

Spring 2009
Volume 21

VERITAS

Literary Arts Magazine

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The University of Virginia
School of Medicine

On the Cover
Diagnosing the Book
by

Elizabeth Tessier SMD 2009

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VERITAS is the University of Virginia School of Medicine's literary-arts publication. Published annually since 1994, Veritas has been student-edited since 2000. We receive financial support through Student Council, Mulholland Society and the Medical Alumni Association. Veritas publishes original student work (writing, art and photography, music) on the web and in print every spring.

Every fall, the organization also sponsors a medical student art exhibit, which is displayed in the Claude Moore Health Sciences Library.

veritas simplex oratio est
"the language of truth is simple"

El Matador by
Peter Oliver SMD 2010



This life, this strife
These days, I'm crazed
Which way's up
While I'm falling down

Pondering, wondering
When's it worth it
(Is it worth it?)
Dim light, no end in sight

This life needs a warning label
Gotta lay it all on the table
Where was my cautionary tale

Tugging and struggling
I'm drowning
And swimming down

Cry myself to sleep tonight
Washed out, used up
Nothing left to give

Life's not easy
But this is too hard
I'm married with a broken heart

I've no net, life set
Tight rope

Sapped, done
I'm throwing in the towel
I'm weak, mystique
Nothing left to give

Too dry to squeeze
No more lies, please
Isn't someone there
To take care of me?

She thought...

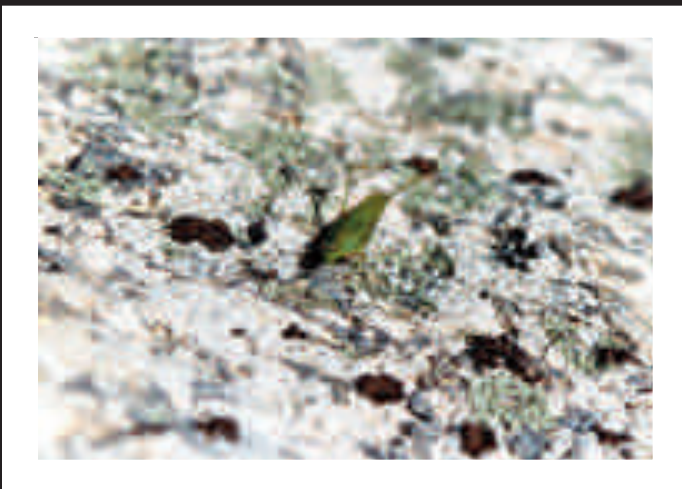
She thought...

Scaffold gone
I'm falling fast
How much longer
Will it last

Warning Label by
Katie McBeth SMD 2010

She thought...

The Small Things in Life Have Eyes Too by
Jaime Miller MSTP



On not making a difference by
Rebecca Previs SMD 2009

An almost fatal accident. Not expected to make it through the night, we do all we can. Trauma elderly female, no one even knows her name or a family member to call.

The intern stuffs a chest tube to relieve her hemothorax. I delicately suture multiple hand lacerations, which matters to no one but me.



Snowy Morning by
Allison Lippert SMD 2010



Fig Tree by
Sarah Schmidt SMD 2010



Road Less Traveled by Barry Bui SMD 2010

Care of the Soul by
Liz Alfson SMD 2010

I met Mr. Johns, a 70 year old man with vascular dementia, when he was transferred to the General Medicine service after a long and complicated course in the medical intensive care unit. As a third-year medical student, it was my job to perform an admitting physical examination, compose a summary of his hospital course, and report on his progress to the Medicine team each morning at rounds. Before going into his room, I waded through his thick stack of progress notes, which described multiple pneumonias, mechanical ventilation, and a severe bacterial infection in his blood. Although he was well enough to leave the ICU, he still had abscesses deep in his pelvis that caused him constant pain, could not be drained surgically, and would require lifelong antibiotic treatment to prevent the infection from spreading to the rest of his body. His was by far the most complicated medical history that I had ever encountered. I wrote down a list of topics to study at home that night and went to his room to conduct a physical exam.

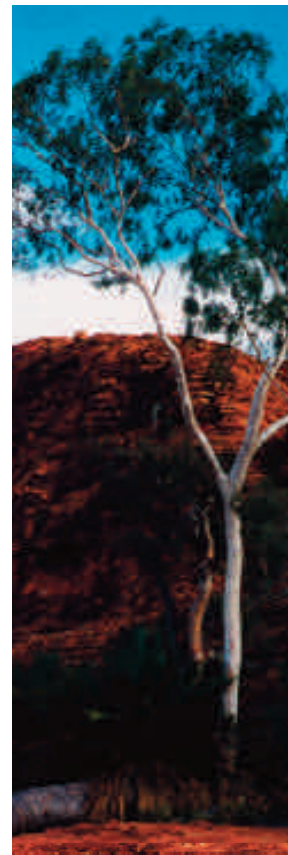
I found Mr. Johns in bed, looking bewilderedly around the room. I introduced myself and asked him a few questions about how he was feeling and what he knew about his medical problems. He put sentences together with difficulty; he could not understand why he was in the hospital. He told me that he lived at home with his wife, but I knew from his chart that she had recently separated from him and was living on her own. I gathered what information I could, then told him that I needed to do a physical exam. With a gleam in his eye, he asked, "Will this be medical touching, or sexual touching?" Not sure what to say, I asked him politely to please not speak to me that way again and began my exam. I tried not to dread the rest of the week.

The next morning, his nurse told me that Mr. Johns had slept very little. He had spent most of the night attempting to get out of bed, not understanding that his atrophied leg muscles could not support him. He tried to pull out his IV lines, yelled frequently for his nurse or his wife, and ultimately had to be placed in wrist restraints to prevent him from hurting himself. When I spoke to him, he was angry and declared that he intended to leave the hospital. "Get this snake out of my arm!" he insisted. After I told him that he wouldn't be leaving the hospital for the next few days, he was uncooperative with my exam and answered few of my questions.

Continued on next page

*veritas
lux mea*

Untitled by
Alejandro Stella
SMD 2010



*"the truth is
my light"*

Untitled by
Jennifer Eudy SMD 2011



Untitled by
My Tran SMD 2009

The concern in my mind,
showed in my eyes.
It became the salt water,
that now flows through your veins.

Water Haven by
Jennifer Sohn SMD 2012



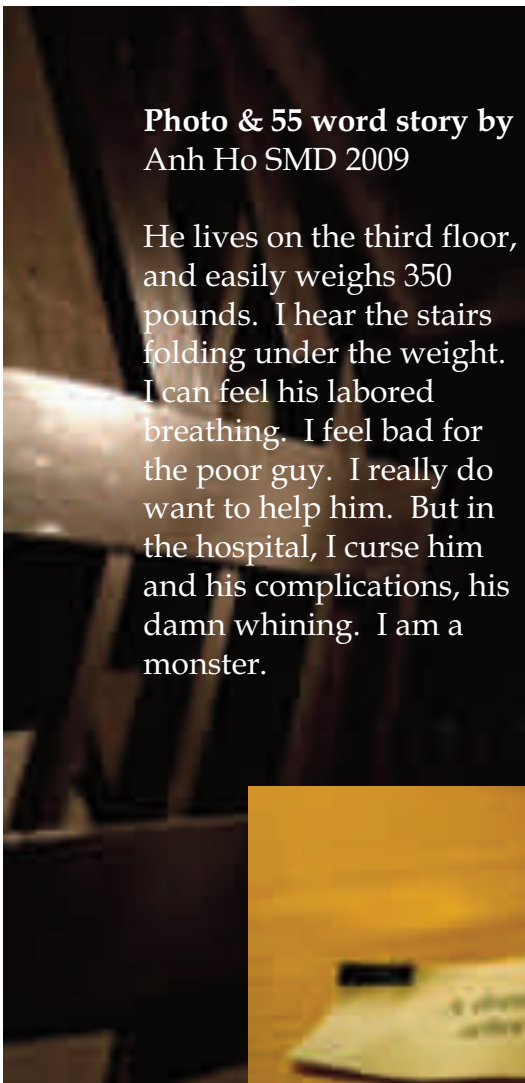
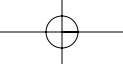


Photo & 55 word story by Anh Ho SMD 2009

He lives on the third floor, and easily weighs 350 pounds. I hear the stairs folding under the weight. I can feel his labored breathing. I feel bad for the poor guy. I really do want to help him. But in the hospital, I curse him and his complications, his damn whining. I am a monster.

Photo & 55 word story by Anh Ho SMD 2009

Reeking of rum, he wished he wouldn't drink so much in public. He wanted to kiss her and apologize. He wasn't allowed into the room. And she turned her bleeding head away, hoping that no one would see. The police escorted him from the ER. He opened the cookie from dinner. He realized the truth.



*in
vino
veritas*

"the truth is in the wine"

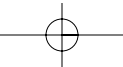
Mr. Johns was in my mind for the rest of the day. I could understand his frustration. He was unable appreciate how sick he was; his family lived hours away and couldn't visit; he was alone, in pain, in a strange place. Hoping to understand him and his home situation better, I called his daughter, with whom he had been living before he was hospitalized. She told me that he was difficult with her as well.

When I went to visit Mr. Johns the following morning, I told him that I had talked to his daughter the day before. I asked him about his grandchildren, and his expression softened. He smiled as he described the way that they jumped in his lap and filled his home with noise. That morning, he answered my questions and cooperated with my exam. As I got up to leave, I remembered seeing in his medical record that he was a Baptist. I asked him if he was a religious man, and if so, if he would like to say a prayer with me. He said yes. I sat on the edge of his bed, and we held hands and prayed for God to grant him healing, peacefulness, and patience.

At home that night, I worried that I had done something I shouldn't have. But, the next morning, his nurse told me that he had been calm throughout the previous day and had slept through most of the night. My heart soared. Mr. Johns and I prayed together again that morning and the next. After we finished one morning, the man who had been so inappropriate days before patted my hand and said to me, "You are a sweet girl."

On the second week of my Internal Medicine rotation, I was struggling to find meaning in a service full of patients with chronic diseases, insufficient resources, and difficult social situations. I had been thriving intellectually, but I often left the hospital feeling deeply saddened by what I seen. I gained an incredible amount of medical knowledge from helping to care for Mr. Johns, but the moments of caring for his soul are what brought me the greatest joy. The honor of sharing difficult moments in the lives of others, of being allowed to see the extent of their suffering and then to be part of its healing - this intense humanity is why I chose medicine as my profession, and what I was able to experience with Mr. Johns. He reminded me that when surgery or medication can no longer cure, there is still healing to be done.

The End





Manna Mission Hospital by
Leigh-Ann Jones SMD 2009

Calcutta by
Harinder Chahal
SMD 2009

It was near the end of a long day for the general surgery service, and we were making our evening rounds. The entire team-- a chief resident, three junior residents, and six medical students, had just entered a patient's room. The medical student responsible for this particular patient began presenting this patient's update when she was abruptly interrupted. The patient, a lively man in his seventies, pointed to me, smiled slyly, and asked the group, "Now where is he from?"

The team turned to me. Knowing where this was going, but too stubborn to give him the answer he wanted, I said, "I'm from California, sir." Without wasting a second he smiled even wider and said, half-yelling, "NO! You're from Calcutta!"

We burst out in much needed laughter.

The Ghanaian Struggle by
Chi Chi Chijioke SMD 2009

Delivery by
Rebecca Previs SMD 2009

Armed guards change shift every twelve hours. My patient, the multiparous inmate dilates quickly. This Friday night I will deliver my first baby. I gown, she pushes, my hands wait, empty and ready.

Two pushes later, I shout, "Happy Birthday!"

I clean her mother, hand her the hungry child, thinking, "Welcome to this cruel world."

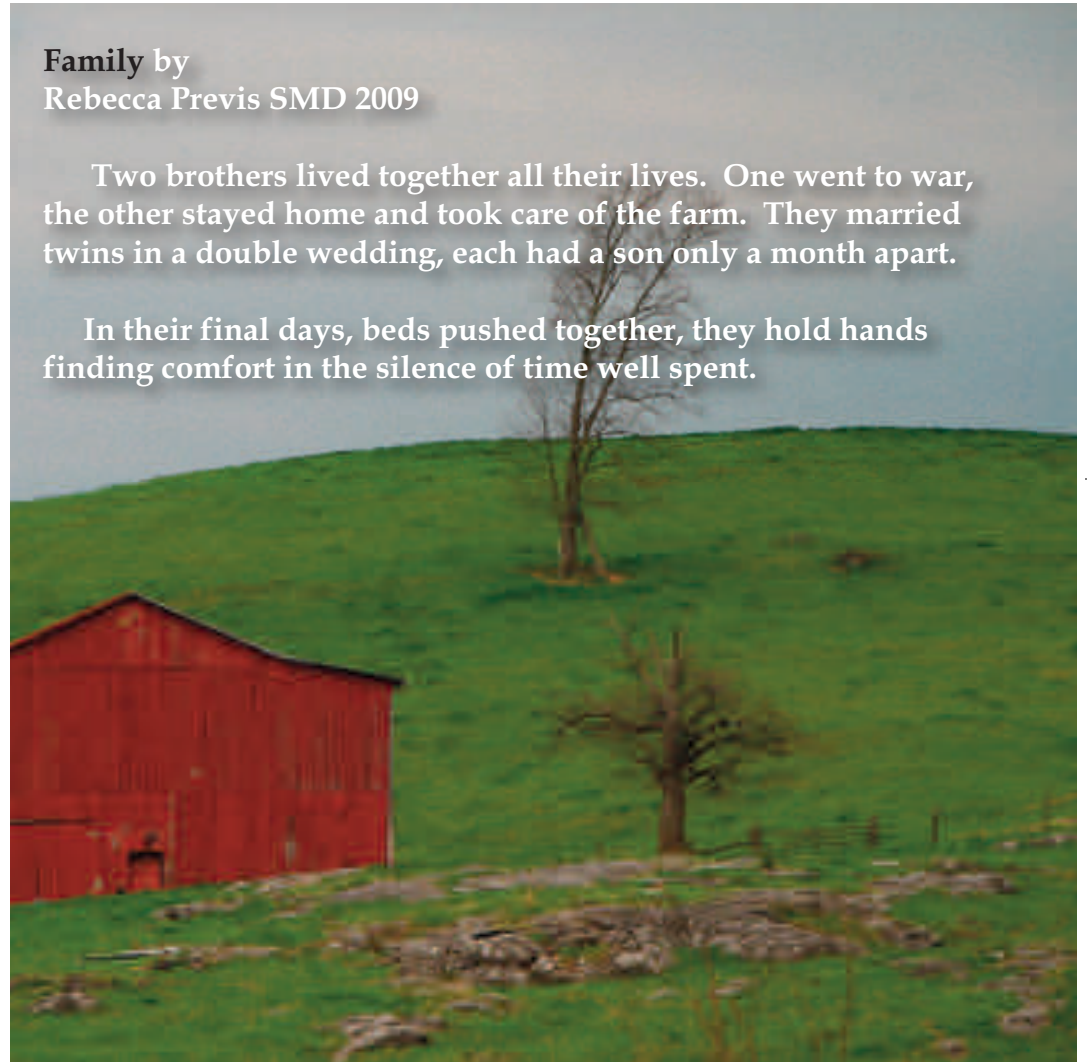


Vincit omnia veritas
"truth conquers all things"

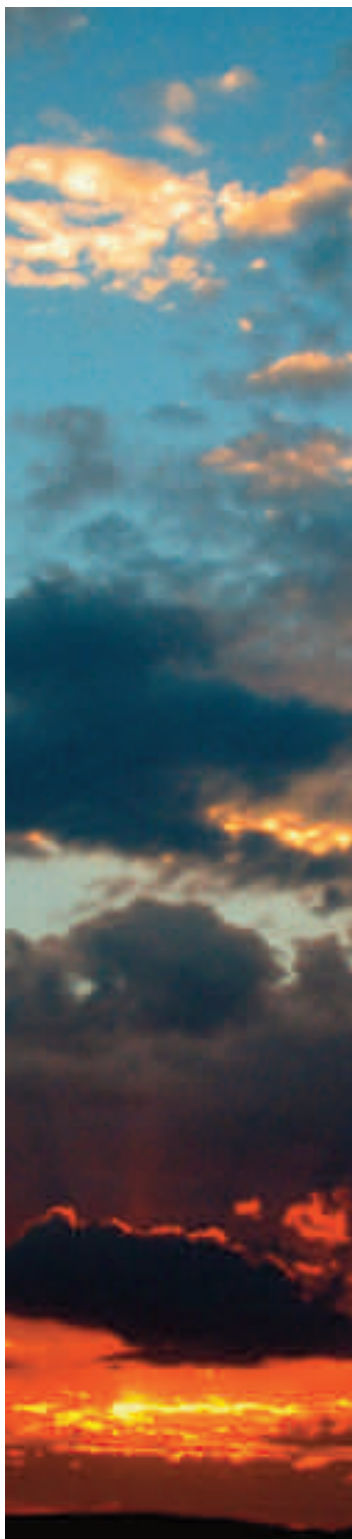
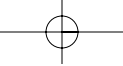
Family by
Rebecca Previs SMD 2009

Two brothers lived together all their lives. One went to war, the other stayed home and took care of the farm. They married twins in a double wedding, each had a son only a month apart.

In their final days, beds pushed together, they hold hands finding comfort in the silence of time well spent.



Late Winter by Lee Cunningham SMD 2012



Lost in Translation by
Harinder Chahal SMD 2009

Mrs. J was 52 years old and was having trouble sleeping. It had been this way for seven months, since the last of Mr. S had been consumed by cancer. She lived alone in a quiet barrio, but echoes of his voice kept her up at night, so she could not sleep, nor could she grieve. She tried many remedies suggested by friends and family, including a form-fitting mattress meant to embrace her body the way his once did. It did not. Bold and weary, she decided her suffering warranted a doctor's time. "I'm rotting inside," she told the interpreter in a moment of truth, otherwise answering as we wanted her to.

A few hurried minutes later we left her with a prescription for sleeping pills. I wondered if she'd dream again.

Dying in another language by
Rebecca Previs SMD 2009

Beautiful Latina with long, dark curly hair. We cannot communicate because neither of us know each other's language. We smile and wave.

Diagnosed with cervical cancer, we offer all the available treatments.

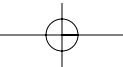
Six weeks later, alone, she screams something I can't understand. In pain, she tears off her clothes. Mets have taken over her brain.

African Sunset by
Hassan Hamandi SMD 2011

Hot Springs Bloom by Diana Newsom SMD 2011



Rejuvenation by James Edwards SMD 2010



veritas vos liberabit
"the truth will set you free"



Baby Shoes by
Matthew Harrington SMD 2009

Belizian Summer by Juliana Minak SMD 2011



St. Marks by Jessica Davis SMD 2012



Excerpt from **The Lies of Love** by Byron Bassi SMD 2012

“Did you sleep with him?”

Even as the words came out of his mouth he convinced himself she hadn't. She wouldn't do that to him, not after four and a half years together. She wasn't like that. The overly flirtatious email he had stumbled upon was just that; an email. All that about visiting some guy back in Sweden and making love on his fishing boat, it didn't mean anything. So she was attracted to him. So what? She would never actually do it.

“How did you know?”

Time stopped. He felt his stomach lurch and his eyes well up. The illusion he had just created for himself quickly dissipated. Deep down he had known it was coming. Things had been rocky even before she left to study abroad in Italy five weeks before. He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

“Did you love him?”

It was the more important question. He hadn't exactly been an angel either while she was gone. He had almost done the same thing, almost made the same mistake she made. But at the pivotal moment, with another girl naked on his bed in front of him, he turned away. He realized he didn't want another girl. He wanted her. He wanted to marry her, grow old with her, have kids with her, and tell those kids that they had been each other's first and only. That was impossible now, gone like an amazing dream you hit the snooze button for only to realize you can never get it back.

She faltered. “I think so.”

He sank slowly to the floor, put his head in his hands, and began to cry. What else could he do? She cried too. Tears of love, tears of assurance that they would get through this and tears of promise that it would never happen again. They cried together that night but he had never been so alone. She moved her stuff out in the morning.

They agreed not to speak for six months and then see how they felt. That lasted all of nine hours. He wanted to know how it happened. She wanted to hear his voice. He wanted to know where and when. He wanted to know everything, so that maybe he could begin to understand why. It was the one question she had never been able to answer. Why, after four and a half years together, four and a half years without a single full blown argument, had she thrown it all away?

Without an answer he began to blame himself. After all, he thought, she was drop dead gorgeous, quite possibly the most beautiful girl on the planet, and he was just, well, average. Maybe she simply didn't realize it in high school, didn't believe it after two years at college. Maybe it took her five weeks in Europe to figure out she could have any guy she wanted, and apparently it wasn't him. It was Gustav from Sweden.

He was embarrassed for wanting to marry the first girl he ever dated, ashamed that he believed in true love, and humiliated he had told everyone they were wrong for saying high school sweethearts didn't exist anymore. Every time he looked in the mirror a fool stared back. In his mind, he was always to blame. If only he was funnier, or taller, or more built, or knew Swedish, or hadn't thrown her out the next morning, maybe then they would still be together.

Only two weeks had passed before he was ready to take her back. He was tired of being alone, exhausted from crying, and sick of living every day without someone to share it with. He was ready to leave this stranger's life behind and get back to his own. He would forgive her, or simply forget it ever happened; whatever it took to make it work, to make things right.

Only two weeks had passed, but she was already dating someone else...

Please see our website for the completion of “The Lies of Love”

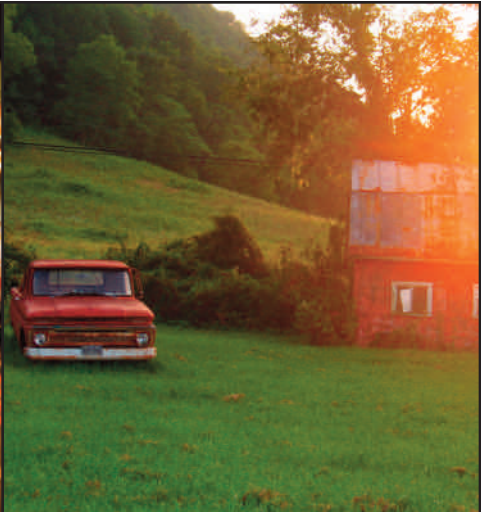
Excerpt from **Courtney meets the Grandparents: Norwalk season at your friendly neighborhood assisted living facility** by B. P. Bradenham Jr. SMD 2010

Seeing as how we had been dating for well over five years, and she now had a diamond ring on her finger, I figured it was about time for Courtney to meet my grandparents. I'd like to make it clear, up front, that by no means had I secretly spent the past five years hiding my grandparents from Courtney or vice versa. It was a simple matter of logistics that had been exacerbated by circumstance. It was one thing a few years ago when we were both undergraduates in Lexington, Virginia; however, now that we were living 500 miles away from one another it was difficult to find the time to make the trip, especially when going to visit my grandparents would assuredly dominate a full day during one of those few weekends that we actually got to spend time with one another.

The past few years have not been kind to my grandparents. From a purely objective health standpoint, they were and still are, both actually doing pretty well. At 94 years old, my grandfather was, and still is, taking an aspirin a day while he nurses an extremely arthritic knee and my grandmother is still truckin' at 93 with significant symptomatic aortic stenosis. Unfortunately, from a cognitive health perspective, the years have not been nearly as kind. My grandfather has been suffering from what would best be described as an Alzheimer's- type dementia. While his episodic memory of past life experiences and people has remained quite sharp, he can no longer find his way to his own home from the assisted living facility, where he now resides. My grandmother's cognitive status can most aptly be categorized as a senile dementia NOS (not otherwise specified). She no longer remembers anyone in my family, save perhaps their first born son, my uncle Bob, and his wife, Margaret. She couldn't even remember my mother's name, Judy, despite the fact that my grandmother's name is also Judy and that my mother had spent the past year and a half making the hour drive to go visit them every week to bring chocolates and make sure they both continue to receive the necessary care they require. As it does with many families, as a nurse, my mother was ex officio deemed the point person for the care of both my grandmother and grandfather once they made the transition to an assisted living facility. As a dutiful nurse and wife, she was more than happy to take the post. On the whole she had been, and continues to be, very happy with the level of care both my grandparents had received at this particular assisted living facility. It is nothing particularly fancy. A few bells and whistles are to be had, but nothing extravagant. It does however have good food, is clean, and is full of kind, attentive nurses and staff. When it comes to assisted living facilities, you can't ask for much more. In addition, the residents of this facility were, and continue to be, quite happy.

The stage is now set for the December morning that will “forever live in infamy”. I'm not much of a breakfast person, but nevertheless, I slowly peeled and ate my banana as we drove to pick Courtney up on our way to the 'burg', the title we affectionately bestowed upon the city where my father grew up and where my grandparents have lived most of their adult lives. With my mother at the wheel, my brother riding shotgun, and the soon to be newlyweds Courtney and myself in the back, we were well on our way by around 8:30 am or so. As we pulled into the parking lot an hour or so after we began our journey, I couldn't help but notice a few butterflies twirling around in my stomach. Was I worried that my grandparents wouldn't like Courtney? I can answer that with 100% certainty, no. But there was still a little something there that gave me pause as we walked through the glass automatic doors and the warm receptionist manning the welcome desk. As the four of us marched up the stairs, little did I know that my apprehensions were soon to be confirmed by my friendly little chemosensory organ otherwise known as my nose...

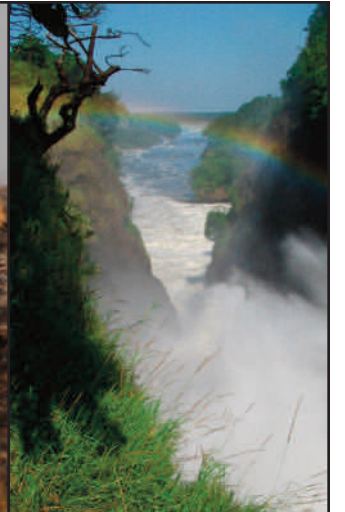
Please see our website for the completion of “Courtney meets the Grandparents”



Veritas Fall Art Exhibit 2008

Top left to bottom right:
 Anh Ho
 Mindy Ju
 Megan Barry
 Melissa Sartin
 Sarah Schmidt

Contributors featured elsewhere in this edition: James Edwards, Diana Newsom, Alejandro Stella & Liz Tessier.



Top left to bottom right:
 Janine Oliver
 John McMurtry
 Cheryl Lynn Horton
 Harmony Caton
 Matthew Wilson
 Peter Oliver
 Sarah Wilcox
 Quang Nguyen

