescent glow
of the light above the sink.
He tells me his first wife
got pregnant by a skinny Italian
and that his eyes are bloodshot
from tears, not beer. Then he makes
my right hand almost invisible
within his and presses my fingers
into the Korean shrapnel wounds on his neck
to show me just how close I’d come
to never being born.

Daniel Donaghy
My hand reached into the grease-stained bag, hunting blindly for any surviving fries. The few I found were cold and soggy, but I dutifully shoved them into my mouth. I couldn’t afford to waste food, especially at this time of year. Bills were higher because of the weather, even if the heat was on a minimum. And those damn Salvation Army ladies were everywhere, tinkling their little bells at me, playing on my guilt. Images of their stiff blue uniforms always came to my mind as I ate dinner. I could never spare them any change, but I would never think twice about coughing by McDonald’s and spending three bucks on a value meal that I could never finish. Usually the seagulls ended up with more of my food than I did.

I watched the fowl gulls from the warmth of my car. They were huddled together next to a dirty mound of snow that once covered the shopping center parking lot. The pile, a permanent fixture until the spring thaw, was pushed against some lamp posts in front of the Shop-N-Bag. In a better part of town, children might have played on it while their mothers rolled carts inside the store. Here, however, kids grew up too fast. Those who were interested in snow were more concerned with making deals with it than with having snowball fights.

I clicked on the radio—AM, but better than nothing. Thank God for WFCN, the classic rock station. If that wasn’t on the AM dial, I’d probably be listening to the polka station with my grandfather Bart. On the radio, The Who was singing about Tommy. Rolling down the window and turning up the volume, I got out of the car to smoke. There was just something special about smoking in the cold air.

I leaned against the driver’s door and sucked hard on my cigarette. My car was shiny, without a trace of rock salt on the sides. The guy in the upstairs apartment worked in a body shop, and he offered to wax my car for free. “A Christmas present,” he had said. “It’ll keep me in practice for the March rush.”

What the hell, I thought. Jerry’s a nice enough guy. My landlady, however, an old gossipy Italian by the name of Petedu, warned me against Jerry. “A nice girl like you ... keep away from him,” she scolded as she collected the rent. “He wants to wax more than cars, if you know what I mean.” I had laughed at her. “I can take care of myself, thanks.”

Across the lot a young mother was dragging her small son by the arm. She cursed at him in Spanish, but I couldn’t make out everything she said. The little brown boy in the second-hand parka was clutching a bag of goldfish crackers and crying. As she jerked him along, crackers spilled out, leaving yellow specks along the pavement. A nearby seagull hurried to investigate the treasure.

Almost four o’clock, I noticed. The grey sky was becoming darker; the street lights began to hum into life. The Pinball Wizard had since stopped playing. I opened the Nova’s door and collected the trash from the front seat. Billing up the wrappers, I tossed them into the back seat with the remains of other fast-food delicacies. Time to go home, I thought. Things to do.

Call Bart about the holiday, I reminded myself. Maybe Aunt Teresa will cook us a turkey again. I turned the ignition key and the car shook and rumbled. Shifting into drive, I decided that I would wait until later to see the family. Right now I wanted to see Jerry.
Mementoes of night
Silent silvery mist
Slowly floating, driftin life
Into your naked body
Clinging to everything it touches:
Muffling the cries of your victims
And the roar of your body.
Over young minds
Clouding them until
They become vague shapes:
And gradually disappear
Depressing spirits that
Were looking forward to that day
Dampening everything

Until it drips with your moisture
Cool early morning breeze
Spreads through the window
Increasing your warmth
Drying the clinging moisture
Decreasing darkness that fell
You slowly begin to dissipate.
With the morning horizon
Gently floating away
No longer in the burning light
Remaining only in my dark heart

R. Kevin Baker
I was born a peasant, poor,
but still I’m black and proud.
A woman far from meek and mild;
my voice is strong and loud.
My grandma filled the cotton socks;
my mother, land she plowed.
Back then we had no right to life,
but now I’m black and proud.
My grandpa was a burdened slave,
and from his master cowed.

Black and Proud

My father was a butler-man;
he shuffled as he bowed.
The Klan caught my brother;
he was hung before a crowd.
They thought that I would hang my head,
but I am black and proud.
I hold my kinky head up high,
and yell the words out loud.
God don’t make no ugliness.
I AM BLACK AND PROUD!!!

Miki Symone
Her brother ordered her to get the ketchup even though she sat farther away from the refrigerator than he did. She didn't move. She looked down at her bowl. Her long dark hair covered any expressions she might have had on her face.

"Soon her mother said firmly, "Carol, please get the ketchup."

"Why can't he get the ketchup? I don't comprehend this place!" she said in anger, though she knew she had said enough already. She got up, walked around the table opposite where her dad was sitting, past Warren, Tina, Cindy, Randy in his high chair, and Steve. She scanned the fridge from top to bottom looking for the red bottle. When she found it, she put it on the table with a thump.

"Carol, the men worked hard all morning unloading hay.

"What did I do this morning, play?" Carol retorted, and then felt a sudden chill of fear. She knew she had better watch herself.

"One more word from you Carol Lynn Peters and I will...."

"Quiet!" her father interrupted. He was trying to hear the weather forecast on television to see if rain would ruin his plans for finishing the hay.

"I was eating, too," she whined to herself. Carol finished her meal quietly, and slipped out of the kitchen and out the back door. She enjoyed being outside. It was quiet, away from the kids, and if she wanted she could momentarily hide in the ground cellar. She sat on the bench behind the house next to the garden. She could see out beyond the barn over the fields to the church at Moorestown. She could even see the road that wound up over the mountain. The weather was her favorite. Hot and sunny. The sky was blue, clear blue. She resented having the whole day taken up by work. On Tuesday, if she got the laundry done early, she could bike up to Nancy's and go swimming for the afternoon. Her mom had promised, now she prayed that it wouldn't rain. Tonight Audrey and her parents would be coming for a visit. She couldn't wait! While their parents talked in the kitchen, she and Audrey would play records and talk about Gary and Jeff and the rest of the romances that were going on with their friends from school. Nancy and George had broken up last week and she was dying to find out if Audrey knew. Maybe they could sneak over to mom's bedroom and use the phone to call him. It was so much fun the last time when they called Joan and pretended...

"Carol, let's go," yelled to her mother through the back door screen.

"Coming."
Her mother had already stacked the dishes and gathered the glasses and silverware. It was her turn to wash.

She reached for the dishwashing liquid under the sink. She gave it a squirt into the dishpan, turned on the faucet, checked the water, then adjusted the hot and cold knobs until the temperature was right.

Her mother started in, “Make the water hot. And make sure those glasses are rinsed clean.

You know how your father hates to have soap suds in his water glass.”

The memory of her father announcing he’d die of ptomaine poisoning if she didn’t improve her dishwashing swept through her mind. He had found a fork in the drawer that had dried fruit on it.

“And do the glasses first, pots and pans last.

When you are done, Ajax the sink, and hang your dishcloth out on the line to dry.”

“When is she going to stop?”

“This afternoon Tina can watch Randy ‘til he takes his nap, while you and I go to the garden and pick those beans. That needs to be done today. Cindy and Steve can play in the yard as we pick. Tina can help us once Randy is asleep. Someone will also have to run drinks to the men in the field around 3:00.

It’s a hot one today and they sure will be thirsty by then.”

Her mother said all this as she cleared the table of leftover soup, butter and ketchup. She then went into the living room to check on the baby who had been whimpering for the last few minutes.

“I bet he has a wet diaper. He always cries that way when he is wet,” Carol thought.

The noise of the tractor came from the back of the house. Through the window she could see her father.

He jumped off the tractor and was coming this way. “I wonder what he wants.”

The door opened. “Come on we need your help,” he said. “Joe had to run home. You need to unload the wagons with John, so Warren and I keep going before the storm comes. Rain is on the way.”

“Ah, man this is the pits.”

“Get a move on, Carol.”

He poked his head in the living room door, and said, “we need her.” The mother nodded.

He turned and walked out the door.

Carol ran up the back steps to her room, to change into her pants. She had left her shorts on one time, and got tiny scratches all over her legs. It burned terribly in the tub and looked awful for about a week. Wearing pants on a day like this was almost just as bad. She ran down the front steps and through the living room and briefly wondered how to get out of this one. She made a weak attempt.

“Mom, I really hate lifting the bales of hay. They’re so heavy. Anyway what about the beans?”

She knew what was coming. It was useless. Nothing around here was going to change.

“Never mind the beans. You are a strong girl. Now, get on out there and quit fussing.”

“It’s not fair. It’s not fair,” she muttered and slammed the back door.

John had just backed the wagon right up next to the elevator. He placed a bale on the unloading belt. John was a good looking man with blonde hair. He had a dark tan from working in the fields. He smiled as she approached. John was working for her dad this summer. In a couple of weeks John would be going to college. She was going to regret his leaving. Dad seemed a bit calmer since John was around.

“It won’t be so bad,” John said, as she eyed the wagon full of hay bales. John climbed up the elevator.

“Okay!” He yelled from the top.

She plugged the elevator into the extension cord. The motor started and the first bale was on it’s way up.

She climbed onto the wagon, grabbed a bale by the twine, and dropped it on the moving belt. She picked up another, and dropped it. Then another, and another. She knew it would get tougher as the wagon emptied. John was patient. She didn’t have to worry about him complaining like she did with Warren.

When they finished, she unplugged the elevator. John climbed down backward as if it were a ladder.

“You’ll take a break while I get the other wagon.”

She sat down on the grass. She picked a piece and stuck it in her mouth. She lay back on the cool earth.

The sky was blue overhead, but the clouds were gathering on the horizon.

Thoughts ran through her mind. “Will it rain before mom brings the drinks out? What time is it?

Will dad get the hay in before it rains?” She wished it were 6:00.

John came around the barn and parked the wagon at the same spot. They repeated the same procedure. A few times John had tied the bale on the elevator sideways. Half way up the elevator, it tumbled to the barn floor. John laughed as she chased it. Her arms were beginning to hurt. Her fingers seemed engroved by the bale twine. It hurt to straighten them. She could hear the tractor. It was dad with another full load of hay.

The sun was no longer shining. The sky had turned white with clouds. Dad put the full wagon load of hay by the side of the barn. He hitched the empty wagon to the tractor and headed back toward the field. Mom intercepted him with her hands full of cups and a jug of something. It was probably her homemade lemonade. Dad stopped the tractor. Her mother handed him a full cup. You could see they were talking while she filled his cup a second time. Dad looked like he was yelling. He threw the cup on the ground.

Carol quickly looked away.

John was stacking a bale up against the stone wall of the barn. She could hear the tractor start up and drive out the lane. Carol had three bales left. She pushed herself to get done. There. The last going up. Mom was waiting by the side of the wagon. Carol noticed the small red mark on her cheek.

She jumped down and unplugged the elevator.

“Lemonade?”

“Yes, homemade. You know your dad loves it.” “It sure does the trick on a hot day like this,” John said.

He seemed to swallow the whole cupful in one gulp. He looked rejuvenuated.

“Well, ready for the next load, Carol?”

“I guess.”

“I got half the beans picked, Carol. Tina is picking the rest right now. We’ll have some for supper. I can use your help setting the table when you’re done. Oh, it won’t be long now. I just felt a drop.”

Carol looked away, up toward the clouds, to hide the tears forming.

She thought of her dad and wished it would rain forever.

"Karen George"
in June,
the rains returned
bringing day-lilies
and your memory.
Thoughts of summer;
of school just let out
and everlasting even
of grass mowing
upon your lap of a trac
We circled the quarter a
rounded by the map
turned spirals in the

turf-singing loudly
but not well.
and sometimes mad
to cover up your ignor
Then the night came and you abandoned
your mowing-mach
found the house
and your silence.

Trina Johnson-Reiner
(A Weaver's Tale)

Autumn was dying: Hallow's Eve.
It was late of course.
After the beer and the wine,
The fire's warmth and the bales of autumn hay,
With the stars delicately stitched onto the cold, dark tapestry above,
It was then long after he had arrived that took my leave
And you played the jest.

Before the loom had slowed,
before the saffron threads in the low circle of stones
Paired in colour with the leaves below,
We met on the bales of summer's gold and talked
In that intimate, knowing way we sometimes talked
As we sipped the aging sunlight cupped in our hands.
When he came and loosed those sable threads
Spun with his usual vermillion subtlety,
I said nothing as you rose to greet him.

(Here we pause to change the spools, for the threads must now be of darker hue)
For Dana Trout

1. It's done. The last of your clothes have been shoved in the trunk and your goldfish are safely buckled in. Drive carefully, use your side mirrors, remember the car pulls to the left.

2. If your eyes get tired from too many miles of 422; put in the tape I made for you and slow dance in the sweaty steam of the dryers again, sit with me in the lobby and I'll play you Billy Joel in a way you said you'd remember forever. And I know you will.

3. You'll be driving in your husband's car on a road that seems somehow familiar, turn on the radio, hear "Piano Man." For a second, you'll be able to forgive yourself for not being beautiful, for not having shoes to match your new red dress. The angry horns behind you will become funny sounds from a college friend you haven't seen in twenty years, who made a face when you said goodbye that still makes you laugh, who said whenever you hear Billy, think of me.

Daniel Donaghy
For Karen Schneller

Fats Domino is on Blueberry Hill
while Karen is in my Chevette with me, wearing
the blue button-down shirt and the jeans
I've slipped past her ankles
a thousand times. After three days of rain,
the sky is as clear as is my mind
when I tell you I love
her more than anything else, but
the memory of the broken
glass, the eight stitches
in my mother's right cheek.
reminds me that his rage
flows latently through my veins
and that one day, during an argument
over money or infidelity, I might raise
my hand to her and become her father.
A soft finger against my cheek
as she asks my thoughts, and I
think for a second of telling
her to get out while she can, but instead
I just smile and lift her hand
to kiss it as we enter Putnam County.
1/5/92 - 3:49 am.

Driving to Peekskill

Daniel Donaghy
Applejacks

Everyone in Judy's art class is scared to death of her because she draws murdered children and cracks her knuckles.

When we met, we grabbed the posters and ran laughing and ripping off the plastic telltale cover—tossing the cardboard we bonded like that something bad in us touched and decided to cat fight.

She says she used to be me kissing far too many boys and she promises I can be her too while her pet snake Evil slithers through her bleached hair and snap the shot.

Corina Benkovic
Passion Blooms

I think that passion blooms like a hot white flower before it explodes
in a wild profusion of scenes, bright petals, red roof, earth, clouds,
loss, earth, roots, red roof, grass, earth, air, clouds, earth, petals,
damn it, mine, yours, earth, yours, yours, yours, yours, yours, yours,
swimming, earth, yours, yours, yours, yours, yours, yours, yours,
clouds, yours, yours, yours, yours, yours, yours, yours, yours, yours.

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