



# Guidelines and Policies

*Freelancer* is an annual publication of the Amarillo College English Department designed to showcase student, faculty, and staff writing of all kinds. Winning entries from the Amarillo College English Department Writer's Roundup contest are also included. A new issue is published each spring.

*Freelancer* invites submissions from AC students, faculty, and staff. You may send us original poetry, short stories, essays, reflections, etc. Submissions may be emailed to a staff member, given to a member of the English Department, or delivered to the English Writing Lab in Ordway 101. We would prefer to receive an electronic copy of each work, either saved on a disk or emailed as an attachment. Submissions must have a name and contact information on them. To be published in *Freelancer*, submissions must be accepted by staff majority vote.

Each submission becomes the property of *Freelancer* until after publication of the issue it appears in, when rights revert to the author. Submissions will not be returned unless accompanied by the author's request and a self-addressed stamped envelope. All submitted works must be original and unpublished.

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# Table of Contents

Contributors This Issue .....	2
A Fashionable Death .....	5
Tory VanDamme .....	5
Zinnias .....	6
Sally Evans .....	6
Breathless .....	7
Kelly Laxson .....	7
Sweetheart .....	9
Frank Sobey .....	9
A Brief Trip into the Existential .....	10
Audra Vela .....	10
Online Class .....	11
Jeffrey C. Purdy .....	11
Leave Me On the Lake .....	12
Jeremy Hill .....	12
Life .....	14
Barbara Logan .....	14
The Maestro .....	15
Sally Evans .....	15
Gathering the Firewood .....	16
Frank Sobey .....	16
The Shattered Mandible .....	17
Anthony Wright .....	17
The Smith .....	22
Jeffrey C. Purdy .....	22
Deadlines .....	23
Cindy Maggiulli .....	23
Adam and Eve .....	24
Allison Harmony .....	24

Interior Design and Medical Malpractice: An Analysis of the Oppressed Narrator in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall-Paper” . . . . .	25
Tory VanDamme . . . . .	25
The Girl Next Door: A Change in Perspective from the 1950s to Present Day . . . . .	29
Kelley Henderson . . . . .	29
Nora Helmer: Journey into a Doll’s Mind . . . . .	34
Crystal Dillman . . . . .	34
To the Evangelical Poster Child Who is a Shadow of My Former Self: A Love Letter (Grand Prize Winner) . . . . .	40
Kelly Laxson . . . . .	40
The Ship (1 <sup>st</sup> Place Sophomore) . . . . .	43
Lesandra Botello . . . . .	43
Ms. S(1 <sup>ST</sup> Place Freshman) . . . . .	44
James Baker . . . . .	44
Stella’s Story (1 <sup>st</sup> Place Winner) . . . . .	47
Angela Chickering . . . . .	47

## A Fashionable Death

by Tory VanDamme

She plastered her walls with photos  
of stick figures with pretty faces  
decorated in couture.

The note on the refrigerator  
hung just below the padlock:  
“skinny is beautiful.”

Officer Day found her sprawled  
on the floor of her efficiency—  
a skeleton with flesh

by a new issue of *Vogue*  
on the coffee table  
beside an empty Diet Coke.

The coroner's report  
called it a natural death.

## Zinnias

by Sally Evans

I talked to my zinnias today  
about marriages that end  
and children who cry  
and the pain that lies on humanity  
like a stone on petals,  
but they didn't care.

They just tilted their pollen-puckered faces  
toward the sun and laughed,  
waiting for that one last diamond-backed dewdrop  
to splash and splatter its way  
across their velveteen tongues,  
flowing streamlined green  
down to the earth.

This one zinnia moment  
dissolved my diatribe into  
truth I had known all along:  
Life is to be lived  
one dewdrop at a time.

## Breathless

By Kelly Laxson

I start my car.

I reach up and mindlessly connect my seatbelt. I peer over my shoulder, and I ease out of my parking space. Instead of my usual left, I take a right and head away from town, from everything, from everyone.

For a while, the cars blind me as the sun bounces off their windshields. But, more and more, they begin to disappear and the road becomes mine. I have no destination in mind. There is no map, no plan. I just drive. I feel scattered and tired, and the late afternoon sun soothes me. The radio is off, and the only sound I hear is the sweet breeze as I drift down the back roads.

I am feeling calm, silent, and alone. I am not lonely. I drive until the road demands I stop. I get out of the car and I look around, squinting down the road. I feel aware of the minimal space surrounding me. I recognize this moment is fleeting. For once, I have been allowed a reprieve, a pause, a comma.

I am empty in this place. I am not working out my salvation with fear and trembling. I do not hear the demands of my co-dependent boss. Phones are silent here and my e-mail inbox has disappeared. Nothing exists. I have no past and no future. I close my eyes, and I breathe deeply through my nose and exhale heavily through my mouth. I am present and alive in this beautiful, healing, hopeful moment. My throat catches, and I feel overwhelmed. A tear slides down my cheek, and I make no move to hide it. All my longings rush forward, and I feel myself both broken and redeemed. I breathe in once more, and I open my eyes.



I hear a car approaching, and I blink hard against the suddenly harsh sun. I stare resentfully as the intruder passes by, and I sigh. As soon as it began, it is ending. My moment is fading, and I feel a chill in the summer air. I clench my hands, desperate, pleading, but it is done.

I get back in my car, and after a moment, I mindfully connect my seatbelt. I reluctantly pull onto the road and head back the way I came. The road is congested with those rushing home for dinner, for the television, for nothing and no one. They regard me casually at the stoplight, and I pretend not to notice. Turning onto my street, my head begins to ache dully, and I rub my temples. I pull into my numbered space and cut the engine. I roll up my window and unclasp my seatbelt. I get out of the car and head inside the house.

They never even noticed I was gone.

## Sweetheart

by Frank Sobey

I wrote my first poem for you  
in the card aisle  
where I thumbed through sentiment  
like a stupefied scholar.

You smiled  
at my earnest pose  
as you would a heart-shaped box  
of orange-crème chocolates.

At least you kept it  
pressed like petals in a book.

Eventually I learned  
to pluck clichés from the red bloom  
of my words, leaving  
only the stem and thorns.

But you did not smile  
at those poems.

You even said, *I prefer gilded  
to gelded.*

Thus I am returned  
to the honeyed aisle  
to bring you what is yours.

## **A Brief Trip into the Existential**

by Audra Vela

Over the whirring of the copier  
I plop pages down upon the glass  
and look away from the light  
as the birth and death of someone  
I've never met is transferred to a set  
of zeros and ones.  
Looking briefly into the light I wonder—  
who will copy down my life in the end?

## Online Class

by Jeffrey C. Purdy

Old guard loathe to embrace  
    This foreign way  
    This future pace

No way to keep control  
    To steer debate  
    To govern flow

Junior ranks advance the march  
    To destined fate  
    To quench the parch

Instinctively entwined with tech  
    This age survives  
    This online trek

## Leave Me On the Lake

by Jeremy Hill

I have always thought that hobbies and relaxing going hand-in-hand. Golfing forever changed that opinion. I was approached by a buddy to give up a weekend at the lake and to join him for a couple rounds of golf. That was my mistake. I soon realized the things I enjoyed so much about fishing were absent from golf. Fishing offers a controlled pace, a chance to escape from everyday life, and an environment that is non-frustrating to me; golfing is the polar opposite.

Relaxing is important to me. I work hard at my job and relish the time away from the daily toil. I was promised by my buddy that golf would offer me a great opportunity to get out and shake off the daily routine. That was a statement I still put zero faith into. If I wanted to get my blood pressure up and feel like yelling, I could just stay at work. Golfing is one of the most frustrating things I have ever experienced. Golfing requires hitting a little white ball five hundred yards into a small hole that sits in the middle of a green. This thing called a green is really something that resembles a frozen pond, with dramatic elevation changes. I also failed to mention it is surrounded by sand. No thank you! My idea of sand is throwing a lure from my boat at a sandy beach and retrieving it back methodically, waiting for the lunker of a lifetime to inhale my lure. In golf I have to worry about your slice or hook. The only hook I should be concerned with is the one tied to the end of my fishing line.

I have always felt my hobbies should allow me time to escape the things from daily life that make me feel I should escape. Golfing puts me right back into the heart of it. Take Amarillo Country Club, for example. This golf course is in the heart of the city, just off of 6<sup>th</sup> Street. There is a fire station that sits directly across the street. This is not

just a fire station, but the busiest one-company station in the city. Listening to a fire truck scream up and down the street, waiting for the little blue-haired lady in front of me, and riding around on a sidewalk in an over-manicured city park is not the atmosphere that lets me escape. These are all things I am exposed to on a daily basis. Give me my boat, a fishing pole, an empty cove, and now I am in therapy. This is my way of lying on a leather sofa and letting everything go. Golfing gives me more issues to need therapy over. There is something about being in a rural setting, with my own agenda at hand, that is appealing to me. I am surrounded by God's natural beauty. Many times I will see turkey frolicking on the shore or deer scampering away from the sound of my lure slapping the surface of the water. Golfing does not offer this to me.

It took me only a few golf outings, but I figured it out. There is a reason for a beer cart on a golf course. I also know why there are camping spots at the lake. The beer cart offers an escape from where you are, and the campground offers you more time to stay. I look forward to many more years of fishing. I am also looking forward to my next garage sale. Maybe selling those clubs will give me enough cash for some new lures.

## Life

by Barbara Logan

I saw the old porch today  
where we spent  
that whole summer  
sitting on the dark bench  
planning our futures  
and what was to be.

We would lead brazen lives—  
squander our riches  
on frivolous things,  
ride a raft through  
a cold raging river,  
yell at matadors flinging  
their sharp swords,  
watch jungle tigers  
sleeping in their lairs,  
climb mountain peaks  
and etch our names in stone.

I have traded  
my passport for life.  
Children now swing  
from the tree in the yard.  
Laundry and dishes fill my day.

When time allows  
I stare out the window  
and slip back to that summer  
on the porch.

## The Maestro

by Sally Evans

I love the symphony.  
The rhythms of Bach and Beethoven  
waltz with my soul a dance of  
order and symmetry.  
The music reminds me that there is  
good in the world,  
balance and depth that I forget  
in the discord of life.

We all become children  
behind the Maestro.  
Sitting pretty in our bow-tied sophistication  
and our low-cut velvet longing  
we are reduced to infancy,  
a primitive place of raw  
orchestrated feeling.

And we remember.  
The cello calls us back to the sturdy arms of motherlove,  
rocking us long into the black night  
and the violin returns that wonder of first love  
in all its undulating variance.

We look oh so composed  
in the face of this decomposition,  
all except the boy in front of me—  
blond curly head tilted up toward the sound,  
dressed in a black stiff suit,  
shirt starched white and spine coached straight.  
He alone reveals what we all are —  
children trying to be grown.  
A heartbreaking stretch of flesh  
beneath pant-cuff bottom and tops of socks too short  
whispers the awful truth of vulnerability,  
uncovered humanity, naked and ashamed  
before Bach and Beethoven  
and the Maestro.



## Gathering the Firewood

by Frank Sobey

He steps into the morning thaw  
    coffee in hand  
and kicks at the dusting of snow  
on the firewood he gathered  
    only the night before

Now all he thinks about  
is his wife before dawn  
    stepping out of her bath  
to steam and candlelight  
    leaving her robe behind her  
    on the floor

On mornings like this  
the food grows cold  
    while the children wait

## The Shattered Mandible

by Anthony Wright

2:00 P.M.

Tobias Kern climbs up on a picnic table, spreads his arms like a flying squirrel, and leans forward as slowly as possible until he is overtaken by gravity and plummets face first to the ground, like a can of beans off of the top shelf.

“You’ll never be able to fly,” his friend Herbert Conroy tells him. “You’re not a bird.”

“Birds aren’t the only ones who can fly,” says Tobias, rubbing his forehead. “What about bats and bees?”

Herbert snorts. “You’re not a bat or a bee either.”

“Never mind that,” says Tobias. “Besides, I did too fly. You just didn’t notice because I didn’t do it for that long.”

“I know you didn’t do it that long, because you didn’t do it at all,” Herbert says in disgust. “You fell straight to the ground. You’ve got a big chunk of mud on your nose.”

Tobias pulls his shirt up and wipes his nose. “You don’t know anything about flight, Herbert. I may not be good at landing yet, but I know I felt myself fly. You just didn’t see because you were too busy worrying about hearing the whistle blow. I can tell. You’re so scared you’ll miss it. You’re afraid you’re gonna be late lining back up and you’ll have to stand at the wall tomorrow with Miss Jan.”

“I am not,” Herbert says defensively. “But even if I was, what does that have to do with anything? Just because I was listening for a whistle doesn’t mean I couldn’t watch you at the same time.”

“Birds and bats don’t go to school, Herbert. They don’t go to piano lessons, they don’t go to daycare, and they never wake up early unless they want to.”

Herbert looks angry and perplexed.

“You’re gonna have to learn to live on your own time if you ever expect to fly, Herbert,” said Tobias.

“You’re stupid,” says Herbert. “And you’ve still got mud on your nose.”

2:06 P.M.

Jan, the playground attendant, looks down at her legs and remembers when they were smooth and tan. Now they’re pale and covered in varicose veins. How did her youth escape her? She used to look so good in hot pants and Lycra, and now she has a hard time squeezing into a size 15. Her mind drifts back to the summer of 1977.

It seems like a foggy dream now, like something she watched from the outside. She was 17, Saturday Night Fever had just come out, and she was dating Lenny Stevenson. He came to pick her up in his red 1972 Dodge Charger. As he smoked a cigarette, his shaggy blond hair blew in the breeze. When she heard that engine rev, she ran downstairs and straight for the front door, leaving a trail of cheap perfume behind her. “That boy drives too damn fast!” Her dad yelled through the screen door as she hopped into the passenger seat. She watched her father shake his head in disgust as Lenny squealed the tires and sped off into the warm summer night. They went dancing until 1 or 2. Then they drove around for a while until they ended up parking somewhere, probably down by the lake where the sewer drained. They drank a few beers that Lenny stole from his Dad. As always, Lenny ran out of jokes right as Jan’s whole body began to feel tingly and warm. They coaxed the sun up with the sound of soft kisses and giggling.

Jan looks back up at the playground. She would give anything to go back to 1977. She contemplates blowing her whistle ten minutes early, just to make the little brats suffer the feeling of lost time. She thinks better of it when she realizes that the teachers will complain to the principal that their planning periods were cut short by the playground attendant. Better to save the spite for a substitute.

She looks at the sun and wishes it were covered with clouds.

She looks at the “I love you” card that Curtis Arden made for her. “Now there’s a sex offender in-the-making,” she thinks to herself.

She looks at the ground beneath the slides and swing sets and wishes that it would turn to lava. She imagines the Earth splitting open, and all of those impish little faces, with their Kool-Aid mustaches and unkempt hair, disappearing into the churning red-orange liquid. Just one last time those fifty squealing voices would melt together into one impossibly shrill frequency, until the ground closed up and there was nothing left but Jan, her memories of Lenny Stevenson, and the lingering smell of burnt flesh. Jan chuckled to herself and whispered the word “macabre.” She always liked the way that word sounded.

2:11 P.M.

For the past three weeks, Curtis Arden has spent his break time perched on top of the monkey bars. At first, other children attempted to share the monkey bars with Curtis, but he just spit at them and told them to go away. Curtis was bored with all the other children. They said stupid things that weren’t true, like “My Dad can build anything,” and “For Christmas Santa’s gonna bring me an X-Box.” Curtis knew that no one could build *anything*. He also knew that Santa wasn’t real. If Santa was so magical and real, then why would he give kids toys that their parents could just buy them in stores? Why didn’t he give things like X-ray goggles and flying skateboards? If

Curtis got a pair of X-ray goggles for Christmas, then he might consider believing in Santa. He couldn't understand why none of the other kids realized what a bunch of dupes they were. It seemed like common sense.

Curtis fixes his gaze on Miss Jan. She's staring at the ground and half-smiling. He hopes that she's thinking about the card he made for her, but then he feels embarrassed and tells himself that she probably isn't. Curtis feels like Miss Jan doesn't like him as much as he likes her.

He shifts his attention to the center of the playground where Tobias and Herbert are standing by the seesaw arguing about something.

"Idiots," he thinks to himself.

He watches Tobias sit on the seesaw while making commanding gestures at Herbert. Curtis loses interest. Of all the kids on the playground, he thinks that Tobias is the dumbest.

As Curtis's attention shifts back to Miss Jan, Herbert sprints toward the seesaw and takes a flying leap into the air. He latches his hands onto the upended seat of the seesaw, pulling it down to the ground with all of the slam-dunk-like force he can muster. At the exact same time, Tobias throws his arms up in a feeble attempt to launch himself into the air. The sudden force throws him off-balance. His whole body lurches forward and he lets out a loud yelp as his teeth bash against the cold metal of the seesaw. Curtis swings back around just as Tobias crashes back down to the ground, barely conscious, his mouth full of blood. Herbert looks terrified and runs off toward the portable on the opposite end of the school yard.

Curtis looks at the stream of red coming down Tobias's cheek and winces. When Curtis lost his first tooth, he couldn't help but notice how strange the blood tasted, almost like metal. His mother told him that it tasted that way because blood has

iron in it. He wonders if that's true. He curses himself for turning his head right as Tobias's face hit the seesaw. He imagines the blood shooting off in all directions like a geyser of tiny rubies. He has never seen that happen in real life, but he's seen it quite a bit in movies. Miss Jan has finally opened her eyes and is rushing toward Tobias. Curtis wonders why it is so easy to miss the good stuff. He jumps down from the monkey bars and runs toward the seesaw to help Miss Jan.

## The Smith

by Jeffrey C. Purdy

He toils in ideas  
with no solid form—  
    hammers out his soul.

Embers glow.  
The cauldron is hot.  
Ideas thunderclap  
    and unfinished go.

Sweat pours from his feverish brow.  
Bones break, teeth gnash—  
    his crashing coming closer,  
    closer to an end.

Take the pain and madness.  
Let it flow like molten lead.

Still these damnable forms taunt and tease.

He begs to be set free.  
So he hammers, hammers.

The iron glows white, then red—  
    flesh seared to the bone,  
    ideas annealed in hope.

Mind numb,  
he must keep hammering.

A multitude of thoughts crash  
    like waves after the storm  
    on the crags of his mind:

now stuck like a tooth in mud.

Fist raised skywards, let it flow.  
    Release him from this vulture  
    picking at his flesh. Still he

hammers, hammers,

    and from his forge cannot go.

## Deadlines

by Cindy Maggiulli

All those written words  
Begun, belabored, bemused  
That could be, now,  
So well used  
Reused, ill-used, and penciled through

Who knew they could turn out so useful  
For class, for class...to meet  
That class  
Deadline

That ever-hovering  
Ever-present, (non-repentant), deadline  
Of one sort, resort, a consort  
Of one kind  
Or another  
That press-press pressure  
Cooker: Life



## **Adam and Eve**

by Allison Harmony

Succulent fruit, a meal of malice  
But a meal of the maker.  
Drips and drops of draining juice  
Newborn teeth knowing  
On the skin and flesh  
Of innovation.

Sweet Nectar rushing down throats,  
This blood, this knowledge,  
In the blood of all  
From the first artists.

**Interior Design and Medical Malpractice: An Analysis of the Oppressed Narrator  
in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper"**

by Tory VanDamme

The narrator's downward spiral toward insanity in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story "The Yellow Wall-Paper" is the perfect example of how society seeks to oppress individuals that refuse to conform to the acceptable norms. During a time when women's roles were clearly defined, a woman like the narrator, who enjoyed writing and possessed a vivid imagination, did not fit into the stereotypical role of a wife and mother. In their attempt to reform the narrator to society's norms, her husband, John, along with her brother and sister-in-law, turn her into a victim of such oppression by imprisoning her both physically and mentally, making insanity her only option for escape.

In the beginning of the story, the narrator establishes herself as a sensible woman who is suffering from an illness that her husband and brother, both physicians, refuse to acknowledge. Both men have come to the conclusion that she is suffering from a "temporary nervous depression" that can only be cured by isolation and separation from anything intellectually or creatively stimulating (78). The narrator expresses that she "disagree[s] with their ideas" and thinks "congenial work....would do me good" (78). By making statements such as these throughout the beginning of the story, she demonstrates that she is capable of rational thought and hints at the unwillingness of the men in her life to accept that fact. She believes that her illness could be overcome if she "had less opposition and more society and stimulus" (79). She

recognizes, to some degree, that she is being oppressed and attempts to fight her oppressors by continuing to write and express herself, despite their objections.

After the narrator moves into the room with the yellow wallpaper, her struggle to overcome her illness and her oppressors is increased. She is confined to the room, left alone for hours under strict orders from her husband to avoid stimulating activities. She writes as often as she feels able to because she believes that writing helps to “relieve the press of ideas and rest me” (81). She knows that she needs a creative outlet to keep herself sane, but out of fear of her husband’s reaction, she writes less often and keeps her work hidden. She begins studying the design of the wallpaper, a task she can perform often and without fear of punishment, to keep herself occupied and her mind active.

As time progresses in the story, and the narrator’s husband and sister-in-law show no sign of giving up on their mission to “cure” her, she discovers that she is no longer able to find satisfaction in the mere studying of the wallpaper. Her subconscious mind is determined to keep her from submitting to the will of her oppressors and stifling her creativity, even if that means losing touch with reality. Her mind begins to project images of her own situation into the pattern of the wallpaper in an attempt to open up her conscious mind to her situation and provoke her to fight her oppressors. At night the outer pattern “becomes bars” with a woman trapped behind them (86). The woman in the wallpaper “takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard” and “is all the time trying to climb through” (88). Although the narrator doesn’t realize it, the woman she sees trapped inside the wallpaper is herself, and the bars represent her husband and the others who are confining her and suppressing her creativity.

By the end of the story, it becomes obvious that the narrator’s fear of her oppressors is stronger than her conscious will to fight for her freedom and right to self-

expression. She admits that she is “getting a little afraid of John” and fears he may send her away to an institution (86-87). She continues to hide her thoughts and feelings, only occasionally expressing them through her writings. This act of suppression eventually leads to her loss of sanity. She allows her subconscious mind to take over and throw away all the reason and rationality that she possesses. She claims that she has “got out at last, in spite of you and Jane” (91). She frees herself from her all of her oppressors, including the part of herself that struggled to deny the existence of a creative being within herself.

The narrator, like most people, needs creativity and self-expression to survive. The husband and other family members’ attempts to deny her that right because she does not “fit” into her role in society were not only unsuccessful, but also cause the narrator to go insane.

## Works Cited

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wall-Paper." Introduction to Literature. Custom Ed. Pearson Custom Publishing, 2006. 78-91.

## **The Girl Next Door: A Change in Perspective from the 1950s to Present Day**

by Kelley Henderson

The stereotype of "the girl next door" has existed for decades in American society, but its definition has changed from a dutiful, pearl-wearing, soon-to-be lady into a tanned, semi-plastic, scantily-clad party girl. Why did girls start idolizing Pamela Anderson and Paris Hilton instead of Doris Day and their own mothers? The media and a surprising majority of men in this society voice their opinions for what women should desire to look like through the booming business of pornography and the continuous news coverage of starlets such as Britney Spears, Lindsey Lohan, and the above-mentioned Paris Hilton. Despite this drastic culture shift from the 1950s to the present, many ideas about the "girl next door" have remained the same while the outward traits expected of the women who fill these roles have changed with the times.

On the surface, Doris Day and Pamela Anderson do not appear to share many attributes. But in their success, each of these women represents what society has valued in women at different times in American history. An article on [filmreference.com](http://filmreference.com) states that "a Doris Day film was consistent with, and a kind of vindication of, 1950s and early 1960s versions of the ideal woman" (Walsh and Pardi). Doris Day illustrates where American society stood in the fifties and sixties concerning women. Modern author Chuck Klosterman essentially voices the same opinion about Pamela Anderson and the current generation when he states in his book [Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs](#) that "if someone wanted to use Pam [Anderson] as a metaphor for the decline of American morality and the vapidness of modern relationships, they could point out that phrase [where are we?] as an illuminating example of a lost generation . . . we don't need Pam to know where she is; she helps us understand where *we* are" (84). These

two women play the same role within their separate societies, but the media designates which qualities that role must include. Doris Day and Pamela Anderson may portray similar concepts to their respective generations, but the specific characteristics they must present to uphold their images vary immensely.

For Doris Day, the "girl next door" had to be ". . . bright , carefree, resilient, honest, caring, tough when she had to be, nobody's fool, unfailingly optimistic . . . [and] pretty" (Walsh and Pardi). She also had to be a virgin, though she could flirt and was popular with the guys as well as girls. The women of her day grabbed ahold of that ideology and mimicked it, not just because they wanted to be like Doris Day, but because they wanted to be liked in the same way that Doris Day was liked. If Doris Day embodied what men wanted, and if women wanted to be desired by men, then the logical conclusion (perpetuated by the media) was to be a Doris Day. On the other hand, a new phenomenon developed in the late eighties and early nineties that elevated a new kind of role model. As Madonna was promoting sexual freedom and the use of sex as power, the internet was just being developed and promoted for personal use. Sexually explicit women had been working their way into the mainstream for quite a while, but with the onset of the internet, the "new woman" became more sexual and more explicit than ever before, prompting Chuck Klosterman to pose, sarcastically, the question, "When exactly did every housewife in America become a whore?" (109). A few pages later, Klosterman notes that "with computer pornography . . . the surfer is hoping to see the 'girl next door' in an almost literal sense" (114). With these images now easily accessible and increasingly acceptable in society, women are striving toward a "girl next door" stereotype that looks more like a pornographic film than a musical comedy, and younger and younger generations are picking up on this shift.

Despite criticism of their wild, sexy, party-driven lifestyles, celebrities such as Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, and Lindsay Lohan still command enormous followings of pre-teen and teenage girls. Egged on by equally large amounts of media coverage, society follows these stars' journeys in and out of clubs, rehab facilities, and police stations. In a FoxNews.com article "Girl Culture Begets Backlash," younger girls who mimic scandalous celebrities are known as "prostitots." "It's those girls at the mall with the tight jeans and belly shirts. They're in between the age group of 10 to 13 or 14 . . . the media tell you that this is what you have to look like to get boys to like you and be a member of the popular crowd," says Anna Miressi in her interview for the article (qtd. in Wereszynski). The truth in these statements is that the media dictates what men should want and what women should strive to achieve in order to gain the affections of men. Marty Beckerman, author of Generation S.L.U.T.: A Brutal Feel-Up Session With Today's Sex-Crazed Adolescent Populace, says, "The stuff coming from prepubescent children was really pretty shocking. These kids are talking about doing everything under the sun" (qtd. in Wereszynski). This statement reveals the reality that girls of all ages not only change their appearance to correspond to media icons, but they also alter their behavior and even sacrifice their morality to re-enact the lives of the celebrities they adore. The entertainment business shamelessly promotes the perpetuation of this new "girl next door" with movies and television shows echoing that very phrase. The 2004 movie Girl Next Door tells the story of a young boy (Emile Hirsch) who develops an obsessive crush on his new next-door neighbor, an ex porn star (Elisha Cuthbert). Through this strange relationship, a number of porn stars are brought into the lives of Hirsch and his friends, fulfilling every one of their social fantasies. Shows like this and the similarly named reality show Girls Next Door on E! Entertainment Television, featuring Hugh Hefner and three of his Playboy Bunny girlfriends, tell young boys,



grown men, young girls, and grown women all to settle for nothing less than porno-quality perfection.

Activists of the mid-sixties to late seventies sought to eradicate the oppressive "girl next door" stereotype in favor of strong women who could speak their minds and seek out their dreams. Is this new "girl next door" what these activists envisioned? If women viewed Doris Day's sweet, innocent, marriage-seeking ideal as suffocating and fake, then women today must experience the same stifling expectations to be the erotic, sexual, brainless "Barbie doll" of the twenty-first century. The "girl next door," though her image morphs with the passage of time, remains a prevalent stereotype that retains the ability to inspire young women to achieve it and to incite young men to obsess over it. Maybe, eventually, both genders can aspire to positively redefine the "girl next door" for the next generation.

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## **Nora Helmer: Journey into a Doll's Mind**

by Crystal Dillman

Civilization's evolution into the acceptance of feminine equality and empowerment has been a slow and painful process. Perseverance, however, has its rewards; in today's society a woman who stood up to her demeaning husband would not only be accepted, she would be celebrated. At the time Henrik Ibsen wrote his controversial drama, The Doll's House, the idea of a woman showing such assertion would have been shameful and scandalous. Critics and audiences have spent more than a century arguing Nora Helmer's case, and most are sympathetic to her plight. She has been heralded as a champion for the feminist cause, but closer examination of her relationships with Kristine Linde, Dr. Rank, and Torvald show a much darker and unflattering truth. While Nora's demand for respect in the final scene was admirable, her decision to abandon her small children and family to embark on a personal quest of self-realization does nothing but cement the fact that Ibsen's heroine is selfish, spoiled, and narcissistic.

In the first act the reader is introduced to Nora's self-involved attitude when her old school friend visits. Kristine Linde arrives looking exhausted and unwell, so much so that Nora does not even recognize her at first. It is more than obvious that she is not doing well, but Nora remains deliberately obtuse to this. Even as she remembers Kristine has been widowed from a loveless marriage, it does not stop her from turning the conversation back to her own life. When she discovered that Kristine had been left childless her response was, "So you are quite alone. How dreadfully sad that must be. I have three lovely children" (1.111). In an essay examining the psychological motivation behind the characters, Carol Strongin Tufts writes that Nora, "appears to have little

sense of her as a person separate from herself and no real empathy for her suffering . . . she plays lip service to Kristine's hardships one minute only to flaunt her own blessings the next" (301-302). Of course, when all of her boasting fails to impress Kristine, Nora once again focuses the attention on herself by confessing to Kristine how they truly received the money to go to Italy.

Her relationship with Dr. Rank is much the same as it is with Mrs. Linde, although the dynamics of the friendship are different. Nora is aware that she is attractive, and she knows how to captivate a man's attention. In contrast to her interactions with a female companion, with men she plays the role of the innocent, child-like woman. Her descriptions of the fantasy of the rich old man, however, show that she is much more cunning than she appears. With both Torvald and Dr. Rank, Nora knows exactly how to go about getting what she wants. Additionally, like her relationship with Kristine, Nora insists the conversation be kept under her control. When Dr. Rank, who is dying from congenital syphilis, tells her he believes he only has another month to live, she chastises him saying, "You are quite absurd today, and I wanted you so much to be in a really good humor . . . do talk of something cheerful" (2.138). She, once again, has shown herself to be incapable of empathy for others' suffering. She is much more consumed by her quest to gain his help in paying off the hateful debt.

Much to Nora's dismay, her antics of flirtatiously gaining Dr. Rank's help backfire, when he proclaims his love for her. Although Nora acts shocked and appalled, Dr. Rank's feelings were obvious enough that Kristine saw them on their first meeting. She warns Nora, "You ought to make an end of it with Dr. Rank" (2.133). Of course, Nora denies any imprudence, but the conversation does plant the idea of going to him for the money. The fact that Nora uses the intimacy of slight touches, cozy words of devotion, and cannily slaps at his ear with her silk stockings shows that she knows exactly how

much power she has over Dr. Rank. Her reaction to his proclamation of love occurs not because of the feelings themselves, but that he would dare speak them aloud. Tufts explains Nora had “a narcissistic sense of entitlement with its freedom to allow her to bask in Rank’s attention and admiration . . . without ever having to acknowledge her responsibility in eliciting the feelings which she knows . . . place his body and soul at her command” (305).

However much her actions toward Kristine and Dr. Rank shed an unflattering light on Nora’s personality, the ultimate testament comes in her deceit, manipulation, and ultimate abandonment of her husband, Torvald. As a couple, they are amazingly well suited, as he is just as conceited and self-involved as she. Throughout the play Nora plays her role of the feather-brained, helpless wife freely and without complaint. She uses her child-like, sickeningly cute antics to gain whatever she wants from Torvald. It isn’t a wonder, then, that he reacts to her with patronizing words and nicknames. Torvald doesn’t take Nora seriously because she doesn’t demand it of him, by actions or by words.

A relationship based on the shallowness of mutual selfishness and disrespectful manipulation is bound to end in catastrophe. Torvald finds out that Nora has lied to him, and worse, committed a crime that offends his sensibilities and endangers his position at the bank. His anger and feelings of betrayal lead him to treat her with cruelty in the final confrontation. When Krogstad forgives the debt and returns the forged bond, however, he apologizes for his harsh words, and forgives her for putting them in such a precarious situation. There will be no forgiveness from Nora, however, as he has committed the ultimate crime; he has disappointed her. She tells him she has lost her love for him because he did not “come forward and take everything upon yourself and say: I am the guilty one” (3.165). The same Nora who fritters about, doting on her

children and charming her husband in the rest of the plays becomes “a woman who, in a fit of disappointment, in spite of appeal to her honor, maternity, religion, and sense of justice, leaves the husband she has sworn to love, the home she has engaged to govern, and the children she is made to cherish” (Scott 1).

The goal of the feminist movement has been to demand respect and equality from their fellow human beings. Nora spends the entirety of the play being the silly, senseless woman who uses her looks and helplessness as a way to manipulate the men in her life; she abandons her innocent children and leaves them with a stranger she supposedly could no longer trust. Not only is Nora Helmer unjustly labeled a champion for womankind, she is the very epitome of everything they spent centuries fighting against.

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# ***Spring 2008 Writers' Roundup Winners***

Each year the Amarillo College English Department holds a Writers' Roundup contest to encourage beginning as well as advanced writers to demonstrate their creative flair. Students are given a prompt and have two hours in which to write. The type of writing is up to the student.

For more information on how to enter this friendly competition, please call (806) 371-5170 or email Angie Kleffman, English Department Writing Lab Supervisor II, at [kleffman-am@actx.edu](mailto:kleffman-am@actx.edu).



## **To the Evangelical Poster Child Who is a Shadow of My Former Self:**

### **A Love Letter**

#### **(Grand Prize Winner)**

by Kelly Laxson

At this wonderfully un-jaded moment, you are confident that you have been included in a minority of the faithful. I can see that you are unwilling to compromise, for you have sacrificed the petty joys of adolescence for the promise of a greater good. While your classmates are browsing *Seventeen*, you are diligently devouring the Book of Daniel. When a teacher coldly comments that “no one likes a bible-thumper,” you glow in the righteous knowledge that you have been persecuted for Christ. Taking every thought captive, you are to be commended, my dear, for choosing to abstain from frivolous pursuits. You wouldn’t be caught dead listening to the secular sounds of Hell’s bells, the music your friends so eagerly ingest. You rise early, work hard, and are always prepared to give the reason for your faith. You are set apart, a new creation, saved.

I am deeply sorry, but everything you know is about to change.

You don’t know it yet but, in a couple of years, those thoughts that you were so quick to deny will begin to eat away at the core of you. The once sure words, “Just trust the Lord,” will seem glib to a friend confiding that her father beats her mother. You will wonder why the congregation does not step forward to help when your mother loses her job and is forced to sign up for welfare. When a local girl is discovered to be HIV-positive, she will be systematically removed from the mouths and minds of everyone

who knew her. The same minister who baptized her as an infant will refuse to officiate at her funeral. You will never forget this.

As the truths you know become irreconcilable with the acts you see, disillusionment is the least of your worries, I'm afraid. At first, you will shame yourself into multiple cycles of confession and salvation. Over and over, you will walk the aisle and recommit yourself to a life free from the sin of unbelief. Eventually, this will stop working and the bandages will be removed to reveal a much deeper wound. Bleeding internally at the idea that God simply does not care, you will attempt to pretend everything is fine. Before long, it will become obvious that you simply won't make it. This God will never be the same and neither will you.

A reader early on, you will no longer limit yourself to the Epistles of Paul or the commentary of your teenage devotionals. Holden Caulfield will ask you to consider his angst and Hester Prynne will demand your compassion. The Karamazovs will question your motives, and Martin Luther King, Jr., will ask which side of Heaven is his. Furthermore, Gandhi will plainly remind you that Christians are nothing like their Christ. You will discover a well-worn copy of Thornton Wilder's play, Our Town, and I am happy to say that you will never look back.

Your eyes will no longer be dimmed, sweet girl, and you begin to see things in an entirely different way. No longer restricted to the colors chosen for you by the well-intentioned pillars of faith, you see life as it was meant to be seen: a canvas that is free, whole, wonderful. Eventually, you will find yourself surrounded by a group of friends who seem to like you for you. Together, you begin to erase the residue of a dead faith and you, my friend, will begin to see that your community, this new congregation, is saving you all over again.

I can see in your eyes that you wish you could have bypassed some of the roads you took. You must feel embittered that you were allowed, even pushed, to wander through a wilderness of sorts. Know this, friend: all roads brought you to my feet and your thoughts have shaped the conversations in a hundred coffee shops and over hundreds of beers. I leave you with the thought that the sweet is never as sweet without the sour. Simply put, I could never have become Me without You, and for that, I thank you.

## The Ship

(1<sup>ST</sup> Place Sophomore)

by Lesandra Botello

She lived aboard, abroad, amongst,  
a crew of two.  
The two who captained the ship,  
the same two who aided her quizzical quest.

Her quest consumed them  
for quite a term of time  
and they were left  
behind, below, beneath, a mound of murk.

They pushed her down the plank,  
with each step bringing her closer to her impending fate.  
When she reached the inevitable end,  
she turned around and let her glistening face  
say her last goodbyes.

She took that fleeting step backwards,  
off, through, into, the tumult.  
She seared through the sea,  
fighting those fathoms, those vertical furlongs, until  
she emerged, her lungs gulping  
for salvation.

The couple peered over her,  
for one last time  
until the waves carried her away.

**Ms. S (This is for my grandfather. He suffers from multiple sclerosis.)**

**(1<sup>ST</sup> Place Freshman)**

by James Baker

Tethered submissive romance  
A match made in heaven  
A young, blindfolded marriage  
to the mystery that is her carnal beauty,

Ms. S  
“Ms.” With an “m” and an “s”  
because you’re not the first  
to wear the symbol of her  
obvious love for you.

She gets on your last nerve, sometimes,  
and you don’t like it.  
It makes you cringe.  
You scream sometimes,  
but what can you do?  
She is your fateful companion  
and you know escaping her  
is impossible.

She clings to your strong  
arms at night  
and makes you weak.  
She makes you moan  
like a lover would  
wrestle you in the sheets.  
A sweat grows on your brow  
that you would remove with the sleeve  
of your shirt  
but she’s tied you down.

Ms. S  
keeps you in your reclining chair  
snuggles close to your shoulders  
in cold weather.  
She likes to hug you  
and hates it when you play piano.

You used to bang the keys  
while J.S. Bach's ghost tapped a tempo  
on your fingertips.  
Greasy keys, man.  
My grandfather was a southern-gospel  
first inversion of a man  
just like my daddy-o.  
They sang bass  
and still do.

But that bitch,  
"Ms. S",  
She is not keen  
on grandpa's singing.  
She hugs him all the time,  
makes his knees weak, and his voice a sound of trembling.

She is a whore that has sucked  
the life out of a genuine man  
and I'm left with memories  
of what he used to be before her.  
Sometimes, I wish he would die.  
Not for me, but for himself.

He was violent sometimes.  
He had a temper like my own.  
Hard as a rock up here [points to head],  
and the beat of a war drum in here [points to heart],  
until she came into his life as fast as  
dynamite or an ambush.

He is soft. Everywhere.  
His docile eyes call out my name  
and his lips follow.  
His anger has been flushed  
by the exhaustion of their late night  
wrestling and sheet tossing.  
He smiles and cries a lot more.  
He's happy and thankful for his life.

He knows of the match that was made in heaven—  
painted in the stars tethered together.  
He is dangling from her marionette strings,  
observing the world as if strung up from above,  
while sitting in his chair,  
in his living room,  
smoking,  
and he asks me if I'm going to go walk for the cure.  
I tell him, "No, I can't, I have to work."

He smiles

Puts his clipboard away and asks me how my marriage is.

I tell him, "It's suffocating, sometimes."

He says, "I know what that's like."

## **Stella's Story**

**(1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner)**

by Angela Chickering

To accomplish a mission, you have to know what your mission is first. Stella's mission was to live a life of poverty and abuse while trying to please everyone around her. How did she do that and keep a smile on her face, you ask? Well look into the eyes of a beautiful woman who was once a beautiful child.

She lived with molestation until she hit the ripe young age of nine. Stella didn't know any better; this is what she grew up with, and it was okay to her. That was, until she went to a friend's house. She started to realize that it was abnormal how much her daddy loved her. As scared as any one person could possibly be, she trembled like it was cold in the Arizona heat. As Stella recounted all the times that her daddy had touched her in certain spots on her body, she cried a river of innocent tears that quickly turned to coal when her mother told her that it was okay as long she didn't take naps with daddy anymore. So part of Stella's mission was complete, to live a life with abuse. That lasted another year or so until her sister came and saved her.

Stella's sister had felt her pain and heard her tears every night as her father took his anger out on her for telling. It took one week after Stella had lost her virginity to her father for her sister to show up and save her. Samantha, driving the get-away car, had said a handsome vocabulary to her father. This is the way Stella was able to please everyone around her, while keeping a smile on her face even while on the brink of poverty.



To thank her sister for taking her out of that situation, Stella worked as hard as she possibly could for free, considering that they could barely buy food after all the bills. So while Samantha was working seventy hours a week, Stella stayed home and took care of the babies. At the age of thirteen, Stella was watching three toddlers, going to school, getting straight A's and playing housewife all at the same time, all the while with a smile on her face. She loved her life. Stella couldn't understand why the other kids in her class could complain when their moms told them to clean their rooms or do the dishes. She did this on a daily basis willingly. She didn't have many friends and was kind of a loner, so when Samantha told Stella that they had to move to Texas from Washington, due to eviction, she was all the happier.

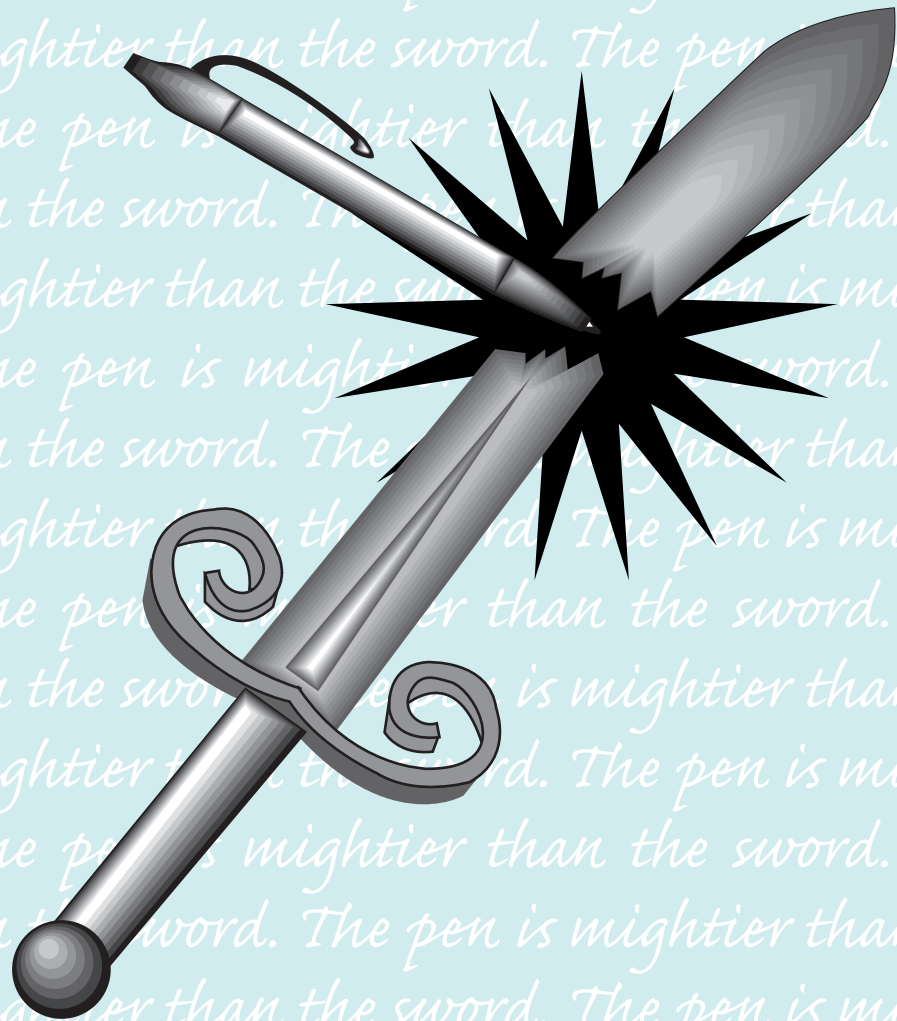
When Stella arrived in Texas, she automatically thought of her grandparents and her mother. She hadn't seen her mother in two or three years and wanted to say hi. When she showed up to her mother's apartment, Stella looked around for food; she found a box of cake mix. That was it, no more, no less. So when they had finally gotten settled, Samantha and her husband, their three babies, Stella and her mother, Stella wanted to live her own life. Now that they were somewhere else, she wanted to start over and regain her own life. But when that finally happened all hell broke loose.

Stella was eighteen when at last she got the nerve to move out. She moved out into her own apartment, got it furnished and cozy; she was going to work and go to school at the same time. She was at school from 6 am-3 pm and work from 5 pm-2 am. Six months later, she lost her place and moved in with her boyfriend. She quit her job at the fast food restaurant and started working at the gentleman's club. She said that she needed an income, even though he had provided everything for her. When he expressed concern for her well being, she left him in order to be independent. She got pregnant from the thirty-six-year-old club manager, but left him and went back home

realizing where she was. She was nineteen having a baby boy because she thought that she was trapped under the spell of Samantha. But, just like the last time, Samantha was there to help and took her in, helped her get through the rest of the pregnancy, and made sure she was healthy.

When Stella finally gave birth, she made the decision to give the baby up for adoption to a couple that she felt good about. She still has contact with her baby and owns a business that she and her sister came up with. They are making good money and Stella is smiling again; however, there is no more abuse or poverty, but she is still trying to make people happy. However, they are the business's customers.

So I ask you, general public, did she accomplish her mission? Did she do what she was supposed to do, or did she fail?



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