

The Hill

by *Anthony Bryant*

It's a long climb down into Valley City.
Twice before I've descended this hill,
leaving when life looked
too tough to stay.

Hands gripping white on the wheel,
I tremble.
Back to college.
Back down the hill.
The right way this time.

I don't feel old, but maybe I am.
The stares from other students
seem to say so.
I want to tell them--

I've lived a life of ups and downs.
I've seen the battle of the bottle;
the birth of a baby.
I put my war clothes on and fought for things
I don't think you believe in.

Things you should believe in.

I hope you don't make the same mistakes I did,
I hope you believe I belong here with you.

I hope our dreams our intact
when we climb the hill one last time.

Space Seeking

by *Angela Uwadiogwu*

Somewhere in the largest groove
of mind it quavers,
welcoming and warm.
Endless. We trudge up,
far into the shaky source of our
continuing passage,
where we want to move
gaily away from the discord of the
outside to the quivering melody
of in.

This is the dim place we all love to hide,
over the protesting creaks of rickety banisters,
where mementos and debris from a senile
home lie in disarray. This place—where cobwebs sleep thickly
on the rusty, red ground, and daguerreotype eyes
shine bright. Piercing sharper than the nails
and wood splinters scattered across the red-brown jagged floor.
That opaque disk outside the small window shines staler
than the night before.

White World

by *Jennie Fischer*

I have
blue all around me
blue swirls that surround
me
as I'm soaking
in the tub
and blue dried to my walls.
Blue in my nails
blue in my hair
and blue in the eyes
of the people that stare.
On the brain and in
my heart- blue.
Blue stains
that paint can't
color
and blue skin
that won't wash away;
permanent blue.
The kind of blue
that can set apart
in such a white world.

Sisters are Forever

by *Teri Smith*

Sisters are a place that when you have no where else to go are
A soft place to fall. A touch, a hug, a gesture here and there,
Always time for baby sister.

From my birth special gifts awaited me.
Sisters loving me like a friend/daughter/buddy,
Loving me like crazy.

Sharing laughter, support, and secrets no one else has.
They are exasperating, sassy, comfortable and kind.
Putting up with hissy fits, bouts of self doubt, and pride.
Loving me like crazy

Teaching me how to live and love without losing myself.
Believing in me when I need it the most
Sisters are forever.

Washing Machine

by *Teri Smith*

The washing machine works over the years building a dependable
Reputation for doing what everyone needs but takes for granted. Like a wife
Working quietly for years, you notice when she is gone.

With no time off or show of approval the machine does not complain
Nor question the circumstance of the grime it encounters. It just keeps
Working hard, day or night.

Chugging along for many years and once in a great while
Jerking, thudding, walking away and losing its balance, quickly
Recovering to do its job.

Few of us think about the discretion of this stoic servant, keeper of confidences.
Always faithful, never passing along the most intimate details.
Noticed only when it dies.

Witness

by *Kaylah Borg*

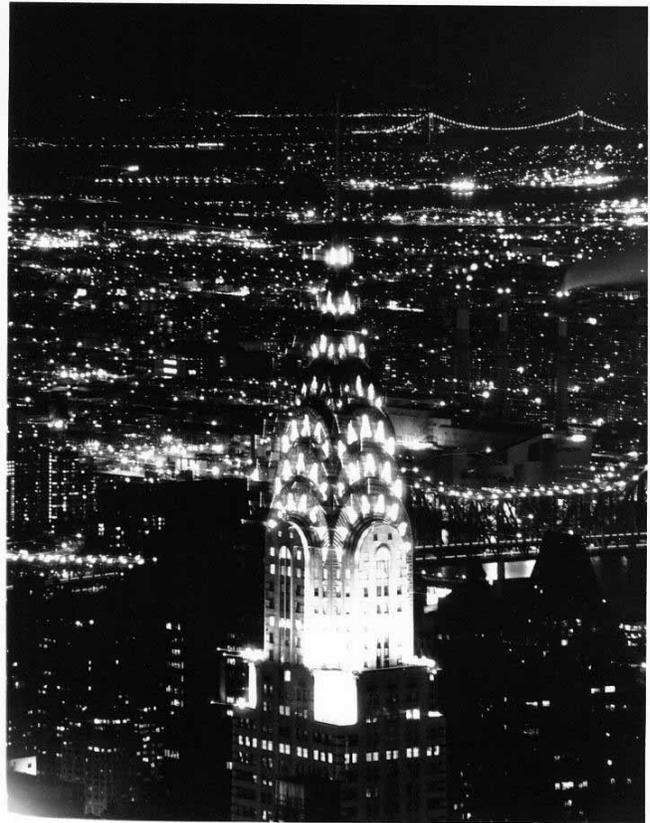
On a clear and crisp night,
icy, smog-filled wind
whips hair across my face.
My eyes widen,
taking in the sight so high above the earth.
Millions of flickering lights,
each with their own story,
stretch for miles around.

Approaching the edge of the building,
My fingers curl around a high, steel safety fence.
I gaze into the sparkling world so far below me
and I can't imagine
anything more beautiful.

Suddenly, I am hit.
I realize how it must have been
on that sad September morning.
The day people just like me
were chased by flames and jet fuel
to a horrific last resort.

Silent and still,
this giant I stand upon
saw it all.
Windows like thousands of eyes,
watching
as its towering neighbors were struck
and crashed to the ground.

I wonder,
after witnessing such an act of hatred
and seeing such pain and devastation,
if this building had a choice,
would it fall too?



Chrysler Building
by *Hilde van Gijssel*
Photography

Fishing

by *Brett Gleave*

Wind wonders across your face, and the sun shines as you can feel the warmth of its rays.
The pole sits on the green grass, while you wait in anticipation for the bite.
Looking up and seeing the bright blue sky and the white cloud clusters,
speckled with geese and ducks flying in no particular pattern.
Birds chirp and water flows free, friends talk in the background.
They tell the same old stories over and over,
sometimes their stories get better with time.
Anything goes with friends.
Hearing them complain about school, sports, work, and women.
Everybody gets their two cents in, for everyone has endured.
It's best when someone actually catches something,
whether it be a snag, a tree, some sort of garbage, or in rare cases a fish.
It is nice to catch fish and especially nice for whoever caught the biggest, boasting is fun.
Snagging is super, losing lures and line is no fun, but watching fishermen scream
and yell at the river and at each other is always a blast.
The freedom of fishing with friends is phenomenal.

Unknown Path

by *Shelly Witt*

Traveling down life's road
Treads become worn, nonexistent
The grip once held tightly
between small sturdy hands
Wears down as pieces break away.
Until it completely loses all form
changing ever so slowly as miles add.
Control inches closer and closer to the edge,
Sharp corner frosted with white crystals
glistening under a full bright moon.
A flash before loving eyes...
Realization of time is unknown,
sweeping eyes panic at emptiness.
Location, lights, memory erased...
Lost grip shoves a hole deep inside.

Untitled

by *Kjell Rice*

Sitting and pondering
Just following a mind wandering
An able mind not hard to find
Still and ever steps merely behind
Common thoughts
Bizarre plots
A bit of a song
All that is wrong
Forgotten names of new people met
Missing old friends and feeling regret
A lonely new stage
That opens a new page
Frees my lust from the tired old routine
Under the rust it feels shiny and clean
More like Saul and less like Jack
Less likely to fall no more looking back
Musing over muses
Ingesting fewer abuses
A long road ahead
Without being led
Just following my mind
Envisioning what I'll find

Waving

goodbye to
you forever since
my broken heart cannot
endure the swelling brought by
the pain you promised never to reveal.

by *Andrew Fischer*

The Perfect Picture

by *Anthony Bryant*

Barreling through Baghdad,
I see a school.
I'm ready for them.
And they for me.

Soldiers were small once, too.
We feel for kids; we know
They wanted no war.

We watch out for them.

As I toss them treats
I'd saved so long,
I bask in their beauty;
the youth of a nation
we're here to help.

Perfect timing for a picture.

No sooner do we stop
then start again.
We want our stops
to be brief.
So do the people.

8 months later I'm home.
The photo proves

I was there.

That I did my duty,
that I cared for those kids.

I hate that picture.

My friends say it is perfect;
kids milling around me,
smiling.
It says I loved those kids.

But I always focus on the fact
that my gun is pointing at them.



Have You Forgotten
by *Megan ReNee Schmidt*
Photography

Untitled

by *Wendy Matcha*

Feeling like a ghost,
Waiting to die.
My time is coming soon,
Maybe tomorrow or the next day.
Daggers are shooting toward me,
All I feel is hurt, pain, stab and alone.
I am left to die,
Bleeding to death.
No one cares or even turns back to see,
They keep on walking, thinking "I didn't do anything"

As I lie there bleeding,
I think who are my friends.
Do I really have any?
Will they come for me?

My life is passing by every time,
I think about who I care about.
Maybe if I had done something,
would this be different?
Would I be lying here bleeding?

Once I am gone,
Will someone still Love Me?
Pain is all I am feeling.



Left

by *Katie Hulse*
Acrylic Painting

Scenic Byway

by *Lee Kruger*

At Kathryn, we left the way I thought I knew
and took gravel more driveway than road
to look for “the longest river to start and end

in North Dakota,” as Pat our guide intoned
from the front of the bus. I figured we’d find it
since the river itself predicated our route.

Early on, sun-spilt fields of shorn wheat
seemed to grow sunlight; other fields receded,
green in the lazy haze of heat, and our eyes

rose to the wispy white of clouds against the
high August sky. Long before noon, the hills
we drove over changed the way we saw things.

Soon, scraggly clumps of trees, most stunted, some
substantial, some dead and bare and accusatory, briefly
blocked the sun, the flickering shadows feeling more

like Wisconsin or Iowa, than N.D. We catch glimpses
of the river through the banks of trees—a bend here, a flat
flowing there; brown glass in places, in others cocoa rippled

with blue. The river is down but not out, its life obvious
all around us: a curious brood of baby wild turkeys scuttle
by the side of the road, looking for mom, toms strutting

straight ahead; a sudden deer stands alert in the distance,
its tan torso and wide ears silhouette against the dusty green
of a bean field. Even the spun-gold splendor of round hay bales

reminds us of our presence, of our dependence here
on a scrabble-earthed land fed by a river
by whose way we are, however scenic it may be.



Bales

by *Hilde van Gijssel*
Photography

Outer Space

by *Levi Westerhausen*

Do you know my name?
Do you see my face?
Probably not
On these slow, cold days in outer space
We get lost
Take out our anger on x-box
(you know you play too much)
But I still can't get enough
Of you

In outer space, we get lost

We take a small walk through the park
To make some art
It's gets dark
But still we don't part
Three small steps back to your room
But not too soon
I'm still so consumed by all of you

In outer space we get lost

As I lie next to you, I let myself go
I don't need anything, but you to hold

Snowflakes

by *Andrew Fischer*

Tiny white dancers
fall upon our roads, our trees
from the winter sky

Death Becomes Her

by *Sarah Fehr*

Graphite
and a Poem



Death becomes her
She watches me
Taunting
The blood rolls down
Staining

Death becomes her
The darkness envelops me
Warmth
I slip into the shadows
Death

Death becomes her
She is
My suicide

An Ode to Cell Phones

by *Justin Stangler*

 Ringing and clicking,
 The songs and buttons wailing.
The whole planet connected by some technological umbilical cord,
 One button away from the touch of a whim.

 Everyone knows everyone,
 And everything that can be said has been.
 Recipes for fillet a la muskrat
 Exchanged on the freeway.

 Alone a stranger walks in the fog,
 Not connected, not talking.
You could skip stones across his wide, thick apathy
 And not detect a ripple of doubt.

 Stranded in a monster blizzard
 He delights at the challenge.
 His heart races at the excitement.
 No call is able to be made!

 Yet he delights in the adventure.
Whatever happened to smoke signals so rough and deliberate?
The stranger yearns for the day when words meant something,
 When there was no such thing as a catch phrase.

 And he walks for help into uncertainty.
His heart and mind eats the excitement like oatmeal,
 Never swallowing but shoveling it in anyway.

 The answer is no, he cannot hear you now.
 No one pays attention to silence anymore.
 It is the neglected street corner hobo
 And he puts a ten dollar bill in the cup.

 This man freezes the snow of adventurous uncertainty
 His final epitaph:
 Switch it off, take a walk, shake a hand,
 Enjoy the silence.

Master Plan

by *Kjell Rice*

Comically twisted

Cosmically gifted

I've sold & I've grifted

Lost my soul

So I'm lifted to deal with the stress

I must confess

Plead no contest

To giving less than my best

But I suggest you respect

My complex & direct intellect

That will best all the rest

By the book on the test

Its time for me to fly away

Bye, bye

Land high and dry

In the middle of the prairie where

I won't quite belong there

Mammy Water

by *Angela Uwadiogwu*

In the night.
Twin moon globes hover about the ocean shore—
onyxes intimate with the dark
and beyond.

Water woman. Wavy, sculpted
fingers
and nails wave.

And you answer.

She is beauty and death,
an apparition you see
and know.
Long, black bushes.
Curls sinister, resting lazily
on slick sea skin.

Her long claws
travel down your spine;
and you don't know how to
respond.

Deep inside the ocean bed,
in her lair, you wait for the morning
ascent to soft cushions.

You better not run to the
incense of Sunday's altar
or the pedestal cross
or the snap of a shrink.

Her heart of thorns
will choke you if it is
necessary, she threatens
you tonight.

Loneliness

by *Stephanie Trautman*

I remember how it felt,
to be so terribly alone.
When I close my eyes,
I go back to that place.

A sad, small girl, sitting
unchosen on the bench,
not asked to play the game.

Walking by the house
where I spent the Christmas Eve's of my youth.
That house is now empty,
devoid of the happiness and laughter
that once filled it.

Sitting on a stool in my room,
tears streaming down my face.
Another one has chosen another.
I am left alone.

An empty room.
A desert island.
A yearning to talk,
When no one is there to listen.

The Drive

by *Anne Lynn Miedema*

My hands grip the wheel as I roll along
the empty highway and my mind wanders
as broken yellow lines pass behind.
Miles go by as I head home and blast music
to drone out thoughts of problems past.
I press on the gas and feel the freedom
of a simple drive.
I am getting closer to relief with each passing second.
I can feel home rushing toward me,
along with the hope of worry-free days.
There are no problems at home.
There is only the open space that whispers my name
and brings me the peace I need.

blind and hateful

by *Andrew Fischer*

a cowboy walks
into the grocery store
hard skin, white with calluses
Gray whiskers prickle on his cheeks
black hat rests on a tired face.

he idles through the aisles
cart rolling like a four wheel steed
carrying tomato juice,
kidney beans, hamburger.

belt buckle the size of texas
shines silver in the reflection
of my eye—he towers over me

a deep, strong voice
“where are bananas? milk?
the bathrooms?”

i stare and Answer
and stare some more,
my eyes a magnet
to the truth of his
sexuality

blind to acceptance
like other north dakota natives
i cannot peel away

i listen to battering,
condescending torts and
fail to deny them

the epitome
of ‘cowboy’
has ended now
with You

10:50 a.m.

by *Levi Westerhausen*

Do you remember that night
When you asked me who all I liked
And I said that was all...but I lied
It was different at that time
You had your life, I had mine
I thought it was all just in my mind
Now I find, that's not true
You just left, I truly miss you

So I drove down to Sioux Falls
Looked you up at Grand Island Hall
The moment I walked in and saw your smile
I knew the trip had been worthwhile

Where have you been my entire life?
And why didn't I realize this last night?

10:50 a.m.

We spent the day at the radio
Harmonica solos and Ben Folds
Walking in Memphis, Damien Rice
Until later on that same night
I told you how I felt and you looked at me
When I was done you told your story
I was so amazed I thought I'd cry
And I saw that tear drop from you eye

In my dream
I just hold you
I can't wait
For it to come true
For me and you
Me and you

Clean

by *Stephanie Trautman*

Rain falls on my face
attempting to wash me clean.
I feel dirty.
Your words coat me,
cover me and all that I am.
With your words upon my body
I cannot truly be myself.
I want them washed away.

I went out in the rain today,
ran around
looking for my innocence,
The innocence you stripped me of.
I'm covered still.
It rains harder.
My hair soaks up the drops.
I put my arms out and welcome the tears of the sky.
I turn my head up towards the clouds.
They are gray and sad,
just like my heart.
The sky cries,
as do I.
I feel cleansed by these tears.
Cleansed by my tears.

Then I go inside
and once again, I am dirty.
Dirty with the words
that you have placed upon my heart, mind and soul.

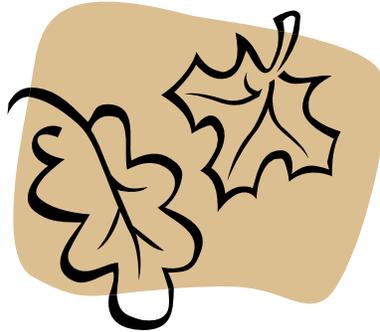
Step-Life

by *Shelly Witt*

Like a rubber band
A circle is made of one piece,
Each end waiting for manipulation,
stretched, pulled beyond recognition
until a union is made.
Forced to become one; basic features are
distorted,
But awkwardly functional.
Gradually the bonds start to break down.
Little reactions tug on the
initial security.
Around and around it wraps tighter
as awkwardness takes on deep
troublesome blue. Elasticity once
abundant disappears to nonexistent.
Bonds break into
hundreds of pieces scattered
on a fast paced
road.

Leaf on my Windshield

by *Justin Stangler*



Free from your arboreal loft,
And tired of riding the whim of a fickle wind,
You stick, cling, hold fast to my windshield.

The pace of the car increases and you flail about,
But never yielding your grip.
What are you smiling at my brown, weathered friend?
Could it be my last, futile attempt with the wiper has inspired your elation?

Your Spartan efforts are exemplary for all human measure.
Mutual respect is garnered and given.
Say what you will, you have my attention.
The patient ear has yielded to your persistence.

However, my view is eclipsed and it is time to go.
Do find another domicile;
For my expletives cannot stick to my tongue as
Easily as you stick to my glass.

A wipe, a swipe and a coarse goodbye,
Finally your resolve is broken and we part.
I shall never forget you, importunate leaf. Spirit of Alamo!
No doubt, someday, I will find you stuck to my shoe!

400 Meter Run

by *Andrew Fischer*

One thousand fans
on their feet,
hands are walls to their mouth,
yelling their loudest.
the track— a sun,
the air— steam
floating off the inner football field.
Sweat drips
into the corner of his
squinting eye
until his face relaxes.
His feet are on fire
as he rounds the bend
on the inside lane
in third place.
Legs are logs,
eyes on the runner
in front of him.
A parabola flings
him around both
leaders with one hundred
meters to go.
Arms pumping,
hands grabbing empty air
as if it will make him faster,
he Grabs his soul,
tells himself
he has the most guts.

Eye the finish line.
Deaf to the crowd.
Veer back to the inside lane.
Don't look back.
Dig deeper.
Leave every squint
of energy on that track.
Lean late
don't get passed,
lean late
don't stumble.
Cross the white line,
fall to the ground,
and Rejoice in Victory.

Kyle

by *Stephanie Trautman*

His lazy blue eyes gaze at me,
they appear down turned, mostly
because of his long, thick eyelashes.
His strong, broad shoulders
give me a sense of safety, security.
He raises his left arm, and his eyes move from my face,
to gaze sideways at his shoulder.
A flicker of disappointment crosses his eyes,
his shoulder, ravaged by a baseball injury,
does not move with the ease that it once did.
But just as soon as that disappointment appeared,
it vanishes and he once again gazes at me with
happy, adoring eyes.
A crooked smile appears on his face
and he begins to tell me a story, a familiar story.
His stories are always familiar though.
As he talks to me, I notice again
that his cap matches his shirt,
like it does everyday.



Ivel

by *Danielle Kurtz*
Photography

Crooked Crosses

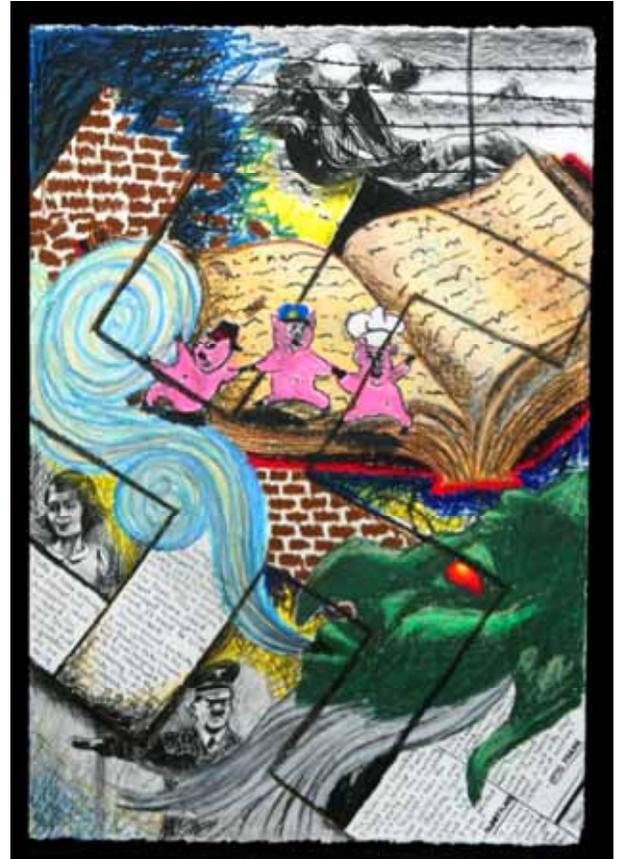
by *Angela Uwadiogwu*

Sixty-six years ago they sailed
over public streets in tainted
garments of white.
A few prophets
may have seen the awkwardly
bent arms
and legs of a wailing,
dying Christ.

I wish I were one
of those crooked crosses
gracing the plain
walls of
secular homes
and hanging on balcony rails—
or even better, draping the shelves
in hell with no hope of resurrection.
See the strategy maps of awe,
and pendulous bulbs in dim
tombs.

I wish
delusional, loving eyes
and flattened saluting fingers would worship me,
shimmer wondrously behind the lethal gas;
I wish I could tower safely high
above the massacred grounds
filled with rancid carcass and
fresh, bomb splinters. I wish I could be
elusive and knowing as the crooked crosses.

But I don't wish to be any of those symbols that
people long before Christ hung
with hopes in their old, fawn colored
homes, facing
the direction of the sun
while their childlike, patient faces
waited for good fortune.



Fairy Tales of War- Holocaust

by *Trista Williams*

Oil Pastel and Charcoal Pencil

2nd Place--Drawing

Seven Poems

by *Scarlet Gray*

A VCSU alum ('03), Scarlet Gray is currently pursuing her Masters degree at UND, and graciously allowed The Forge to publish some of her latest work.

A Scholar's Notes to a Distant Lover

I

How can I concentrate?
Despite my fighting, you
repeatedly penetrate
my thoughts, and my body
is jealous.

But I must wait
two more days until
the weekend to see you;
two more years until
our wedding night to have you –
too much time to write
more bad poetry to you.

II

They used to bother me:
the cute couples standing close,
holding hands, kissing –
but now it is my turn to be
disgustingly in love,
and they only bother me now
when I am missing you.

III

You make me curse
my solid state: I want
to melt in your arms,
let my love flow around you;
glow like ionized gas,
be a flashing neon light
proclaiming myself yours.
You make me buoyant
as helium – I do
strange things to your voice
as you breathe me in
and we float away.

Breakfast in Bed

He peels an orange in bed to feed his love.
She laughs as he holds slices up above
for her to nip at like a playful pup.
She tells him then she'll never give him up,
and he reminds her, as he's tried to warn
her from the start, that someday she may mourn
the day she gave away her heart – "Never,"
she says, and asks him, "How could we ever
regret the hours we've spent engaged in talk
to learn each other, trying to read each thought
that lights our eyes and glimpse each other's mind?
And though you might enlist, and we could find
that separation hard, I think it's worse
to never know such love except through verse."

Life Story

My life –

A shitty first draft scribbled on a page;

a discovery draft for no eyes but mine
to read and revise as I struggle
to find words and devise
a reasonable end. But

then the page falls
into your hands –

"Mind if I take a look?"

I let you read me, and you actually like
what you see. You become my editor, helping me cut out the crap and work with what I
have, find focus and form,

all the while complicating
the plot, weaving in another story line -

yours.

The Deputy's Daughter

The daughter of a deputy sheriff learns things – simple tricks of self defense, how to make a grown man cry, and that she should dismiss an attacker's injuries as his occupational hazard.

She'll know how to gage the nearness of Christmas when the number of domestic violence calls rises.

She'll know many of the city and county officers by name and badge number, how to interpret parts of "10 code," and how to identify a possible DUI.

She'll hear about busting up high schoolers' prairie parties, what it's like to do undercover investigations, and what it's like to clean up after a fatal accident or enter a home after its owner blows his own brains out in the bathroom.

She knows her dad is never really off duty, and that he doesn't have to be in a squad car to stop someone, but can be on a bike ride with his kids or driving in the family car, and she knows what it's like to be subpoenaed as a 12-year-old when in such cases the offender tries to fight the citation.

She'll have ridden in the front of a squad car, been in the jail but not *in* jail, and have seen and maybe held Ziploc bags of things that would make a junkie drool.

She knows the names of guys she could never ever date, and knows that her boyfriend was initially suspect because his younger brother was a known "little puke."

She knows what it's like to be the target of bitter comments or petty vandalism because her dad was doing his job.

She knows what it's like to take extra home security measures because a man just broke out of jail and might come after the deputy who put him there.

She knows when there's been a recent rape because the number of her dad's lectures on being careful when coming home late from campus increases.

And she knows that if she hears such cautions a hundred times and gets pepper spray as a first-apartment housewarming gift, it's not so much out of paranoia as concern.

On Lakota Thunder at the Medicine Wheel Park in Valley City, North Dakota, Autumnal Equinox 2002

The drum they beat, I feel it in my self,
an echo of my heart and that of all
the teeming life on earth; a primal pulse
that shakes my very core; its wild call
transports me back in time to start of life.
The song they sing, I feel it in my soul,
a primitive cry infused with human strife,
and yet it's full of praise for Earth, and hope –
The tears that blur my eyes mix grief and joy
as I stand 'round the circle of rocks and souls
who gather to reflect upon this day
on time, on life, on duty and family roles.
They drum, they sing, they tell us to take heed:
We often take for granted what we need.

Falling

Leaves drop, a golden rain
steadily trickling from the trees,
yet many still remain to rustle
softly in the breeze as it weaves
in and out the branchy maze.

So many leaves cling doggedly,
but in time all yellow falls,
leaves the azure autumn sky,
gilds the ground. and crawls
en molten wind-blown masse.

And the regular rasp of leaves
on grass and streets provides
a constant whisper of farewell
as our summer's shade retreats
from the places where they fell.

Winterkilled

Winter wind-blown leaf,
amber relic of autumn
resting on a snowdrift—
your dull brown
contrasts sharply
with vibrant white.

Blown by breezes,
you escaped the wrath
of leaf-raking humans
so your corpse may
now lie triumphant
on the glittering white
that killed you.