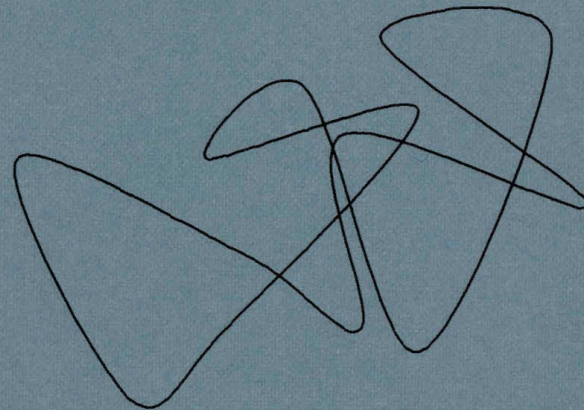


the phoenix



Literary Journal of Milligan College

Spring 1998

the phoenix

the phoenix

Volume 10 Number 1
 Fall 2007

Editor: Heather Hoover
 Assistant Editor: Nathan Gilmour
 Faculty Sponsor: Patricia Magness

The Phoenix is a student-run literary journal at the University of Northern Iowa. It was founded in 1997 and is published twice a year. The journal features a variety of literary works, including poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. It is a platform for students to showcase their writing and to engage in literary criticism.

Editor: Heather Hoover

Assistant Editor: Nathan Gilmour

Faculty Sponsor: Patricia Magness

“The Phoenix is a mythological bird of fire that only once in a great while will be resurrected from ashes. Like the Phoenix, life is born from death, our true spirituality is born from suffering, and ultimately, artistic creation is born from the angst the artist experiences as he or she tries to make sense of the paradox of the beauty in life and the isolation from it. Everything we have in life that we consider good or true or beautiful must be constantly resurrected from and is only possible because of the ashes of suffering, isolation, and death.”
--JM

Contents

Todd Edmondson

*Mostly in His Head**

Megan Dunn

*Sibyl**

Amy Wicks

What You Should Know

Robin R. Soendlin

Outside

Abigail Melton

Mildred

Mista Kage

Betrayed with a Rose

Anne Acker

Sine Qua Non

Anne Acker

Joy

T.C. Patrick

the lesser pain

Amy Wicks

For Garrison Keeler

***featured poem**

*Mostly in His Head**

Todd Edmondson

Salty sweat stung Caleb's clean blue eyes and rolled fiercely down Caleb's dirty red cheeks as he dove into the skinny frame of his enemy. At the moment, Caleb couldn't even remember the name of the enemy, but it really didn't matter. He recognized the face—the eyes, the nose, the mouth. It was the mouth from which the hurtful words had come a few moments earlier. They weren't new words—on the contrary, they were words he'd heard a million times before, mostly in his head. But they still hurt.

"Your dad's in jail. He touched little kids so they sent him away." These were the words which so recently had registered in Caleb's brain for the one million and first time. No sooner had he heard them than the darkness came, first in his mind and then in his eyes, till he was swinging in the blackness, spinning towards the object of his fury, bent on destruction without remorse. Despite the blackness, however, he could hear just fine; the angry music of percolating child-rage filled his ears, diluted with the occasional shout of encouragement or discouragement—it really didn't matter which, for all was one and he was king of the blackness.

He rose to his knees to face the one who had knocked him down with a little fist and found himself groping in the blackness for his strength. He was exhausted. Just a few quick moments of unchecked passionate action had left him decidedly inactive, and there was nothing he could do to even summon the energy needed to stand up straight. Then the thought hit him. His dad was in jail. He touched little kids so they sent him away. Number one million and two. He hated his father, but couldn't swing at him behind those walls and bars no matter how hard he swung. So he cried.

That was the formula for Caleb's usual playground scuffle: hurtful words, blackness, and exhaustion. And the formula always led to the same end—the chair outside Mr. Larson's office, and Caleb's mother on the phone. Soon his mother would not be on the phone, but in the office itself, staring dead into Mr. Larson's pudgy face and telling him that "Caleb's not a bad kid, he just has problems because of his father being in jail," as though Mr. Larson didn't know already, as if he hadn't heard it a million and two times before, mostly in his head.

Throughout the whole meeting, Caleb's mother wouldn't cry, she wouldn't even raise her voice or get nervous. Caleb would barley hear through the door what was being said, but he would pick up enough

to know what was going on. He didn't like it, because he knew his mother was pretending.

The red-headed lady in the office hung up the phone and smiled at Caleb. Caleb liked her. She was always friendly to Caleb and his mother, and even gave Caleb a piece of hard candy when he looked really sad. As Caleb sat in the office that day, trying to clear the blackness from his head while he waited for his mother, the red-headed lady offered him candy. Two pieces. It was orange flavored, but in a red wrapper, and Caleb unwrapped it and put it on his tongue, where he let it linger for a while before crunching down hard.

A few minutes later, Caleb's mother walked in the door and sat down on the couch with her boy. She put her hand on the back of his head in a way that he knew—tender and firm, as if to say she felt what he felt. Then Mr. Larson called for her and she jumped up to go see him. The talking began behind the door and Caleb tried to picture what was going on. He knew Mr. Larson was making his mother feel small. He was stronger than she was, and he could do anything he pleased—even touch her, if he wanted, touch her and make her feel dirty and small. It was the same way with her boss at the store—he made her feel small. And it had been the same way with his father and the little kids he touched. Someday, Caleb hoped, he would be big and strong and he would look at weak people and treat them kindly, not make them feel dirty and small. But the rage building up in his tiny body told him this wouldn't happen; he'd be like all the rest.

The door opened, and Caleb's mother walked out, looking down into her purse to find her keys. Her face was red, like she was going to cry. Caleb wondered if Mr. Larson had touched her, but he didn't ask.

"Let's go Caleb," she said, showing a weak smile to the red-headed lady.

"Where?" the child asked.

"Home," the mother answered, "they think you shouldn't come back here for a few days"

"What about you?" he asked as they pushed the heavy double doors open and stepped into the parking lot.

"Oh, I don't think you should come back either," she said, "you and I need to think about some things first."

"No, I mean are you OK?" Caleb felt very grown-up asking that question.

"I'm fine," she answered, unable to hide her lie even from her seven year old son, "everything's great." Slowly and methodically the woman took her keys and unlocked the car door. Then she let her son in and slid into the seat next to him before driving off.

*Featured story

Sibyl *

Megan Dunn

Oh Beautiful One, my Dorian Grey,
seduces the night and rapes the day.
Priest of Pride, ambitious lethal Lust,
spews words of flowers as promises rust.
Appearing as a Lamb his converts fall—
glorious lies enrapture the small—
my deepest shame is to love too much
the Deceiver, my Nightmare, the Accuser, my Crutch.
Captive my heart is his ministry—
How will I break free?
How will I break free?

*Featured poem

What You Should Know

Amy Wicks

Sometimes I pick my nose and eat it.

--Does this bother you?

Sometimes I watch while you sleep.

--Does that shock you?

Sometimes I steal into your room
when you're not there, and
look through your albums and
count the pages in your books and
sift through your trash.

--Does that shock you?

I've eaten trash.

--How about that? No?

Sometimes I...No.

That would be too much.

And then you's hate me.

And I would never lie to you.

--Aren't I a great friend?

Outside

Robin R. Soendlin

A girl,
green soft grass
darkness,
a glowing candle

an old, sweet story...
wonders and dreams

Mildred
Abigail Melton

I wonder what she was like
when she was young,
that beautiful face,
her artist's grace.
Was she the same?
She walked, she embraced.
Her gorgeous face,
so full of faith.
Missing, what is missing?
Is it the tender laugh,
the sweetness?
What can one say?
Mildred, your tears
are wiped away.

Betrayed with a Rose
Mista Kage

Stone cold. Gives me shivers to the bone.
This slab of concrete does little to heat this icy heart.
The petal of a rose can only last so long in a world so cold.
The icicles and snowflakes live in harmony,
Relishing one another's company in blissful homeostasis.
But out comes the sun, once again rearing its destructive head
Towards a helpless creation.
And the unison of nature is destroyed.
Who says love is a good thing?
Who says a quickened heartbeat makes the day more pleasant?
That heartbeat will just cease to beat someday anyway.
Only so much can be said for cultivating a field of stones.
A rose so perfect, so genuine, so divine it pierced through my heart.
What joy did fill my mind!
Enough joy rained from above to bring dry cones into celebration!
This was what life had been waiting for.
The clouds folded back like sheets, as the sun shined through.
The whole earth could see the rose had finally come!
The long-awaited arrival of spring has broken down the bordering walls
of winter.
It is finally safe to come out of hiding.
All is good now. The rose is a sign of hope.
I reach out my arms, spread my fingers, and strive toward this rose of
glory.
Closer and closer my fingers get, yearning for what lies ahead.
Suddenly with a touch, a thorn pierces my flesh.
The poison of the heartless rose rushes through my veins as I cringe in
confusion.
I should have known the spring would never come.
A rose, a symbol of love. A symbol of sincerity. A symbol of trust.
Betrayed
Who says a rose is a good thing?
Who says a quickened heartbeat makes the day more pleasant?
Lies. Lies. Lies. It's all a lie of the winter.
I've been betrayed with a rose.

Sine Qua Non

Anne Acker

Love is not exhausted,
Though pushed to the edge,
Worn to a thread,
And tired beyond measure.

Love does not abandon the hopeless

Love and pain are one flesh
And sweet are the offspring:

Patience, Mercy,
Truth, Endurance,
Forgiveness.

Joy is strength,
But Love bears all things.

Faith is evidence,
But Love believes all things.

Love is the Mother of Hope,
And Love endures all things.

Love is the abiding place of every virtue
And no darkness escapes it,
For God is Love.

the lesser pain

T.C. Patrick

blood stirred chill by bitter soul
the ache of aged love wakens will
the ripened grape turned sour yet sober still
i fill my ravaged rationed mind
with lies like wine that coat the brain
betrothed to you to life to time
i choose to live the lesser pain

Joy
Anne Acker

I will laugh with God
(I was never afraid of thunder!);
I will lift my face to the cold
Rain, and raise my hands in wonder
At the miracle of who I
Am because of You alone,
Acknowledging no fear in
Pain, only the unending and unknown.

For Garrison Keeler
On this Tuesday, the 27th of January, 1998
Amy Wicks

The slush is gooey, wet, and cold,
and makes me think of Eskimos,
and other things like sand and mold
that slip beneath one's toes.

The slush is slimy, slick, and damp,
and makes me think of darkened caves
and long days spent at summer camp
and feeling kelp 'neath ocean waves.

The slush is sticky, white, and clear,
and makes me think of flowered fields
and children running in between
with stick-like swords and leaves for shields.

Perhaps this slush is what I need
to make me smile again, indeed.

The first snow fell
On the landscape the 1st of January 1938
Amy Hicks

The snow is gone now and
and makes me think of Easter
and other things like that and
I've not heard of it since

The snow is gone now and
and makes me think of Easter
and other things like that and
I've not heard of it since

The snow is gone now and
and makes me think of Easter
and other things like that and
I've not heard of it since

Perhaps that is what I need
to have me smile again indeed

Special thanks to *all* who submitted entries.
Continue to resurrect your Phoenix.

